

Let Your Faith Arise

Good morning! We're starting a new series called "Arise and Shine!". It's taken from Isaiah 60:1-3. Now, before we read this passage, I want to show you something. That is a 14-Karat diamond. That is what every woman desires. Including my wife. Right? Although I told her I was going to give her something better. A 24-karat gold ring. There's a lot of gold in heaven. The streets are paved with gold. Anyway, look at it. It sparkles and shines. Especially in the dark.

I remember the story I read about a guy who lost the wedding ring he was going to give to his new bride on the night before their wedding. He was with his friends celebrating at a restaurant when one of them said to him, "Don't forget to give the ring to the best man before you leave." And he said, "Great, I've got that covered." And so as he was getting ready to leave, he reached into his pocket and to his utter disbelief and shock the ring was gone. He couldn't believe it.

Then his mind raced back. It must have fallen out when he reached into his pocket to take out his car keys as he was leaving the church parking lot. So he and his groomsman rushed back to the church parking lot and when they got there all the lights were out. It was pitch black. There was no one there, and there's this huge empty church parking lot. His heart just sank. He thought, "What am I going to do?"

Then an idea came and he told his friend that he was going to drive around his car with the headlights on and to hope that the light catches those diamonds. And sure enough, right when he turned the lights on, boom, he shouted in jubilation. Because the diamonds just burst into light. They just sparkled in the dark of the night.

Folks, God wants you to shine like a diamond in a dark night.

As Christ followers the Light of the world who is Jesus wants to fill you up so that you shine. But it seems like we're living in a time when the world is enveloped by a night of negativity. There are so many problems and so many hurting people and so much pain and evil in the world today. We all know what happened in Florida recently. That truly was heartbreaking. And many are asking, What's the solution? When is this darkness going to end?

Every one of us experiences dark clouds of difficulty and pain. Every one of us go through the darkness of anxiety and fear, but I really believe God wants to put His hand of favor on your life in such a way that you shine brightly, that you stand out in a sea of selfishness and reflect the light of God's love. Amen?

I want you to open your Bibles to Isaiah Chapter 60 because as we move forward as a church we want to fulfill God's purpose for our church and I think this passage will inspire us and help us put things in perspective and help us to see that God wants us to make an impact in our community and in the world.

"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." Please be seated.

Isaiah says to the people of Israel that it's time to rise up and shine brightly the light of God's favor and blessing. But notice he doesn't say that it's time to rise up and shine brightly the light of God's favor on your life because you have no problems, because everything is perfect in the world, because everything is smooth sailing around you. No, it's just the opposite.

In fact, he says darkness covers the earth, thick darkness is over the people. So he's saying that you're living in difficult, dark days, and it reminds me of the time we're living in. We're living in difficult and dark days.

There's so much pain in the world, so much evil, so many problems that are huge, it just seems like we'll never be able to get through. But it says the Lord rises upon you His glory. The light of His favor and strength are upon you.

Look again at the very first word in that passage. Arise. See, this is our part. We have a choice. We can rise in faith or we can hunker down in fear. When difficulties come your way, when you're in difficult days, when you're in stressful times, when you move through seasons of anxiety and fear, you always have a choice. You can rise in faith or you can shrink back in fear, and to experience the light of God's favor we have to make a daily choice to rise in faith and to seize this moment in time and shatter the darkness.

You see, God puts these moments in time in our lives, these defining moments, and if we seize those moments and rise in faith instead of shrinking back in fear, then it propels us ahead to new levels. I mean everyday in the Christian life, we're to take steps of faith, and some days it's three steps forward and two steps back, but we're making progress. But there are several times in your life where God will put a defining moment in front of you, and many times that defining moment looks like a disastrous problem, many times that defining moment looks like a huge difficulty but when you rise up in faith and you seize that defining moment it shatters the darkness and it takes you to a whole new level.

I want to share this message with you because it's time for you to rise in faith instead of to shrink back in fear. And over the next six weeks, we're going to go on a faith-building journey until Easter.

And then for our church, it's going to help us as a church rise to the challenges we are facing today so that we can really seize this moment in our history and shine a light for many people.

I want us to go back to a time in the Old Testament when the people of Israel were going through difficult and dark days. Darkness had kind of covered up the whole camp of Israel because they had lost their great leader, Moses. Moses had just died and now an inexperienced leader, Joshua, who had never led before, steps forward and he has to do the most crucial part and that's lead the people into the Promised Land. And so here he is with hundreds of thousands of grumbling and complaining people that he's leading and he has to lead them into the Promised Land and the Jordan River is at flood stage and the only way you can get into the Promised Land is you cross the Jordan River. And so he was faced with an impossible task, and I'm sure everyone was wondering and worrying, "Man, I don't know if he can rise to the challenge. I don't know if he's up to this, and I don't think we're up to it because I don't think we can get across the Jordan River. That's impossible."

So, the very first thing Joshua was called to do after Moses died was to do the impossible. And once he would get through the Jordan River, he knew there were enemies on the other side. But here's what God says to him, the same thing He says to us today.

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will

be with you wherever you go."

(Joshua 1:5b-9)

And what God says to Joshua here, we get four principles that go against the grain. These are the four principles that really are the key to having the light of God's favor upon your life, the key to stepping into the light of God's blessings and strength and wisdom and purpose in your life. The first principle is this:

1. GOD USES ORDINARY PEOPLE TO DO EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. If you don't understand this, then you'll never rise to the challenges in your life. You'll never go to the next level. You'll never get through the Jordan River that you're facing. You'll get stuck. If you don't understand that God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things, you'll have mental barriers. We have these mental barriers and we think we can't get through the Jordan River. It's impossible. We'll drown. It's at flood stage, and some of you've been stuck at a Jordan River for years, and God wants you to break through over the next several weeks. God wants to tear down that mental barrier that's in your mind and in your heart. It's not even real.

Some of us think, "I'm not talented enough, and God can do a miracle in someone else's life but He can't do a miracle in my life. I'm just really ordinary." The good news is God only uses ordinary people. In Joshua 1:9, God said to him,

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

So three times God tells Joshua in this passage be strong and courageous. God was saying, "Joshua, I know that you feel weak and afraid. I know that you feel insecure. I know you feel inadequate. I know, Joshua, you're ordinary. But it's not about you. It's about me, and I'm going to do this miracle through you.

It's not about who you are. It's about who I am. I am the great I am. I am whatever you need."

When God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, Moses said, "Well, what's your name so I can tell them who sent me and they won't laugh at me? I mean they're not going to believe me anyway, but what's your name?" And God said, "Well, my favorite name is I am." He was saying "I'm not the God of the past. I'm not the God of the future. I'm the God of the present. I am. I am here right now to meet your need." He was saying I am whatever you need at the time. Do you need peace? Are you anxious and fearful? God says "I am your peace." Do you need provision? God says "I am your provision." Do you need strength? God says "I am your strength." Do you need forgiveness? God says "I am your forgiveness." What do you need? God says "I am."

It's not about who you are. It's about who He is. And Joshua began to learn that God uses ordinary people. This is the secret to our church. At Fil-Am God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. And I think that's the whole point. God wants to use you. God wants to use me.

Everyone has fears, but people who allow God to do great things through them don't get stuck in their fears. They choose to move forward in faith in spite of their fears because they realize it's not about them, it's about Him. Don't get stuck looking inward at what you can't do.

You look at what God can do through you and you realize that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

The second thing I want you to know is that

2. DEFINING MOMENTS DETERMINE YOUR DESTINY

That's the second principle. Defining moments determine your destiny. Joshua faced a defining moment.

He could lead the people by rising up and stepping into what God called him to do or he could shrink back in fear, and he was feeling fearful. He was feeling weak and insecure, but he didn't let his feelings keep him from following God. It's not about your feelings. You may feel like "I don't know if I'm going to do this or not. I don't know if it's going to work. God, I don't know." But if you step in faith and obey then God blesses.

In Joshua 3: 5 - 7 it says, *"Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.' Joshua said to the priests, 'Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.' So they took it up and went ahead of them. And the LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.'"*

So Joshua tells the people, you better consecrate yourself and get ready for a miracle because God is going to work a miracle tomorrow. I'm sure Joshua must have his doubts. But he believed God. He stepped out in faith. And I want to ask, "Are you ready for a miracle in your life?" I think God has miracles with so many peoples' names on them. God has these miracles in Heaven with a lot of names on them, and He's ready to give them out, and when we get to Heaven we're going to see all these miracles wrapped up in packages, and I'm going to see all these miracles with my name on them and go, "God, what is this?" And He's going to say, "Those are all the miracles I wanted to do in your life but you didn't rise up in faith to receive them. You didn't get ready for the miracle." Are you ready for the miracle in your life?

He says consecrate yourself. That means surrender totally to God. So, make sure that you are surrendered to what He wants to do in your life. Are you ready for the miracle?

And let me ask you this: Are you doing anything in your life that can only be explained that God is doing it? Are you doing anything in your life that requires faith that if God doesn't come through you're toast? The Bible says without faith it's impossible to please God. The Christian life is all about stepping out in faith and then God coming through.

Joshua steps out. His whole reputation is at stake. God's reputation is at stake, but God wants to do great things in your life. You see this was a defining moment; and Joshua, even though he felt weak and insecure, stepped into that moment in faith.

There have been many times in this church where I have felt very inadequate. There have been times where I felt really down and disappointed. There have been times when I've had doubts, but I've never stopped stepping out in faith. I don't let my feelings of fear stop me from believing God and stepping out in faith because it's not about my feelings. It's about the facts, and it's about stepping out in faith, based on the facts of God's word and God's promises.

Now, the third principle is this

3. WHEN YOU NEED A MIRACLE, PLANT A SEED OF FAITH

If you want the light of God's favor in difficult times, apply this principle. When you need a miracle, plant a seed of faith. Now, let's fast forward to chapter 3 when Joshua and the Israelites are about to cross the Jordan River. The problem is, the river is at flood stage at this time of year. They needed a miracle, and here's what happens. In Joshua 3:15-16, it says, *"Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away...So the people crossed over opposite Jericho."*

As soon as their feet touched the water, the miracle happened.

Let me ask you. What is your Jordan River right now? What's the Jordan River that you feel like you'll never be able to get across, that's keeping you stuck? What is that problem in your life that you feel like you'll never get through or maybe you feel like you're drowning in your Jordan River? God says, "I want to give you victory. I want to send you to a new level. I want you to step out in faith and get your feet wet."

You see, we want God to part the river and then we'll walk through. "God, if you'll just part my Jordan River, if you'll just take it away, then I'll have a lot of faith." And God says, "No, if you'll step and get your feet wet, then I'll work the miracle." Whenever I need a miracle, I have to plant a seed of faith first and then God begins to work His miracles. When you have a need, plant a seed. God always wants us to plant a seed of faith because without faith it's impossible to please God.

Whenever you give of your time, talent and treasure to plant seeds of faith, you're going against the grain, and there are two types of people in the world, seed planters and seed holders. There are a lot of seed holders out there that say, "I'm going to hold on to my seeds. I'm not going to give out. I'm going to just spend everything on me. I'm going to meet my needs." God never blesses seed holders. He only blesses seed planters. We're to be seed planters.

In early 1991, while I was working in Australia, God impressed upon me to undergo missionary training. That meant leaving my job because he directed me to a Discipleship Training School under YWAM in Hawaii. I struggled to obey, even though that was Hawaii, because at the time I was sending money to the Philippines, and it was some amount. It was to pay for the mortgage, for utilities, for the schooling of my siblings. If I stopped working, what would happen to my siblings? My parents were here in the States already.

They were living with my sister and her family in California but they didn't have enough to send. Being single and the eldest brother, I felt obligated to do it. I really worried even though a number of people confirmed God's call in my life. Yet, I couldn't say "yes" to God that easily.

Then I learned that my younger sister was being hired as a singer by a restaurant owner in Japan. I told myself, "If she goes to Japan, then she can take over the expenses. So, I'll wait till she leaves then I'll leave for Hawaii." I told her about my plan and she agreed. The problem is, she couldn't leave because she couldn't get a visa for some reason. I was in a dilemma. The training was coming soon. If I said "no" to God, I'll be disobeying. If I said "yes" I couldn't send money anymore. In the end I said "yes" and just left it to God. Right after I made that decision, my sister's visa was released. And she went on to shoulder the financial responsibility.

When you need a miracle, plant a seed of faith. Just step out in faith and watch as God unfolds his miracle.

Finally, the fourth principle is

4. IN THE DARKEST NIGHT, GOD'S LIGHT SHINES BRIGHTEST

In the darkest night, God's light shines brightest. You see, it seemed like the darkest night for the people of Israel when Moses died. He was a capable and effective leader. Joshua takes over. He's leading the people, but in Joshua's dark night of doubt, three days before he was to lead the Jordan people across the Jordan River, God comes to him with the light.

There are three kinds of light that God gives him. First is

a. The Light of God's Power

And that's what you have today as well. You have the light of God's power if Christ is in your life.

In Joshua 1:5a it says, *"No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live."* God is saying, "Joshua, you can rise to this occasion because I'm going to raise you up in my power." We ought to remember that, whatever God asks you to do, He'll give you the strength to do it if you'll take one step and get your feet wet. As Jesus said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Then, God also gives him

b. The Light of God's Presence

In verse 9, God says, *"Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

God says "No matter how dark the night, Joshua, I'm going to be right there with you. I'm going to go through the Jordan River with you." And if you're a Christ follower, Christ is not only with you, but He lives in you through His Holy Spirit, and you'll never have to walk through any dark days by yourself. He'll always be with you in the light of His presence.

Finally, God gives him

c. The Light of God's Promises

In verse 8, God says, *"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."*

Note that word successful. God keeps telling him "You'll be successful, you'll be successful." Now God doesn't want you to fail. God doesn't want you to fail in life. God's not out to get you. God is for you. But this word successful, when we think of success usually we think of fame and fortune but it's so much more than that.

The word success here in the Hebrew literally means the ability to make wise decisions, in your family, in your relationships, in your work, in your career, in your finances and on and on. Wise decisions, that's the key to true success and God says, "If you will believe in my promises, study my promises and follow my promises and step into my promises, then I'll give you the ability to make wise decisions. I'll give you true success. I'll put the light of my favor upon you and you'll walk in it and you'll reflect the love of Christ."

Look at Philippians 2:15. It says, *"So that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the universe."*

God wants you to shine like stars and reflect the glory of God so people notice and say, "What's different about him? What's different about her? There are a lot of difficulties, but it seems like they have joy and that God meets their needs."

Darkness does cover the earth today. There's a real darkness of despair and hopelessness. There's the darkness of poverty. There's this darkness of evil and terror and death in this country and in many parts of the world. But what an opportunity, what an opportunity to be the light of Christ to this world. There's the darkness of a meaningless existence that hovers over our world today, but I want you to know there's a light and in the darkest night God's light shines brightest.

There have been so many defining moments in the history of our church where we've chosen to step forward in faith instead of shrink back in fear. We're at another one of those defining moments. God has called us to seize this moment in the life of our church and not hunker down in fear but to rise in faith, to seize the moment and shatter the darkness. God wants to use us to meet the needs of people around us with His love, and that's what God is doing through you.

But I know that Satan always reminds us of the darkness and the difficulties and the night of negativity, and I just challenge you. Let's step into the light of God's favor and let's believe God for everything He wants us to believe.