

“THE LIGHT OF CHRIST LIVES ON”  
Isaiah 63:7-9, Colossians 1:9-14, Luke 2:21-38  
December 28 & 29, 2024

Pastor William Wimmer of Grace Chapel Church of God in Benton, Arkansas, shares this interesting account. “On a warm, summer night, my wife and I were traveling in our car with Micah, our three-year-old son, who sat in the back seat. After many miles of driving in the darkness, we came to a stop in a remote area. The brightness of the traffic light revealed all of the dirt, dead bugs, and insects on our windshield. Micah said, ‘Look, how dirty!’

“My wife and I didn't think much of his comment until a moment later when we drove on—away from the light and back into the darkness. Upon reentering the darkness, we could no longer see the mess on our windshield, and Micah quickly piped up and said, ‘Now the glass is clean!’

“Before the law came, the dirt within us was hidden under the darkness. But when God gave the law, its light shined on the windshield of our hearts and revealed the filth of sin we'd collected on our journey. The law, then, is a light that shows us how sinful we really are. It cannot cleanse us or make us whole. But it does starkly highlight the true situation of our souls—and thus can lead us to Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah 63:7-9 tells of God's great love for His people, how He reached down to bring correction and redemption of our sin. Yet it would not be through the Law given by Moses that would bring that correction. It would be by a much greater method - a perfect sacrifice given that would pay for and atone all of the sins of the world for all those who would receive this sacrifice.

God loves us all so very much, and desires that none of us perish because of our

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 165)

sinfulness and rejection of His laws. So He established the perfect sacrifice and sent His only Son, Jesus, into the world so that our sins could be forgiven and we could stand before the Lord God Almighty once more, pure and holy in His sight. The celebration of Christmas is our recognition of the very beginning of God's great work of salvation for all who will believe in Jesus Christ.

God humbled Himself unto us, and Jesus willingly became human like us, yet without sin, so that He would become the Perfect Sacrifice, who would take all of the sins of the people in the world upon Himself, and with His death on the cross, pay the sin debt for all humanity, so that we could find our place in God's family as we put our trust and faith in Jesus.

But that happened so long ago, and sadly many people have lived and died without knowing that Jesus has bridged that sin-gap between God and us. Or they have blatantly disregarded the laws and commands of God to live however they want to live. They have lived their lives without the saving knowledge of Jesus' great love for us, and they died without making a commitment of faith in Him as their Savior. So they forever gave up any hope for themselves to find redemption of their sin to become righteous once more in God's eyes through Jesus Christ.

You see, we have only one life to live here on the earth. And as long as we live here, we have the chance to recognize our sinfulness and rejection of God's commands. But when we draw our last breath here on the earth, there is no more hope for us to change our eternal direction. No one can pray us into heaven. No one can buy our way into the kingdom of God. That decision has to be made while we are here on the earth, each making our own decision about Jesus being the Savior.

But as we live in the darkness of this world, our lives seem to be clean and holy because

the ugliness of our sin does not show up in the midst of the darkness all around us. It is only when confronted by the Light of the Law of God that we become aware of our great sinfulness. And when God's Light shines onto us, exposing the dirt and sin in our life, we have the choice to either come to affirm that we need God's remedy, His Perfect Sacrifice, Jesus Christ, to redeem us and purify us from all sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9). Or we can reject all that we are told about sin and wickedness, and continue to live any-ole-way we want too. However, as we become aware of our inability to cleanse ourselves from our sinfulness, we have the opportunity to confess our sins to Jesus and become free from the penalty that is involved, which is eternal death.

And so God, in His great love for us, has done a great thing to break the power of sin in our lives and to free us from sin's bondage to death. Jesus Christ came to us as the Light of God to shine deeply into our hearts so that we might find His love so compelling and so attractive that we give ourselves over to Jesus so that He might become our Savior, to save us from all our sin.

Robert Russell, author and pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky explains it like this. He says, "About 40 years ago there was a family in a house near the entrance of our subdivision that kept their Christmas lights burning long after the season was past. They burned their Christmas lights throughout January. Even through the first of February those outside lights burned every night. Finally, about the middle of February I became a bit critical and said, 'If I were too lazy to take my Christmas lights down, I think I'd at least turn them off at night.'

"But about the middle of March there was a sign put up outside of their house that explained why they'd left the lights on. It said simply, 'Welcome home, Jimmy.' We learned that that family had a son in Vietnam, and they had unashamedly left their Christmas lights on in

anticipation of his return. Lights are a symbol of hope.”<sup>2</sup>

God sent the Light of Heaven into the world so that we could have hope for eternal life. As we submit ourselves to Jesus Christ, and allow His light to illuminate all of the darkness in our lives, so that all our sin is made evident to us, we have the chance to receive God’s great hope of Salvation for us. As we come to know Jesus and believe in Him, and receive Him as our Savior, we find that God “*has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*” (Colossians 1:13-14).

Only as we receive Christ Jesus as Lord of our lives do we find His Light in us, which then, gives us the hope we need to endure these current days of turmoil and grief. Only as we have Jesus as our Savior can we become “*His holy people*” living “*in the kingdom of Light*” (Col. 1:12).

We see that hope for life in the lives of those who first received Jesus as the Son of God, Immanuel. Listen to the account of hope brought by Jesus soon after His birth to a few folks in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is Luke 2:21-38. (READ Luke 2:21-38)

Simeon and Anna were both faithful to the Lord. They had received confirmation that they would see God’s Salvation before they died. Though there had been no prophetic word from God to the people of Israel in 400 years, these two had kept their faith in the God of Israel all of their lives. And they eagerly watched for God’s promise to be revealed to them. The Holy Spirit had encouraged them to stay ready for God to show the fulfillment of His prophecies.

On the day that Joseph and Mary came into the temple to complete the requirements of the Law of Moses for Mary’s purification after giving birth to her first born son, Jesus, the Holy Spirit nudged Simeon’s heart and directed him to go into the Temple. As Mary and Joseph

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<sup>2</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 134)

brought Jesus into the temple courts, the Holy Spirit opened Simeon's eyes to see the One that the Lord had provided as the Messiah. And so moved was he by the sight of God's Messiah, he took Jesus into his arms and praised God. The gift of Salvation had been given to all the nations of the world, beginning right there in Jerusalem. He would be "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of [God's] people, Israel*" (Luke 2:32). At just that time in the history of the world, God supplied His Perfect Sacrifice to "*save all people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21). Simeon's hope had been confirmed, and he held in his arms the Savior for the whole world.

Imagine the joy and peace that came into Simeon's life at that moment. The very thing he had been waiting for all of his life was now right there in his arms. The Savior was there!

And directly following Simeon's proclamation, the prophetess, Anna, also saw what God had done, and she, too "*gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem*" (Luke 2:38). The joy in her own heart of the fulfillment of God's promise flowed out to all those who would listen to her.

One confirming the words of the other, both proclaiming the great work of God for everyone who would believe. They had not let their hearts waver from the faith they had in the Lord their God, even when all around them was chaos, confusion, wickedness and evil. They remained faithful and God fulfilled their greatest desire.

When God makes a promise, He is sure to fulfill that promise. And both Simeon and Anna were rewarded for their faithfulness. The Light of God had come to give life to all who would believe. And great joy flooded into Simeon and Anna so that others could also come to faith and bring light and life to those around them who were also experiencing hardships and trials, too. Their expectation for a Messiah had now become a reality. But this was only a baby. How would God fulfill His promise of the salvation of Israel through a baby? There would need

to be many more years in between before people would let themselves become hopeful for the redemption of Israel.

But the fact remains, no matter what we have to face, God promises to be with us and bring us hope as we keep our trust in Him. If we remain faithful, God will provide.

“Dr. James Dobson relates a story of an elderly woman named Stella Thornhope who was struggling with her first Christmas alone. Her husband had died just a few months prior through a slow developing cancer. Now, several days before Christmas, she was almost snowed in by a brutal weather system. She felt terribly alone—so much so she decided she was not going to decorate for Christmas.

“Late that afternoon the doorbell rang, and there was a delivery boy with a box. He said, ‘Mrs. Thornhope?’ She nodded. He said, ‘Would you sign here?’ She invited him to step inside and closed the door to get away from the cold. She signed the paper and said, ‘What’s in the box?’ The young man laughed and opened up the flap, and inside was a little puppy, a golden Labrador Retriever. The delivery boy picked up the squirming pup and explained, ‘This is for you, Ma’am. He’s six weeks old, completely housebroken.’ The young puppy began to wiggle in happiness at being released from captivity.

“Who sent this?’ Mrs. Thornhope asked.

“The young man set the animal down and handed her an envelope and said, ‘It’s all explained here in this envelope, Ma’am. The dog was bought last July while its mother was still pregnant. It was meant to be a Christmas gift to you.’ The young man then handed her a book, *How to Care for Your Labrador Retriever*.

“In desperation she again asked, ‘Who sent me this puppy?’

“As the young man turned to leave, he said, ‘Your husband, Ma’am. Merry Christmas.’

“She opened up the letter from her husband. He had written it three weeks before he died and left it with the kennel owners to be delivered with the puppy as his last Christmas gift to her. The letter was full of love and encouragement and admonishments to be strong. He vowed that he was waiting for the day when she would join him. He had sent her this young animal to keep her company until then.

“She wiped away the tears, put the letter down, and then remembering the puppy at her feet, she picked up that golden furry ball and held it to her neck. Then she looked out the window at the lights that outlined the neighbor's house, and she heard from the radio in the kitchen the strains of ‘*Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come.*’ Suddenly Stella felt the most amazing sensation of peace washing over her. Her heart felt a joy and a wonder greater than the grief and loneliness.

“Little fella,’ she said to the dog, ‘it's just you and me. But you know what? There's a box down in the basement I'll bet you'd like. It's got a little Christmas tree in it and some decorations and some lights that are going to impress you. And there's a manger scene down there, too. Let's go get them.’

“God has a way of sending a signal of light to remind us that life is stronger than death. Light is more powerful than darkness. God is more powerful than Satan. Good will overcome evil. Matthew 4:16 [NIV] tells us, “*The people living in darkness have seen a great light, the prophet said. ‘On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.’*”<sup>3</sup>

The darkness of the world today seems so bleak, so final. The troubles and trials affecting our lives seem so insurmountable and complete. The events happening in our days seem so unbelievably evil, yet unstoppable. The misery all around the world seem so permanent. There is so much potential for us to lose hope and see only despair and gloom.

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<sup>3</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 187)

But God has not forsaken us! He knows what is happening. He knows our hearts, our hopes, our dreams, and our faith. And He has provided for us the Light of His Son, Jesus, to encourage us and empower us to endure all that this world has to throw at us. Though we may seem to be a defeated people, God has not finished His plan of Salvation, for there are so many yet to hear about Him. God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Though we've been waiting many years for the Lord Jesus to return as He promised, if we keep our faith in Him and live for Him each day of our life, God will provide for us the encouragement we need to remain faithful witnesses to our hope found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus came into our world to bring us hope, and love, and joy, and peace, and life. As we walk in His Light and let it purify our hearts and minds, we will find all the strength we need to be the living witnesses in our world of God's fulfilled promise of a Perfect Sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. We can remain hopeful for His return, despite the long wait. We can receive all the power to stay true to His Word, and live so that the whole world can see Him through us. We can let the Light of Jesus Christ live through us so that it impacts those in our world around us. Let the Light of Christ live on in you so it can touch those around you.

Let's pray. Father, Thank You for all Your goodness and provision granted to us through Your Son, Jesus. Continue to empower us through Your Holy Spirit to remain faithful for the fulfillment of Your promise for the Salvation of the world. Guide us and encourage us so that we, too, might praise You for what You have done, even today. Help us to be the bold witnesses of Your love for the whole world so that those who have not yet heard, or those who have turned away, might come to You. Thank You, in Jesus' Name. AMEN.