

**Through the light of Christ, God seeks, saves, and brings us home.**

I often wake up pretty early. Early enough that not even a mouse is stirring. It is dark, silent, some mornings almost eerie. I have noticed in these mornings of shadows, there is an anticipation of what is to come that builds as the light arrives and the house awakens to a new day.

We are into the second week of Advent, waiting. The dawning of light and the promise of it again has us familiar with darkness. In fact to thoroughly understand the gift that is the incarnation, the arrival of Jesus, we have to sit in the dark for a while.

“To practice Advent is to lean into an almost cosmic ache: our deep, wordless desire for things to be made right and the incompleteness we find in the meantime. We dwell in a world still racked with conflict, violence, suffering, darkness. Advent holds space for our grief, and it reminds us that all of us, in one way or another, are not only wounded by the evil in the world but are also wielders of it, contributing our own moments of unkindness or impatience or selfishness.” Tish Harrison Warren

We are tempted to build a veneer that projects happiness, Christmas cheer! But God invites us to a place of honesty about the brokenness of our world, and the sinfulness of our own hearts, because that is what Jesus came to undo. Familiarity with the dark makes the hope for and arrival of light so much sweeter.

**John 1:9–14** “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God...[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (ESV)

Our anticipation, our waiting for the return of Christ, has us like the humble watchman in Isaiah crying out for more of Jesus, for earth-shaking presence and a move of God.

**Isaiah 64:12** “Will you restrain yourself at these things, O LORD? Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?” (ESV)

In Isaiah 65 we have the answer. And it gives us just what we need to thrive, the hope we need to shine into the darkness.

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### **Isaiah 65:1-25**

Here is the final deposit of prophetic hope for God’s people. Let’s remind ourselves who they are as they would have heard Isaiah’s voice.

A nation under siege - from without and within. Warring nations encroached on their territory and the pursuit of idols was rampant. They are a people headed to exile and keenly in need of assurance of deliverance. Exactly what God has promised by way of a Servant, the Messiah.

They are a people going through darkness who are given light to keep them, even just a remnant of them.

The end of the book has been then the description of renewal or revival under the king of light. There are stirring calls to prayer, hunger for his presence and now an answer that shows us the heart of God and the hope of eternity with him.

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Per usual, there is a lot going on in the text but we are just going to walk through it and cherish what we find.

### **1) God Seeks**

The petition for presence and the prayer for God to unleash his power are met with the eagerness of God to seek a people for himself.

**Isaiah 65:1** “I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, “Here I am, here I am,” to a nation that was not called by my name.” (ESV)

God is so eager he is being found by people who aren't even longing for him. “Here I am, here I am.” He wants to be noticed.

Those that didn't seek him, to them God initiates. He pursues. And this is the arrival of Jesus. Humbling himself, taking on flesh, entering the scene in the low place. Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Here we have God hinting at that pursuit. To rebels, idolaters. Who we don't expect, outside the typical camp. Spreading out his hand all day...

Giving us a picture into the expansion of the kingdom through the ministry of the Servant. The appeal going to the ends of the earth.

Totally upside down that he would do the seeking - isn't God supposed to be far off and unattainable, out of reach; yet his word says he is “here,” findable.

Do you ever geocache? My kids and I have tried to find a few in our neighborhood and each time we search, following the app's maps and clues, we don't uncover the loot. So we give up.

Not so with God. It would be like walking along actually looking for others things and tripping on treasure beyond our wildest dreams. God doesn't wait for us to show interest in him, he comes after us.

“This is the way of God. He requires of us no spiritual pedigree or talent. He just says, “Here I am!” with heart-awakening power. And anyone may welcome him.” RO

This is the voice in the stillness of a dark morning. In the intensity of a stormy night. “Here I am.” This is the light of Advent. God seeks.

The incarnation is so surprising; light dawns in the most peculiar of places. In a stable under the stars. In a strip mall full of churches...

So then the church is where people who wouldn't be caught dead in church can find God.

This is glorious news. Fuel for our telling the story of his grace.

But also in the response is not only his seeking, but his meeting with justice.

**Isaiah 65:6–7** “Behold, it is written before me: “I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their lap [7] both your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together, says the LORD; because they made offerings on the mountains and insulted me on the hills, I will measure into their lap payment for their former deeds.” (ESV)

With seeking comes justice - the presence of God as judge, the light revealing all. And because of that, we are in need of saving.

## **2) God Saves**

The people eat tainted meat sacrificed to idols, they revel in their self-righteousness, they reject God and they will be repaid... yet the remnant has hope. Because God not only judges sin, but he saves those that can't save themselves.

**Isaiah 65:8** “Thus says the LORD: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,’ so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all.” (ESV)

An image of a cluster of grapes and some are broken and bruised... but he does not cast them off. For the sake of his Servant, he does not destroy them all.

Only in the Servant is salvation found, and we know this is Jesus. This is what it means to be saved. There is a reckoning coming for all of humanity just because we were born, in our inherited disobedience toward God and his way, and our willful rejection of him, we deserve destruction. Like spoiled grapes.

“...down inside us all is a fear of the future, a deep insecurity, a passion for control, an unbendable will that looks for any way but God's way.” RO

All sinners go to hell. But sinners go to Hell in one of two ways - either personally or substitutionally... and this is what is in view in Isaiah 65. A remnant saved for the sake of the Servant. Because they are under the righteousness and atoning work of the Servant.

There is no grey here, it's in or out. Immense blessing for "my people who have sought me" or the weight of judgment for those who forsake the Lord... "I will destine you to the sword... because when I called you did not answer... because you chose what I did not delight in."

This is the stark reality of life under God (which is life for everyone!) The only options are to be "in the Servant" or destroyed.

Those in shall eat, shall drink, shall rejoice, shall sing for gladness of hearts. While those out will be hungry, thirsty, put to shame, and wail for breaking of spirit.

Things in our existence are not right, the light reveals that, the way to provision, joy, identity (a new name), is through the Servant - the main character of Isaiah, the whole point of the book! - the One whose blood would be poured out to work justice for his people.

Jesus' birth leads here. Taking on the darkness of sin and death and winning. So there would be forgiveness of sin, salvation, wiping the slate clean in his name. "Because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes."

That's what we need. That's what we have to offer. A God who saves.

And this saving is headed somewhere, not just an experienced difference now but eternity of peace and celebration.

### **3) God Brings Us Home**

Isaiah has already given us a glimpse of this new city but here it is the last burst of light for those waiting in the dimness of life without the experienced presence of Christ.

"Behold" Look and be in awe. He is creating new heavens and a new earth.

Former things forgotten. Former rebellion, sin, the worst of our lives, not even a thought.

A home of joy and gladness. An end of sorrow. An end of death. And it is not just some fluffy filtered image, it is real life. Building homes, cultivation of a vineyard. There is redeemed work, no longer in vain. Hopelessness vanishes in the presence of a God who is glad in his people! And here he is again, eager for interaction, answering before we call, present, known.

A home of peace. Where predators eat hay and there is harmony throughout creation.

This time of year we wax nostalgic for the Christmas spirit of yesteryear. The caroling, the coco, the cookies. Family all together, everyone a place to belong. A Norman Rockwell image of home, warm, and full. This is a good thing to do, even to experience if we can (minus the snow of a white Christmas) but it all pales in comparison to our true home, God dwelling with us.

This is where Advent leads us. This life is the journey home, from the inbreaking light of Christ, his work on the cross, his resurrection. The illuminating and enthusing power of the Spirit. Waiting to go home for the holidays!

**John 14:3–4** “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. [4] And you know the way to where I am going.” (ESV) He is the way, the truth, and the life!

Those saved by God through the light of Christ live then having seen where we are headed. And we become eager for others to see. It is exactly what we need, a home, a name, a hope in Jesus. And it keeps us from traps of iniquity and idolatry because it is what we really long for, what our souls ache for.

“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing... I must make it my main object of life to press on to that other country and help others do the same.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Living now to celebrate in preparation for home. "Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create." Rejoicing in all that is made new - this is his presence experienced. May it be so in us!

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**Be Found by God** - God is eager to help us. He welcomes any sinner who will reach out and grasp his hand extended in Christ. He's still saying, "Here I am."

Turn from the wasted ways of self and the voices that have promised to fulfill but only leave you empty. Turn to Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, his light, and experience his fullness. Return often to his seeking, that in love he takes on your life and gives you grace.

**Be a light** - Live headed home and tell people about it. With abandon, rejoice in the gift of grace you have in Jesus. If you are in Christ, God has not just patched up your old you. He has made you new. And you will enjoy God forever in endless newness. (2 Corinthians 5:17) Let your light shine. Be expectant for what Jesus will do.

"Never underestimate the power of a God who could have turned his back on us in wrath forever, but instead became love incarnate, love that bore all things and endured all things, even to the cross, so that we might be restored to him into one another. And so we may truly give thanks for this hope of glory and, in doing so, rededicate ourselves to his service, "not only with our lips, but in our lives. " Fleming Rutledge

It has been winter a long time, but Christmas is coming. The light has come and is coming again.

The God who saved you will bring you home. Rejoice! The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.