

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Psalm 5:4-11 (ESV) ⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. ⁵ The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. ⁶ You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. ⁷ But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you. ⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. ⁹ For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue. ¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you. ¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.

Janet and I were in Schaumburg last week in the afternoon. When the meeting ended, we walked outside to get into our car. It was not that late in the afternoon and it was already completely dark. The darkness comes earlier and when it is dark, it is really dark.

Everything we ever learn about God brings light. Jesus Himself is the Light. Everything there is to learn about God builds us up and helps us to understand the way God works. I have almost completed the major prophets, Isaiah through Ezekiel and then I will be done with the one-year Bible. I did it all in a different order. The major prophets are not easy to read through at all. They are filled with the rebellion of God's people. God had done everything for them, and they rebelled completely against God. God forewarned them what would happen if they refused to repent. After centuries of complete rebelliousness against God, God refused to let them continue in their sin. Had they repented, God would have relented and the judgments could have been avoided. As I read the sins of the day in the major prophet's books, it was not all that different in what we see happening in our nation today. Jesus is the light but for whatever reason people prefer the darkness.

Monday morning I had a conversation with a confidant. The person does not attend St. Mark. We discussed the problems of the world in general and in our nation in particular. Both of us are seasoned men with responsible positions in the community. The conversation is

private. I left the office feeling rather disheartened. Before I left, we prayed intensely for God to overcome this horrendous darkness with His all powerful light.

One of the worst traits of our time is people no longer know the art of agreeing to disagree. People in general make those they disagree with the enemy and have no place for them in their lives. This impacts our corporate worship. A person who lives in another state will not go back to church because the church requires the wearing of masks. So that particular person's opinion on masks is more important to him than pleasing God and worshipping God faithfully. We make an idol out of our own opinions and God takes second or third place at best. The enemy has found an issue that is keeping people away from worshipping God. To wear a mask or not to wear a mask. To be vaccinated or not be vaccinated. Our view is masks are recommended but not required and if you are sick, please stay at home and watch online. Loving your neighbor means you will do all you can to help your neighbor, not wanting to pass onto them any disease or illness.

This leads me to the point of this Advent sermon. The greatest gift God has given to us is God Himself. God is full of glory and light. God is good and can do no wrong. God is wise and holy. God knows everything, sees everything, and is everywhere. I fully believe God has pulled back some of His restraining power. God has the power to restrain sin. I know what that restraining power feels like. But when people mock God, ignore God, rebel against God, and walk in willful disobedience forsaking God and God's ways, God will only allow this to occur for so long. God will be patient, yes giving time for people to repent of their sinful ways and turn to God. God's patience has its limits. Just ask Noah. When God's patience is spent, God gives people over to their sins by withdrawing His power that restrains sins.

Romans 1:28-32 (NLT2) ²⁸ Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. ²⁹ Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling,

deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. ³⁰ They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. ³¹ They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. ³² They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them too.

Friends the darkness is very real, but God's light is brighter still. Are we going to walk in the darkness of sin or walk in the light and thrive? God is light and in God is no darkness at all. Therefore as you study the Scriptures and learn of God and God's ways, you are letting more light, more of God into your life. When I look into a person's eyes and see nothing but darkness, I know that person is rebelling big time against God and has let sin take over their lives. When I visit a person who is full of the light of Christ, I am stunned at their relationship with God. That is how I want to be.

One time I tried to water ski without having a life preserver on me. I wore a wet suit, but a wet suit will not keep your head above water. Yes, I lived to tell the story. Knowing God is like having a constant life preserver on. You will not drown in the darkness. God's saving life preserver will at the least keep your head above water where you can see the light of God. You will not be overcome by the darkness.

This is why you are being asked during Advent to pick one attribute of God daily and focus on that trait of God throughout the day. This is a fantastic way to be encouraged and to keep our lives on the right path. God's light shows us the way. Psalm 5 is a great Psalm filled with the light of who God is.

I quote, "For you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; [You cannot tolerate the sins of the wicked NLT]. No evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.

When I read these words revealing God, I feel like I am taking a shower and the darkness of this world is being washed away replaced with God's light. I feel empowered to stay obedient. Listen to these seven specific things about the Lord.

1. God takes no pleasure in wickedness. What God sees actually displeases him, the wickedness of our time.
2. No evil will dwell with Him (literally). God is good and never participates in evil.
3. Arrogant boasters will not stand before Him.
4. He hates workers of those who do evil, who do wicked things. I quote, "These words mean what they say. God thoroughly hates everyone who does evil. The evil doers are the ones who sin as a way of life. If you are a Christian, this should not describe you because the Holy Spirit [the Restrainer] will not let sin be your normal lifestyle" (James Johnson, The Psalms Vol 1, 1-41, pg. 66).
5. He destroys those who lie.
6. He abhors murderers.
7. He abhors deceivers.

Dr Chuck Swindoll writes, "Why does David review these things? Because it is therapeutic to review the attributes of God, to remind ourselves that God is always good, and that God is always right in His ways. God's love for us never fails and God's timing is perfect. Many of the pent-up angry feelings and frustrations of our inner emotional tank are diffused as we review God's character and remind ourselves that God is for us and not against us. Focusing on His character helps dispel discouragement! God is more powerful than any evil and more persistent than any difficult circumstance. As for those who try to harm us, the Lord is far more capable of dealing with them than we are (Crosswalk.com The Attributes of God, Nov.17, 2021).

There is no one greater than God in the universe. The greatest knowledge there is is knowledge of God. God's Presence in our lives is the greatest gift of all. God is allowing horrible things to take place so God's people will cling to God and so the wicked will repent and turn to God. These are the ways of God as revealed in the prophets.

The darkness of our time will come to an end. God's light overcomes all darkness. No one is getting away with their sin or evil. As we think on who God is, God's light shows us how to live and how to avoid the dark ways of this world. Amen and Amen.