

"Longing For God"

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the first Sunday in Advent, December 1, 1996. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7. 17-19' 1 Corinthians 1:3-9' Mark 13:24-37.

C.S. Lewis was one of the foremost Christian writers of the 20th century. Millions have read his books like Mere Christianity or his Tales of Narnia. Many people, like Charles Colson, became Christians as a result of reading his books. Lewis was a bachelor for most of his life but, at the age of 58, he fell deeply in love and married Joy Davidman, a woman 15 years younger than himself. Hollywood turned the story of their romance into a movie several years ago with Anthony Hopkins playing the role of Lewis. Joy died in 1960, four short years after their marriage. When she died, Lewis[^] felt abandoned by God. In the depths of his anguish following her death he wrote,

~~"Where is God? When you are happy, you have no sense of needing God. But go to God when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become."~~

Who of us has not felt abandoned by God at times? Maybe your marriage was falling apart. You cried out for God to help. But, despite your prayers, your marriage wasn't healed. Or you waited outside the emergency room, praying for God to miraculously heal an injured loved one. But, despite your prayers, your ^{Loved one} ~~child~~ died. Many of us, at times, have felt abandoned by God. The Job you wanted.

Experience in life without an answer

Isaiah knew that feeling - the feeling of helplessness that a little child feels when she's lost in a shopping mall and can't find mom or dad, searching the faces of all who pass by, searching and longing for the face of her father or mother. That's how Isaiah felt. He searched the skies for the face of God but could not see him.

Isaiah felt like that because the Babylonian empire had conquered and destroyed the nation of Judah, God's chosen people. Pagan Babylonian soldiers laid waste the towns and villages of Judah. They tore down the walls of Jerusalem. They reduced God's beautiful temple to rubble. They deported the survivors to prisoner of war camps in Babylon. Isaiah felt abandoned by God. He prayed for God to intervene. God remained silent. *BUT Isaiah kept on prayin' J. . .*

~~Yet God's people, both Jews and Christians, have never~~
ceased to cry out to God, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!" One of the marks of the church in every age is longing for God. Whenever the church ceases to cry out for the Lord to come down, the church withers and dies. One of the truest marks of the church is longing for God. God's people, in every age, watch and pray for the hidden face of God to be revealed for all the world to see.

Every time we recite the line in the Creed, "He will come to judge the quick and the dead", we express our hope that God will tear open the heavens and and come down and fix this broken world. *Every time we stand at a funeral here: I am the resurrection & the life* Every time our church treasurer sends off a check to support the mission work of the church, we're not so naive as to believe that a few thousand dollars will convert the whole world

to Christ. We do so because we live in the hope that, one day, God will graciously make himself known to all nations. When we take our food basket over to the Neighborhood Services Center for those in need, we do so not because we're so naive as to think that a few canned goods are going to end world hunger. We do so because we live today in the light of God's tomorrow, when God will provide a feast for all the families of the earth. Every time we sing, "Come, thou Long-Expected Jesus, born to set thy people free," we're expressing a longing for God to win in the end and triumph over all oppression and injustice. And every time we celebrate Holy Communion, we anticipate the time when Christ, whose presence is hidden in the Bread and Wine, will be openly revealed to be the King of kings and Lord of lords. Even so, come, Lord-Jesus. Amen.

Let us pray: O Lord, keep us awake and alert, watching for your kingdom. Make us strong in faith, so we may greet your Son when he comes, and joyfully give him praise, with you, and with the Holy Spirit. Amen.