

Title: “The Hidden God Who Saves and Rules”

Text: Isaiah 45:15 “Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.”

Theme: Though God often hides His face, He has not hidden His heart. He rules by providence and reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, who showed us the face of God and supplied grace and love enough to save the world.

OUTLINE

- Opening

A. Welcome / personal intro (Tony, elder)

B. It’s the New Year **hope + unease**; the future is full of potential, but shadowed and unknown.

C. Threshold questions: *Who’s in charge? Can the future be trusted? Is there meaning under uncertainty?*

D. Transition to main problem: If God governs/provides/is good... why does He sometimes feel hidden?

I. Naming the Problem: Divine Hiddenness

A. Introduce the topic

- “Problem of God’s hiddenness” (philosophers/theologians for centuries)
- Brief personal note: providence + preparation

B. Prayer: Ask God to come close; open eyes to see Him in the dark

II. The Text That Holds the Tension

A. Read Isaiah 45:15

- “A God who hides Himself... the Savior”

B. Key tension

- Hiddenness and salvation held together: He hides, *and* He saves

III. The Modern Protest: “Not Enough Evidence”

A. Bertrand Russell illustration

- “Not enough evidence, God”
- Beneath defiance: **the ache of distance**

B. Pastoral widening

- This question isn’t only for skeptics
- Hospital corridors, late-night prayers, seasons of silence

C. Schellenberg’s argument (summary)

- Perfect love → desires relationship → relationship requires awareness
- Therefore God should make Himself unmistakably known

D. Alex O'Connor quote as emotional weight

- Searching, praying, reading... “nothing spoke back”

E. Tone-setting line

- Sometimes not arrogance; **grief** Christians can't deny

IV. Roadmap for the Sermon (4 Moves + Application)

A. Scripture records hiddenness

B. The resistance of “non-resistance”

C. The belief of the “non-believer”

D. Answer: why God is hidden; and how we can experience Him

V. Move 1 — Scripture Records God's Hiddenness

A. Bible gives language & permission

- Not an embarrassment; an honest experience

B. Examples

- **Job 23/30**: searching, not finding
- **Psalms (13, 44)**: “Why do you hide your face?”

C. Unique Christian claim

- **Jesus on the cross (Psalm 22)**: “Why have you forsaken me?”
- Divine absence appears **inside God's own story** (cross)

VI. Why Hiddenness Is *Especially* a Christian Problem

A. Other worldviews

- **Islam**: God redefined as ultimately non-relational; hiddenness expected
- **Atheism**: silence fits an empty heaven; removes expectation

B. Christianity's stronger claim

- God is Father / elder Brother / Love united by the Spirit
- Eden as baseline: God “walking in the garden”

C. “Mirror dimly” (1 Cor 13:12)

- Not nothing—dimly
- **God not absent; our vision incomplete**

D. Telos: face-to-face

- Rev 22:4 “They will see His face”
- Rev 19:7 marriage imagery

E. Interpretation of the ache

- The ache means the story isn't finished; He's not gone, He's just not done

VII. Move 2 — The Resistance of “Non-Resistance”

A. Challenge the category

- “I don’t know that person... especially not in the mirror”

B. Personal confession

- Grudges, anger, negotiating Jesus’ commands
- Sometimes God feels distant because **we are guarded**

C. Romans 3:11

- “None who seeks God” — not insult, but **diagnosis**

D. Historical proof: Incarnation

- When God “showed up,” we didn’t crown Him ... we crucified Him

E. Advent callback: Matthew 2

- **Magi:** minimal light, maximum effort
- **Religious experts:** maximum knowledge, minimum movement

F. Gospel turn

- God doesn’t wait for non-resistance
- He comes **because** we resist—absorbs resistance into love

VIII. Move 3 — The Belief of the “Non-Believer”

A. There are no faith-free humans

- Everyone trusts something

B. Atheistic “faith commitments”

- Universe came from nothing; mind from chance can understand ultimate reality; morality/meaning without source or intention

C. Acts 17:28

- “In Him we live and move and have our being”
- Why isn’t existence itself already testimony?

D. C.S. Lewis’ Hamlet analogy

- Shakespeare never appears on stage, yet Hamlet is never outside his authority
- God is not less present, but **more present**

E. Key question

- **The question is not “Is God present?”** but “Do we recognize the Author?”

IX. Move 4 — God Is Hidden, But Not Silent

A. God’s witness in external creation

- Psalm 19:1 — heavens declare glory

A. God’s witness in our internal conscience

- Romans 2:15 — law written on hearts

A. Why God doesn’t overwhelm

- More evidence wouldn’t produce more love
- Israel’s miracles + rebellion
- James 2:19 — demons believe and shudder

A. Central principle

- God seeks **love**, not coerced compliance
- Love cannot be forced

X. The Hidden God Comes Close: The King Who Became Poor

A. Kierkegaard illustration

- King loves poor maiden; power imbalance ruins freedom
- So he comes undercover; not absence, but humility

B. Define hiddenness

- Not absence—**condescension**
- Hidden enough to be refused; near enough to be trusted

XI. The Ultimate Presence: Jesus Christ

A. Christian answer is not a diagram but a face

- God revealed in flesh

B. Cross as the darkest “hiddenness”

- Psalm 22 on Jesus’ lips
- John 1:5 — light shines in darkness
- John 1:14 — Word became flesh
- Hebrews 1:1–2 — God has spoken by His Son

C. Love-first logic

- 1 John 4:19 — we love because He first loved us
- God doesn’t demand love at a distance; He demonstrates it up close

XII. A Counter-Model: Power Without Love (Esther)

A. Ahasuerus illustration

- Relationship built on fear, not love
- Obedience extracted, not offered

B. Contrast

- God’s providence is not control without consent
- Fatherly care; elder Brother leading; Spirit sustaining

XIII. Providence for the New Year: Carried in Sovereign Hands

A. We step into the unknown—never alone

B. Psalm 103:19

- God’s throne established; kingdom rules over all

C. Pastoral assurance

- The God who carried the world to the cross will carry you through the year ahead

XIV. Application

A. For Believers

- **Do we recognize our resistance?** Distraction, bitterness, bargaining with Jesus
- **Are we attentive to His “clues”?** Quiet providences; conviction; Scripture clarity; unexplainable peace
- **Are we making God visible in a dark world?**
- 1 Thess 1:3 — faith produces work; love labors; hope endures
- Eph 2:10 — saved for good works
- Question: when people look at us, does God look hidden, or beautiful?

B. For Skeptics and Seekers

- **Are you truly non-resistant?** Or is it fear of cost, surrender, change?
- **What can your faith carry?** Suffering, guilt, beauty, love, death
- **Compare worldviews** - Consistency, livability, moral grounding (C.S. Lewis Quote on the consistency of Christianity with lived reality)
- **Doubt your doubts** - Many gods worth rejecting—have you considered Jesus?
- **Inheritance illustration** You’d deposit the check from a rich relative you didn’t believe you had, why not consider Christ who promises more than wealth?

XV. Communion: God Meets Us Here

XVI. Benediction