

## **“The Son Who is the Light”**

Isaiah 9:1-7

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*<sup>1</sup> But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

*<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.*

*<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*

*<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

*<sup>5</sup> For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

It is a surprising piece of very good news that turns a tragedy into a story of joy. JRR Tolkien called this the eucatastrophe, and he argued that almost all good stories have them, surprise plot twists that bring about good endings just when all hope seemed lost. The hero we thought had been shot and killed rides into the rescue to bring final defeat to the forces of evil.

I love today's passage and have preached on it twice before here at Forest Hill, both times as part of Advent series. This time, coming to this passage as I'm preaching through Isaiah, the background of darkness laid out in the opening verses of Isaiah 9 is clearer. Do you remember how Isaiah 8 ended last week?

*20 To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. 21 They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. 22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. – Isaiah 8:20-22, ESV*

Last week, we talked about the reality of both internal and external conflict, and how we all experience external conflict, but it's the internal conflicts that drive our decision-making and the direction of the plot of our lives. In a similar way, Israel experienced both external and internal darkness. Their spiritual darkness led them into judgment from God in the form of the external darkness of oppression by foreign powers.

## **Part I: Sudden and Dramatic Good News!**

Let's listen again to the opening of this wonderful passage –

*But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.*

- Isaiah 9:1-2, ESV

## **From Gloom and Anguish to Glorious Light**

Very often, when we read the Bible, we run into unfamiliar names of people and places and that can make our reading intimidating or confusing. Thankfully, we have access to lots of resources that allow us to understand these unfamiliar things and clarify what's confusing. Verse 1 tells us about an area that's been in anguish –

*In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

This is describing an area of northern Israel to the West of and around the Sea of Galilee. This area had already been devastated by Syria and was going to be the first area in Israel to fall to the massive Assyrian hordes that will sweep down. Places that have been subjected to foreign invasion and domination are scarred very deeply in ways very few of us can even begin to grasp. The death and destruction of war are followed by years of slavery and subjugation, along with a loss of culture and identity.

## **Overwhelming Joy at the Coming of Freedom**

And yet, Isaiah is given a vision of a time when this land, which has already experienced pain and which would experience even more anguish, would see their anguish end and incredible joy and freedom come to them –

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and the staff for his shoulder,  
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*and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

The coming freedom and joy is described in six ways –

1. People walking in deep darkness will have a great light dawn on them.
2. The nation will be multiplied, and as their population grows, their joy will grow, too.
3. There will be great joy as when bringing in an abundant harvest.
4. There will be great joy as when dividing the spoil from a great victory in battle.
5. The oppression which has enslaved the people will be broken.
6. The war which has trampled the people will end.

This is incredible and abundant good news. It gives the people some hope to look forward to as they are about to be plunged into such anguish and many years of misery.

## **Part II: Why This Good News?**

But why and when will this surprising good news, this light and joy and freedom, come to God's people in these areas? The key is the little word "FOR" which begins verse 6 –

*<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

- Isaiah 9:6-7, ESV

## **The Son Who is Given**

The child born to us is the Son given to us. In the context of Isaiah, we see that Isaiah and his wife have already been given three sons who were prophetically significant, signs of what God was going to do among His people. One of them, Immanuel, pointed far beyond himself to a greater One who would come as the true Immanuel, God with us. Here, we

get a closer look at the true fulfillment of Immanuel, the promised baby born to a virgin that we first heard of in 7:14.

This Son who is given is unlike any other Son, for He is the Son of God, and He is Immanuel. He is given four throne names to reveal His character and anticipate His coming – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. It's interesting that the last named child in Isaiah also had four names – Maher-shalal-hash-baz – and here is an even greater child to come with an even greater four-fold name.

Before we go any further and look at these four titles for the Promised Son, I want us to see something: God loves His people and while they get themselves into trouble by their faithlessness, idolatry, and repeated rebellion, He comes to their rescue and brings them freedom and joy, not because they have repented sufficiently or because they are finally measuring up to His holy standard – that never happens at any point in these chapters or in the history of God's people. No, His move to free and redeem and bless His people comes from His grace and meets them in their needs.

I don't know what has caused anguish in your life. I don't know what has put you in bondage and has caused you to feel oppressed. Most of us have felt overwhelmed by sadness or paralyzed by fear or held down by something beyond our control at times in our lives. The temptation we have is to think that the root cause of the biggest problems in our lives lies outside of ourselves.

A Christian counselor I'm friends with on Facebook posted this and I thought it was very helpful –

One of the questions I ask every new client to answer is, "What kind of person do you want to be?" No one ever says they want to be quick-tempered or selfish or fearful or lazy or unmotivated. But only those desperate for change ever do the work needed. The reasons for this may be complex and storied. But generally speaking, we all would rather just have our circumstances change instead of us changed.

If you had asked people in Judah or Jerusalem or up in the northern areas listed in verse 1 what their biggest problems were, they would probably talk about invasion and oppression by foreign armies, and that makes sense. But the root of their problems was found in their faithlessness, in their sinful hearts that would not trust the Lord.

But here's another common problem we have with how we think through the biggest problems in our lives. We often think that maybe the problem really is us, but we either

give up because we're too weak and unable to change or we think that we need to just do the work to make ourselves better. In some cases, this can contaminate our thinking about God and we either hide from Him in shame over our inadequacies or else we think we need to earn His favor by doing a better job. Or we might even think that He's waiting for us to clean up our act before He'll really love us or bless us.

But none of this is what's revealed to us in Scripture. God has so much better news for us than any of that. He meets us out of the abundance of His steadfast love at the point of our deepest need.

And so, Jesus comes as Wonderful Counselor because we are profoundly ignorant and held captive by lies. He has great wisdom for He is the Truth and the Wisdom of God incarnate, and so His counsel is wonderful. The word "wonderful" is the closest word in the Hebrews Bible to our concept of supernaturally miraculous – a miracle. Both the content and the method of Jesus' counsel are miraculous, truly wonderful. He has divine, perfect truth in Himself, and by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, He is able to write His truth and wisdom on our hearts.

Jesus comes as Mighty God because we are pathetically weak, completely unable to stand up against or overcome our truest enemies of sin, death, hell, and the devil. We are worse than powerless against these deadly enemies of our soul; so often, we help them in their oppression of us. But Jesus is Mighty God, the eternal and all-powerful God made flesh, coming to identify with us, represent us, and overthrow our enemies for us. Nothing is impossible for Jesus. No enemy can overcome Him or overwhelm Him, as we so often are.

Jesus comes as our Everlasting Father because we are spiritual orphans, uncared for and unprotected in this world. (NOTE: Isaiah is not here making any theological statements about the Trinity. He is not saying that Jesus is God the Father, but that He is our Everlasting Father.) In the ancient world, kings and rulers were seen as the fathers of their people, protecting them and providing for them. But all human fathers are fallible – weak, sinful, unable to perfectly protect and provide. As a father, I often feel overwhelmed by my own inadequacies and inabilities. Jesus is the perfect Everlasting Father to His people. We are safe in His loving care.

And finally, Jesus comes as our Prince of Peace, because we are in such deep conflict and turmoil and are so completely unable to provide peace for ourselves. He secures peace with God on the cross for us, and He gives us His peace, the only peace that surpasses our

understanding, the peace of the One who has overcome the world, the peace that keeps us eternally.

## **The Reign He Establishes**

This is who Jesus is as the Son of God given for us, born of the Virgin Mary for us and for our salvation. But what kind of reign does He establish? We're told this in verse 7 –

*Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.*

Jesus reigns everlastingly and ever-increasingly. He sits right now on the throne of David at the Father's right side, waiting until that day when all His enemies are defeated, and He is gloriously revealed from heaven as the King of kings and Lord of lords. But HOW does He reign?

Well, He showed us that when He came in the flesh and literally fulfilled the opening verses of this passage. If you look again at the map of where Zebulun, Naphtali, and Galilee are, you'll notice something. Not only were these the first places conquered in the Assyrian invasion, but this is also where Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and grew up in Nazareth, where He had His home base during the years of His earthly ministry, and where He did almost all of His miracles and teachings. This is the land where the Light of the World shone the brightest when He came. And yet, this was such a despised and overlooked land that, even though the people of God had this prophecy from Isaiah, they discounted that the Messiah could possibly come from or do ministry in this compromised and rejected area.

It's Matthew 4:12-17 that confirms beyond doubt that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in His earthly ministry –

*<sup>12</sup> Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. <sup>13</sup> And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup> so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

*15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
16 the people dwelling in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,  
on them a light has dawned.”*

*17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

- Matthew 4:12-17, ESV

Jesus came to Zebulun and Naphtali, to the Sea of Galilee and to the land beyond the Jordan as a Wonderful Counselor. He gave the Sermon on the Mount, told His most well-known parables, and patiently taught the people about the kingdom of God for hours and days on end. And He did so while working many wonders – feeding the 5,000, walking on water, healing the paralyzed man, and raising the dead.

Jesus came as Mighty God, calming storms on the Sea of Galilee, casting out a legion of demons from a man on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and teaching with such authority that He spoke about the Word of God as if He were the One who wrote it. He overcame all opposition.

Jesus came as the Everlasting Father. He was deeply moved because He had compassion on them because they were as sheep without a shepherd, and so He patiently taught and lovingly healed. We focus our attention on the miracles of Jesus that the Gospels describe in greater detail, but Jesus didn't just do a few miracles a few times. As Mighty God and Everlasting Father, Jesus would heal large groups of people all day. We read in Luke 4:40-41

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*Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.*

– Luke 4:40-41, ESV

We read in Matthew 4:23-25 –



*And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.*

– Matthew 4:23-25, ESV

This kind of healing and deliverance of large numbers of people from all over the area is something that would have spread a kind of joy and freedom like nothing we've ever seen or can even imagine. It definitely fulfilled Isaiah 9.

And finally, Jesus came as Prince of Peace, to make peace. The only way for Him to make real and lasting peace for us was to take on our worst, most powerful, most oppressive enemies. He did this by fulfilling all righteousness for us, dying in our place on the cross for all of our sins, and rising again to conquer death and hell forever.

And now that Jesus sits in heaven at the right hand of the Father, has His reign come to an end, or is it just to be held on pause until He comes again? No! He reigns now, and He is building His church as the visible expression of the Kingdom of God on earth. He calls us and works through us to continue His work – to teach the truth powerfully, to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and bring the oppressed to Jesus to be set free. He calls us to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim the Gospel of salvation that He has brought, to bring freedom, peace, and eternal life to all who will trust in Him.

I don't know what anguish you've suffered in your life, how the darkness has oppressed you, or how you are really doing even now this morning. But I know that Jesus is still the Wonderful Counselor, still the Mighty God, still the Everlasting Father, and still the Prince of Peace who brings us what we need out of the abundance of His steadfast love. So come to Him, trust in Him, and walk with Him!