

A Child is Born, a Son is Given

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Bible Text: Isaiah 9

Preached on: Sunday, December 10, 2006

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Tonight I would like to look with you at Isaiah chapter nine, a very well known passage. I think every Christmas we read the sixth verse which says, “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.”¹

What I would like to do is look at the context in which this prophecy was given and to get some idea of the significance of it, I think it is a...just a marvellous picture that God gives us of his purposes in this world. I think it is very, very exciting.

In the first two verses of the passage we read this.

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. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.²

For us to understand this we need to get a picture of what the land of Israel is like. We have been to Israel. Israel is a very small country. It is possible to travel from north to south in a very, very short time. I mean you can make it from Jerusalem up into Galilee, you know, in an hour and a half, two hour drive. It is no big deal. But in that day they did not have souped up vehicles and they couldn't move at 60, 70 miles an hour on a highway. Instead most of the travel took place either by walking or ox cart or something of that sort. And, of course, travel was very slow.

And so the journey from the area that is called Galilee down to Jerusalem was an incredibly long journey. It was one that few people undertook. As we know, during the time of the Passover, people who were able would travel from all over the land and would gather in the city of Jerusalem, but that was a major journey. As we read about the story of Mary and Joseph and how they traveled from Nazareth which was up in Galilee to go to Jerusalem, this was a big journey for them. This was not a simple trek that we might, you know, consider today. I mean, I can get in a car and before I know it I am

¹ Isaiah 9:6

² Isaiah 9:1-2

somewhere in Florida or I am in Atlanta or, you know, pretty much anywhere we want to go. I can get in an airplane and be at the other end of the world in no time flat. But in that day travel, of course, was quite different.

And therefore certain areas in the land were somewhat isolated. They would be...the area that is called Galilee which was the area of the two tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali—that's how we get these names—they were very distant from the place of learning in Jerusalem. And so they were considered to be places where there was very little of the light of learning.

You will remember when the issue came up about Jesus coming out of Nazareth, the first question that was answered, "Does anything good come out of Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"³ In other words, how is it possible out of this dark area where learning did not exist, where people were as far from the seat of learning as you could get and still be in what is called the Holy Land, how could it possibly be that that would be a place from which a great prophet would come? Nobody believed it. And so that was the attitude of the day.

Now there was a certain degree of truth to this because because of that great distance it was rare that the people in Galilee would get down to Jerusalem and yet in Jerusalem that is where all the learning took place. This is where the great rabbis taught. This is where the religious teaching of the day was centered. And so if you wanted to learn and you wanted to become a person who was mighty in the Scriptures it was normal for you to go and to attach yourself to a rabbi in Jerusalem and to learn down there. That was very common. And, of course, many people up in the area of Galilee were simply unable to do that.

And so we read in this passage, "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."⁴ In other words, this was a place that was looked on contemptuously, a place that people would say, "Well, this is out in the sticks."

What could we compare that with? And I don't want to be insulting to anybody who may have come from, you know, what we would call the sticks, but I don't know. You might think of a place in Georgia where someone might say, "Oh, gosh, I mean. There aren't intelligent people who come from that area." There must be some place like that. I don't want to mention a town. Somebody may come from there.

I know that we lived for some time in the state of Missouri and you think about the people who lived in the Ozarks. And although it is not quite like that today because, you know, learning has spread pretty much everywhere, but not too many years ago you would think of the Ozarks and you would think of, you know, folks who walked around without shoes, who had nothing, who learned nothing, who lived their lives with very, very little knowledge. That is the view that people had of Galilee.

³ See John 1:46

⁴ Isaiah 9:1

Well God said that this place that was viewed that way and to some respect was like that was going to change dramatically. Something was going to happen, that here in the place of darkness all of a sudden a great light was going to shine. And that light was going to be a light of great knowledge and wisdom that would come to the people in this far off land.

Listen to the words of how he described it.

But later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.⁵

That light was the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By the way, I was just reviewing a CD today. It is a little off the subject, but I happened to cover a little of this period and in watching the CD...it is one that I want to show in church where we are thinking about showing this over the period of a few weeks during the evening service. It is brand new. I don't know whether any of you have even heard of it. It is just simply called "The Gospel of John." It has been advertised. It is meant as an evangelistic tool. It is an absolutely amazing CD, DVD that we have. It is...the whole thing is three hours long and my goal would be to show it in four consecutive weeks, about 45 minutes each time. And when you listen to it you hear nothing but the words of Scripture. I mean it is utterly amazing. I mean you hear the entire book of John being read. And when there is narration, in other words nobody is actually speaking, there is a narrator who says the words. And then you get to a spot where people are interacting and you see the characters. There are many, many characters in this and they actually say the words and interact and tremendous acting and it just really is a marvellous portrayal of the gospel of John. And it is something that we bought and we want to share in the church, hopefully, Lord willing, in the month of January. That is one of our goals.

But I was watching this and at the point where it says, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"⁶ You could see the expression on the faces of the people and it was an expression of incredible contempt. It was, "Gosh, this is impossible. You have got to be kidding."

And yet it was the Lord Jesus Christ who was that light. And we read of this in the book of Matthew.

Matthew chapter four there is a quotation of this very passage. And it says this beginning with the 13th verse.

⁵ Isaiah 9:1-2

⁶ See John 1:46

And leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned."⁷

The light was the Lord Jesus Christ. He came and he began teaching in this land of darkness and opened up an incredible light to the people as they heard the Word of God and the message of the Savior.

One of the amazing things that really surprises me, initially, but then I realize the greatness of our God and his love for people. What amazes me is that here is the King of the universe, here is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one who is very God of very God, he is the one who dwelt with the Father and the Spirit in heaven throughout all eternity. And when he came to earth what did he do? I would think, you know, he is going to come to earth, he would appear in a castle and he would be there to present himself to the kings of the earth or possibly he would go to Jerusalem and appear to the religious leaders of the day, that there would be an opportunity for him to go to the leaders of the various nations of the world and there he would be wined and dined and taken care of and cared for. And what we see is the exact opposite. When he came he was born in a stable.

Now, you know, we talk about the manger. I don't know, some of you have probably been in stables. They are not real nice places. I mean, you know, I have never...I have been in stables. I have never slept in one. I mean I probably ought to try it sometime just to see what it was like for the Lord Jesus as a baby. I probably won't. You know, it is not a real pleasant place. The smells are not great. You know, the sounds of the animals are not wonderful.

So here is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and he comes and he is born in a stable. It just seems absurd.

And then we read of the places where he went. Where did he go? Well, he was born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is a little town. We have been there. I mean if you want to...just a tiny little town. It is nothing big. You know, we talk of Bethlehem, it is a real big thing because that is where the Lord Jesus was born, but there is nothing special about Bethlehem. It is just a little town on the road and the way to Jerusalem, the big city. He wasn't born in Jerusalem. He was born in the little town.

Where did he spend his time? He spent his time up in Galilee, the place where nothing good could come from. That was the view of the people.

⁷ Matthew 4:13-16

What does this mean? Well, I believe that it means that our God is the God of the little person, that his emphasis is not the people of greatness. And, in fact, when we look around us we find that the majority of people who have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ are not the great people of the world. They are not the wealthiest people. They are not the people who are super and special. But on the whole they are the common people.

Isn't that what it said in 1 Corinthians chapter one? Listen to the words beginning with verse 26.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.⁸

Now, I don't know. If I could go and get our whole congregation if there were here this morning and others who are, you know, and if I would just simply ask the question: Who many multi millionaires do we have here? My guess is there wouldn't be too many hands to go up. If I were to ask: How many people live in palaces? My guess is, you know, I don't know of anyone in our congregation who fits into that category. If I would say: How many of you consider yourselves to be the wisest of the world, the most intelligent, the greatest? We have many intelligent people, but none of us fit into the categories that are put here.

It was interesting that there was a noble woman, she was a baroness who lived over in Europe and she read this passage and she said that she was saved by the letter "m." That sounds a little strange, doesn't it? She was saved by the letter "m," because she read this passage and she said, "It says not many wise, not many noble." And she said, "I am so thankful that it doesn't say, 'not any noble,'" because God was even willing to save here, a noble, a wealthy woman. God in his grace.

But that's not what we see most of the time. The choice of the Lord Jesus Christ when he was picking his disciples, these were not the great learned people of his day. Who did he pick? Fishermen and tax collectors. I mean, who was it who announced the birth of Christ? Not the great ones, the kings, the mighty ones, shepherds, people who stayed out in the field taking care of sheep.

You see God has a special interest in the people of the world who are the common people. He cares about them. And so we see that the multitude of those who are saved fit into that mold.

But he goes on in this passage to tell us that not only would there be light coming into

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

dark places, but that there would be incredible joy at the coming of the Savior. He gives us two, I think, magnificent pictures of this joy.

Listen to the words as we read them beginning in the third verse of Isaiah chapter nine. “Thou shalt multiply the nation, Thou shalt increase their gladness; They will be glad in Thy presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.”⁹

There are two pictures here. One of them is the time of the harvest. Now I have never lived on a farm. I have told you that before. I mean, gosh, I used to think corn came in cans. I didn’t know any better than that when I was a little boy, born and raised in the city of Philadelphia, you know, I didn’t know any better. I thought it was almost miraculous when my father planted a few tomato plants and real tomatoes came up. I thought, “Wow.” This was fantastic.

Some of you, I know, have had big gardens and you have grown vegetables. I was never brought up in that kind of environment so I don’t know what a harvest is like. But farmers have told me what it is like.

The work of a farmer is very hard work. I mean you get out in the field. You till the ground. That’s not easy. You finish with that you plant the seeds. And then you watch and you wait. And the months go by and the rains come—or at least you hope the rains come or you have to irrigate the ground. And finally you begin to see the plants coming up from the ground and the months pass. And finally the day comes when it is fully grown and whatever it is that you have grown is ready to be reaped and taken in and so you go out in the field and the produce is picked. And in ancient days they were so concerned that there might be insects that would destroy, there might not be enough rain to provide for the plants to grow. And so the time of the harvest was an incredibly joyous time when the farmers went out in the field and all the labor of the year was finally there in the result of the harvest that was being brought in. And they rejoiced.

God says that that is what the coming of the Messiah is going to be like. Just like the harvest time when you rejoice in all that has been produced for you throughout the year.

And then there is another picture. It says, “As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.”¹⁰ This is a picture of what war was like in the days of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that time soldiers would fight and their salaries were not very high. They didn’t earn a lot of money. I can’t say soldiers earn a whole lot of money today, but I mean, they didn’t earn a whole lot of money as soldiers. But a lot of their pay was involved in the spoils of war. In other words, when they destroyed the enemy the property of the enemy became theirs. And one of the things that would happen is when the victory was won they would gather together all of the things that they had captured from the enemy and the soldiers would sit around and they would begin to share. And here is something for you and here is something for you. And there would be rejoicing as the victory was won and all that they

⁹ Isaiah 9:3

¹⁰ Ibid.

had accomplished would be that they were ready to take the spoils back home. And they were rejoicing and happy.

God says the coming of the Messiah was going to be just like that, people rejoicing with the harvest, soldiers rejoicing as they divided the spoils.

Well, what is the picture of that Messiah who was going to come? Do we rejoice today as we approach the Christmas season, as we think about his birth? Is it that exciting for us?

Three things we see that should excite us. First of all a light has come into darkness. In the lives of every one of us there was a time when we did not know the Savior. But he came into our life and by his sovereign power and grace he changed us and made us to be his children. That's exciting. Light came into darkness. And as we contemplate it we think of the harvest. We think of the soldiers dividing the spoil and we realize that God has given us everything in Jesus Christ. And it is all ours.

No, we may not be wealthiest of the world, but I will tell you something. When we stand in the presence of God and God divides the sheep from the goats, I will tell you, I would rather be a poor sheep than a wealthy goat, my friend, because in the sight of God all that is going to count is that we know Christ as our Savior and Lord.

Now here is the picture of that wonderful one who was going to come. It says, "For a child will be born to us," verse six, "a son will be given to us."¹¹

I want you to see the distinction between those two statements. It is very, very important. A child will be born. The Lord Jesus Christ was born as a child. He was a human being. I can remember one time...this was several years ago, in fact, 1994. I was in the country of Uganda. And I was in the town of Entebbe and there we...I was the joint task force chaplain for Operation Support Hope where we were helping people after the war in Rwanda. And I remember sitting there with some of the chaplains. And there was a young Roman Catholic chaplain who was there and he was insisting to me that Protestants were always putting down Catholicism. That is what he told me. And I said, "Fine, you know, I mean, I am not putting down anything. I'll tell you what I believe. You ask me a question and I will tell you the answer."

And he asked me, he said, "Do you believe that Mary is the mother of God?"

And I said, "No. No, I don't believe Mary is the mother of God. God can't have a mother. I mean, that is absurd. How can the eternal God have a mother? I mean, he existed throughout all ages."

And this young man got very upset at me. You know, he is telling me that we reject Catholicism, but he, in essence, was rejecting me because I didn't happen to agree with him. And that's another point.

¹¹ Isaiah 9:6

The distinction here is that it is a child who was born. God cannot be born. God exists eternally. But the person of the Lord Jesus as a human being was born. And here is the distinction that we have here. Unto us a child is born. But, listen. A son will be given to us.

Do you see the difference? The child is born. That is the human body, the human person, Jesus. But a son, the Son of God, is given. The Son of God can't be born. He always existed. So what happened is that in the womb of Mary there was united the birth of a child and the giving of a Son. And so this person had two natures, the nature of God and the nature of man joined together in one.

And this is written 700 years before the coming of Christ and that distinction is so clearly made. A child is born, son is given.

And then it says, "And the government will rest on His shoulders."¹² What government? What does that mean? I mean, the United States government? No. The government of the Roman Empire? No. It is the government of his people. He is the leader, the ruler, the governor, the king over his Church. You know, you say that in this church we have a pastor and we have a board of deacons. They are the leaders. No they are not. They are subrulers under the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, he is the king. He is the governor who governs our church. And if we are sensitive to his will the human leaders in the church look to him and find out what he wants and we do it. And as we become more and more faithful to the Word of God we find we are doing more and more of what the leader wants us to do. We are not the leaders. We are sub rulers under the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And then he is described for us with a name. As you know names are so very important in Scripture. I have mentioned this over and over again and I think it is so significant. You have the name of Abraham, father of many nations. And that is what he was, a father of many nations.

"You will call his name Jesus, Savior, for he will save his people from their sins."¹³ The name Jesus is so significant.

He will be called Emmanuel, God with us.¹⁴

Isaiah's son, Shear-jashub, a remnant will return, a prediction of what was going to happen in the life of the nation of Israel. And here is his name.

By the way, if you were to read this in the translation put out by the Jewish Publication Society it doesn't read quite like this. This is how it reads. "For unto us a child is born,

¹² Isaiah 9:3

¹³ See Matthew 1:21

¹⁴ See Matthew 1:23

unto us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulders and his name will be called פלא יועץ אל גבור אביעד שר-שלום (Peleo ates, el gabor, ave'av zar shalom).

They just transliterate the Hebrew. They make it into a name. But God wants it to be a name that we understand, a name that is significant to us.

There are actually four names here, each one of them having two words: Wonderful Counselor, might God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Each one of those speaks of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. A couple of them are obvious. Mighty God, eternal Father, they are pretty clear, right?

Well, Prince of Peace, only God can be the Prince who gives peace. And the first one, Wonderful Counselor, the word “wonderful” in Hebrew is the word פלא (peh'- leh).

פלא (peh'- leh) is a word that is only used in the Old Testament to speak of God or the works of God. It is a word of deity. Where it says “Wonderful Counselor” it really could mean the divine counselor, the God counselor.

So here is a picture of the eternal God who was going to be born as a child who would be given as a Son, who would be the ruler and king over his people. But more than that there are a couple of other things that this name tells us.

First of all he is a counselor. A counselor is one who helps and assists and teaches. A counselor is one who comes alongside and puts his arm around you and says, “I love you and whatever your needs are I am here for you.” That is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our counselor. He is the one who cares for us and gives us counsel beyond anything that any human being can do.

One of the things that I have learned in my counseling as a pastor is that people don't need to hear my words. They need to hear God's Word. For that is where power is. And my job is to be able to discover what their problem is and to find in the Word of God the answer to their problem and to then convey that to them so that they can see this is what God says, not what the pastor says. That is irrelevant. Not what some human being says, but what God says. And then be able to apply that to their lives. God is the Wonderful Counselor. He is the one who gives to us the message that meets the needs of our lives.

He is also the Prince of Peace. I think that has many meanings. Obviously it can mean peace in the world, but we don't see much peace in the world. The peace that I believe that is referred to here is the peace that we can have in our hearts, the peace of God that passeth all understanding as the New Testament teaches us.

Each one of us has trials and difficulties in our lives, some more serious than others. I often think one of the most difficult days in my life was a day many, many, many years ago when my sweetheart was in a hospital in New Jersey and she was suffering after an automobile accident with a hematological disease called Stevens-Johnson's Syndrome which nobody in the world has ever heard of. But it is a disease that is almost always

fatal. When I tell people that my...and I mean I have told people this within the last year. I have said, "My wife suffered from Stevens-Johnson Syndrome." Some...a medical person, the first thing they ask is, "Did she live?" That's how serious it is.

And I can remember the doctor telling me that if she is alive in the morning we'll transfer her to a larger hospital by ambulance, if she is alive in the morning. I spent that night in the waiting room in that hospital. And I can remember it being one of the most difficult days in my life, but I prayed and I asked the Lord by his grace and by his love to give her life that she might be there in the morning.

And there was sense in which God just gave me a peace at that time, a peace that I can't understand. I was a nervous wreck, I mean honestly. I didn't know what was going to happen to my sweetheart. And yet a peace came over me that is beyond anything that anybody could imagine. And I had a sense of God's love and God's grace in the midst of that.

He is the Prince of peace. He is the Wonderful Counselor. And he can give that peace to each and every one of us no matter what our trials and difficulties in life are. For, remember, he is the one who brings light into darkness. He is the one who gives us a blessing like the harvest and dividing the spoils. He is the one who is the divine Son of God, the one who is the child who is born, the one who is the leader over the Church and the one who is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Eternal Father and the Prince of Peace.

Let's pray together.

Thank you, Father, for your Word. We look at it, Lord, and it amazes us. For in it we find that peace which can only come from you. Bless us now as we would seek to serve you and honor you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.