

It's a difficult thing to wait, especially these days. Because in the past 40 years, we've had the invention of the computer and especially the invention of the Internet, and that has made us more impatient than ever. Because if you want to find out something these days, you don't have to go down to the library. You don't even have to ask around. All you have to do is sit down your computer or pull up your smart phone, plug a few words into it, and boom! You have the information that you're looking for. Easy, painless, simple, and quick. Above all quick. And if you want to get something you can't find locally or you just don't want to leave the house, you can go on your computer, go to Amazon, load it up, pay for it, and they'll even ship it to you. You don't even have to ever leave your home. Easy, simple, painless, and quick. Or think of shipping these days. Things used to take two or three weeks or longer to get to you when you ordered it from a company. And now you get things in two, three, or even four days. Or if you really pay for it, you can get it overnight. We don't have to wait. We can get everything that we want right now.

And so as a result, we're not a very patient people. And when we're forced to wait for something, that makes us pretty irritable and start to wonder, how long is this going to take? How long do I have to wait until this is going to be over or until I get the thing that I actually want? But it's hard enough to do that, Christians. It's harder still to be forced to wait for something. Because if I'm just waiting around until I can take care of something, that's one thing. I can deal with that and deal with it in my own time. But if I'm being forced to wait for something, that makes me irritable. That makes me very impatient. How long is this going to take? But longer still than that is being forced to wait for somebody else, because now you can't do anything about it. Now you really have to wait. Now everything is out of your hands. And you start to wonder, how long is this guy going to take? Is he ever going to get done with what he promised to do? When will I get what I want?

But as hard as that is, Christians, the hardest thing of all is to wait for someone else in the midst of suffering. When I don't have any control over what is happening to me, when I am dealing with a difficult time in my life, but I can't do anything about it, and I'm forced to wait for someone else to do something about it, that's the hardest thing of all. Because now it's like I'm down in the dirt waiting for someone to lift me up again. It's like I'm sitting in a dark room waiting for somebody to turn on the light. How long is this going to go on? Is this going to go on forever? Am I going to have to deal with this for a very, very long time?

That was the question that Israel was struggling with in our Old Testament reading for this evening. Because Israel used to have it pretty good as far as things went. Back in the days of Solomon things were great. That was when the kingdom was the biggest that it ever was. That's when they had all kinds of prosperity. That was the day when they built the temple. Everything was going great. But after the days of Solomon, things went steadily downhill. Things got worse and worse and sins got bigger and bigger. Until now finally, in the days of Isaiah, Israel is suffering. If only because of the sins which they have committed, but also because the nations around them are attacking them on every side, attacking them and making their lives miserable. And worse than that still, Isaiah said to them that because of their sins they're going to have to leave their homes to go to a foreign country and to stay there for many, many years. There wasn't anything they could do about it. Israel was going to have to suffer for a very long time, and they

had to wait for someone else to do something about it. How long, O Lord, is this going to go on? Are we going to be away from you forever? Will you ever come and bring us home again?

It is to that situation that Isaiah speaks in our Old Testament reading when he says these words: "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. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." In those days when Israel was sitting in darkness, wondering when God was going to do something about it, Isaiah gave Israel hope, the hope of knowing that God would in fact do something about it. God was going to shine into their darkness and drive it away. God was going to restore them again and to bring them back to their land and to put them at peace with all of their neighbors. Everything they had lost since the days of Solomon would be given back to them again. God was going to help them, and he proved that in his Son Jesus Christ. Because it's not a coincidence that our Gospel reading speaks of all of these same ideas. The idea of God's light shining into the darkness, the star which they saw from afar and which they followed. Jesus is the proof that God was going to restore his people. He was going to lift them up out of the dust and shine the light into their darkness, so that they would have hope again. God would deliver them from everything that was afflicting them, and they only had to wait for him when he would act. Because Jesus is the light of the world, the light which no darkness can overcome. Jesus gave them that peace which they were looking for. Which we see even in the wise men, those nations coming from afar to worship him as God. God was restoring his people in his Son, giving them hope in the midst of their darkness.

And so that's why Isaiah says with this command: Arise! Shine! Get up and glow! Because there is hope for you in the midst of your darkness. This will not go on forever. God will not make you wait forever. God will restore you again. So you can lift up your heads and rejoice, knowing that the Lord is on his way.

And Christians Isaiah speaks this message to us today, too. Because we very often also sit in darkness, the darkness of sin, the darkness of this world, especially a darkness of a world that is opposed to us. It's not easy to be a Christian. God never said that it would be. The world will hate us because of Jesus. And it seems like that's getting worse with each passing day. And so we might cry out to God, Lord, how long do I have to wait? How long is it going to take before you give me help? How long will I be in this darkness?

And Isaiah says this message to you today, Christians: Arise! Shine! For your light has come. Jesus Christ is your hope in the midst of darkness. Jesus Christ is the one who has come into this world to deliver us from the bondage of sin and to bring us into his marvelous light. Jesus gives us hope in the midst of all that we suffer, so that no matter how long we might have to wait, we know that we do not do so in vain. And more than this Christians, we are also looking forward to that day when Jesus will return again, when he will bring into this world, when he comes to judge the living and the dead, a light which will never be put out again. Darkness will disappear on that day and night will be no more. And we will enter into his eternal day when he brings us to himself and gives us the help that we have been looking for all these many years. God will not fail to help us. God is our light in the midst of our darkness. And God will deliver us from that darkness in his Son Jesus Christ.

So Christians, don't be afraid. God is your help. And even if we have to wait for many, many years, we do not do so in vain. God has come and God will come again. And on that day, he will give us help, the help that we need in all our days.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.