

Isaiah 60:1-4. "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. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm.

Arise and shine for Your Light has Come

When is the last time that you praised God, I mean really praised God with a heart bursting with happiness, that you have been delivered from Satan and his demons? When is the last time that you have said a simple prayer* as you wake in the morning or go to bed at night giving thanks to God that you live and lie down as one who is securely held in the hands of God and not as one who dwells in the clutches of the evil one? This is the peace, the joy, the happiness that we have as Christians. This is the redemption and salvation and the victory that we live in daily. You who have been baptized into Christ have been rescued from Satan's dominion of darkness and you have been brought into the glorious light of the kingdom of Christ. Arise and shine, dear Christians, each and every day in the fact that your light has come. The glory of the LORD himself rises upon you. ***Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.***

Maybe it's the culture that we live in, maybe it is the work of the devil, that great deceiver, who tries any and all tactics to weaken our faith and drag us away from God, but there's a part of most of us that is trained to be just too rational, just too far removed from that ancient realm of Satan and his demons that we don't appreciate, like we should, what God has saved us from. He has set us free from Satan's dominion of darkness through Jesus our Savior. As redeemed children of God, many of us lifelong Christians, we are aware of the darkness of sin and unbelief, but we don't really get or understand, see or properly perceive, just how thick the darkness is over the peoples of this world. ***See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.***

This is the point that seminary professor E. Allen Sorum drives home in a recently published book, ***2000 Demons: No Match for My Savior***. In his book Professor Sorum draws from his personal parish ministry and his experience in assisting pastors in different home and world mission settings in order to construct composite characters who represent how different people take different views of spiritual beings like angels, demons, and Satan. He does this to help us change our perspective on the spiritual realm, not so that we might be frightened or alarmed, but that we would in fact see what

God has truly done for us in rescuing us from Satan's dominion of darkness and bringing us safely into his glorious kingdom of peace and happiness through Christ Jesus.

Here is a summary of an eye-opening portion of Professor Sorum's book in which he constructs a number of composite characters based on real life people that he has encountered in his years of ministry. The first character he describes as Robert. *Robert's perspective on such spiritual things is that he doesn't give it much thought. He is a modern rational man who would not consider legitimate the idea that demons come from some spiritual place, in a spiritual form, to bring suffering on humans. Jenny's views on this supernatural is connected to her social life with high school friends. She gets together with friends who go on to talk about unexplainable things that happened to so and so and how it was kind of like the scary movies that they just went to see. Her friends get together at parties to turn over the creepy cards that tell what the future holds. There is something going on here, but she can't put a finger on why this is so appealing, what kind of power this actually is. Jonathan eagerly wants to engage with the supernatural. Ghosts are his hobby. He likes to read about houses and their poltergeists. These spirits, in Jonathan's view, do not represent evil or want necessarily to harm humans. He believes that every ghost has a story and he wants to find out more, to make contact, to have a relationship with the paranormal. Then there is Dawb – she prefers this traditional name to her English name. She is the child of immigrant parents who came to North America from Southeast Asia. Dawb wants to be left alone. But there is no place she can go to be alone; spirits and their mischief are everywhere. Dawb hopes that her family, the ones who have died and passed into their next place can protect her – at least a little. Dawb's father brings extra offerings to the small shrine in the family's home. They consult the spirits, the family discusses whether or not they can afford to pay the shaman, but the fees are much too high for the family to handle. Dawb's father is afraid. She sees it. She is afraid as well.*

There are definitely more perspectives, but these composite characters represent how many in our world view such things as the devil and his demons. Robert is skeptical. Jenny finds such supernatural topics a source of entertainment. Jonathan actively wants to communicate with the paranormal. Dawb is fully engaged with the spirit world and is afraid.

What is your perspective? I ask this as one who would admit that even as a pastor I tend to fall into seeing the world through the eyes of a Robert. Living in a modern world that seems so far removed from such ancient things I may tend to overlook the intense spiritual warfare that is taking place all around me. Satan is constantly at work trying his best to keep, to drag people back, into spiritual darkness and so often I go about my day not giving much thought to this significant battle.

What is your perspective on such things? What should our perspective, in fact, be? The prophet Isaiah issues some important insight. ***See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.*** Take notice of the importance of that first word...See. See it. Through his prophet God invites us, urges us, to see how the devil is still very much at

work. He attacks many in our culture by tricking us into thinking he is no longer a threat, no longer around, no longer an influence. As we fail to think about him and how he threatens us, perhaps we won't see how important it is to have Jesus on our side, in our life. That crafty serpent of an enemy, entices others to dabble and to explore his world. He exploits human curiosity and he lures his victims in slowly, subtly, waiting to pounce like a lion looking - concealed by the 'tall grass' of our rational and modern habitat - waiting and looking for someone to devour. And for still others in this world, he ensnares them in a thick veil of his darkness where he openly taunts and terrorizes.

In his book *2000 Demons: No Match for My Savior*, Professor Sorum goes on to describe some of the encounters and the ministry his pastor friends in home and world missions have experienced and shared with him. He speaks of those in certain cultures who have been exposed and made vulnerable to the haunts of the devil and his demons. Pastors in places like Laos and Vietnam and here in America have come into contact with people who are suffering in the darkness of these spiritual forces. Suffering physical pain, emotional turmoil, suffering in ways that are hard to describe and even imagine. And how have these pastors responded? After meeting with family members and those suffering in these terrible ways, they pray to Jesus. They proclaim his name. They speak the name of the Savior, they pray to their LORD of glory who has power over all things, and they pray and proclaim his name some more. Professor Sorum then writes in his book what these pastors are so happy to share, Jesus delivers those suffering in darkness and brings them into his kingdom of light.

A woman referred to in the book as Elizabeth would love to have you know her story. *A pastor and some of his fellow Christians from a Southeast Asia immigrant community came to visit her in her Midwest American home. The family of Elizabeth had invited this pastor to come and pray for her because evil spirits were causing her and her family tremendous suffering. Elizabeth's situation was extremely difficult. The process that this pastor and his members went through before the demon finally left was long and agonizing. But the power of Jesus and the power of the prayers from the people of Jesus prevailed. Finally, Elizabeth was free of the evil spirit inside of her. What did Elizabeth say? How did she feel when the demon departed? She said, "I am really happy. I know the demon is gone. What was controlling me is no longer in me. I feel clean. I am who I am now. I no longer feel controlled. I feel happy." She transitioned from victim to victor. Quite a journey, yes? But at her baptism, she got more! Again, the apostle Paul says, "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:22).*

To be more aware of such a spiritual darkness in our world, to see how thick such spiritual darkness and how it wants to spread to more and more, is not something that we should ignore or dismiss. Nor is it something that we should curiously cozy up to through the choices we make in our entertainment and our social encounters. But a positive and necessary shift in our perspective is to see and acknowledge there is such

thick darkness from which Jesus so graciously has set us free. With such an understanding we will not shudder in absolute fear now that we are more aware of the reality of such terrible darkness, but instead, we will daily awake with greater appreciation of what our God has done and is doing for us. We have been set free by the power of Christ, we belong to his kingdom of light. With happy and grateful hearts, we will include in our prayers words of thanks for our Savior's power and his grace that he has rescued us; that he willingly suffered the suffocating darkness of hell on the cross for you, for me, for the sins of the whole world. His arms extended on the cross were stretched out in pain so that he could destroy the devil's work. His arms once extended on the cross are now reaching out to us with the light and the joy of his saving and powerful word that is our refuge our strength, our shield, and our sword. His saving arms embrace us. We are his. We belong to him. We are given this freedom, this light, this joy, that we may be cleansed and happy in the presence of our Lord and Savior now and forever. We are held securely by our Savior in his kingdom of light and grace and every time we pray, "let your kingdom come", we are praying that God may reach out to more and more people who are covered by the thick darkness but by his glorious grace in Jesus are set free and brought into God's glorious kingdom through the saving gospel. We pray that there may be more and more people who like Elizabeth are wrestled from the clutches of the evil one and are held for all eternity in the mighty arms and the caring embrace of Jesus, our Lord, and Savior.

"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. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. AMEN.

** Luther's morning prayer is one that you might use to remind you daily of how God saves you from and protects you from the evil one. The prayer is printed for you below:*

In the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit.

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. Into Your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.