

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 353, 01-05-2019 †† Epiphany

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Isaiah 60

¹Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is dawning upon you. ²Look, darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness covers the peoples, but the LORD will dawn upon you, and his glory will be seen over you. ³Nations will walk to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴Look up. Look all around and see! All of them have been gathered. They are coming to you. Your sons will come from far away, and people will carry your daughters on their side. ⁵Then you will look and be radiant. Your heart will race with excitement and burst with joy. For great riches from the sea will be delivered to you. The wealth of the nations will come to you. ⁶Caravans of camels will cover your land, young camels from Midian and Ephah. All those from Sheba will come. They will carry gold and incense, and they will announce the good news of the praise of the LORD.



Rise and shine! Often in the Bible the point of light is joy. If someone’s face “brightens,” it is a happy look. Isaiah said it first, “ARISE! SHINE!” Why? “*For your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is dawning upon you.*”

Isaiah clearly beheld the birth of the Savior, as well as His death and resurrection. This prompted Isaiah to call out to the small flock of believers, “Lift up your eyes and look all around. See! They gather together and come to you!” Already Isaiah could see the apostles of the Lord going out into all the world and gathering millions of godless sinners to the Church of Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah’s prophecy he could see them coming from the Mediterranean Sea, which bordered Africa, Asia, and Europe. The gospel achieved its first and greatest victories from among the multitudes living along this sea. Paul worked there, filling all of Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy with the gospel. Judas Thaddeus

the apostle was known for sailing to his missionary journeys. The “caravans of camels” covering the land suggest regions in the East and Near East, Persia and Arabia and the East Indies and Ethiopia. Thomas and Matthew went to these lands; Bartholomew and Thomas may have gone to the far East. Andrew went to northern Russia.

You might be impressed that the wise men traveled so far to the light of the star that shone on the babe of Jesus at Bethlehem. But this was just a microcosm of what Isaiah shows us in his chapter 60 of the Bible. Counselors, emperors, kings, princes, and lords have laid down their scepters, crowns, and royal garments before the staff of the Good Shepherd, humbly worshipping at the foot of the cross. That is what we mean by “the brilliance of His dawn.”

REJOICE TO SEE THE BRILLIANCE OF HIS DAWN

Peer into the darkness and provide for the missions.

If we look at the world, we see there are

- 138 million atheists and
- 716 million agnostics.
- Only 18.3% of non-Christians even know a Christian.

Christian Europe, Asia, and northern Africa, where the gospel was once abundantly heard, are now filled with millions of worshipers of that false god that Muhammed preached, Islam being the fastest-growing religion in the world. Almost 2.2 billion people living today are still considered unevangelized, without the light of the gospel.

Like us ...

- They all have one God in heaven, who wants to be their Father, and one Savior.
- They too are paid for by the blood of the Lamb, the Son of God Himself, and Jesus Christ went on record for their punishment.
- Their souls are all purchased and won for eternal life and eternal communion with God.
- Paradise in heaven is open to them.

But they know none of this, because it has not been proclaimed to them.

They do not know where they came from or where they are going. Like us, they have a feeling heart that longs for perfect happiness, rest, and the peace that this world and all its glory cannot offer. But they know nothing of the One who

- calls the weary and heavy burdened to Himself;
- refreshes them;
- and gives them rest and peace for their souls.

They are sinners, as we are. The thoughts and inclinations of their hearts are evil from childhood. But they have no power to resist sin.

Millions of them are also poor in earthly goods, but they know nothing about the Father who gives every gift. They know nothing about casting all their anxieties on Him because He cares for them. They are weighed down by the inexpressible sufferings of this age. They groan from their sickbeds and cry in the valley of misery. For them the earth is a waiting room for hell. They do not have the comfort that those who sow here with tears shall harvest joy in heaven. They have no reason to say, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:32) Millions die in anxiety, fear, and pain because they know nothing of Him who took the power from death and brought life and immortality to light. They live without God and die without hope.

Let's peer into the terrible darkness that still surrounds millions of our fellow people. It is more horrible than if the earthly sun did not shine upon them. May this darkness shout loudly into our ears, "Do not hide your light! Set it on a high place to burn bright, shining into our poor, desolate, hopeless, and eternally lost land!"

To meditate on this sadness is to realize even greater joy in the work of missions. There are two ways in today's text we can realize this joy. Those who have come to faith can a) offer the necessary means and b) they can pray.

God has wonderfully arranged things so that earthly means supports the advancement of His growing kingdom. God could have chosen to do it in a different way. He could have chosen to keep us alive without air, food, and water, and He could have preserved the Church without means and our offerings. But God chose to sustain life through food, air and water ... and to sustain His kingdom of grace on earth with offerings and means that believers must present.

A Christian congregation, at great cost, has to provide preachers and teachers, establish seminaries, and build churches and schools. If the church wishes to

carry on missions, it has to find the heavy funding that requires for missionaries and their education. God has ordered it this way in His wisdom and love. This isn't because God needs man or your gold and silver. As He says, "*The silver is Mine; and the gold is Mine*" (Haggai 2:8). Instead, God wants us who have come to faith to share in the work of saving the world of sinners. He wants us to see how glorious and beautiful it is. He doesn't mean to impose a heavy burden on the faithful. But He wants to show you the highest and greatest honor that can be shown to a poor sinner. When unrighteous wealth fails, they will receive you into eternal dwellings.

But as important as your means and offerings are for the work of missions, they are not the main activity to demonstrate your joy. The main activity of the faithful is and remains prayer. Even an unbeliever who has no heart for missions can throw money into the plate, but he cannot pray for the work of conversion. Only the true believer can do this. Whenever you pray "*Hallowed be your name*" and "*Your kingdom come,*" you also pray that God's Word and saving kingdom of grace may come to the godless.

May our mission work rest on your praying heart. Ask God to add His blessing to the Spirit's work far off today.

If it hasn't occurred to us to do that, to give and to pray, then we ourselves are in deep need of a missionary. If we have prayed only occasionally, it's time to scold ourselves for our idleness. We need Isaiah to speak to us, "ARISE! SHINE!" Then, let's be encouraged to a new heart for missions, a new active soul for the work of other souls. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.