

I CHRISTMAS

All Years

This Bible study was written by Robin Denney for 1 Christmas in 2017.

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
my whole being shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of
righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to
spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn
and her salvation like a burning torch.

² The nations shall see your vindication
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

³ You shall be a beautiful crown in the hand of
the Lord
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Commentary from Robin Denney

In mid-winter, the longest nights of the year, we hear this passage from Isaiah, full of imagery of shining royal splendor and beauty and of the springing forth of plants from the ground. In the midst of cold, dark nights, these images shine even more brightly. We are told that God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up in us, just like the garden causes what is planted in it to spring up. The gardener knows intimately that despite all their work, it is not they who cause the plants to grow and spring forth. We too, are not called to sit idly by and wait for righteousness to spring up in us. We are called to cultivate it, and trust that God will do the rest.

Discussion Questions

What might it look like to plant the seeds of righteousness and praise in our hearts?

How will we know when God has caused righteousness and praise to spring up in us?

Psalm 147

- ¹ Hallelujah!
How good it is to sing praises to our God! *
how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!
- ² The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; *
he gathers the exiles of Israel.
- ³ He heals the brokenhearted *
and binds up their wounds.
- ⁴ He counts the number of the stars *
and calls them all by their names.
- ⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power; *
there is no limit to his wisdom.
- ⁶ The Lord lifts up the lowly, *
but casts the wicked to the ground.
- ⁷ Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; *
make music to our God upon the harp.
- ⁸ He covers the heavens with clouds *
and prepares rain for the earth;
- ⁹ He makes grass to grow upon the mountains *
and green plants to serve mankind.
- ¹⁰ He provides food for flocks and herds *
and for the young ravens when they cry.
- ¹¹ He is not impressed by the might of a horse; *
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;
- ¹² But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him, *
in those who await his gracious favor.
- ¹³ Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; *
praise your God, O Zion;
- ¹⁴ For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; *
he has blessed your children within you.
- ¹⁵ He has established peace on your borders; *
he satisfies you with the finest wheat.
- ¹⁶ He sends out his command to the earth, *
and his word runs very swiftly.
- ¹⁷ He gives snow like wool; *
he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.
- ¹⁸ He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; *
who can stand against his cold?
- ¹⁹ He sends forth his word and melts them; *
he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.
- ²⁰ He declares his word to Jacob, *
his statutes and his judgments to Israel.
- ²¹ He has not done so to any other nation; *
to them he has not revealed his judgments.
Hallelujah!

Commentary from Robin Denney

This psalm expresses thanksgiving and awe at the glory of God, who not only shapes all things in the natural world, but also cares for us. The psalm closes by extolling God for the special relationship God has with the people of Israel by the revelation of God's judgments. As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection is the revelation of God.

Discussion Questions

As you read all of Psalm 147, what other language and imagery reminds you of the revelation of God in Christ, of the incarnation?

What does the psalmist call us to do in response?

Why is our response important?

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

²³ Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be reckoned as righteous by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian,

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir through God.

Commentary from Robin Denney

Have you ever felt unable to live up to the rules or expectations that govern your life? Constant self-judgment, or the judgment of others, leaves us feeling lacking no matter how hard we work to prove ourselves. Into this quid-pro-quo and pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps world, the light of Christ breaks forth, entering our hearts, and inviting us to cry out “Abba, Father!” For we are no longer slaves to production and success, but we are adopted and beloved children of God.

Discussion Questions

What does this amazing gift of adoption by God feel like?

How is Christ calling us to respond to this gift?

John 1:1-18

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Commentary from Robin Denney

Into the midst of our broken and hurting world the light of Christ bursts forth. It is easy to become overwhelmed with the news of terror attacks, of the refugee crisis, of violence and conflict. It can seem like the darkness is all around us, and yet, into that darkness, into that pain and uncertainty, the light of Christ shines, and the darkness did not overcome it. The darkness is still there, the pain and suffering, but with the light of Christ shining in us the darkness no longer has the power to overcome us. The incarnate one, who became one of us, walks with us through these times of pain, and calls us to follow him, not driven by fear into places of comfort and safety, but to lay down our fear, and to go out into the world to love and serve.

Discussion Questions

What difference does the light of Christ make in your life

What might following Jesus look like, in light of a current event that has been troubling you?