

**Introduction:**

Have you ever been in a life-threatening situation, a truly life-threatening situation, in which you were completely out of control and had to be saved? A terrifying and amazing video has circulating the internet this last week of a man who was literally hanging on for his life while hang gliding in Switzerland. Chris Gursky and his wife were vacationing in Europe, and on their very first day in Switzerland, he decided that he wanted to see the countryside from a different point, 4,000 feet in the air, by hang-gliding. Since he had never done this before, Chris was sent out with a hang-gliding pilot. This should have been a scary but completely safe adventure. But unfortunately, the pilot didn't do last minute safety checks before taking off. If he had, he would've realized that Chris' safety harness was not actually connected to the glider. So moments after the glider took off, Chris fell vertical, with one hand tightly gripping the bar and another holding onto the pilot's leg. The pilot also reached out and grabbed Chris' arm, and then tried to steer the hang glider to an open field. Unfortunately because of the weight imbalance, he instead steered the glider over a cliff and the pair rose 4,000 feet above trees, farms, and fields. Chris managed to hold on to the bar, and the pilot managed to hold onto Chris for four minutes until he was final able to land the glider. Chris, in an interview on Fox News told the reporter: "I just glanced down, and said this is it: I am going to fall to my death...It wasn't my time, I was going to hold on as long as I possibly could." After crash landing, Chris sustained a broken wrist and a torn bicep from hanging onto the glider for such a

long time. Christian Boppart, director of the Swiss Hang Gliding Association, said:

“The pilot knew he made a terrible mistake, but afterward he made a good save, the first lesson is that you check before starting that everything is good, and that everybody is attached.”

In our Advent Psalm for the day, the Psalmist cries out to the Lord over and over again that He would save His people. The NET Bible version, which is where our video series comes from, choose to interpret the word as “deliver,” which is one possibility, but most other translations instead use the more common translation of “save.” So hear this plea of the Psalmist to God, in Psalm 80:3, 7, and 19: “Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, *that we may be saved*...Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, *that we may be saved*...Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, *that we may be saved*.” Let’s break down the Psalmist’s appeal. *Restore us, O God*. This is a call for God to make his nation Israel as they once were. *Make your face shine upon us*. This petition recalls the priestly blessing that God gave to Moses to tell to Aaron and his sons in Numbers 6:24-26: <sup>24</sup> “The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD *make his face shine on you* and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” The Psalmist is asking God to reestablish them as his Blessed people and to look upon them once again with a glad and approving face. *That we may be saved*. If God restores them and looks on them favorably,

then Israel will be saved from her miserable state of being out of God's good graces.

So, what does it mean to be "saved?" Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers 3 definitions of the verb "save."

- to rescue or deliver from danger or harm

- to preserve or guard from injury, destruction, or loss

And believe it or not, the number one definition for "save" is "to deliver from sin."

The truth we live in, every single day, whether we realize it or not, whether we admit it or not is this: we need saved. We are all guilty of sin because we intentionally and unintentionally live against what God has declared to be holy. Paul tells us in Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Because God is Holy, He cannot be in the presence of sin, so our sin drove a wedge between us and Him, and the natural consequence for us then is eternal death. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death." Fortunately for us, as much as God is Holy, He is also love, and his love compelled him to save us from our sins which drive us away from Him. Paul concludes the second half of Romans 6:23: "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We all need saved, but gratefully God planned a way for our salvation through the gift of His son Jesus Christ.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent, that time of waiting in the church calendar when we eagerly anticipate the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas, which was the initiation of God's

grand plan to save the world through Jesus. This morning we are going to dive deeper into John 1 and Isaiah 53 to look at the gift God has given us, that is “eternal life in Christ Jesus” and how he had planned on giving this gift of salvation to us from the very beginning, long before we even knew that we needed saved.

## **1) The Gift**

There are four parts to this gift of God found in John and Isaiah that we are going to look at to help us understand what it means to be saved.

### **a. This gift is adoption**

The first part of the gift is adoption. In the beginning, God created humankind and called them good. We were His beloved children. But because of the sins of the first man and woman, and because every single person who has been born since Adam and Eve has sinned, we separated ourselves from God and gave up our place as His children. We are still His creation, and he loves us all deeply, but until He is able to restore and save us, we cannot become His children again. The Gospel writer tells us in **John 1:12-12**, that part of the Gift of God in Jesus is being made His children again: <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

### **b. The gift is life**

The second part of the gift is life. **John 1:4** says “In him was life...” What does the gift of life mean to people who are currently alive? Two things; first, I think that you can be living and not actually have life. You can eat, breath, sleep, your heart can beat and your lungs can breathe without also having joy, without also having purpose, and without also having direction. In Jesus, we are given all of those things that make life worth living well. We can do more than just grind out our days to make enough money to feed our families and to buy things that won’t ultimately satisfy. God gives us new life, free from sin, free from meaninglessness, and in that we can truly live.

Secondly, this gift of life also means eternal life. Again, Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

### **c. The gift is light.**

The third part of the gift is light. **John 1:4**, which begins “In him was life” concludes by saying “and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...” According to the account of Jesus’ birth found in Luke, angels appeared to the shepherds in their field at night and proclaimed to them the birth of Jesus. Jesus, the light of the world, was literally born at night, born in darkness. And John says that the light of Christ cannot be overcome by darkness. Light is a living entity, but darkness is simply the absence of light. So while you can always overcome the nothingness of darkness by adding light to it, darkness in itself

does not have the ability to overcome light, as long as the light is strong. All of us experience difficult situations in which we ourselves cannot get out of the darkness; it takes another light source, such as friends, family, or God. But, our world lives in a present darkness that it cannot see in unless it receives a stronger source of light, and that light is Jesus Christ.

#### **d. Healing**

The final part of the gift is healing. Isaiah 53 is a part of what is often called the Suffering Servant passages, in which Isaiah writes about a coming messiah who would suffer on behalf of the Israelite people. In **Isaiah 53:4-5**, the prophet tells us that through this servant, Israel would be healed: “<sup>4</sup>Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” We discover in the New Testament that Isaiah’s vision of the suffering servant would come to fruition in the life, suffering, and death of Jesus, through whom we are given healing. And what are we being healed of? Isaiah lists infirmities, diseases, transgressions, iniquities, and punishment. Those repercussions of living as sinners in a fallen world, those scars we bear for lives that both have been on the receiving end and the giving end of hurt through anger, malice, violence, jealousy, selfishness, pride and all other types of things antithetical to God, through Jesus’ coming down to Earth, we would be healed.

So, what is this great gift that we anticipate during Advent and celebrate at Christmas? It is the adoption, the life, the light, and the healing that comes through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And because of this gift, we can truly experience the life that God intended for us, both now and in eternity. As I reflect on this gift, I'm reminded of the words of that great Gaither song "Because He Lives."

### **"Because He Lives"**

God sent His son, they called Him, Jesus  
He came to love, heal and forgive  
He lived and died to buy my pardon  
An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow  
Because He lives, all fear is gone  
Because I know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living  
Just because He lives.

**Transition:** So now that we've considered the Gift of God that is in Jesus Christ, let's look at God's plan to give us this gift.

## **2) The Plan**

There are two significant parts of this plan that our passages speak to today: the timing of the plan and the actions of this plan which would result in the gift given.

We learn from Isaiah that God had been formulating the plan for a saving gift long before the events of the Gospel happened.

During the time Isaiah was acting as prophet to Israel, the nation had been taken captive by enemies. God had promised to Abraham that he would make a great nation of his descendants, and God had promised to David that his kingdom would never end, and now there would be no more kings and there would be no more kingdom. But God gives Isaiah a message to give to the people, that through this suffering servant, all of those sins that had led to Israel's destruction would be paid for and they would be healed from their punishment. Isaiah doesn't say when this would happen, only promises that God had a plan in place for their redemption.

Then we learn in John's Advent account that not only was Isaiah's redemptive prophecy coming to fulfillment in Jesus, but that Jesus had been with God, was God, and was a part of God's plan from the very beginning. **John 1:1-3**: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." So first, this suffering servant, this gift of God, was actually God coming to us and had been with God since the creation of the world. Because God is a loving God and a God jealous for His people, when they began to turn away from him, He initiated a plan to bring them back. It started with a complicated sacrificial system described in the first five books of the Old Testament, but this was never meant to be a permanent solution for the problem of sin. Ultimately, the plan would be executed through the birth of The Word into the world.

So we see Jesus was a part of God and God's plan for the world since the beginning; how then would this plan come to be?

Ultimately, it would be the suffering of this gift that would lead to our being made righteous once again before God. Isaiah says in 53:6 “<sup>6</sup>All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” And then in vv. 10-11: “<sup>10</sup>Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. <sup>11</sup>Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”

John echoes these same sentiments in John 1: 9-13 that the light would come into the world, but the world and even his own people would not accept this light. However, any who would receive and believe in Him would be given this great gift of God.

### **3) Our Response**

So, how then do we respond to this gift and this plan? How did the people in Isaiah and the people in John respond to the gift and plan? In Isaiah 42:18-22, God has some strong words to say to the people, who had been given the news of this servant but refused to listen and see.

<sup>18</sup> Listen, you that are deaf; and you that are blind, look up and see! <sup>19</sup> Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like my dedicated one, or blind like the servant of the Lord? <sup>20</sup> He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear.

John tells us that there would be some who would not listen, and we see throughout the Gospels many who would reject Jesus' life and ministry; eventually he would be arrested, beaten, and killed by those who rejected God's plan, although they were being used as a part of God's plan to save the world. But John also says that there would be those who would receive Jesus and because of this received the Gift of adoption, life, light, and healing.

As we continue through the weeks of Advent and further explore the Nativity story, we will hear about some of those who did receive Jesus: a teenage girl who was going to give birth to the Son of God, a young man asked to raise a son who would not be his biologically, a group of shepherds, lowly in society yet held in high esteem by God, and foreign astrologers finding the Messiah of a different religion, all a part of this strange motley crew who heard God's plan and received God's gift of Jesus Christ.

If we hope to be ready to respond to God's gift and plan this Advent season, we need to recognize that we can't do it on our own, that we need to be saved. And we need to be willing to give over control of our futures so that God can give us the gift

of Jesus, to be saved from our sin, saved from the meaningless grind of the world, and given light, life and purpose. I'm going to close this morning with a quote by Reinhold Neibuhr from his book "The Irony of American History." I want to challenge you to consider these questions: What do you need saved from today, and are you willing to let God save you?

"Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness."