

## **FGBC: Advent 2019: Dark to Light**

Isaiah 2:1-5

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Are you an early adopter or a reluctant conformer when it comes to Christmas decorating?

So about a week after Remembrance Day has been fully remembered my wife starts getting the Christmas bug. And she starts stringing lights and decorating the house. And then there is me. Decorating is not my forte, it's right up there with furniture shopping and picking myself in the eye. Am I the worst one here, or is anyone with me?

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But I will admit that once it's done I like the lights. And that's because Christmas is all about the transformation of dark into light.

So 2000 years ago darkness was invaded by the Light it never saw coming. God put skin on and stepped off His throne to walk among our garbage. He risked getting His holy hands dirty with our sin – that's what always happens when something clean touches something dirty, but not this time. Everywhere He went His holiness transformed our darkness.

So Jesus walked down the backwater streets of Palestine and people had their lives transformed out of darkness into light. Physically sick bodies got healed, spiritual oppression was lifted, fractured relationships were restored and ultimately sinners were reunited with the God who loves us.

And this is what Christmas is about. And this is what humanity is hungry for. And my evidence for this is that every Christmas movie has this theme. The Grinch needs a heart transplant. Buddy the elf is looking for his dad and if I only had that Red Ryder BB gun I would have lasting peace and happiness. And it always works out in the end. Christmas is about dark to light.

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So today we are going to unpack the foundation that lies below the dark to light of Christmas. And so if you've got a Bible on your phone or you see one in the pew in front of you go ahead and open it up to the book of Isaiah. You'll find it just a bit after Psalms and Proverbs in the Old Testament. And today we are going to be in chapter 2. Would you stand with me for the reading of God's word?

[Read Isaiah 2:1-5]

Now if you are familiar with Isaiah you know there is a lot of dark going on in the context of today's passage. The first 24 chapters or so are full of God telling the world that He is going to judge it for its sin. Israel's going to get it. Babylon's going to get it. Egypt and Cush are going to get it. Everybody's going to get it.

It's like when mom has been pulling her hair out all day and telling the kids – keep it up, sooner or later dad's going to come home. This never happens in our house, but in some of your houses. And that about sums up Isaiah.<sup>1</sup>

But in the midst of the dark there are these pin pricks of light – something good is coming. God says, “Yes, everything is broken, but I'm going to fix it.”

Look at verse 2. The first thing we see is that God is going to elevate the mountain that His temple is built on.

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So, last Christmas I had the opportunity to visit Israel, and it is so funny walking into a place you've spent your life reading about because you realize your brain makes up pictures of what things look like, and none of them are anything like reality.

And one of the big things I was blown away by is how pathetically small the mountains are in Israel. They are not the Rockies, they are more like the drive up Foothills. And so yes, Jerusalem is on a mountain, but it's really it's more like up the Hart. And it's not even the highest mountain around. The Mount of Olives where Jesus was the night He was arrested overlooks Jerusalem and is twice as tall.

And so God says I'm going to elevate Jerusalem and all the nations are going to stream to it. What's going on here?

Well, the predominant thought of the day was that the higher up you went the closer to God you got. Hence the Tower or Babel – “Let's make a tower that reaches to the heavens. Then we will be like God.”

Or remember how throughout the Old Testament every time a good king came along they tore down the high places. These were little places of worship that were situated up the mountains in honour of other gods.

And so the good king would tear these down saying we aren't going to have things in Israel that are higher than YHWH's temple. YHWH is going to be first.

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Now we aren't really into high places anymore. Hartland Baptist and College Heights Baptist don't have anything on us other than less smog.

But there are still lots of things that compete with God for importance in our lives – right? And this was the point of the high places in Israel too. The people were looking to other things to bring joy.

So a little further down God confronts Israel about what has stolen their heart from Him. He says:

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<sup>1</sup> Outline adapted from Matt Chandler <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/already-but-not-yet> (Accessed November 30, 2019)

Israel is full of silver and gold;  
 there is no end to its treasures.  
 Their land is full of warhorses;  
 there is no end to its chariots.  
 Their land is full of idols;  
 the people worship things they have made  
 with their own hands. (Isaiah 2:7-8)

Now these are high places we understand. Israel stopped trusting in God when they got rich, when their army got strong and when they had lots of cool new stuff.

This is Canada in a nutshell – except for the army bit – we still need to trust God there. But we are rich. And it was just Black Friday so our houses are full of the newest gadgets we didn't know existed last week but were such a good deal we just had to buy. And our money and our stuff lulls Canadians into a false sense of security. Right?

And into a context like this God said, a time is coming when people from all nations won't buy into these lies anymore. They will center their lives around My mountain. Verse 3 continues:

[Read Isaiah 2:3]

People from all around the world are going to wake up to the reality that the way they've been looking out at the world has been wrong and isn't leading them to happiness like they thought. And they are going to center their lives around the truth of Zion.

Friends, it has always been God's plan to draw the world to Himself and His blessing through Abraham's family. And God rehashes this plan in today's text: When the Messiah comes "many peoples will come and say 'there is something going on in Israel that I want to get my hands on. Life with God is abundant.'

And we don't have to wonder whether this came true, because we are here right now. We are the *many peoples* from *all the nations* that have seen the good God has done for us in Jesus and been attracted to Him. If you love Jesus today you are someone who has oriented your life around His glory, learned His ways, and walked in His paths.

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Now notice it doesn't say believed in Jesus and prayed a prayer. It isn't just a mental thing, it is a whole being transformation. So what do these ways and paths look like?

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Well, it turns out the people of God have always worked to live lives that are different from the lives of those around us, and this has shown up particularly in the ways we view sexuality, power and money. There are more, but these are the big three. And when people see our difference, they get a taste of Jesus.

So Christians believe God created sex as a good gift. It's not dirty, it's good. But it's powerful. And so, like anything powerful it needs to be used the right way. And God has established some parameters to this end for our protection and pleasure.

And God's good design is that sex works best within the confines of marriage between a man and a woman. This is where people, particularly women, are protected and valued and cherished and not used or consumed.

And in case you haven't noticed, this is not the way the world views sexuality. In the world sex is just a physical thing. And so sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is used to sell everything from toasters to sports cars. And on top of this the pornography industry is all about turning people, again primarily women, into commodities to be consumed. And the result is that young men, boys really, are learning that women exist for their pleasure. But that's not the design. And Christians stand against that in contrast to the world and say we are going to use our sexuality God's way because that is where abundant life resides. This makes us different.

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And we view power differently. Jesus is by far the most powerful person to ever walk the face of the earth, and He spent His time washing feet and hanging out with the poor. So, for Christians the power we have is not for beating people around us down, it is for serving them – this is God's economy. And it makes us weird.

So if you've got a particular gift that makes you good at something, you don't step to the front of the line. Your job is to use that gift to serve the people around you. And if you are really godly you don't get the best seat in church, you sit behind one of those posts over there – maybe you didn't know that. Now everyone's going to be fighting for those bad seats. That's God's economy.

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And we view money differently. There's weird stuff in the Bible about money. Money's not evil, but it's also not a blessing. It's a responsibility. It's powerful, so it needs to be used the right way or it causes harm. And the Bible's "right way" is that we become "cheerful givers."<sup>2</sup> The Greek is "hilarious" giver. So the picture is of a crazy person just giving their money away. I don't need to tell you – that's weird!

Now if you're wondering what that looks like practically, it's the opposite of someone who constantly builds bigger barns and stores up wealth just in case they live to 120. But that's what makes sense to our world.

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Now it's not wrong to be wise and prepare for the future. But it is wrong to trust money as the source of our happiness or security. That's a high place that needs to be torn down. God must be the source of our happiness and security.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Now some people in the world look at us when we live like this and say: “Wow, that’s amazing. I wish sex didn’t control me; I wish I wasn’t striving for more power and more money. I want some of what they have.”

And other people look at us and say “That’s stupid! I don’t want anything to do with that that.” But either way we look different to the world. And this is God’s design for drawing people towards the abundant life He created us to enjoy.

You see living like God says does result in abundance. When we orient ourselves around His glory we do find what it is we’ve been looking for. We are all looking for happiness and love and joy. And every commercial promises you that you can have it all if you spend your money there, but only God delivers.

The only way into the light is to orient ourselves around God’s mountain. And when we do this the result is joy and happiness... and sometimes more pain.

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Hold on a second, that’s not supposed to be there... but look at verse 4.

[Read Isaiah 2:4]

Isaiah says, “The Messiah is coming and people from all around the world are going to orient their lives around Him. And then He says that the Messiah’s reign will result in the end of war, violence and death. Armies are going to take up farming.

Now I don’t know about you, but I don’t see this working out right now. I mean we have it pretty good in Canada, but if you look at the global scene there has been more bloodshed and terror over the last century than ever before. The world is full of predator drones, supersonic missiles and armies full of children. If there is one thing we are good at it’s taking up swords and training for war. So what do we do with this verse?

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Well, theologians call this an “already but not yet” passage. And the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are full of texts like this, and the Christmas story is full of these passages.

When God puts on skin and walks into our brokenness there is an invitation to come out of the dark and into the light. And people start walking in it. In a room like this there are lots of stories of this kind of thing happening. In fact next week we are having another Life Together weekend. And Lighthouse is going to be dedicated to people sharing stories of God showing up in their lives.

Loved ones have come to Christ after years of praying for them. People have been healed from cancer and all sorts of other diseases. Financial distress has been set straight. And lots of people have had opportunities to share the gospel.

I know Nikki and I have been praying for opportunities to connect with our neighbours and right now piles of our neighbours' kids are coming to church and learning about Jesus. This is an answer to prayer. These are "already" moments.

But these aren't all the moments. And the reality is that just because we align ourselves with God's glory doesn't mean that brokenness disappears. And there are people here who are living in brokenness in spite of orienting themselves around God's mountain.

There are people in this room who are sick or have really sick people in their families. And God hasn't healed in spite of their prayer. Some of us have broken relationships. Some of us are struggling financially. There are people in our church who are dying right now. These are real "not yet" moments.

And this is the tension we live in as Jesus followers. The Messiah has come and we do walk in His paths and enjoy His light. Jesus has brought peace. We have been saved. And yet we still live in a broken world where we hunger for more peace and more life.

It's like Bono sings: "I have climbed the highest mountains, I have run through the fields... I have kissed honey lips, felt healing in the fingertips. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

And then he answers himself: "I believe in the kingdom come, then all the colors will bleed into one. Bleed into one. [But until then] I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

There is salvation and life now, and yet we long for what is yet to come.

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In the end of Revelation John tells us where Jesus followers are headed. He says:

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among His people! He will live with them.... He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Revelation 21:3-4)

One day it will just be "already", but until then it's already but not yet. And this is where we find ourselves this Christmas. So there is just one last thing to talk about: and that is how do we live in the space between these two places? How do we live in the already but not yet?

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Look at verse 5

[Read Isaiah 2:5]

In the already but not yet we are faced with a command and a choice. God says "walk in the light." In other places it says "Live ready for Jesus' return. Stay awake." And that's because the darkness is real and it seeks to suck you in this Christmas. Don't let it win!

Friends, here's the thing, some of the darkness we face is because we live in a broken world – people are going to get sick and die here – even godly people. And it has nothing to do with how you live or how much faith you have. But some of the darkness we face comes from our choosing not to walk in the light. Do you know what I mean?

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Sometimes, instead of wrestling through our doubts we feed them; we meditate on books and shows that destroy faith. And then we wonder why our doubt increases. That's not walking in the light. Or sometimes we feed our sin addictions instead of starving them. We put ourselves in situations where lust can grow or substance abuse can happen. And then we wonder why abundant life evades us. That's not walking in the light. And that is not what God has for you. But it is your choice.

So this Christmas, choose to walk in the light. Pursue it. Turn away from sin and move towards the mountain of the Lord. But do this looking to the future and refusing to be discouraged when brokenness slaps you in the face. Friends, today we live in the already but not yet. The kingdom has come, but it isn't completely here yet. But one day Jesus will make all things new. So walk in His light.