

# Your Light has Come

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 24th of December 2004. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled, Your Light Has Come, and is based on Isaiah chapter 60, verses 1 to 22.

Father, we pray that you'll speak to us now from your word, that the light of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ will shine in our hearts for eternity. Amen.

Well, usually I'm not much of a morning person, which ought to mean that I should be firing on all cylinders tonight, though I'm not sure that I am, and I'll be even less of a firing on cylinders early tomorrow morning in our morning services.

It usually takes something special for me to get up early in the morning, and I think the worst sound that you can have in the whole of the world is a ringing alarm clock. It's the thing I hate the most, waking up with this alarm clock blaring in my ears.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] One special occasion when I did get up very early, indeed, was one year to watch the sunrise over Jerusalem. On that particular trip in, I think it was 1995, I was staying in the centre of the old city of Jerusalem, and on the roof of the hostel where we were staying, in the very centre, it had a beautiful view over Jerusalem.

We were up before the sun rose over the Mount of Olives, and the soft colours in the stones of Jerusalem made it worth getting up, even at that ungodly hour, to the sound of an alarm clock.

Jerusalem is normally bustling with people, and it was quiet and peaceful, and there were these soft colours as the dawn was breaking over the city of Jerusalem, with the promise of a very hot day ahead.

The passage that was read for us from the prophet Isaiah begins, Arise, shine, for your light has come. Famous words, really.

It's not just like an alarm clock call, come on, get up, shine, your light has come, it's day, get on with the day. It's more than that. This is announcing the day of God's kingdom.

[ 2 : 2 6 ] That day is arriving, is what the prophet Isaiah is foretelling in this chapter 60 of Isaiah. And throughout this very famous prophet Isaiah, a long book in the Old Testament, 66 chapters, the longest of all the prophets by way of the number of chapters, his perception, he keeps coming back to, is that this world in which we live, and the people of God living in this world, and people in general living in this world, are living in darkness.

And he's announcing here, at the end of history, yet to come, Arise, shine, your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Not a physical darkness is the perception of the prophet Isaiah, but a spiritual darkness is hanging over the people of this world, including the people of God, to whom in particular this prophet spoke 750 years before Christ.

Earlier in the chapter, in the book, in chapter 9, in a famous prediction of the Messiah, the Messiah will come with promised light. Later on in the book, the people of God living in this world are called to trust in God, even in the situation of darkness, in the world in which we live.

And now in chapter 60, this foretelling of an announcement, Arise, shine, your light has come. Now this is prophetic license in a sense.

[ 4 : 02 ] He's speaking about a future event, yet to occur. Speaking about it as though it's about to happen. So come on, get up, your light is shining. What he's doing here, what is the purpose of this, is to encourage the people of God to keep trusting in God, though they live in a dark world, spiritually speaking.

And in a sense he's saying at the end of this dark tunnel there is light. And he's seeking to spur on the people of God, to persevere in their trust in God's promises, even though this world is dark.

And the situation around the people of God at the time of these chapters was quite bleak in fact. God is beckoning his people to his kingdom. It's in effect what Isaiah the prophet is saying here.

Arise, shine, your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon you. God is beckoning his people out of darkness into the light of his glorious kingdom.

Jerusalem. Poetically this chapter is addressing Jerusalem, the city that I got up early to see the sunrise over. But not Jerusalem the stones, but Jerusalem the people, as a way of capturing the people of God, in the nation of God, for which Jerusalem was the capital.

[ 5 : 20 ] It's a bit like today we might say, we might hear a press release, you know, Canberra has said today that such and such happens. What it means is that Australia is going to do such and such and the Prime Minister has announced it.

It doesn't mean Canberra the city excluding us here, although occasionally we might feel that. So here it's the people of God that is the focus of this address. Here in Isaiah chapter 60, they're being invited to trust in the coming kingdom of God, even though the world in which they live is spiritually dark, and even though there are all sorts of problems besetting them, and every temptation to give up faith and trust in God.

When we come to Christmas, we see some of this prophecy, those 750 years preceding Jesus, come remarkably to fulfilment.

If you're listening carefully to the reading, you would have heard about all the multitude from other nations who would be coming to Jerusalem, and we're told they will bring gold and frankincense.

Now, no myrrh is mentioned there, but certainly there's an indication that when Jesus was born, the notes of fulfilment are beginning to sound. The light of the glory of God has risen.

[ 6 : 41 ] When Jesus is born in Bethlehem, 750 years after these words of Isaiah the prophet. Now, for those who know Isaiah, or those who would be reading through this book of prophecy, this is not the first time, far from it, that we hear echoes of Jesus.

Handel's Messiah takes much out of the book of the prophet Isaiah, rightly so in many cases, and shows us how Jesus fulfills. But those wonderful words back in chapter 7 about the virgin giving birth, and you'll call him Emmanuel, the prince of peace in chapters 9 and chapter 11, the descendant of David.

Time and time again in this book of the prophecy Isaiah, Jesus is its fulfilment. And nowhere more graphically so than in the famous chapters 52 and 53 of the despised one who dies carrying the burden of sin and iniquity for the people of this world, the suffering servant.

Chapter 60 is anticipating the coming of God's kingdom and the coming of God's king. That's what this book is calling us to trust in and wait for. For us, outside of Jesus' birth, some if not much of this, has already reached points of fulfilment.

The dawning of the glory of God has occurred when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. And chapter 60 leads on into chapter 61, which gives us, if you like, a manifesto for what Jesus came to do in his earthly ministry before his death.

[ 8 : 21 ] The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. He sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, to comfort all who mourn.

Words that Jesus quoted himself at the beginning of his adult ministry. That's the ushering in of the kingdom of God. That's the dawning of the kingdom of God.

The soft colours of light. For we still live in a world that is spiritually dark. We still live in a world where those who mourn are not necessarily comforted. Where those who are oppressed are not necessarily set free.

Those who are ill are not necessarily healed. The dawning has come. The full blaze of the midday sun of God's glory awaits us in the heavenly kingdom.

As indeed in the prayer for today that Vaughan said earlier in the service, that the light that rises, if you like, at Christmas will shine fully in our hearts in God's eternal kingdom or heaven.

[ 9 : 29 ] And you may have thought that that longish reading from Isaiah was a little bit obscure in parts, talking about strange nations coming and their sheep and their camels and turning bronze into gold and all those sorts of things.

Some of that description may not necessarily appeal to us in our modern ways of thinking, in our so-called sophisticated ways. But there's great attraction in that description of a place of peace, a place of provision, a place of splendour, a place of wealth, a place of righteousness, a place of salvation, a place of joy.

For example, verse 18, violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders. You shall call your walls salvation and your gates praise.

That's the full blazing sun of the glory of God. The dawning of that comes at Christmas. The full shining of that glory awaits us in heaven.

Ours is an age of great impatience. I suspect that we're becoming more and more impatient as people.

[ 10 : 51 ] We see that in road rage, for example. We see that in our aversion to joining queues for shopping or whatever it is. We see it in the demand for instant gratification, for instant solutions to our problems, for an immediate answer to whatever the dilemma is.

We want faster food. We want more instant solutions. And we become impatient as people more and more. This passage, 750 years preceding Jesus, is telling us, firstly, to be patient.

It is telling us that the dawning of God's glorious light is not an immediate thing for Isaiah and his contemporaries. 750 years later, it took, before Jesus was born.

And we, 2,000 years later, are still awaiting the full blazing midday sun of the glory of God's eternal kingdom to occur.

So this is telling us to be patient. But from our perspective, it's telling us to be patient with confidence. Because when God makes promises, He keeps them.

[ 12 : 10 ] And for those after Isaiah's day, they may well have, and probably did, give up on the promises of God. Where is Isaiah's words going to be fulfilled? And later prophets seem to indicate that that's what the people thought.

They'd given up on Isaiah's glorious prophecy. It didn't occur. But they didn't wait long enough. 750 years till Jesus was born.

And many more thousands, or at least two more thousands, before the full glory is seen. So this passage is firstly telling us to be patient in trusting the promises of God.

So if you're a person whose faith in God is flagging, be patient. Look back to God's fulfilment in Jesus and look forward with expectation of future fulfilment when God's eternal kingdom is brought by Jesus' second coming.

If you're a person who's frustrated by the lack of action, so called, of God in our world, demanding in a sense the full flowering of God's glory now, full healing, full release of prisoners, the end of oppression, the full comfort of those who mourn, etc.

[ 13 : 21 ] Be patient. We see the dawning of that, the glimpses of that, the soft colours of that occasionally, as anticipatory of the full flowering of God's heavenly kingdom to come.

If perhaps you're just weary in your Christian walk, weary in this earthly race, then keep your eyes focused forward to the full flowering of the light of God's glory to come.

If you're struggling with temptation that seeks to seduce you along the Christian path, then look forward to the solid joys and lasting treasures that the blazing sun of God's glorious light promises us in heaven.

Maybe, though, you're a person who just doubts this future glorious kingdom, that your whole life is oriented to this world, to the here and now. Well, God is the guarantor of the promise of His eternal kingdom.

The very end of the chapter is, if you like, His stamp saying, this is My Word. I am the Lord in its time, I will accomplish it quickly, He says, at the end of that chapter that was read for us in the first reading.

[ 14 : 38 ] God is saying, in My time, I will accomplish this. Trust this promise. It has My God's name as its backing.

And throughout the Bible, every time God makes a promise, we see it fulfilled or we're still waiting for it to be fulfilled. The Bible, if you like, is the evidence book for the faithfulness of God to His promise.

It gives us sufficient evidence to trust the promise of His glorious and perfect kingdom that is preserved for us in the future one day when Jesus comes back again.

So that's the first thing, being patient, trusting the promises of God. Secondly, there is much debate in our media in recent weeks leading up to Christmas about the place of celebrating Christmas in a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious Australia, especially post-9-11.

Interestingly though, it's not those of other faiths who are against Christians celebrating Christmas. It is those really of, we might say, no faith, the secularists or the humanists.

[ 15 : 56 ] They're the ones who are trying to put a dampener on Christian celebrations in our society, not those who are Muslims or Jews or of other faiths. The reality is that the Christian faith is for every person.

is not for those of one particular place or background or ethnic upbringing or heritage. The Jesus who was born in Bethlehem was born for all, white and black and yellow, northern hemisphere, southern hemisphere, western world, eastern world, whoever, whenever, Jesus was born for all.

Jesus is for the people of every nation, so integral to this picture of this glory of God's light rising and dawning are the nations of the world, all of them, Gentiles as well as Jews in Old Testament language, coming to God.

And so we read, for example, back in verses 3 and 4, Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around, they all gather together, they come to you.

And again we see the dawning of that light when Jesus is born. As we saw in the second reading, three kings, wise men from pagan nations coming to honour and worship Jesus alongside the Jewish shepherds and Mary and Joseph and the angels.

[ 17 : 27 ] Jesus is for people of every nation, not just a select few, not just a select nation. And so it's our responsibility as Christians to proclaim Him to those of any nation, our own and others, because He came to die for all.

And the third thing in this passage is that the heartbeat of God's kingdom is praise of God. We've seen the call to be patient.

Secondly, we saw that it is a kingdom for all nations. But the pulse of this kingdom, what makes it tick, is the praise of God Himself.

The angels of Bethlehem, that's the dawning of that. Not its full light, but a sampler, a little taster, like those ladies in Cole's supermarket who stand behind little trolleys and give you a tiny little sample of tiramisu or ice cream or something like that as though it's going to satisfy your appetite.

Of course it's not. They're wetting your appetite. They want you to have more. And so the glory of the angels praising God, as we know so well in the Christmas story, or the three wise men praising God when they come to Jesus' birthplace in the Christmas story, they're wetting our appetite.

[ 18 : 51 ] They're samplers or tasters for the praise that lies at the heart of heaven for eternity. So we read in verse 18 at the end of 18 in this poetic and imagery-filled picture of God's eternal kingdom, your gates shall be called praise.

And when we read the descriptions of heaven in the New Testament like in the book of Revelation, the pulse is very clearly praise to God and praise to Jesus Christ, his son.

It's a good question to ask ourselves at Christmas. Has the dawn of God's kingdom left an indelible mark of praise in your heart? As you come to hear the Christmas story again, does your heart beat with praise for God?

Externally, we can go through the patterns of worshipping God at Christmas, but in your heart and soul, is it pulsing and beating with praise? Why praise God though?

Well, Christmas is the dawning of the light. We're praising God for sending his son Jesus as the light of the world. We're praising God for Jesus who came, as the hymn says, in dark streets shining as everlasting light.

[ 20 : 12 ] We're coming to praise Jesus who rescues us out of this world of darkness into a world of God's glorious light, who rescues us from a world of sin and evil to a world of salvation and righteousness in God's holy kingdom.

We're coming to praise Jesus who not only died to enable that but rose from the dead to prepare a place in God's eternal kingdom for us. As the dawn of God's glory and light left an indelible mark of praise beating in your heart, we are made for the praise of God.

That is the chief goal of humanity. It is the chief activity of heaven and it is what God is beckoning us to when he says, Arise, shine, your light has come.

The glory of the Lord has risen on you. Amen.