

Last week, we started this Advent Sermon Series “From Gloom to Hope.” Today is the second message.

One of the main lessons we learned from the first message is that no darkness can prevail against God and that God’s light always comes through.

The prophecy from Isaiah 9 explained

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish... The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us...

We learned that Isaiah 9 is a prophecy of the coming Messiah, Jesus the Christ, and that he is the child spoken here that brings light to the darkness we may face. And his light means new life and healing for whoever welcomes him.

With this in mind, Christmas is the story that reminds us that God does not forsake us but has done the impossible to free us from bondage and set us free to lead a life of peace, joy, hope, and love. In other words, a life that breaks away from gloom and doom.

For this second message, I want to share a critical belief that empowers and gives us the confidence to overcome the gloom in our lives: welcoming God into our lives.

This is a critical theme in the advent season, for we celebrate God coming to us and are reminded that God is with us because God chose to be with us.

So, when everything is against us, and we don’t seem to find a way, knowing that God is with us assures us that we will make it.

Let’s dive in.

One of God’s names that we often hear during Christmas time is *Emmanuel*, which means: *God with us*. This declaration is found in Isaiah 7:14,

Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

(The young woman is Mary and the child is Jesus.)

However, many times we don’t feel that God is with us. It sounds great to say that God is with us, but if we are honest is another story to know confidently that that is the case. Perhaps this is an even more pervasive reality because of what we have been going through this year.

Have you ever asked the question: *is God with me?* Probably so. Most of us, if not all of us, have had that concern.

This is a fair question because we can’t have sustainable hope without the assurance of God’s presence in every circumstance we may experience. In other words, ultimately, our hope comes from knowing that we are not alone.

This is the challenge: most people struggle with feelings of loneliness or abandonment at some point in their lives. They have felt the heavyweight of loneliness by losing people we love or missed opportunities in life. These life experiences sometimes set on us as a heavy burden and make us wonder if God cares about our lives or if God is with us at all.

Other times, as it relates to our faith, we believe that God is not with us or that God does not want to have anything to do with us because either we don't think we deserve the presence of God in our lives or simply that God does not care enough to be with us.

Even more, our acting sinfully causes us to struggle with shame, guilt, and fear, and these sentiments make us distance ourselves from God and even from the people we love.

In such times of loneliness, when we are confused, afraid, tempted, hurting, or discouraged, we may struggle sincerely wondering if what wants to be with us and do anything for us.

Can you relate?

One of the things that I have learned by ministering to people and having my challenges is that God is always with us, but we do not always feel God's presence.

Well, feelings are not infallible; sometimes, our feelings are misplaced and misguided. From this, I have learned that God is with us not because we feel it, but because God chooses to be with us and has promised God's presence in our lives.

So, when we feel alone and struggle with all kinds of heavy thoughts and emotions, there is a gift we can always rely on: *God's presence*. The God we believe in has chosen to be present in all of our pains and needs—whether we feel it or not. Our God joins us in our brokenness. Our God feels as we feel. Our God has been with us since always.

Psalms 139 gives witness to the presence of God through the struggle of someone that thought deeply about the same things we are thinking right now. Hear the Word,

1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from far away.
 3 You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.
 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is so high that I cannot attain it.
 7 Where can I go from your spirit?
 Or where can I flee from your presence?
 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
 9 If I take the wings of the morning
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
 10 even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me fast.
 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light around me become night,"
 12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light to you.

King David wrote this Psalm; a profound one indeed.

In this Psalm, David tells us that he knew that God knows everything and is everywhere. He reflects about a place and time where he may find himself truly alone, yet there is none.

Even if he goes deep into a pit of darkness, God will meet him there. Even before he had a consciousness while being formed in his mother's womb, God was there with them. And, he says: I come to the end of everything I can think of, and I am still with you.

But he did not know this always; he experienced a great deal of loneliness in his life and endured a myriad of struggles that led him to write this and many other Psalms.

Here is his story. He was the youngest of 7 brothers, often left out of any vital family discussion. Throughout his life, David was persecuted by people he loved and was left to die in his enemies' hands. He also committed dreadful sins that we would not think a man of God would do.

Yet, despite the ways he was treated and the wrongs he did, he always came back because his love for God was greater than the injustices committed against him and the injustices he committed against others; he was able to forgive and receive forgiveness—the moment he realized his wrongs, he would return to God, confessing and imploring for God's presence to not abandon him. (See Psalm 51 as an example of this.)

Through all of this, David soon learned that God's presence never abandons us but that it is us, humans, that run away and hide from God because of our fears, even to the point of rejecting God because we have yet to realize how much God loves us (think Adam and Eve, for example).

We say things like: "God would never want me. God would never welcome me. God has abandoned me because of what I have done. God does not care about me anymore."

But this is not what the Bible teaches us. Here is the good news: King David would challenge these statements because he learned that God's love was greater than any of his fears, shames, and guilts; that even though God knew his brokenness or lacking, God never abandoned him.

This knowledge or revelation of God's heart changed everything for King David and can change everything for us too. God, knowing everything (the good, bad, and ugly) and being everywhere, was not a cause for fear but comfort, hope, and confidence in the future. Even when David felt alone or forsaken by all others, he knew that God was there with him.

To this, David exclaims (v. 6): "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it."

And so, David reflects: God isn't just everywhere, but everywhere I go, God lays hold of me (v. 10). God's presence is not like a force field that follows me; but is personal, a warm, caring, and guiding embrace that upholds us.

My friends, if anything can be said about God, it is not: "why have you abandon us," but "why do you keep insisting on being with us?"

And that is Christmas: God insisting on being with us, bringing light to our darkness, and hope to our gloom; changing everything from death to life.

I finish with this: when we are confused, God's presence will guide us; when we are afraid, God's presence will protect us; when we are tempted, God's presence will help us resist; when we are hurting, God's presence will comfort us; when we are discouraged, God's presence will encourage us; when we are lonely, God's presence will be our companion. Amen.

Phrase for social media:

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