
The Light of the World Among Us

DARRELL DELANEY

Imagine a world wrapped in darkness, waiting, hoping for a light to break through; and then, one night in Bethlehem, it does. A child is born, fulfilling ancient promises; bringing a light that darkness cannot overcome; but what does it mean for us today? In this episode of *Groundwork*, we continue our journey through Advent and anticipate Christmas by exploring the light of the world among us: his birth, his life, and the hope he brings. Stay with us as we uncover the profound meaning of Christ's light shining in our world, next on *Groundwork*.

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And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in part four of our five-part series on Jesus, the light of the world. In the first episode, we talked about waiting for and anticipating the light of the world coming into this world. In the second episode, we talked about what it means to actually prepare for the light of the world.

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Then in our third episode, we talked about the first of those who shared the good news of the light, and how God wants us to live. In this episode now, we are going to talk about the light of the world actually arriving; and we do this, of course, as we are situated now between Christ's first advent and his second advent.

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DARRELL DELANEY

So, you know the word *advent* means arrival, Scott; so, what we teach our kids in children's worship, in the little children's sermons, is that we are preparing for Jesus to come. The good news is, we know that we have the full counsel of the Word of God. He has already come, and now we are waiting for him to come back; but when we look at scripture where we are talking about the context now, Israel was still waiting for that Christmas night. They lived in oppression. They were longing for rescue. They were yearning for a leader who would break their chains; and the prophet Isaiah is really good at making sure they know that light is coming.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, we will start this episode in that pre-Bethlehem, pre-Christmas advent moment from the Old Testament; and you know, Darrell, there is a reason why we are drawn to light when we are in the dark. If you are ever in a place where there is no electricity...maybe you have chosen that by going out camping...or maybe you have a power outage. There is a storm and a tree falls on the wires and you lose electricity; and you know, when you are in that situation, even the smallest flicker of light can seem like a lot. You know, I sometimes think at noon on a sunny day, if I take out the strongest flashlight I have and turn it on, you cannot even tell whether the thing is on or not; or maybe look real close and, yeah, it is on, but it looks like nothing compared to the sun; but do that at midnight on a moonless night, and all of a sudden, that flashlight is huge. I mean, it is just a huge source of illumination. Well, when we are in the dark, sometimes just a flicker can look like a lot.

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Yes; you know, it may seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, Scott, but if it is a complete, dark situation, that little flicker can be the very inspiration and hope that you need to be able to see; to be able to navigate where you are. I think that is what Isaiah was getting at when he was prophesying about the coming of Christ; because the world... I mean, spiritually speaking, it was dark; it was a dark place: a lot of violence, a lot of brokenness, a lot of oppression; and they are hoping for a deliverer. So, Isaiah begins to talk about this in Chapter 9.

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Yes; you know, it may seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things, Scott, but if it is a complete, dark situation, that little flicker can be the very inspiration and hope that you need to be able to see; to be able to navigate where you are. I think that is what Isaiah was getting at when he was prophesying about the coming of Christ; because the world... I mean, spiritually speaking, it was dark; it was a dark place: a lot of violence, a lot of brokenness, a lot of oppression; and they are hoping for a deliverer. So, Isaiah begins to talk about this in Chapter 9.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Isaiah writes: ²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴For as in the days of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. ⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

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What I like about this prophecy, Scott, is that Isaiah is speaking as if the future has already occurred. What I learned when I was in seminary is that prophets see the vision that God is putting in front of them, and they walk backward toward the people who they come from. So, they are not walking toward the vision, they are walking back from the vision. So, that is why Isaiah is speaking as if it had already happened, even though Israel has not experienced it yet. He says: They have seen a great light; the Son has been given. So, he is speaking as if it is completed, because that is how it is from God's perspective.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and again, for the people who didn't see the vision and walk back with it the way Isaiah did for them, this was, you know, probably some cognitive dissonance—some disconnect. It is like...mmm, we are still in darkness, Isaiah. The light has not come. But Isaiah saw the vision, as you just said, and says to us: It

will come; it will come. Maybe you are seeing it from a distance, but even...sometimes, Darrell....even a faint flicker gives you hope.

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So, there is the tension right there, Scott; and we will be talking about this a little bit more as we continue. There is this already/not yet happening. The good news of what is coming has already been announced; but the manifestation of it in full has not yet occurred; and even when Jesus is actually here doing his ministry, he says the kingdom of God is here, but in full, it is not actually here in completion; and the consummation of it is not yet. So, Israel lives in that tension. I mean, even today we live in that tension as well, between the two advents.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

We sometimes have seen it in movies or in TV shows; maybe it is a story of a family that is driving in a whiteout blizzard winter storm. They cannot see anything; or maybe it is somebody trudging through a very dark woods. I remember seeing something a while back of somebody just trudging through the darkness, but then all of a sudden in the distance, you could see just a little flicker of light; and it turned out to be no more than the light coming from a cabin that had light on the inside; but just seeing that flicker: A) Now I know which direction to walk. B) It will only get bigger the closer I get to it; and then there will be safety and light once I get there. That is sort of what Isaiah is doing. He is saying there is a light up ahead...Israel, there is a light up ahead. I can talk about it in the past tense, I am so sure I can tell you, there is light that is going to come on to you in your darkness, so keep moving forward. Don't give up...don't give up hope.

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So, Isaiah...we call him the eagle-eye prophet because he sees seven hundred years in the future—the actual birth of Jesus. He gets that vision way before; and that is the distant glow that you are referring to, Scott, that beacon of light; that little hope; that is the posture that we are supposed to have; and that is what Advent teaches us. Israel is waiting for their Messiah to come, and we are waiting for his return, but we actually have

these promises in scripture as that light to hold onto for hope.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a great light that comes, but of course, as we are going to see, and think about a little bit more in this episode, when God sends his light into the world in the person of his Son, who becomes born in a manger in Bethlehem, it is not the grand shining of light the way the world might... You know, it is not like... Sometimes you see those spotlights they used to... I don't remember if they even do this anymore, but car dealerships are having a big sale, they would have these crisscrossing spotlights. You could see them from a long way off. Well, Jesus as the light of the world in Bethlehem didn't come with quite that much panache or that much visible light. It was definitely a spiritual light. He came as a little child; as a helpless baby; but Isaiah is telling us here: Now that is it. That is the great light that is going to shine on the people who have been living in darkness, and it will come; it will grow; keep moving toward it; and in Advent, that is what we remember, that journey of anticipation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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In just a moment, we will talk a little bit more, moving into the New Testament. We will go to Luke 2 and the Christmas story and how God brings that light into this world. So, stay tuned for that.

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Segment 2

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SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and you know, Darrell, there is something about that moment when anticipation turns into reality; and you know, a lot of us who are married can think about that in terms of, you know...for a lot of people, anyway...I know this is true for my wife and me...it was true for a lot of the people I did premarital counseling with as a pastor, whose weddings I conducted...a lot of planning goes into it. Months and months in advance. Planning this; calling caterers; choosing flowers; getting a dress fitting; figuring out

where you are going to rent your tuxedos from; planning the honeymoon; planning the food for the reception; the venue for the reception; everything, everything, everything builds up; and then the moment arrives and the doors at the back of the church open and there is the bride, and now it is no longer just an anticipated event, it is the event itself; it is here; it is happening.

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And that is the shift that we see in scripture, metaphorically speaking. Isaiah is talking about what is coming; he is talking about great anticipation; about this great day coming when the Messiah will be born; when God will address the brokenness and bring the light into the world; but then, fast forward to Luke; it is actually happening. The prophecy has been fulfilled. The announcement is here. So, when the doors swing open, so to speak, the light of the world steps into history and this is coming in where we read from Luke Chapter 2.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

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DARRELL DELANEY

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you:

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is it. This is the moment when the doors at the back of the church open and the bride comes down the aisle. This is the moment when the doors of history open and the Son of God descends in the form of a baby. The light Isaiah talked about now has come into the world. Not with the royal fanfare; not in a palace; not in the most famous...you know. Luke...we have noted before on *Groundwork*, in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3...Luke is quite clever. He opens these chapters with the names of the bigwigs: The Caesar Augustus and Quirinius and all these other people that even more are named in Chapter 3 before we get to John the Baptist out in the middle of nowhere. Luke did not do that just to situate this historically. He did it to say that is not where the real power was. Don’t go to Rome; don’t go to Caesar; don’t go to Herod; don’t go to Quirinius or Licinius or anybody else who were the bigwigs of the day, whose names were in the news. You go out to the sticks; you go out to the middle of nowhere. Bethlehem was a little no-account town in the backwaters of the Roman Empire; and that is where the light arrived.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the way he came in isn't the way that...you know, it doesn't garner the world's attention; because, you know, you got the bigwigs that you mentioned. They are in the palaces with the shiny walls and all that, and that stuff is not where God is; and that is not what God is doing. He is using the most obscure situation. He is using a lowly manger; he is using a lowly family that is not royal at all; and he is doing it with shepherds who, most of these people in this day would look down on and say: Who are these guys? They are not anybody. Look what they are doing. They are not important. So, not only does God situate himself in a place where people who may not have voices or power are, he is turning the whole government upside down by doing that; and that is where his light shines.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and the shepherds return and they tell people. They became the first preachers. The shepherds, of all people, were the first evangelists telling people about the birth of this child that was announced to them by angels, no less. Very, very, very amazing. Again, as God has done all through the Bible, God often upends expectations, you know; you saw it all through the book of Genesis already, when God always chooses the younger child...

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Over the older: Abel, not Cain; Jacob, not Esau; Joseph, not his other strapping brothers. Abraham and Sarah are the most unlikely people to kick the whole thing off. That is just how God has liked to work all the time; and so, we look even today for Christ to show up in ordinary places.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; he also uses David; he is the eighth born; he is one of the youngest sons; and so, you know, God often does things in the way we least expect; and I believe that he doesn't want to be somebody you can formulaically predict or contain. I think God wants to make sure that we trust him, because he does things in ways that we least expect; and so, I think that we see that, in this birth in Bethlehem, the King comes in humility; the King comes, not in this grand spectrum, but he really does let his light shine in simple and unexpected ways; and so, Mary also responds in a way that is kind of interesting. She doesn't go preaching a sermon; she doesn't go tell it on the rooftops; she actually takes these things and ponders them in her heart. I think that is an invitation for us to reflect quietly on some of the things that God has done in our own lives as well.

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Yes; he also uses David; he is the eighth born; he is one of the youngest sons; and so, you know, God often does things in the way we least expect; and I believe that he doesn't want to be somebody you can formulaically predict or contain. I think God wants to make sure that we trust him, because he does things in ways that we least expect; and so, I think that we see that, in this birth in Bethlehem, the King comes in humility; the King comes, not in this grand spectrum, but he really does let his light shine in simple and unexpected ways; and so, Mary also responds in a way that is kind of interesting. She doesn't go preaching a sermon; she doesn't go tell it on the rooftops; she actually takes these things and ponders them in her heart. I think that is an invitation for us to reflect quietly on some of the things that God has done in our own lives as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I heard a story of a missionary one time who was trying to bring the gospel to some remote village, and she thought she needed to do it with power, so she would try to preach with power; she would try to convince the people through clever arguments and impressive arguments, and they just resisted; but what opened the door finally was one day when she just helped an older woman gather some firewood and helped her build a fire. So, the villagers saw this woman doing acts of service and *that* is when their hearts were softened and opened to hear more about Jesus. The way Jesus came tells us that is the way to tell the world about the gospel now. We tell it in humility; we tell it by bearing the fruit of the Spirit; by being good and gentle and respectful and kind. To introduce them to the King of Kings, who came in lowliness; who came in humility; who came to sacrifice his life in service to bring us salvation.

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DARRELL DELANEY

He actually came to be among us; that is what *Emmanuel* means: God with us. God didn't stay in the clean part of holy heaven. He came down in the middle of our situation...our dirty circumstance...because he cares for us; and he is teaching us by bringing his light into those dark places, how we might live as well; and as we continue in this episode and close this program down, we want to talk about how we live as children of light in this world. So, stay tuned.

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Segment 3

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SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee; along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Darrell, we have been talking, of course, in this whole series about the light of the world: Jesus. In this episode, we looked at the Old Testament setting with Isaiah anticipating the great light that would shine upon those living in the land of darkness. Then we jumped to the New Testament, to Luke 2 in the previous part of this program. We saw that light arrive, very quietly, in an out-of-the-way place; revealed to shepherds; not to the Roman higher-up types, but to lowly shepherds; but that was the definitive inbreaking of God's light.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, light. I think that is one of the reasons why if you think about bonfires and camps on cold nights, it is not just about the warmth that the fire brings, but it is about what the light does to the darkness. It draws us in and it creates a place of safety, and it reminds us no matter how deep the night goes, the fire still burns; and that advent is a reminder that Christ is that light; and he is not some distant light way down there, but he is actually right here with us in a very deep and personal and unwavering way; and we need that hope, don't we, Scott?

DARRELL DELANEY

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SCOTT HOEZEE

We do; we do. I mean, Isaiah was right. People have lived in deep darkness. They have lived in confusion. They have lived under the cover of sin. We will think about that more in the next episode—the final episode of this series as well, when we turn to the meaning of epiphany following Christmas. But yes, we need that. There is a moment at the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—the first of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, when Aslan the great lion, who was the Christ figure, gets to the White Witch's castle, and throughout the story of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Darrell, you will remember, she would cast a spell on creatures like Mr. Tumnus, and others, and they would become frozen; I mean, they would become literally frozen. But Aslan comes and he...hhhhuh...he breathes on them, and in the film version of this, there is a great special effect, where you just see the ice melting, and they go from blue to color returning to their faces. Aslan's warm breath melted away the cold; and although that is not, per se, an image of light, it is

the light coming to unfreeze us. We are drawn to that light because we don't want to live enthralled to sin; enthralled to the thick darkness all around us.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; that light touches us; that light awakens us; that light brings us to life, just like the breath that you were mentioning. So, Christ being the light of the world is the one who is going to be an encouragement to us, even in times where darkness seems to be prevailing. We see that promise in John 8:12, where it says: When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

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In that, we know that Jesus is not promising that we won't have any hardship. He doesn't say that we won't have long night seasons, where it feels like it is really challenging, but he does promise that when we follow him, we will never be without his light, because his presence will always be with us, Scott.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the light of life, so we know that he walks with us at all times; still, in this light, because we live between the already and the not yet—between the two advents—we will have times when we walk through the valley of the shadow; that will still happen, but we don't walk alone, and we don't walk without his inner light with us; and that is more than good news. His light exposes what is hidden; not to shame us, but to heal us, you know. This is great news. So, in Ephesians 5, Paul writes to the Ephesians:

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⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth).

⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth).

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, you see a change happen there, Scott. First, we witness the light coming in Christ; but now, it is our identity to be the light that shines. So, we are called to live as Christians who allow Christ's presence to shape us and change us, and then we begin to reflect that light to everyone we are around, when we interact with people in our communities and in the world around us, we are reflections of his light. That is what we are called to do.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

For now, in this world, that can still be a little bit spotty, but we do anticipate the time that is predicted in Revelation 22, and I think we looked at some of this in the first episode of this series when we sort of surveyed the whole Bible, playing with the images of darkness and light, but we end up in Revelation 22:5. This is in the new creation now: 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.

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So, that is what we anticipate when everything will be light. For now, there is still some darkness; so, maybe we can just conclude this episode, Darrell, with three things...three takeaways, we could call them...how we can live in the light of Christmas every day.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the first thing is that we can let the light of Christ guide us. His presence and his Word can illuminate our path; that is what it says in Psalm 119:105: The Word is the lamp to our feet and the light to our path. We can study God's Word; we can do devotions; and we can learn from that to give us the way we need to live. So, let the light of his Word guide us.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

The second thing, of course, and we will think about this more also in the next episode, we have to reflect that light to others; and we are going to go to Matthew 5 in the next episode, but obviously, we don't keep this to ourselves. Again, we will talk about that again in connection to Epiphany; but this is a transforming

light to us. If this is the light that lights up our path so we know which way to walk, we want others to join us on that path. We want them to be guided by that exact same light, because, yes, the last thing we want to do is hoard the light for ourselves. We want to bring it to others so that they too can walk on right paths.

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DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and then the third thing is to remember that darkness does not win. I know it can seem really dark, especially when we turn on the news, when we talk to our neighbors, or when we encounter situations in our lives and in our communities. It can seem like darkness is winning, but we need to remember that Advent reminds us that the light has already come, and that we have victory in Christ Jesus, even though we feel like sometimes we may be losing; and the hope of Christ is not just some wishful thought, Scott; it is a firm foundation and a promise of his second advent; when he comes back, he will set everything straight. Shalom, justice, and everything not missing and not broken. That is what he is going to do when he comes back.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

And if Isaiah could comfort the people of Israel by anticipating the light, Isaiah could see it, and when he walked back to the people, he could almost talk about it as though it had already happened. *It has dawned*, right? Well, now it really has dawned. We are not looking forward; we look back to Bethlehem, and we know that the light has come. We know that the light is shining. We know from John 1 that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it; and that is what we cling to every single day, thanks be to God.

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