

# Followers of the Way

## Arise, shine: The Gospel in dark times

Heather Scammell, 08-02-26

I wonder what you are like in the mornings? Some are ‘up with the lark,’ raring to go and wilt as the day draws on, others are night owls, getting an adrenalin rush to complete tasks that may last into the wee small hours, but struggle to engage brain and open mouth before the morning has half gone. Then there’s the reason for getting up – an early start for a long – anticipated holiday is very different from dragging yourself off to root canal treatment on a cold dark morning. Or there’s an unexpected wake-up call; the phone rings and your heart stops, or a surprise knock on the door – a welcome delivery, or the harbinger of bad news?

We began this year with a call to commitment, to re-dedicate ourselves to the Lord and were challenged as to what it is to be a Holy Nation. Last week, Lynn exhorted us to, ‘Take up our cross’, and leading on from that, today we are encouraged to Arise and shine and consider the role of the Gospel in these dark times.

The word ‘Arise’ (or ‘arose/ ariseth’) appears over 150 times in the Bible and ‘wake up’ or ‘awake’ is found 80-100 times, in various forms. The primary Hebrew root for ‘arise’ or ‘stand up’ occurs around 630 times in the Old Testament. It is an upbeat word, pro-active language demanding a response. Those of you who noted the title of today’s address will probably either have been singing, ‘Rise and shine and give God the Glory,’ or thinking of our reading from Isaiah 60 ‘*Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*’ And there is something upbeat and encouraging in the words. An online search revealed a KJV Dictionary giving 13 different uses of the word, some of which merit further scrutiny:

The first listed is, ‘to ascend, mount up or move to a higher place; as vapours arise from humid places.’ Some might find that a strange juxtaposition because the act of ascension requires determination, physical effort on our behalf, whilst vapour might seem to rise independently – but actually vapour rises due to buoyancy, it is less dense than the surrounding air; on a frosty morning, the sun shines on the ice and the mist rises. We are called to, ‘*Let (y)our light so shine before men, that they may see (y)our good works, and glorify (y)our Father which is in heaven*’ (Matthew 5:14-16). Do you see yourself as a source of light in a cold, dark world? Because that is our calling, not to ‘*hide our light under a bushel,*’ (or a bowl) – and what is that light? It is the light of Christ shining through us. Think of Moses having to veil his face, because it shone so brightly from being in God’s presence that the Israelites were terrified (Exodus 34:33-35). But he removed it when entering the Lord’s presence. Or Christ, as he was Transfigured in Matthew 17: ‘*His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*’ Our bodies are ‘*Temples of the Holy Spirit*’ (1 Corinthians 16:19-20) and we need to cultivate the BEING in the Lord’s presence, resting in Him, so that His light will shine through us onto humid places and the vapour will arise. Don’t you find that encouraging? So often we tie ourselves up in knots trying to DO things for the Lord, or berating ourselves for failing to meet our own expectations, when our priority should be to spend time in His presence, being transformed into His likeness?

There is a rather lovely song by Bernadette Farrell, with the chorus:

Christ, be our light  
Shine in our hearts  
Shine through the darkness  
Christ, be our light  
Shine in Your church gathered today

It all sounds so easy doesn't it? In some ways, it IS 'that easy,' except that the world does everything it can to stop that light shining - and that includes our own human nature fighting to distract us from our Lord. Even Paul wasn't immune:

*'For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.'* (Romans 15:17-20)

So we wrestle with our own sinful nature, but also, as Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, '*against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*' Wrestling requires effort on our behalf, but it is focused because, if we keep ourselves centred in Christ, then we fight the battles for which He has prepared us – in the same way as a sprinter has a different training schedule from a long distance runner, we need to seek the Lord for His purpose for us and take time to rest in Him, so that His light can shine through us in the way that He intends.

Have you ever gone out and inadvertently left a light on? In the bright light of day you probably won't even notice, but if you come home in the dark, even a tiny tea light on a windowsill offers comfort and hope as you fumble for your door key. Our World seems to be darkening by the day, but that means that your light, however feeble, shines ever more brightly.

The Gospel of John puts it so clearly:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (John 1:1-5)

Harking back to the definitions of 'Arise,' the second is 'To emerge from below the horizon; as the sun or a star arises or rises.' And now you may well be thinking of that lovely chorus based on Psalm 113, '*From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised.*' But this again demonstrates how it is God's creation that acts in accordance with His purpose. We take for granted that the sun rises by day and the moon by night, because that is the way He has made it and it will continue as long as He decrees. As long as we, His children, have breath we will praise Him, but as we heard earlier, Psalm 8 reminds us, '*You have set your glory in the heavens.*' Sir Christopher Wren's epitaph in St Paul's Cathedral translates 'Reader, if you seek his monument look around you;' isn't this what the Bible tells us about God? However much we despoil and abuse His creation, it still testifies to the glory of the One who fashioned it and it can only function as He determines. It is beyond our control. And hard wired into us, His children, is to rejoice in it and praise him throughout the day.

So if you are wondering where exactly this talk, with a rallying cry for a title is going, it seems that God is first reminding us that the focus must be on Him, to rest in Him and allow Him to equip us

and direct us so that His light shines through us exactly where He requires its illumination. There is of course another spontaneous form of ‘arising’ and that is when water bubbles up from the ground; in John Chapter 4, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman *‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life’* (John 4:13-14). From this we have the image of Christ as the wellspring – some translations specify not just a spring of living water, but a ‘wellspring’ or a ‘fountain’ bubbling up through us to spiritually irrigate the land around us. Now that may not necessarily marry well with the ‘shine’ in our title, but the important thing again is that we do not function in our own strength, we are merely a means through which the Lord chooses to operate and that the whole of Creation testifies to the Creator.

Do you remember how the Pharisees demanded that Jesus rebuke His disciples as he rode the donkey into Jerusalem on what we now call ‘Palm Sunday’? What was it that provoked their fury? The recognition that Jesus was – is indeed – the Messiah:

*‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’  
Luke 19:38*

And how did Jesus respond to those who demanded this Truth be silenced?

*I tell you, he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’  
Luke 19:40*

So in a very real sense, the Gospel is hard wired into God’s creation, if we just knew how to look at and interpret it. In a similar fashion, as we walk with our Lord through this life, it is – or should be – in the process of being hard-wired into us as we, *‘die to sin and live to righteousness’* (2 Peter 2:24). Or, as we read in Galatians 2:20, *‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.’*

Isaiah 43:7 reminds us that we are created for the glory of God; this was well understood by the early Church, which taught that ‘the primary purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.’

*1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God".*

*Isaiah 43:7: "... everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made".*

*Matthew 5:16: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven".*

But it is also important to realise that God takes delight in OUR company too. Psalm 149:4 reminds us, *‘For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory’*.

Those of you who joined our mid-week prayer group last Wednesday will have prayed about the Choices facing Britain today – we really are at a pivotal point where we either renounce the foreign gods and the bad choices that have seemingly been imposed on us, or suffer the consequences of our wilful rejection of God in this land. But it actually shows how much we mean to God – He doesn’t demand the submission of automatons pre-programmed to do His bidding, as is the case with so many demonic entities, rather He wants us to choose to worship Him. But that of course opens up the

possibility of our choosing to reject Him; this grieves His heart, not just because we cannot be in fellowship with Him, but because we cannot live to our full potential if we fail to ‘follow our maker’s instructions.’ Societal collapse is the self-inflicted consequence of our determination to choose to go against His purposes, both individually and collectively.

For a long time, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland stood proud in the World and punched well above its weight. We exported an education system that had grown out of Christianity and was something to be proud of, a rule of law that was rooted in Biblical values and infrastructure that still works today. We pro-actively abolished the slave trade at the cost of the lives of many British Sailors and a huge debt that was only paid off earlier this century. But above all we sent missionaries around the globe to spread the Gospel. Did we get it all right? Of course we didn’t, but we were not, and are not, solely responsible for all the ills of the World today.

So why are we living in such dark times? Many of us grew up in post-war optimism – we knew that we had hard-won freedoms and were building a ‘better’ world, confident that the carnage of the two World Wars could not happen again.

And we took our eye off the ball.

Little by little, our values were hollowed out – *‘Did God really say ...?’* whispered the serpent in the Garden in Eden; the serpent who was *‘more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made’* (*Genesis 3:1*). When Christ was tempted in the Wilderness, He refuted every assertion with a clear Biblical fact. We stopped teaching Christianity in Schools for fear of causing ‘offence.’ We started believing that our national standing was somehow the product of our own innate talents, even ours by right rather than submitting to God. We separated Science from Religion and pretended that they had always been incompatible, even worse that Science had superseded Christian Belief. The Truth became ‘your truth’ and we realised that that meant no absolutes, so gender became a matter of personal feeling, and women were supposed to welcome biological men into their personal spaces. Humanity has been stripped away so that we are now only rated according to our economic worth - 30% of pregnancies end in abortion according to the latest statistics, and they are still pushing to decriminalise women who abort for any reason up to birth. While at the same time the House of lords is trying to provide scrutiny to the euphemistically named ‘Assisted Dying’ Bill, which would give the State the power to terminate life - undermining the roots of our failing Health Service and going well beyond its boundaries.

Very subtly and incrementally, we have transferred to the State areas which had formerly been the responsibility of the Church – education, welfare, health – and our Christian roots have been quietly severed. We were persuaded that Religion was a ‘personal matter’ by a Government that proudly asserted, ‘We don’t do God.’ We were taught to be ashamed of the very values that underpinned our Society and to pretend that all cultures, all religions, are equal, or even superior, to our own – even if that means ignoring our long held Christian shaped values on women’s rights, animal welfare, the right to be tried by our peers, or the integrity of our legal system. The ‘Church’ ignored Biblical grounding and embraced the liberal culture, forfeiting any right to speak on moral or ethical issues, and an arrogance replaced humility before Almighty God. We have institutions so full of their own self-importance that they have lost touch with their foundational ethos. We have a ‘me’ generation so intent on self-gratification, and ‘what’s in it for me?’, that the structures of society can no longer function, along with a welfare state that cannot possibly meet demand. Mental illness is through the roof, nothing seems to work properly, and our very democracy seems to be in jeopardy.

None of this is new; the Bible is full of the people of Israel sinning, falling under the judgment of God, repenting and being restored - that cycle seems to be on ‘rinse and repeat’ from Genesis until the Day of Judgment. But it is no accident that we live in these days - the cycle has always involved men (and women) of God praying and testifying to His Goodness, calling the people to repentance.

Think of the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's Feast: *'You have been weighed in the scales and found wanting'* (Daniel 5). This, at a lavish feast involving sacrilege, because Belshazzar used sacred vessels from the Temple; he was criticised for his arrogance, and that night the Kingdom fell to Darius the Mede.

Is the UK being 'weighed in the balance today and found wanting'? Was the arrogance of Belshazzar worse than where we are today?

Look at the arrogance in our society – corrupt politicians who, far from retiring from Public Life when their wrongdoing is exposed and devoting themselves to Charity, as did John Profumo, retire to the back benches for a short period, and then come back. (And back again!) A monarchy that struggles to deal with wrongdoing within its own ranks and seems unable or unwilling to 'Defend the Faith', which is integral to the foundations of our Society. A golden calf of a Health Service that reduces patients to symptoms and leaves too many languishing on waiting lists, or dying in A&E, but still claims to be the 'envy of the world', and a Church that seems more intent on appeasing the world than glorifying God. Time and again, God calls out and chastises the arrogant. But the first challenge is to His people:

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).*

And humility starts in the presence of Almighty God, not in assuming that we have it right and that if only everyone came to us and did it our way, then everything would be so much better. It is standing like Isaiah in the presence of Almighty God, and realising that we too are people of unclean lips. It is seeking His call on our lives and walking the individual paths He has prepared for each and every one of us. It is not comparing ourselves with others, our yardstick is our Lord and only Him – on our own strength, our own merit, we are not worthy to enter His presence; that right has been bought for us at great cost by His Son. It is acknowledging that we can only operate in His strength, that the battles in which we engage are His – we are merely His foot soldiers, and the Glory goes to Him.

What does the passage from Isaiah tell us?

*'Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.*

*See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you  
and his glory appears over you  
Isaiah 60:1-2*

Darkness is a time when we slumber, when nefarious deeds are committed because they go unseen. We arise because *the glory of the Lord is risen upon us*. Day has dawned, the son (with an o) shines. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5:8, *'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.'* Note that he doesn't say you were once IN darkness, he says you once WERE darkness. We have been - and are being - transformed by the light of Christ shining IN us and THROUGH us. Darkness is not defeated by being pushed aside, darkness is defeated by the infusion of light – which exposes what has hidden, and also attracts.

Just a note of caution: Isaiah 60 is a prophetic vision specifically aimed at Israel, beginning with a political and geographical restoration in the 6th century BC, but looking forward to the future reign

of Christ. It quite clearly references Gentiles being attracted to the light, *even Kings will be attracted to Israel's rising*, so whilst in principle it has application to all of God's people, Isaiah is speaking here to Israel as Israel. Replacement Theology does not work. But the final verses of the chapter, which we heard read earlier, are mirrored in the book of Revelation: *There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever (Revelation 22:5).*

Now we know that times are dark, and the likelihood is that they will get much darker. In FOTW, we have often said that our Nation is at a pivotal point and that we can either continue on our trajectory away from God to utter chaos, or we can repent, humble ourselves and turn back collectively to the precepts that underpin our Society. This is the battle that rages over our Nation and it is not the time for God's people to slumber, or even retreat into a 'holy huddle', bemoaning the state of the world and feeling helpless. Battles are not fought by lay-abled sluggards, but by disciplined, trained soldiers who put their lives on the line. We have already looked at Ephesians 5:8 with the exhortation to '*live as children of the light*;' that chapter continues :

*'(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible – and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:*

*'Wake up, sleeper,  
rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.'*

*Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil'*

*(Ephesians 5:9-16).*

And so we arise at the bidding of our Saviour, to let His light shine in us and through us. We proactively seek to do His will, letting '*the joy of the Lord be (y)our strength*' (*Nehemiah 8:10*), trusting that He will use us to attract others, to expose the works of darkness and, above all, '*to give glory to our Father in Heaven.*'

And in case you think this is an easy calling, because it is letting God work through us, I want to read a post that Aaron Edwards put on X this week, in response to an announcement by Rupert Lowe about the Crowdfunded Rape Gang Inquiry he set up in disgust at the failure of others to act as they had promised:

*We like to talk about light overcoming darkness.*

*It sounds nice and pleasant, the stuff of well-scripted royal speeches where dignitaries speak of "our Christian values" as a nation.*

*But in reality, it means exposing the darkness. This is what takes real courage to do.*

*It's easy to talk about exposing darkness in the abstract, never specifying the particular darkness which needs exposing in your own time, where no one in particular will ever malign you, undermine you, threaten you, or attack you for doing so.*

*But if you really do care about exposing the darkness, if you really do care about those who have been, or will be, affected by it, then you must be willing to face whatever may be thrown at you by those who want to keep the darkness away from the light.*

Godspeed, [@RupertLowe10](#) & co!

So let us all Take up our crosses, gird our loins, arise, shine and BE the Gospel in these dark times.

Amen