



## Sermon Transcript October 7, 2018

### Hospitable God, Hospitable People Arise! Shine! Isaiah 59:14-60:9

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 7, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

**Sermon Text**  
**Isaiah 59:14-60:9**

**59:14** Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. <sup>15</sup> Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. <sup>16</sup> He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. <sup>17</sup> He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

<sup>18</sup> According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. <sup>19</sup> So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives. <sup>20</sup> “And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the Lord. <sup>21</sup> “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,” says the Lord, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

**60:1** Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

<sup>4</sup> 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 carried on the hip. <sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. <sup>6</sup> A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. <sup>7</sup> All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house. <sup>8</sup> Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? <sup>9</sup> For the coastlands shall hope for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from afar, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has made you beautiful.

## Introduction

Do you know what I like about this passage? It tells us that all we need to do is “get up and let the light of Jesus shine through us, and God does the rest. Right in the middle of our passage it says in Isaiah 60:1, “*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*” I just wish we believed it more than what we do.

One of the magazines I get is *Christianity Today* and at the end of each monthly publication is the story of how someone came to faith in Christ. This month’s edition told the story of a sport’s writer by the name of Jonathan Tjarks. He didn’t grow up in the church and he never dreamed that he would ever be a Christian. He was as secular as they come and he was fully immersed into the party scene: drinking and drugs. He felt that as long as he didn’t hurt anyone else he could do whatever he wanted to do. The only problem was that he was empty and he wasn’t happy.

Do you know what began his journey to faith? It was simple hospitality. He writes, “My journey to faith began six years ago, when I had dinner with my coworker and his wife who were evangelical Christians. There was nothing out of the ordinary about them, but the contrast between our lives was jarring. After dinner, I was meeting up with friends to split up some drugs. My coworker and his wife never got drunk. Instead of getting messed up on weekends, they helped people.”<sup>1</sup> He went to church with them a couple of times, but it didn’t connect with him and he didn’t really believe in God.

He felt science had all the answers. But then he started reading about scientists grappling with how everything seemed to be fine tuned for life to exist on earth. How did that happen? And then he began reading history and he read the story of the Jewish people. It intrigued him that after all they had been through that they still even exist as a people. He wrote, “The Jews believed a Messiah would come who would spread the worship of their God to every nation on earth . . . Then, one day, a penniless Jewish preacher showed up, claiming to be the Son of God. Jesus wandered around a backwater province of the Roman Empire for a few years, gathered a few disciples, and was crucified. That should have been the end of his religion. His followers were a persecuted minority of a persecuted minority. There was no reason to think that his persecution was the beginning of a religion that would change the world, just as there was no reason to think the Jews would still be around more than 4,000 years after they were slaves in Egypt or that their God would be worshiped throughout human history.”<sup>2</sup>

As is often the case, his mind was ahead of his heart, he still didn’t believe in the

supernatural. A year after he had dinner with his coworker, he was at a New Years Eve dance party where he had taken the drug Ecstasy. The party he was at was an EDM show, with a DJ playing electronic dance music with lights and images flashing everywhere. As he was watching this unfold in front of him, he had somewhat of a spiritual awakening. He actually sensed the presence of evil and the demonic in what he saw on display in front of him. He actually said that at that moment “I felt something like a surge of lightning to through my body.”

He left the concert knowing what he had to do. He called his coworker and asked about churches in the area. He writes, “I didn’t know what I was walking into. Joining a church was awkward at first. When I went to a community group meeting at someone’s house, it was the first time I had been sober at a social gathering in years. Much about my lifestyle had to change.” He confesses what all of us have come to know about the Christian life, “Walking with the Lord hasn’t always been easy, and I’ve slipped up many times over the last five years. But I’ve never regretted the decision.”<sup>3</sup>

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”* It is interesting how Tjarks describes his coworker and his wife. “There was nothing out of the ordinary about them, but the contrast between our lives was jarring.” God took the light shining through their life in the context of simple hospitality and he did the rest. John Oswalt says this about our passage this morning. “However far God’s people may fall short of all that God is, if they will only reflect the light of [Jesus] in some part of its power, even kings will want to come and fall at the feet of Jesus.”<sup>4</sup>

This passage we are looking at this morning is encouraging because it reminds us that what we are incapable of doing on our own, God is able to do. Even the light that we shine is not our own light. Notice in Isaiah 60:1 that the light that shines is a light that *“has come.”* It has come to us in Jesus. It is his light shining through us. It is what John says in John 1:9 when introducing Jesus to us as the light of the world. He says of Jesus, *“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”*

In one sense, this passage takes the pressure off of us. It reminds us that just like we are saved by grace, we are also empowered by God’s grace to be his light in the world. In and of ourselves, we are helpless to be God’s light in this world. Now by saying that this passage takes the pressure off of us, I am not suggesting that we ought to be passive or lazy in letting our light shine. The opposite ought to be true. We ought to be eager and active and confident in shining the light of Jesus to those around us because this passage tells us that God is at work through us. My prayer is that you would be encouraged this

morning to get up and let the light of Jesus shine through you. I want to explore what that looks like and what it means to have the light of Jesus shine through us.

### **Stand Firm in Christ—It is His Work**

Our passage begins with somewhat of a bleak picture of things. In Isaiah 59:14, the prophet laments over the fact that *justice* and *righteousness* cannot be found. He says that there is no truth *in the public square* and the one who is righteous, the one who *departs from evil* actually makes himself a victim of those who practice evil. He says of the righteous, *“he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.”*

This week, I came across a book that was just released this year and it was written by Alec Motyer. Motyer was an Irish theologian who was best known for his commentary on Isaiah, and I am using his commentary to help me understand this Old Testament book of Isaiah. He died in 2016, after dedicating his life to helping the church understand and appreciate the Old Testament. We often shy away from the Old Testament because it may seem distant and removed from our current world. But if you take time to study the Old Testament you find that it is very current. The title of the book that was just released is *6 Ways the Old Testament Speaks Today*. In other words, the Old Testament is pretty current in its picture of God and of life. Doesn't verses 14-15 read like a commentary on our day? The bleak picture of verses 14-15 seems to describe the bleak picture of our culture. *“Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.”*

But here is the interesting thing about the context of this verse. It is not just a commentary on the secular world in which we live. Rather, it is a commentary on the people of God. Remember, Isaiah 56-66 is describing the people of God who have tasted of the grace of God through the suffering Servant. This third section of Isaiah begins with the call for God's people to *“Keep justice and do righteousness.”* Why? It is because God's people are to be God's servant in this world and to shine God's light to the world so that the nations would come and worship Israel's God. But if there is anything we discovered the past few weeks is that Israel fell short of being God's light to the world. They confess of themselves in Isaiah 59:12-13, *“For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us, and we know our iniquities: transgressing and denying the LORD, and turning back from following our God.”*

There are two things working against God's people shining God's light to the world. The

first thing working against us is our own sin. That is clearly Israel's problem in Isaiah. We saw last week that even while observing their religious rituals, they were oppressing their workers and were not caring for the one in need. And they were told that if only they would turn their attention to the hungry, the homeless, the naked and their own people, *"then shall your light break forth like the dawn."* But it was their own sin that tripped them up from being God's light to the nations. And secondly, there is this spiritual reality at play, a present darkness, an evil that is always at war with God's people and it just seems like evil always has the upper hand and that God's people walk on an unending road of suffering. Isaiah 60:2 describes this constant present reality when it says, *"For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples."*

This passage is designed to impress upon us that in and of ourselves, we are so weak. How can we possibly even be the light to this world that God has called us to be? We have our own junk that gets in the way. On top of it all, there is the weariness that comes from the constant wrestling not against flesh and blood *"but against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."* So when it comes to being light in this present darkness it leaves us saying, "God help us!" Exactly! That is the message of this passage in Isaiah.

When God sees the lack of justice and righteousness, it says in verse 15, *"it displeased him . . . He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede."* So what is God going to do? How is his light going to come to the nations? Look what it says next. *"Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak."* What a picture. It is a picture of a warrior dressing for battle. But who is this warrior? It is Jesus. In Isaiah 1-39, Jesus is portrayed as the eternal King who brings about God's eternal kingdom. In Isaiah 40-55, Jesus is portrayed as the suffering Servant who dies for his people. But in Isaiah 56-66, Jesus is presented as the Divine Warrior who brings God's light to the nations. Motyer says that when the Lord dons this clothing that he is declaring "what he intends to do and that is able to do it."<sup>5</sup> He will bring about salvation and he will bring about judgment. God will accomplish his purposes in this world and will bring the light of his grace to the nations through Jesus.

Did your ears perk up when you heard that this Divine Warrior wore a "breastplate of righteousness" and a "helmet of salvation"? Is this not part of the armor that we are invited to put on in Ephesians 6? Here we are told to *"take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm . . .*

*Having put on the breastplate of righteousness. . . the helmet of salvation.*” Earlier in this same letter to the Ephesians, they are reminded of the “power” and the “mighty strength” they have from God because of their faith in Christ. They were reminded that Jesus has already ascended to the top of Mount Zion in triumph over his enemies and so by putting on the armor of Christ, they are to simply stand firm in Christ.<sup>6</sup> We stand in his righteousness. We stand in his salvation. Our confidence is in Christ.

This is so encouraging. This builds confidence because as I seek to be light in this broken world it is Jesus shining through me. He takes us, as weak and imperfect as we are, and the Divine Warrior conquers evil through weak vessels like ourselves. He even uses us to penetrate this present darkness and to rescue people from hell itself. It is a miracle! When you look back on church history and the mess that church has been down through the years, don’t you marvel over how it is that we are even here this morning? Any local church that has been around for a long time can tell its own story of ups and downs, good times and bad times as it perseveres. And yet God takes this imperfect people and as we stand in Christ, his church advances. Think of the story we began with this morning. God used an ordinary couple around an ordinary meal to spark a extraordinary and unlikely journey to faith in the life of an unlikely convert. How can you explain that apart from the power of God at work? It is the power of the Divine Warrior in whom we stand. Put on the armor of God. Stand in Christ. Be confident. As we say in our Way of Life, “I will live with the conviction that God is at work in this world whether I see it or not.” So what must I do? I must stand firm in Christ! It is his work!

### **Rely on Christ—It is His Power**

I wonder how you feel about this image of Jesus being portrayed as a “Divine Warrior.” When I see him “suited up” in verse 17, I can’t help but get the picture out of my mind of the many super hero movies that so many people are attracted to. These super heroes can often be identified by the suits they wear. One young man who works for the campus ministry Inter-Varsity was excited about the new Spider Man movie coming out and when he sat down in his seat at the movie theater, he was taken back by how crowded it was. Then thinking back on the other super hero movies he had been too: Avengers, Thor, Iron Man 2 . . . all of them were packed. He wondered why they were so packed when basically these movies tell the same story over and over again. Upon further reflection, he realized that the story they tell speaks to a longing in our hearts for someone to come and make this broken world right. He said, “People thirst for a story of redemption and salvation and we bear witness to the greatest true redemption story of all time: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup> It is not my intent to cheapen

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, by comparing him to a fictional super hero. I am just pointing out how these stories speak to the longing of the human heart. We need someone who can come and conquer evil and make this world right.

And so when Jesus is pictured here as the Divine Warrior, Oswalt cautions us to not lose sight of the ultimate purpose for Jesus waging war on sin and evil. He writes, “No matter how fearsome his wrath against sin, no matter how terrified those who choose to remain in sin should be, still it is the patient compassion of a God who longs to forgive that should capture our attention.”<sup>8</sup> And so in verse 20 we read of the intent of the Divine Warrior, “*And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression.*” Again, it is to the humble and contrite who repent of their sin and turn to Jesus who find redemption. But as great as that is, it is not the end of the point being made here, nor is our redemption the climax of the passage.

It is in verse 21 we find the end to which the Redeemer has come. It is to cleanse and empower his people so that we may be clean vessels able to speak God’s Word and God’s hope to the nations. It is my favorite verse in this passage. “*And as for me, this is my covenant with them,*” says the Lord: “*My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,*” says the Lord, “*from this time forth and forevermore.*” Let me make a little but important observation from this verse that should encourage you. When he says, “*My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth . . .*” the words “*you*” and “*your*” are singular, referring to the Servant—the Divine Warrior—the Redeemer—Jesus. The Spirit that came and rested upon Jesus at his baptism and the Word that came from the mouth of Jesus is the same Spirit and the same powerful Word that has been passed down to us in the Scriptures. And it has the power to make a person wise for salvation and to change our lives. We need to rely on Christ and the power of his Word. I love the promise that says, “*from this time forth and forevermore.*” That is us! That is today! That is the next generation! God will do it. We shine his light as we rely on Christ.

At the beginning of the book of Isaiah, we find the prophet confessing that he is a man of unclean lips and he dwells among a people of unclean lips. And now we discover that because of the wonderful work of the Divine Warrior—the Redeemer—our lips are transformed and as we proclaim Jesus, we are used to advance the kingdom of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on this longing our culture has for a “super-hero” - John McAteer writing for the Christian Research Institute makes this perceptive observation, “Our culture has a sense that something is wrong with the world and that,



despite our own failings, we have a responsibility to do something about it. We also know, if we are honest with ourselves, that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves. Christianity gives the best diagnosis of the problem and offers the only hope for salvation. Only with the True Hero living in our hearts can we have the power to overcome the forces of sin and death.”<sup>9</sup> That is exactly what Isaiah is saying. As we rely on Christ, his Spirit and his Word, we become a light to the nations. It is his power.

### **Shine Christ—His Glory**

The last thing I want you to see about what it means to be light to the nations is that it is his glory that shines through us. Look at Isaiah 61:1-2. *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 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.”* When I think of the physical manifestation of the glory of God, I think of those heavenly visions that capture the brilliance and the majesty of God. And so when Isaiah says that God’s glory has *risen upon you* and that his glory *will be seen in you* it is reminder that God reveals his majesty and his character through us. Through the transformation that God produces in our lives by the power of his Spirit and the Word, we become a light that shines in the *thick darkness* that covers the peoples.

If you stand in Christ and rely on Christ, you will be able to shine Christ to the world around you. I love the way Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 3. Here he is reflecting on the fact that we have been made ministers of a new covenant. That is what Isaiah is talking about at the end of Isaiah 59, *“my covenant . . . my Spirit . . . my words.”* Paul concludes 2 Corinthians 3 by saying, *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* In other words, as we stand in Christ and in rely in Christ, we are being transformed by Christ and in doing so, we shine his glory to this dark world.

Wasn’t that the testimony we heard at the beginning of the service? When hospitality was extended to Jonathan Tjarks, he got up from the table and realized, “there was nothing out of the ordinary about this Christian couple but the contrast between our lives was jarring.” That is the glory of the Lord shining into the thick darkness of his life. It is the testimony we heard last week in Isaiah 58 when God confronted the people who were observing religious ritual but not spending themselves on the hungry, homeless, naked and hurting. He said that if they turned to meet the needs of those around them, *“Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily,*

*and your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.”* I mentioned the other week, James Davidson Hunter’s call to the church to reconsider our preoccupation with winning the culture wars and turning to politics as if it is going to usher in righteousness in our land. Remember the beginning of our passage, there is no truth in the public places and darkness covers the earth. Man cannot solve this problem. So what do we do? As the people of God, we shine the light of Jesus. Hunter says, “we are called to honor the Creator of all goodness, beauty and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God’s command to love our neighbor . . . We are to pursue a course of ‘faithful presence’ in our local communities and neighborhoods.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, let the light of Jesus shine through us. It is his glory!

### **By Land and By Sea**

Do you know what I love about the rest of this passage? It is a wonderful testimony of the light of Christ reaching the nations. In verse 3 he says, “*And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*” In verse 4 they come by land and travel by camels (v. 6) to come and worship the Lord. And in verse 9 they come by sea and from distant lands to worship the Lord. These verses ring with the assurance of success. Through us, God is bringing his light to the nations.

I heard the story the other day of a 70 year old man in Myanmar who gave his life to Christ through the ministry of a local church and Free Church missionaries. His daughter started attending the church against his wishes. But because of the persistent love that the church expressed to him, his family and his community, God drew him into the church. He heard the gospel and the Spirit of God moved in his life and at 70 years of age in a predominantly Buddhist country, this man was brought from darkness to light. Surprised? We shouldn’t be. This is what Isaiah said would happen.

We have started a bi-vocational church planting residency program with the hopes of seeing 2 to 3 churches planted in this the Greater Hartford Region or somewhere in New England. We are stepping out in faith and we have a resident in place and we are feeling our way through this process. We will be sharing at our congregational meeting that a second resident has been made available to us and we marvel to see how God is moving. I have confidence that this will lead to the establishment of churches and people will come to Christ because of it. Why do I feel that way? It is the expectation I have from this passage. God is at work in this world through us.

It strikes me that if this passage describes people coming to the Lord from distant lands and across the sea, why we would not expect people across the street or next door or in the next cubicle to make their way to Christ. You might say, “well you don’t know my neighbor.” If God’s grace can reach you, why can’t it reach your neighbor. If we could just take the step that couple took at the beginning of the story –eat with someone— and let the light of Jesus shine through us, who knows what Jesus will do with that. Remember, God didn’t get the address wrong. You are planted right where he wants you. Stand firm in Christ, it is his work. Rely on Christ, it is his power. Shine Christ, it is his glory. Know that God is at work.

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”* I just wish we believed it more than what we do.

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<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Tjarks “My Supernatural Shakeup” in *Christianity Today*, Volume 68, Number 2, October 2018 p. 96

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 95

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 95

<sup>4</sup>John Oswalt *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 539

<sup>5</sup>J. Alec Motyer *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993) 491

<sup>6</sup>Frank S. Theilman “Ephesians” in *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* editors: G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 830

<sup>7</sup>Christian Holmes “The Gospel According to Superheroes” <https://intervarsity.org/blog/gospel-according-superheroes> July 6, 2012

<sup>8</sup>Oswalt, 530

<sup>9</sup>John McAteer “The Gospel According to Marvel” <http://www.equip.org/article/gospel-according-marvel/> Volume 38, Number 3 2015

<sup>10</sup>James Davidson Hunter *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 234, 280

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## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Did you have a favorite super hero growing up? (Or maybe you still do?!?!?) Who was it and why was this one your favorite?
2. What is your reaction to the opening and closing statement of the sermon: “*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*” I just wish we believed it more than what we do.” What keeps us from believing it?
3. How did the story of Jonathan Tjarks in the introduction encourage you to take steps towards hospitality?

### Diving Into The Word

4. Read Isaiah 59:14-19. What do you think about this image of Jesus as a “Divine Warrior?” What does it tell you about this “present darkness?” (See Eph. 6:10-12)
5. Read Isaiah 59:20-21. As you seek to be light in this world, what hope do these verses give you? What hope do you have for the next generation? Why?
6. Read Isaiah 60:1-3. What are some of the simple ways God’s light is able to shine through you? (See Isaiah 58:6-8, 10). How can you be more conscious of this throughout the day?
7. Read Isaiah 60:4-9. What is God going to accomplish through us—his people? How should that give us boldness in practicing hospitality?

### Taking It Home

8. What encouragement did you gain from your conversation on?
9. What is one thing you want to do this week as a result of your conversation?