



BRIGHTER

The light of Christ is brighter than all competing lights. He is the light shining out of darkness. In our own darkness, we search for light and sometimes attach to lesser lights. Faces and rooms lit by television, computer and phone screens are a familiar scene in our world. What light are we looking for? Brighter, truer, more beautiful is the eternal light we find in Jesus Christ.

Brighter: No Brighter Hope • Isaiah 60:1, 18-20 • Tim McConnell • December 10, 2017

There are a few things that the McConnell household always seems to run out of, at least if you are judging by what shows up in our stockings on Christmas morning. Apparently up North, the team has noticed a few things we almost always need. Lip balm is one. Chapstick. Makes it into every stocking every year. Scissors made it into all the stockings one year. I guess the jolly old elf saw me running around looking for scissors too much! Nail clippers and tweezers. But lately it's been those little LED flashlights. Amazing how those things disappear, but luckily the elves have figured out how to make them I guess (it's all very mysterious to me) because we keep getting them in our stockings. Good thing too because it seems no matter how many flashlights come into the home, when the power goes out or something is lost out in the dark a sum total of zero flashlights are available. They are not where they are supposed to be, or they are where they are supposed to be, but they were left turned on in the drawer and the batteries are out, or they are just plain gone. I'm expecting a pile of them to arrive again December 24th. We'll see.

But we won't need flashlights forever. Here is the amazing promise God gives us in Scripture today: the day is coming, and in some ways it is already here, when the Lord will be your everlasting light. "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end." (Isaiah 60:19-20) That might sound familiar. There's a similar passage we read a lot at memorial services from Revelation: "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there." (Revelation 21:22-25) That's the amazing thing about prophecy—or about God's Word—it lasts. What Isaiah said was for his people at his time—in his context, he spoke an encouraging promise from God and it counted right then. But it was also for Jesus' time. Isaiah 60:6 talks about guys coming on camels to deliver gold and frankincense to praise the Lord. But then it was also, and it *is* also, for our time. We need the promise of the light of God in our lives. And, *and*, it is a picture of the future time, the end time, when all promises will be delivered. That's the power of the

Word of God. The lights we use between now and then, the little flashlights we carry and misplace, they are only temporary. What is our brighter hope? It is this. God has determined to bring light.

A promise is only as good as the one making it. Consider the source. If a salesman on TV at 3 a.m. is making the promise, I don't know. Kids, if the Santa Claus at the mall made you a promise—eh, I wouldn't bank on it. Maybe; maybe not. If I make a promise I hope to follow through, but it's not a sure thing until it happens. But with God. If God makes the promise, it is as good as done. It's only a matter of time. Hope is an expectation of a coming result—an expectation that a promise will be fulfilled. Hope is only there to get you from the promise to the fulfillment. That's why Romans 8 says, "...But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." (Romans 8:24-25) Once the thing you were hoping for shows up, there's no need for hope anymore. But until it gets there, you can't be fully sure it's going to happen. You ache to see the fulfillment, to see the promise made good. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13:12 ESV) Hope is that waiting, longing, desiring period between the promise and the fulfillment of that promise. And you had better measure the promiser. If God makes the promise, you can rely on it. There is no such thing as empty hope in God's promises. God promises to bring His light. It was promised to come by Isaiah, it came in Jesus, and it is coming with the Kingdom of God that is on the way even now. It will be. There is no such thing as empty hope in God's promises.

I don't know about you, but I'm ready to see more of God's light. The world is fairly well a mess right now. It has been hard to watch the steady attrition of male leaders who abused their power over women. Each day there is a new list—men we have all trusted and looked up to and followed. In my own social media I have heard heartbreaking stories of young women I've known since they were kids in my former churches that suffered terrible harassment when they got out into the workplace. I think if I were a woman I would feel like I'm not sure there is any safe place to be! Is there a decent man on the face of the earth at this point? I hope so, but where am I basing my hope?

Tracey Bianchi is a pastor and author who writes for Christianity Today on women's leadership issues. She shared a story recently of driving one of her elementa-

ry-school-aged boys home from hockey when he kind of dropped a bomb on her. He said, "Mom, can I ask you a question?" A comment like that from a boy that young kind of puts a lump in your throat. "Uh. Sure," she said. Her son asked, "Mom, what do you think the world is gonna be like in twenty years? When I look around things seems really bad, they seem really dark, and I just wonder how much worse it is going to get." What do you want to say to a kid like that? You want to say, "It'll turn around. Things will get better. I'm sure it will all work out." Let's be hopeful. But what are you basing that hope on? What is your brightest hope?

There are plenty of prognosticators out there, people telling us it's getting better or people telling us it's getting worse. The DOW is up. Test scores are down. Murder rates up here, down over there. Drug use up. Marriage rates down. Where do you look to keep the score? These cultural scorekeepers can seem a little like weathermen to me. Looks like it will be colder tomorrow. Might get warmer next week. When we lived in the UK we watched the weather for a laugh. Why? It was almost always the same, especially in the fall and winter. Overcast. Dreary. But over there they have something we don't. The meteorologist will say "but it's brightening." The local weather had a brightening index. It wasn't a matter of the clouds blowing away—they weren't going to! But the sky may brighten a little more one day. How do we measure things? When we look at the world and the direction it's going, as a father, I get concerned for my kids. I wonder where they will run for shelter or how they will walk a healthy track with all that comes at them from glowing digital screens, with legalized marijuana; with the ways dating and romance are approached. It isn't brightening. It's getting darker it seems to me, and I even begin to wonder if there will be a protected sanctuary of virtue anywhere, if there will be an island of purity and godliness anywhere at all.

But there will be. There is a brighter hope. God has determined there will be a place of purity in this world. The same God who said, "Let there be light"... "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6) If I told you that I was going to ensure a place of purity and light remained on the face of the earth, I wouldn't want you to believe me. You'd be a fool to believe me because you and I both know I don't have the power to do it. But that's not what I'm saying. The scripture tells us God has determined to bring light and hope to this world.

God has determined that there will be a place of safety and light in this corrupted world. God decided not to allow His creation and all the people of the world to slip inexorably into corruption. God sent His Son Jesus into the world to be our Savior. In Christ there is sanctuary. In Christ, purity and light entered the world again and will shine forever. In Christ we have a brighter hope. There is no brighter hope than Jesus Christ.

There is no such thing as empty hope in the promises of God. What God has promised He will accomplish. Out of darkness a light will shine. "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you." (Isaiah 60:2 ESV) And as we read, "No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. (Isaiah 60:18-19) Since God has promised light, light there will be. Since God has promised an enduring sanctuary, an enduring sanctuary there will be. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe." (Proverbs 18:10 ESV) What God has brought in Jesus, in the name of Jesus, is a place to run, a place of enduring purity, a light. It will never fade. It is a kingdom planted like a seed that will only continue to grow until it comes into fullness. You can run to the name of the Lord.

Our hope is different than the hope of the prognosticators and forecasters. Our hope is based on Jesus Christ. If I tell you there will be an enduring light, the light I can promise is intermittent, temporary, unreliable. It's about as good as me telling you there's a flashlight in the junk drawer in the kitchen. Maybe. And maybe it has batteries. If God determines there will be light, there is no such thing as empty hope in the promises of God. No matter how deep the darkness, no matter how corrosive the corruption, this will endure.

In developmental psychology, they talk about something called "object permanence." This is when an infant realizes that something still exists even if it isn't in their field of view. At first, infants only know what they see and feel, but at some point they develop the knowledge that what they can't see still exists somewhere and they cry or try to look for the thing they are missing. Where did that binky go? I need that thing! This time of year Druids would gather to

begin performing rituals and sacrifices to attempt to bring back the sun. I can't see it. Maybe it's gone. God's love isn't like that. God's light isn't like that. It has object permanence. Our hope is different; it is a brighter hope. Even if you can't see it for a moment, even if you can't feel it through a night or a dark season, we know a rising sun that never sets. There will be a place, in Jesus. There is a place in the name of Jesus, a place of refuge, of love, of purity—and of purity restored—and goodness and light.

This time of year many are looking for something. Many are looking for a place where goodness endures, where light vanquishes darkness. But day by day they are met with a barrage of bad news. Imagine for a second if God sent emissaries to our city to reveal the good news—that the light of Christ endures. With everyone searching for the magic of Christmas and a place where the good defeats the bad, what if God sent hundreds of messengers to our city who were able to say, "Yes. It's true. It has happened. I know a place to go. I know a tower of refuge and strength. I know where you can exit darkness and enter light. I know where there is one pure thing, one good man, one godly protector." Friends, over the next two weeks, you are that emissary.

"...you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise." (Isaiah 60:18) The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The walls are called Salvation. In the presence of the Savior you are safe. There is a place of refuge. There is a place of purity and light. In the presence of your Savior. And you can enter. The gate is called Praise. Verse 11 says "Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night,..." (Isaiah 60:11) Any can come. Any can walk through. You come with praise on your lips; straight through the gates of praise. Glory to God on high. Glory to the name of Jesus. Glory and praise and all adoration to the One who establishes peace, who saves His children, whose light never fades! Enter through the gates of Praise and know the peace within the walls of Salvation. There is no brighter hope than Jesus Christ.

STUDY GUIDE
Brighter • No Brighter Hope
Isaiah 60:1, 18-20

UP: Connect with God Through Spending Time in God's Word

- Read our passage for the week Isaiah 60:1; 18-20. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one more time.
- What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- Our passage today is about hope. Hope for what God will do. In our passage, how is that future day of restoration in God's Kingdom described?
- In today's world, what do most people put their hope in? Where are you tempted to put your hope?
- In the midst of hard, troubling situations, God's people were to put the hope of God's promises in front of them. Think about those areas where you wonder, "will God bring light?" What does it look like to keep hope in front of you? What helps renew hope for you?
- What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

IN: Connect with the Family of God

- What does it mean to participate in Christ's mission of bringing light to our world? Think about those around you who reflect the light of Christ. Send them an encouraging note, email, or text this week.

OUT: Connect with the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

- Even in especially dark situations and circumstances, we hope in the light of Christ. As you think about specific situations and circumstances, pray for courage and strength to reflect Christ's light in our world.