

The Light Is Worth the Trip

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INI – SDG

Isaiah 60:1-6

When my brother David was in college, we drove together to Austin, Texas without stopping. We drove all night and all day. When we arrived, we were there for maybe twenty minutes, turned around and drove all the way back. About twenty-four hours one way and the same back. Why would we do that? All that driving for just twenty minutes in Austin TX. There must have been something we thought was very valuable down there.

The Magi undertook a much longer and far more dangerous journey. Longer that is in the time it took them, not much longer in distance. They did it all just so that they could come and see and leave again almost right away. They came. They saw the Savior. They gave their gifts. They left. All that long journey for just twenty minutes in Bethlehem, and yet what does Matthew say?

Matthew 2:10 they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy

There was obviously something they considered very wonderful, very precious waiting there in Bethlehem for them. Something they thought well worth going to see even though it meant months of travel and they were only going to see it and leave.

The Magi really put us to shame in this regard. They traveled 1200 miles to worship Jesus. We often aren't willing to drive ten minutes.

In our text this morning, the prophet Isaiah foretells the true worth of what they went to see and why they were willing to travel so far to see it.

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

Isaiah speaks here to the people of Israel who were in great darkness. They were captive in the land of Babylon. Yet Isaiah greets them with this startling proclamation, "Arise shine; for your light has come."

This prophecy is fulfilled in its lesser sense in the account of the Magi. The star arose over the people of Israel. They did not recognize nor rejoice in that light, but the Magi did. The star of the Magi is only a foretaste of what God is promising his people here. The real fulfillment is not the star but Christ himself.

The glory of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush, to the Israelites in a great cloud, and Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. Here and now, the glory of the Lord comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is a much greater thing than what any of them saw. TO them it was only a vision which did not last, but now the glory is "risen upon you." The real thing has come. Not a temporary vision. The Lord of Glory has come into his temple. He is risen above you and will not set. It is not a vision or a dream which disappears in the morning, but the real and true thing.

For this reason, this passage speaks to each one of us, whenever we find ourselves in darkness, arise and shine in Christ.

2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you.

This reminds us of the ninth plague. During the ninth plague there was darkness over the whole land but there was light in the houses of the Israelites.

I personally think this is one of the most fascinating of all the plagues. It wasn't just the sky that was dark, but there was no light anywhere, even inside their houses. If they tried to light a candle or fire it didn't work. God caused even the candles and fires and oil lamps to not give off light. Except in the houses of the Israelites. They had light.

Isaiah reminds us in the same way there is darkness over the face of all the earth, but the light of the Lord shines in the hearts of his people. Just as the Egyptians tried but could not create light, so also no matter how hard people try, they cannot create light apart from God's word. Light exists only in the hearts of those who hear and believe God's word. All worldly attempts to create light only increase the darkness.

Often the greatest evils in the world are those who thought that they were creating light. Karl Marx and Stalin thought that they were bringing light and hope to the poor people of Russia, but they only created a regime of terror and violence.

Pieper comments on WWI in connection with this passage although he calls it "this World War." He says "It was the wisdom, the virtue, the highest culture of the world that united to devote all the world's knowledge, power, and wealth to the titanic struggle of the nations in this World War, bent on destroying themselves and each other to what end? For - nothing, absolutely nothing, except only to deceive and cheat each other with hollow phrases. When the wars come to an end, men remain what they always were: sinful and evil, altogether evil."

This is the deep darkness that covers the earth, but wherever the light of the Gospel comes there is light.

3 The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.

It is not the gentiles or nations, but rather "gentiles." That is to say not all the gentiles, and not whole nations but rather people from every nation. As we read in Revelation, a great multitude from "every tribe and tongue and nation." These come from all over the world. Again, the Magi are the first of a greater fulfillment.

People do not notice how dark the world is until the light of Christ is risen. When that light is seen they cannot help but be drawn to it. As the wise men came from afar, as moths will always fly to the light, so the people come. Not all, but many. They come to see the light, to worship the king.

The Light of Christ's glory is so great that even those who do not believe it are changed by it.

When you study the history of Hinduism, it is clear that there is a marked difference between Hinduism before the 18th century and Hinduism after the 18th century. Hinduism changed in response to the coming of the gospel. Many of the more brutal and barbaric practices are gone completely.

This is true not only in India but also in all the lands. The brutal and barbaric practices of all ancient religions have been tempered by the preaching of the Gospel. So that people these days say that all religions are the same. Religions are not all the same but they are much more similar now than they were.

Everywhere the gospel is preached it is that Christ is light so that even the unbelievers attempt to make their gods more like Christ.

I've never heard a Christian argue, "our God is just as vicious and ruthless as your false god.

Yet often false religions have tried to claim, "our god is just as merciful and gracious as your God."

Even the Muslims are taught to constantly address god as "most merciful." It is as if they must repeat this truth over and over otherwise, they might forget that he is supposedly merciful.

Jesus is the light, many see that light and come to him, but even those who don't come try to imitate that light.

4 "Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side.

"Lift up your eyes."

Whenever you are in darkness or downcast lift up your eyes to see the truth of God's church.

The coming of the Magi from the east is a very joyful thing to us. These people have come to worship Christ. There is nothing that gives a true Christian greater joy than to see others coming to worship Christ.

Psalm 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD."

What David means in this psalm is that there is no greater joy in his life than when others also want to come and worship the LORD. Imagine if a group of men from Iraq or Afghanistan came into our church today to worship with us. What joy to know that they have also come to worship the king our Savior.

Therefore, the prophet encourages us to lift up our eyes when we are weary and depressed and rejoice that many are coming to Christ. This is our comfort in all darkness, and all tribulation.

This is why we endure tribulation and suffer. We suffer so that others might learn about Jesus. If it weren't for this fact than perhaps God would take us to heaven and we wouldn't have to suffer. But God has not taken us to heaven, instead he leaves us in this cold dark, sinful, lonely world so that others can also learn about Jesus and come to the light.

In this way God encourage Elijah when he was ready to give up preaching the word. God told him there were still seven thousand believers.

Similarly, Isaiah encourage us in all darkness and all suffering we ought to lift up our eyes and see those who are coming. It is ok that I suffer shortly so that they might come to Christ.

This is not an easy thing to see when our church attendance is declining. Yet God would have us look at the greater picture. Remember the vast multitude that he speaks of in Revelation.

5 Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy; Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. 6 The multitude of camels shall cover your land, The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, And they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD.

This verse is describing the wealth of the world flowing into the land of God's people. Camels were a status symbol, in the ancient east. It wasn't just anyone that could afford a camel. On top of camels Isaiah mentions gold and incense. They bring everything that is good with them. Not just money and gems but wisdom and literature and science and math, painting, music etc. All these things serve the newborn king. All these things serve the Lord.

Nothing that is evil or bad has any place in God's kingdom, but everything that is beautiful, pleasant, good and kind does.

God does not mention these gifts so that we will think, ahh all these riches will be mine. Rather they are mentioned so that we will recognize what a great gift this light is. It is well worth more than all the gold. These people gladly give up the gold and the riches to have the one true gift, the gift of salvation and forgiveness of sins. It would be very foolish of us to do the opposite, to give up the gift of Christ so that we can have the gold of this world.

Christ is a light more precious than all the wealth of this world.

The reason David and I went down to Texas was to get a car full of books. A retired LC-MS pastor told David he could have all his books. Those books were well worth the long drive and the price of all that gas. As a bonus we also stopped and got some real Texas Bar-B-Q.

The journey of the Magi was for a far greater prize. It was well worth it to them to see and worship the king. We also ought to travel far if needed to gain this great prize. The prophet calls on us like the Magi to arise and shine in the presence of Christ. Come and worship the newborn king. Amen