

The Comforting Power of the Message of Christmas

Christmas

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The title of the message is, "The Comforting Power of the Message of Christmas." The Comforting Power of the Message of Christmas. We're going to look at another one of the glorious prophecies of the prophet Isaiah. We read earlier from Isaiah 53 and saw that the amazing clarity with which Isaiah saw into the future and by God's grace and saw Christ in such vivid detail, and really, as we've been reading each week on Sunday mornings, the Scripture readings throughout the last several Sundays have been from the prophecy of Isaiah and we've done that because there are some astoundingly clear pictures and portraits of Christ that the prophet Isaiah was able to see. We looked at Isaiah 7:14, the prophecy of the Virgin, and we preached on that last Sunday. We read Isaiah 9 some weeks back. We read Isaiah 11, Isaiah 42, and then today Isaiah 52 and 53. And of all the Old Testament prophets, of all the Old Testament passages, none had a clearer vision into the glory of Christ than Isaiah, than did Isaiah. It's amazing that he had the visions that he saw of Christ 700 years before Jesus was born with such clarity and we come to another one of these beautiful passages, the familiar passage, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. The government will be upon His shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Last Sunday we looked at Isaiah 7:14, "a virgin will be with child and she'll bear forth the son and you'll call His name Immanuel, God with us." And today we look at this passage that continues to expound for us the glory of Immanuel; this tells us more about the child to come and this shows us more of his amazing grace and sufficiency in our lives.

So the comforting power of the message of Christmas, what I want to point out is that Isaiah had such clarity of vision and yet he lived in such a perilous and tumultuous time. It's a paradox. Isaiah lived in a time of great adversity, great moral decay, spiritual darkness, religious syncretism and rebellion, a time of darkness in Israel, a time of not only spiritual and moral decay, but international pressure. I mean, he begins his ministry at the end of a period of prolonged prosperity. The reign of Uzziah lasted more than 50 years and Isaiah is called to ministry, "In the year that Uzziah died," Isaiah 6, verse 1, "I saw the Lord." That's the beginning of his prophetic ministry. Fifty years of prosperity under Uzziah has ended. There's now turmoil. There's an ungodly king, Ahaz, reigning and God is about to bring judgment, and so this time of prosperity and blessing is coming to an end, and there's all kinds of uncertainty going on in Isaiah's day. We saw last week as we began to look at it, the prophecy that he gave in Isaiah 7:14 about the virgin birth,

remember, was in a time where Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of God's people, Judah is where Jerusalem is, it's where the Davidic king rules in Jerusalem, Isaiah's ministering to the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom called Israel, though both are actually descended from Israel, 10 tribes in the north, remember 12 tribes, Jacob had 12 sons, 12 tribes, two tribes in the south, Judah, 10 tribes in the north, they split apart after the death of Solomon and now their brothers have amassed an army on their northern border and have enlisted the help of the Syrians or the Arameans and this massive army is on the border and they're ready to invade and that was the stress that was coming on when God sent Isaiah out to meet King Ahaz. And he promised deliverance, "God will deliver you. If you will stand firm in your faith, you will be made firm. If you will trust in the Lord." The message of the book of Isaiah in a sentence is a question, "In whom will you trust?" That's the purpose and message of the book and Isaiah's name is the answer of what we should know. Remember Isaiah's name is "salvation is of Yahweh." Salvation is in the Lord. Trust in the Lord, not in human ingenuity, human energy, human effort. Trust in the Lord, in his provision, his grace. That's the message.

And so Isaiah is in this tumultuous time where there's this threat of invasion and he tells Ahaz, "Trust in the Lord." Ahaz rejects his counsel and what's going to happen now is because he's rejected God's counsel, God is going to bring even more judgment upon the southern kingdom of Judah. It's going to go from bad to worse, and as it goes from bad to worse, now think about all this time of prosperity, and comfort and ease and blessing is coming to an end, and you can see the handwriting is on the wall, judgment is coming in. The world is becoming tumultuous, tribulation, uncertainty, and in the midst of that, God is, even as judgment comes, God is showing his people how to respond in the midst of judgment. Such a relevant message for Christians living in our world today, especially America. We live through a time of really extraordinary prosperity and blessing and we've seen the people of God turn away largely from God and the nation as a whole was so informed by Christian values and beliefs and it's continued to reject that and to thrust God away, and in many ways, there's such a parallel. We are now seeing after a period of economic prosperity, national security, cultural blessing, we're seeing the handwriting on the wall in many ways that difficult times are coming. I mean, now with the whole internet age, you can be inundated with that message as much as you want to, right? News is instant, the bad news is out there constantly, and we think about what's going on in our world, the war in Ukraine, people talk about that could become World War III. What's happening in the Middle East, in Israel, that's a powder keg that could expand in its impact. There's all kinds of economic uncertainty, economic experts predicting that we're coming for a crash again, it'll be worse than any crash we've seen in our lifetime.

So you hear all of these messages and as Christians, what we're tempted to do is to seek for a shallow comfort. When you see uncertainty and difficulty coming, one of the things we like to do sometimes is distract ourselves and we can use Christmas in a shallow way like that. I mean, the comfort of Christmas we're talking about, the message of Christmas is not that shallow comfort. You know, it's a blessing. I mean, and it's a joy to just forget, you know, even the Christmas songs, you know, forget about your troubles and just focus on the joy of Christmas, singing Christmas carols and, you know, all of the fun of the

gifts and the parties and all of that, and there's nothing wrong with that in and of itself, but the message of Christmas is something far greater. The real message of Christmas is, listen, in the midst of your adversity, no matter how bad it goes, from bad to worse to worse, no matter how bad it goes, the message of Christmas is in a word, Immanuel. God is with us. God is with his people, no matter what the circumstances are, and he will support those who look to him in faith. He will strongly and sufficiently support those who cling to him.

And this is what we see lived out in Isaiah in his own experience, and in his own life, and this is why I believe the Lord let him see with such vivid clarity what Christ would be. Though he looked more than seven centuries, he was looking off into the future more than seven centuries into the future. Think about that, 700 years. Think about 700 years ago, 1323. Think about what life was like 1323. I don't even have the ability to conceive of that. That's 700 years in the future, and yet he sees Christ with such clarity and part of the reason he's able to see Christ with such clarity is because the circumstances of his life have driven him to God. And let me just mention this, and I encourage you, if you have some time, maybe this next year to plan some time to read through the book of Isaiah in its entirety, some of you may be doing that now, one of the things you'll see about the prophets, it's about, you know, it's an interesting dichotomy of the way the Lord describes the prophetic ministry, the ministry of the prophets. One is the prophet is a spokesman, navi, the Hebrew word for prophet. The prophet is the one who's received a word from God and delivers that word. He is not a prophet because he prophesies of the future. That's how we tend to think of it. No, he's a prophet because he has received a word from God and he speaks for God. He's God's mouthpiece. That's what the prophet is. He speaks the words of God. That's what makes him a prophet.

Now sometimes, of course, he does foretell the future, only because God has given him a word about the future and so that's one of the key concepts of prophet, a spokesman, but there's another word that is used throughout Scripture, the Old Testament, for the prophet, and that is the word seer, s-e-e-r, a seer. It's not only what he hears, he hears the word of God and speaks it, that's navi, spokesman, but he's also a seer. He sees things that other people don't see. God opens his eyes to see things and Isaiah is one of the prophets that especially emphasizes this idea of vision. In fact, let's just look at that real quickly and then we'll read our passage and I want to show you, turn over to Isaiah 1:1 and we're going to get to our passage in Isaiah 9 in just a second. Look how Isaiah introduces his prophecy. He has some things he wants to say from God, but look how he says. It's not so much what he hears as what he sees. Look, Isaiah 1:1, "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." It's what Isaiah saw. Look at chapter 2, verse 1. He introduces the next chapter with, "The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz," not heard, "saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." And the most important passage in the book of Isaiah is surely the sixth chapter where he is called by God into his prophetic ministry. That's actually chronologically would be the first chapter of Isaiah, but God puts it together, Isaiah puts it together in a way that puts the beginning in chapter 6. Isaiah 6:1, what does he say? "In the year of King Uzziah's death," remember 50 years of prosperity, the uncertainty of a new king. In the year that King Uzziah died, there's the

rumblings of international pressure, possible war already, the rumblings of war. "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple."

He saw the Lord. In fact, he says in verse 5, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." And I love that. He said in the year that King Uzziah died, all the hopes of Israel, in a sense, dashed. Now this wicked king Ahaz, Uzziah's son, who's not faithful to God, Uzziah had been faithful to God, is now reigning. Political instability, economic uncertainty, military pressure, all of those things now but in the year that the king died, "I saw the King, the Lord." He saw the true King. He was able to see what is not visible to the human eye, and that is the reality of the spiritual reign and rule of God at work in the world. And that's where comfort comes. When we began to see what Isaiah saw, and we see it through the word of God, we see that God is actually sovereign over everything that's going on. His hand is moving even in the chaos and calamity that we see around us. No matter how bad it gets, you can know that the King is on the throne ruling and is with his people in the midst of it.

That's essentially the message of Isaiah, and particularly that's the message of Christmas and we're going to read Isaiah 9 now, verses 1 to 7. Isaiah 9, verse 1,

1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. 5 For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire. 6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Let's ask the Lord to bless his word.

Father, we do pray now that You would open the eyes of our hearts to see what we should see, what You gave Isaiah eyes to see, and that we would love You and serve You more faithfully and trust You more completely. We pray this in the name of Your precious Son, amen.

The comforting power of the message of Christmas. I want us to take a minute, we're going to see there's three points, essentially the three points that God wants us to experience the comfort of the message of Christmas, we need to do three things. But before we get to those three points, I want to just, again, talk a little bit more about the circumstances that they're going through so that we can really connect with this passage in the way that we need to. And as I mentioned, remember there's an army on the north ready to invade. It's the army of Israel and the Arameans or Syrians, s-y-r-i-a-n, not the Assyrians, the Syrians are ready to invade and God has promised that they're not going to be a problem. And in fact, they're not going to be a problem, even though Ahaz does not trust in the Lord, God's not going to let that army mess with Israel. He's going to let another army now because of Ahaz' lack of faith, the Assyrians are going to come and he's going to describe what's going to happen. It's going to go from bad to worse and I want you to read, and we're going to read chapter 8 to get the full effect of this. So imagine that you are living in the eighth century BC, 730 BC and you're concerned about the tumult that's going on around you, the decay spiritually, the uncertainty economically, and now militarily, this threat of invasion, and you know that God has offered a way out, but your leadership has not received it and the Lord's now going to judge the nation because the leadership has failed. Now the reality is the overwhelming majority of the people have failed. There's only a remnant of believing followers of Yahweh in Judah and so this remnant is going to get caught up in the judgment. That's the bad news. We get caught up sometimes, the righteous have to suffer for the unrighteous and their faithlessness. And how do you bear up in that? Well, if we look to the Lord the way we need to, we should not only be comforted, we should be joyful, and we should be filled with peace. That's the message of Christmas that we're going to see, that we have to follow through on what God has called us to.

So let's look at, though, the circumstances, how it's going to go from bad to worse. Chapter 8, verse 1.

1 Then the LORD said to me, "Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters: Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey. 2 And I will take to Myself faithful witnesses for testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah." 3 So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz;

Again, that's a great name. Put that down if you haven't had kids yet, this is one you'll want to use later on. The name actually means in Hebrew "swift is the booty, speedy is the prey." Actually, in verse 1 and verse 3, the exact same Hebrew. I'm reading the New American Standard, it says, "write in ordinary letter, swift is the booty, speedy is the prey." In Hebrew, it says, Maher-shalal-hash-baz. You see, so it's just translating in verse 1 what is said in Hebrew, that is a meaning for meaning rendering of a language Hebrew into English. That's translation. In verse 3, it's a transliteration. It's taking the words and the sounds phonetically and turning it into English, Maher-shalal-hash-baz. That's what the word is in Hebrew. So he said, name him that. Name this child you're about to have,

"Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey." That is that Assyrians are going to come in so swiftly, so quickly, and they are going to wreck this place and Isaiah's son is a sign of that. Verse 4,

4 for before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."

Well, first of all, swift is the booty, speedy is the prey, God's going to deal with those northern kingdoms you were worried about. God's going to take them away. But the double effect of it is then he's going to let the Assyrians come and mess with you because you have turned away from me. Verse 5,

5 Again the LORD spoke to me further, saying, 6 "Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah And rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah; 7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates,

The imagery here is just, is really powerful. When he says you've rejected the gentle flowing waters of Shiloah, Jerusalem, was the water supply for Jerusalem was from a spring called the Gihon Spring, which is also called Shiloah, and the spring was outside the city walls, and the water flowed through an overground, you know, kind of an aqueduct that flowed from the spring into the city and the water supply then was outside the city walls. Jerusalem was a fortress and a strong walled city, but its water supply was outside. This is actually why when God told Isaiah in chapter 7 to go meet King Ahaz, you know where Ahaz was? He was out here at the spring because he knew the invasion was going to happen and he was concerned about the water supply to Jerusalem, which is a prudent thing to do. You need to have water if you're going to be besieged, right? But he didn't trust in the Lord. In fact, God put this water supply like this so that they could learn to trust in God. God's going to protect your water, even though it's outside the city walls. He's going to protect it if you trust in him. And so what he's saying is, "Rather than trust in the water that I provided for you from that spring, you are looking to the river Euphrates. That's where Assyria is. You're drinking out of the Euphrates River rather than the gentle flowing spring of Shiloah. God's provision is gentle and flowing and all you need, but you've turned away."

Now think about this. It's really cool what he does here. He says, "You've turned away from what I gave you, and you're going to drink from the river," remember what Ahaz does. He doesn't trust in God to protect him from that northern alliance. He actually makes a treaty with Assyria, the international power, and that's Euphrates, the river Euphrates. He drinks, he trusts in that political alliance rather than God's gracious provision. And I love the imagery here. What he's going to say is, he's going to describe in the next few verses, what's going to happen is the waters of the Euphrates are going to flow into Jerusalem and come all the way up to the neck. Now think about that, you're thirsty, you've got to have water, right? God's given you all the water you need. This is the image, God is going to provide for you. He's given you water. It flows into the city

perfectly. You go out, you get your water, everything's fine. But you didn't trust in that. You wanted to go get more water. You were scared about your water supply, so you went to the king of Assyria. You know what's going to happen? You're not only going to have water coming in, you're going to have a flood. God is going to flood so much that it's going to be all the way up to your neck. Imagine you're in a place, you know, some of you can swim maybe for 30 minutes, an hour, I don't know if you had to, if you're treading water, but those of you can't swim that long, and most, at some point, all of us would be out of energy. If you're this tall, I mean, the water's right here, and you've got to stand there, that's a pretty precarious situation. He said, "That's what's coming because you didn't trust in Me."

Now, the righteous are going to experience that too. That's the hard part. Isaiah is going to experience that too. It's going to be bad, but God is going to tell him how to be faithful in that. Now we get to the outline. What are you to do in this predicament? What does faithfulness look like? How do you find real comfort from the message of Christmas? That's now three points that we have. The first point is face reality honestly. Face reality honestly. He invites him to really see things as they truly are. I mentioned earlier, we can look at Christmas and the message of Christmas in kind of a trite way and it's a distraction. In fact, one of the sinful ways that human beings respond to adversity and difficulty is we look to an idol of comfort or distraction. Maybe you go to entertainment to forget your troubles. I mean, if you're going to something to forget your troubles, that's becoming an idol. Doesn't mean that you can't enjoy some entertainment, but why are you doing it? Well, Christmas can be like that. Rather than think about all my problems, I'm not saying you sit there and morosely just dwell on your problems, but escapism is ungodly. To be distracting yourself from things because they're overwhelming is ungodly. To rather face what is hard and go to God with it, that is godliness. Take your burdens to the Lord. Cast them on him for he cares for you. Don't distract yourself from your burdens, you see.

And so facing reality honestly is the first step of being faithful in the moment and receiving God's comfort. You have to really look at things as they are and the Christian can do this. In fact, we don't need to practice escapism, we need to look more diligently at our circumstances even though it's initially very unpleasant and difficult. I mean, don't you find, we all feel this, you look at something that's a bad situation and it's painful and we naturally resist pain and so, "I just can't, I just can't think about this right now. I've got to distract myself." That's not the way that leads to blessing. The way that leads to blessing is to keep looking at it and to cry out to God, to look at it, as it were, in the presence of God, to trust him. But you have to face reality honestly and this is what he encourages Isaiah to do.

Now, I told you, the water's going to come up to your neck. He says in verse 8,

8 "Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, It will reach even to the neck; And the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

And look how bad it's going to be, verse 9,

9 "Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered; And give ear, all remote places of the earth. Gird yourselves, yet be shattered; Gird yourselves, yet be shattered.

He says that twice.

10 "Devise a plan [devise a plan but what can you do?], but it will be thwarted; State a proposal, but it will not stand, For God is with us."

There it's Immanuel again. God is now with us in judgment. Now here's where Isaiah is going to receive the beginning of the help, but the Lord wants him to see exactly what's going to happen. You see the vivid detail with which he said, "Look, it's going to go from bad to worse and people are going to try to devise a way out of it, but there's going to be no human way out of it." Now, how do you bear up and chapter 8, verse 11 begins the turn through chapter 9, verse 7, and we're going to see there's three things we need to do. I'm sorry, actually, there's two more things we need to do. The first thing I said was face reality. So you have to face reality honestly. The second thing, so there's three points total, face reality honestly and secondly, fear God only, or fear only God. That's what he's going to tell Isaiah right now. Look at verse 11 of chapter 8.

11 For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people,

So this is instruction for the righteous in the midst who are caught up in the avalanche of God's judgment. Do not walk in the way of this people saying,

12 "You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!' In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. 13 It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread. 14 Then He shall become a sanctuary;

That's the turning point. You're not to call a conspiracy all that they call a conspiracy. Now, I think what he's getting at, he's not to say that there's not a conspiracy going on. I think there was a conspiracy going on but he's saying, "You're not to sit around and just focus on the conspiracy. Can you believe how bad this conspiracy is?" What is he talking about? I think he's talking about the alliance between the northern kingdom and Syria, the Arameans. He's also talking probably, it was apparently, because remember, the northern kingdom are their brothers, they're cousins, basically, who supposedly serve Yahweh, though they're not serving Yahweh very well, neither is the southern kingdom, and the northern kingdom is wanting to depose, and there's a secret intrigue about how to kill Ahaz. Apparently, there's an assassination plot that they were going to kill the king, the southern king of the line of David and replace him. So there was a conspiracy afoot. There is this threat and what he's saying is, listen, he's not saying don't call a spade a

spade, don't say what's true is true. He's saying don't be preoccupied with what evil is doing, rather be preoccupied with God and what God is doing. This is what he's saying. You're not to say it is conspiracy. You're not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is God who shall be your fear. He shall be your dread. What he's saying is, listen, no matter what Satan is doing, no matter how ugly it is, no matter how wicked the actions of the ungodly are, no matter how great is their violence, no matter how ugly is their sin, and we see it flooding around us, he's saying, don't sit there and focus on the actors themselves, focus on God who is sovereignly bringing this to pass. It is God whom you shall fear.

What's happening, yeah, there's a conspiracy. Yeah, there is. Yeah, there's an army on your border. Yeah, there is. Yeah, there are people coming. Yeah, they are. Yeah, they're evil. They're idolaters. They're wicked. They hate God. Yes, it's true. All those things are true. But the one thing that Isaiah sees that is most true is the only reason those people have power to do what they're doing in our lives is because God has brought them of his will and purpose. That is the thing we are to be preoccupied with. We're not to be preoccupied with the evil of evil and the blackness of sin that we see. We see it, we can mourn over it, but don't be preoccupied with that. Be preoccupied with God who has allowed this to happen. He's bringing it. He's saying, look at God and marvel at what they should have been doing in that day, God is faithful to his word, look what he's done as the water's getting up to the neck and all these other people are like, "The water's up to our necks! This is terrible, this is terrible!" And the faithful, "God has told me He's going to be with me. Look at the faithfulness of God and what He's, yeah, He said we could have the gentle waters of Shiloah, we could be drinking out of that. No, we wanted the rivers of the Euphrates and look what God has done. Isn't He holy? Isn't He righteous? Isn't He marvelous? Isn't He good? Praise His name. The Lord's praise shall continually be on my mouth." And it's time to praise him, that's what he's saying, and fear him.

Now think about this. Satan is at work in the world. Yes, he is. Evil is at work in the world. Yes, it is. Sin is at work in the world. Yes, it is. Worldliness. All of the enemies that we have, but you and I are to be preoccupied with what God is doing because even when Satan rages, even when the ungodly mount up with everything they can against God, we should be looking at the Lord. And you see this exemplified in the life of Job. When you read the book of Job, you see that Satan is alive and well and it's really interesting how the Lord unfolds that. I'll just mention, read that again, so I'll just summarize quickly. Remember, God brings up Job to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job?" Because God knows what Satan's going to do. Satan's going to say, "Well, hey, Your servant Job is only faithful because You've got a hedge around him, You protect him." And God says, "Well, touch anything that he has, just don't touch him." That's chapter 1. And what does Satan do? Satan, the Scripture says, is the one who authors these terrible things. You know, first the Chaldeans, and then the Sabeans, and then this great wind he causes to blow that kills all of his children. Satan is the one who does all of that. But what does Job say? Job has the eyes of faith that Isaiah has. Job says, "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Is Job wrong? No, the Scripture says, "In all this Job did not sin with his mouth." He called it exactly as it is. The issue is God had willed that.

Chapter 2, same thing. Now God brings up Satan again, "Have you considered My servant Job? He's faithful even though you incited Me against him." That's what the Lord says, "You incited Me against him." Well, "Skin for skin, a man will do anything for basically his health." "Well, attack his health, you just don't take his life." So he then puts that misery on him and again, Job says, "Shall we receive good from the hand of the Lord and not also evil?" From what? The hand of the Lord. Now, the Bible tells us the Lord does no evil, nor does he tempt any man. That is absolutely true. God does no evil, but in his sovereignty, in a splendor of his amazing reign over all things, he wills and uses even the raging of evil to accomplish his purpose perfectly. That's astounding but it's true. He's saying that's the same thing Isaiah is being told to do. Don't fear the raging of evil, fear God who has now willed that this evil rage like it is right now. You see what he's seeing? He's seeing things as they really are. He's seeing past the raging of evil, past the tumult and spiritual darkness to the hand of God. He's seeing the Lord and that's what Christmas tells us. God is with us. God is here. The most relevant issue in any moment is God and what he's doing.

So you fear only God. Be in dread of him. Don't be in dread of what man can do. What can man do to me or you? If God be for us, who's against us? We only need to fear the Lord. There's real comfort in that if you meditate on that and apply that. You have nothing to fear in Christ because whatever comes, and this is the beautiful thing, another key point in Isaiah as you read the book, if you take time to read this book, salvation comes through judgment. This is a part of the message. Yahweh is salvation, salvation is of Yahweh, that's what Isaiah's name means, and salvation comes through judgment. As sinners in a world that has been wracked with sin, with hearts that have turned away from God and have rebelled ourselves, how do you get saved? Salvation comes through judgment. God has to deal with us. He has to get our attention. He has to show us the error of our ways. You come to brokenness and now you're ready to receive salvation. And even Jesus himself, how did salvation come? It came through the judgment that fell on him. Our judgment, the judgment for the chastisement for our sin fell upon him. By his stripes we are healed.

So we only need fear God. Face reality honestly, fear only God and then he's going to say trust only Christ. The third point, trust Christ alone or trust only Christ. What he's getting at with this, as we move into that ninth chapter, it's interesting, the power of the imagery of the words. If you look at verse 21, this is talking about how bad it's going to be under the Assyrian invasion, how they're going to just desolate the northern kingdom. Look at the words, 8:21,

21 They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry [that is the people now], they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward.

The nation of Israel, as they come under the northern kingdom, as they come under the Assyrian domination, they're going to be enraged and curse their king and their God.

Verse 22, "Then they will look to the earth, and behold," what will they get, what happens? Rebellion, turning away from God leads to this.

22 Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be driven away into darkness.

But now the beginning of the ray of light and hope, "But there will be no more gloom," chapter 9, verse 1,

1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light;

Isaiah sees into the future and he sees that now he's not talking about Judah anymore, he's talking about the northern kingdom. He's talking about the land of Zebulun, Naphtali is the far reaches of the northern kingdom, because you know where the light is going to be the brightest when Christ comes? It is in Galilee. Jesus was raised in Nazareth. Most of his ministry happened not in Jerusalem and Judah, but in Galilee, in the northern reaches of Israel. The place that was the most dark will become the most bright. That's like God. When you find yourself in the place of greatest darkness, you have the opportunity to see the greatest light. It's like you can see the stars clearer when you are removed from all earthly light, right? When you get out in nature and there's no light coming up from the ground, you can see the stars greater. Someone has said that the brightest stars you could see is if you put yourself in a well in the ground, looking up through the darkness of that well, even crystallizing the light that you see. I don't recommend that as a way to look at the stars, but the darkness magnifies the light.

And so this is what happens. He's going to come to this northern area, and that's where Jesus' miracles, most of his miracles happened in Galilee. Verse 2,

2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

He's saying, "Listen, darkness is going to be turned into light. Anguish and gloom is going to be turned into joy and gladness when you look to God in the midst of His judgment." This is what Jesus does, Jesus takes gloom and anguish and turns it into joy and gladness and this is what's supposed to happen even when you're sitting there with the water up to your neck. So if you and I find ourselves in situations, personally, you may find yourself in a situation where life, the calamities of life come and you find yourself like that, what are you to do? You're to face reality honestly, fear God only, the Lord has done this, and you are to trust Christ completely. He's with me. He's ordained

this for me to look to him and he will take this darkness and this gloom and this anguish and he will fill my heart with joy if I trust him. I love that we can face life as it really is. The Christian doesn't have to be a Pollyanna type person, pretend it's better than it is. No, we can face it as it really is because Jesus Christ is on the throne and he's with us and when we see things like Isaiah saw it as it really was, it filled his heart with joy and wonder. The darkness becomes light.

Then he goes on and says, verse 4,

4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor,

He's saying, listen, what's going to happen is not only light turns into darkness when you look to Christ, bondage turns into liberty. Slavery becomes freedom when you look to Christ. And how does that happen? Verse 6 and 7. The way that the light shines, the way that the bondage is broken is in this child that is to be born. Here again, the paradox. You're in the midst of tribulation, you're in the midst of an Assyrian invasion, and you put your hope in a baby. Doesn't the baby need to grow up first before he's going to be a help to us? I mean, think about that. Somebody brings in a baby and says, "Okay, everything's okay now." Well, we're glad there's a baby, but that's not going to help us. He doesn't have any idea what to do. No, he's saying this particular child, everything changes when he comes. This is not merely a child. He's going to tell us the government will rest on his shoulders. He's going to make everything right. His rule, he has come to rule. It says in verse 7, "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David."

He has come to reign. He brings blessing, light out of darkness, freedom out of bondage, but it's all found in the sufficiency of his person and work. These four titles in verse 6, "His name will be called." Now remember Hebrew, the name means not just the name like we use as a label, it means the character. It means the essential qualities of this person. That's what the name means in Hebrew. So Jesus was given the name Jesus. He wasn't given the name Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Those weren't what the people actually called him. They are names that are appropriate to him, but they are a revelation of his essential character.

Think about these things. If you were in the midst of incredible darkness, darkness that is so great, in fact, I forgot to mention this, when it says the verse 2, "The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them," the word for dark land, translated dark there, it's much greater than it comes out in the New American Standard. The Legacy Standard Bible gets it right when it says, "in the shadow of death." The land of the shadow of death, that's really what this word means. In fact, that word is translated exactly that way in Psalm 23. The valley of the shadow of death, same word.

So they walk in darkness, they live in the shadow of death, they see the light. Think about when you're in the dark and you have no idea where you are. Have you ever been like in a

situation where it's so dark you can't even tell which way is which? "I have no way to go." I've experienced this once in my life where, I don't know, maybe partly being sleepy and in the middle of the night, but I could not find my way out of my room for like, I woke Patty up because she heard me making noise. I'm trying to find my way out of our room and I couldn't tell which way was which. Now imagine if you're underground, you're in a cave, you have no idea which way to go, what a horrible feeling that is. That's the kind of darkness he's talking about. But you know, if God is with you when you're in that cave like that, if Immanuel is there, and if you know Jesus and if you repented of your sins and place your faith in Christ, he is with you.

You know what he is? He's a Wonderful Counselor. I love this. He's a counselor. He will help you. He will give you direction. He will speak to you. He will help you know which way to go. And his counsel is wonderful, that is, it is supernatural. It is amazing. It is awe-inspiring. When he gives counsel, you will marvel at his counsel. When you really listen to Jesus in the moment, you will find him. And listen, his counsel is the sweetest when it is the most necessary. His counsel is the brightest when you are in the greatest darkness. And it becomes wonderful.

So really, the affliction for the Christian is the doorway of opportunity to see the greatness of our Savior. We need to think biblically about our affliction and so if things go from bad to worse in your life or bad to worse in the culture, in our lifetime, the Christians, we should be people who are seeing what God sees and who are joyful in the midst of it because if the water gets here, he's doing his work. He said when people turn away from him, he judges them. Glory to God. And we know that he's also a God who will save anyone who looks to him in the face of judgment so we can say to everyone around us who's fretting and afraid of the dark that is descending, "Look to Christ." And then as you and I are looking to him, we're facing reality honestly, we're fearing only God, we're trusting only in Christ, we see he's a Wonderful Counselor.

He's the Mighty God. This baby is mighty God. This was such a trouble for the Jewish interpreters throughout those 700 years between Isaiah's prophecy and the birth of Christ. This baby is God. And he's not just God, he is the Mighty God. He doesn't just have the ability to counsel, he has the ability to protect you. If he is with you, what does it matter who's against you? God is with you and he is almighty and you are worried? That's just silly.

Not only mighty God, Eternal Father. This, I think, is a sense of an illusion to the Trinity. Yes, three in person, one in essence. The Son, "I and the Father are One," he says. But in another sense, I think what he's getting at here is he is eternal, no beginning, no end, only that's true of Yahweh but he's eternally Father. That is, what is a father? He's compassion. He's saying he not only gives you counsel, he not only has all power as mighty God, he is a compassionate friend to you in the moment like a father who cares for his children, always watching over you, not forgetting you.

So no matter how bad things get, he is Eternal Father and then he's the Prince of Peace. He brings the shalom of God, the peace of God. Such a rich word in the Scriptures. It

goes so far beyond our understanding naturally of what peace is. We think of peace as the absence of conflict. It is that, but it's so much more. And shalom in the Scriptures goes so far beyond that. It's not only the absence of conflict, it is the blessedness that comes in the sense of complete, profound well-being that comes from the absence of conflict. It all is right with the world. That's the shalom. So Jesus brings this sense, he brings this sense that everything is right and good. So you go from being terrified because of your circumstance, when you looked and understand this is who God is, this is what God is doing, now you have the shalom of God. And I love it, he's the Prince of Peace. The way that you have that is submitting to his rule. You stop fighting, you stop kicking against the goads, you submit. He's your King, he's your Prince. And when you submit, you find yourself, you stop fighting, you have peace, the peace of God that passes understanding.

The Lord wants you and me to have that kind of blessedness this Christmas season. Not a shallow escapism, but the ability to look at life as it really is. No matter what comes tomorrow, we can face it honestly, squarely, and we can look to God and we can know that he is the only one we need to fear and that Jesus is all that we need. He is more than sufficient, more than able. That's the glory of Christmas.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for Your greatness, the beauty of Your plan, and we thank You for the glory of our Savior who has everything that we need. We pray that You would help us, Lord, You grant us more repentance. We confess that we so often are tempted to just distract ourselves from our troubles rather than go directly to You and lay our troubles at Your feet. Thank You that when we do, You will meet us. You'll help us to worship You and trust You, and You will be all that You say You will be, more than sufficient, You're more than able to handle whatever comes into our lives. And Father, we end up on the other side of each trial as more than conquerors. The afflictions of the righteous are many, but the Lord delivers him out of them all through Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.