

Text: Isaiah 42:14-17. Mid week Advent. **November 29, 2018.**

Jesus gives us light and hope. Amen.

Do you feel hopeless around the holidays? What? Christmas is coming! That's the best time of the year. But suicide rates spike around the holidays. Many feel hopeless. Not everyone looks forward to family. Grandpa is gone for the first time. There's a reason a TV show had a character drunk uncle, who was always upsetting people. Weddings, funerals and holidays can bring out the worst in family. And it seems like there's no way to fix it. So hopeless.

What about helpless? What? Helpless at the holidays? But there's so much help: toy drives and coat drives and food drives. But what if you can't help, don't have the resources? What if you need to be on the receiving end of the help, how does that feel? Black Friday gets earlier and earlier, but when you shop like crazy it just leaves you empty. What if Black Friday is a dark day for you, because you don't have money to spend?

Advent and Christmas aren't going to give you money to pay off the credit card debt you ran up on Black Friday. But Advent and Christmas do give you help, help to see your greatest treasure is not in stuff, but in your Savior. Not in cash, but in Christ. Not in money, but in the manger. There is Jesus, your eternal help! There is the one to call upon in trouble. He will deliver you. There is hope in Christ. Christ is your only hope of heaven, your greatest help for all problems on earth. This Advent season and through Christmas we are focusing on the contrast of light and dark. Being in the dark feels helpless and hopeless. But Christ's birth brings help. Christmas bring the light of hope.

God has held back. Just a little background. At this time, God's people were in captivity. They had been taken away from their land and deported to another country, called Babylon. God's people were wondering, "Has God forgotten us? Will God ever rescue us?" Well, here's God's answer.

I have kept silent long enough. After a half century of captivity, I am coming to punish and I am coming to deliver. We can see both of these pictures. This punishment is certainly coming. As certainly as a baby is coming when a woman is in labor. Maybe God used this picture of a woman in labor to make us think of the birth of Christ we are preparing to celebrate. I wish everyone could read the original language in this verse, because the words for gasp and pant sound like gasping and panting noises. I suppose we can even say those words in English that way. Gasp. Pant. If you've seen a woman in labor, you know what God is talking about. There's pain. But just as it's pain with a purpose when a woman is in labor, it's pain with a purpose when God quits holding back. God's purpose is to punish and to rescue.

First, God pictures the punishment. Dry, desolate, destruction. I know we haven't seen this lately. We've had wet, not dry. But remember, this is written in a desert, spoken to people who were used to going months without rain and they didn't have irrigation and they were farmers and they relied on and used carefully the little rain that came. This dryness was a big problem! And it's just a picture here of a much bigger problem! Sin! Sin leads to desolation, destruction, death!

And yet, there is deliverance! Even in this picture of destruction, some people who were carefully listening to Isaiah, could have seen deliverance. Deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God's miracle of crossing the Red Sea. The word for pools isn't used for swimming pools, but for ponds, marshy, reedy areas. One name for the Red Sea was the Reed sea. Maybe, some people would have thought of God's deliverance of his people on dry ground through this reed sea.

Certainly we can all see deliverance as the Lord leads the blind. Think of what a big problem it is to be blind! Think of how helpless you would be! Maybe you can picture this in a small way, if you can't find the bathroom at night without your glasses. But imagine being totally blind. That's a big problem! That's helplessness! You can't find the way. You need someone to help you. Being blind is a big problem. It's hopeless. You are helpless. Being blind is a picture of sin! Sin is a big problem! You can't help it. Sin is what you are! You can't fix it. There's no surgery for sin! You are helpless. You are hopeless.

Only God can fix it. Only God can perform the sin surgery. Only God can open our blind eyes and show us the way to heaven. It's a miraculous way, a way no one else could have every thought of, or seen on their own. It's a way that starts in a manger. God is leading us to that manger now in Advent. God helps us see our big problem, so he can show us his bigger solution: a Savior. Ironically, God gets us to see how blind we are, so he can open our eyes to the one solution: Jesus. Jesus left heaven, just for you. Because he couldn't stand the thought of heaven without you. Jesus came to a manger, so you have a mansion, in heaven. Jesus lived the perfect life you couldn't, died the death you should've, rose from the grave you wouldn't. So now that baby sees you perfect. That man on the cross gives you new life. The one who rose from the tomb will raise you from your grave.

Brother, do you see the light? Sister do you see the light? There's a miracle in that manger. God became flesh. Light came into the world of darkness. And when light and darkness meet, light wins! Every. Single. Time. Light wins! God opens the eyes of the blind. God helps the blind to see the one and only way to heaven is Jesus, a way we could never have found on our own. God smoothes out the rough spots of our hearts. God straightens out our crooked thoughts. God will certainly do this. God will not forget this. God will certainly bring you to heaven. God has already given you the light of hope. There is no doubt! There is no question!

Those who worship idols will be put to shame. Utter shame. Shame and shame again the original language says. Well, that's not me. I didn't cut down a tree in the forest and shape it into my God. Yeah, we just let someone else make the tree into paper, color it green and then spend all our lives chasing that paper and hoarding that paper and worrying if we will have enough of that paper to retire. You know, whatever is most important to you, is your God, your idol. Could be TV. Could be sports. Could be family. The thing that's most important to you, that's your God. And any God that isn't the true God, will leave you helpless, hopeless, in utter shame.

But that's not how God has left us. God didn't leave us in the dark. God brought us light. Jesus is the light of the world, light that shone in a manger. Jesus brought us the light of help, a help that stuff can't provide. Jesus is the greatest help in all our trouble on earth, help to see there is a purpose to this pain, the purpose to focus our eyes on heaven. There is the light of hope in Jesus. Hope, confident assurance that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Jesus shined the light on our hearts, in our eyes to see: that baby in the manger is our only hope, not just hope for a happy holidays, but a certain hope for heaven. Amen.

God says, "I will turn your darkness into light." Amen.