

Lets open our Bibles to the book of Isaiah. Our text for this morning is Isaiah 9:1-7. This is a familiar text during the advent season and for good reason. There is in Isaiah one of the clearest prophecies of the birth of Jesus and so it is appropriate and fitting that we ought to read and delight in this passage on Christmas Eve.

“9 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.

- 2 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.*
- 3 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.*
- 4 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.*
- 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*
- 6 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.*
- 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.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”¹*

This is the Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 9:1–7. All other Scripture quotations also taken from the ESV.

The Christmas season is a time of anticipation. Its mingled anticipation. For many in our country it is anticipation of celebrations, and reunions, of giving and receiving. There's also the anticipation of difficult feelings, or a celebration changed through loss. I wonder if you've ever noticed how much of Christmas has a built in sense of longing... "***I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams,***" "***I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, just like the ones I used to know,***" "***Its beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go.***" Have you ever noticed how many Christmas songs are filled with longing, or anticipation?

We hum these tunes and maybe our spirits lift, or sink...but for most either way there is anticipation. Isaiah 9:1-17 is a passage meant to build our anticipation, but not for snow or sweets, but for a destiny greater than what we can imagine. The anticipation of a King, but he builds that anticipation, first, through showing us the broken kingdom...

I. The Broken Kingdom

Our passage opens with people who are in "anguish" and who are in "gloom" — this anguish and gloom is tied to what Isaiah has been saying before this text. Look at the end of Isaiah 8 specifically vs. 21-22, "***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 describes God's people in a dark place, not nighttime, but darkness of suffering and soul darkness. These verses come at the end of God's pronouncement that Assyria, a great world power, was coming to conquer Israel, but these hard words form the backdrop for the glorious promises of Isaiah 9. God's promises shine brightest when we see them against the backdrop of the darkness of our world.

Isaiah shows us ***the kingdom is broken because it is conquered***, saying "***In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali***" — at this point in Israel's history portions of the kingdom had already been conquered by Assyria, so we read in 1 Kings 15, "***29 In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria.***" (2 Ki 15:29) — Israel's northern kingdom did not fall in a day, but gradually.

To God's people the thought of losing their kingdom was unthinkable, and for every prophet warning the people of God's wrath there were false prophets who said that God would never do such a thing. Israel was so intoxicated with their own prosperity that they could not see that they had abandoned the Lord and the Lord had departed from them. Isaiah's warning is clear, the kingdoms fall is already happening, the enemy has already come to the lands of God's people.

Then Isaiah describes ***the brokenness of the kingdom in its darkness*** in vs. 2 he refers to, “*The people who walked in darkness*” & “*those who dwell in a land of deep darkness*” — Those two verbs are important for us here “walked” which is a metaphor for living, and secondly “dwelt” which speaks of living, but also “sitting” or “inhabiting” – the picture is of a people living in complete darkness.

The darkness Isaiah is describing shows God’s people with a complete loss of purpose and direction, the ever-present reality of fear and anxiety, the choking reality of depression and despair. All the hallmarks of the kingdom of darkness.

And its important for us to recognize that before this moment, what led to the darkness was not circumstance, or military weakness, or just plain bad luck. No the people who were walking, living and dwelling in darkness were there by their own doing. God’s people weren’t just down on their luck, but were rebels against the God who loved and saved them. They were a rescued people who had suffered under the Egyptian rule as slaves yet had been delivered by Yahweh and fashioned into a kingdom of great power and majesty. And in the midst of their blessed life they had become convinced of their own greatness and they were convinced that they no longer needed God, they’d do just fine without Him. The darkness they faced was one of their own making. And it is the same with us. Not every struggle you face is directly related to a sin you committed, but do kid yourself, your every struggle is related to sin. Whether you sin, or someone sins against you, or because we live in a sinful broken world, darkness comes from within us, not outside us. This is what the Lord Jesus said so clearly, “*Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.*”

Isaiah has told God’s people the uncomfortable, but clear truth that they walked in darkness because they chose the darkness, and this is true of every human who has ever lived, each one of us. We are not little rays of sunshine, in fact, we are by nature sinful, selfish, and rotten from the inside out – and we actually know this to be true. You may try to convince yourself that your ok, that you just need to be more loving of yourself, more accepting of yourself, more focused on self-care – but the honesty of God is a great help to each of us. The Lord doesn’t give you a laundry list of ways you can fix yourself, he is gracious to point out our darkness and then grant us sight to see His light.

And the Lord has given His people the hard truth that judgment awaits them, but now that judgment will not be His final act, wrath will not be the end of His people, He is going to judge, but destruction will not be the period at the end of the sentence in the story of His people.

For some Christians though Christmas is a season of bittersweetness, or just bitterness. It can be a time filled with memories that feel much darker than light. If that is you, you are not weird or odd or doing it wrong, you are experiencing life in a broken kingdom. Weary saint, do not allow the evil one to steal the light from your heart and soul, for there is hope, darkness does not win, gloom does not triumph, even if right now you are walking in sadness, fear or anxiety. Do not give up, reach out to your brothers and sisters in Christ. They can't fix you, but they can point you to the one who can. Because He is our rebuilding King...

Then, in vs.4, ***the brokenness of the kingdom in oppression*** — vs. 4 uses three words to describe the experience of God's people they are under the burden of a "yoke" they are under the "staff" and the "rod" — the words picture Israel as cattle not sheep, as slaves not citizens. The image is a reminder that the coming judgment of God would include exile. The people of God would not be ruled by the God who loved them and saved them, so they would be ruled by nations who would oppress and enslave them. But the reality is that they chose this slavery when they fled from the God who had freed them in the first place.

Finally, in vs.5, Isaiah shows ***the kingdom's brokenness in war*** vs. 5 gives us images of war filth covered boots, and blood-soaked clothes. This is the ultimate image of kingdom brokenness, death and violence. When God planted the garden of Eden, the garden was full of life, and the command for life to be fruitful and multiply stands as the joyful duty of creation, and yet here implements of war and evidence of death show that this kingdom is not as it once was and not as it should be.

Against this backdrop of darkness, God shines his light. In the darkest of places for every example of the kingdoms brokenness there is a counter promise of God rebuilding His kingdom.

II. Our Rebuilding King

To each evidence of brokenness our rebuilding King responds with how He will restore.

In vs. 1 – ***He is the King who removes shame.*** The lands which were the first to be conquered would no longer be a pathway of doom, but a path of glory, for one would come from Galilee to whose coming was from of old...whose presence would not mean destruction and exile, but would mean that people would be gathered in. Whose footsteps would lead him into Jerusalem, up the hill of calvary and out of the grave.

The land of Galilee once signaling doom now signals hope. The way once shrouded in contempt because of the entry of the enemy has been made glorious because it will be the way of the king.

In vs. 2 – **He is the King of light.** The darkness that surrounded and threatened to consume the life of God’s people meets with indomitable light. Here Isaiah says, the ones who walked and dwelt in darkness, “*Have seen a great light*” & “*On them light has shone*” — this light dispels the darkness. We know the source of this light don’t we.

“⁴*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* ⁵*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*” (Jn 1:3–5) — who is the “him” who is this life & light possessing being. “¹²*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*” (Jn 8:12) The Son of God, Jesus is the light-bringer to darkened souls. He restores what darkness steals.

In vs. 3 – **He is the King who multiplies His people and increases their joy.** The darkness and sorrow in which the people formerly walked is replaced with joy from the King of light. When the Lord rescues us from darkness and brings us into His light, it is His joy that becomes ours.

In the ESV, and in most other versions, vs.4-6 begin with the word “for” or we could use our English word “because” in vs. 3 The people who were in darkness and are now in the light are now rejoicing and multiplying, why and how? Vs. 4-7 are the answer.

Because In vs. 4, **Our King brings Freedom.** The “yoke” “rod” & “staff” of the oppressor is shattered by the Lord.

And Isaiah roots future hope in God’s past faithfulness. Christian, this is important for you as you read your Bible, especially the Old Testament. The Lord has been faithful to His people in both blessing and judgment, so we can be sure that He will continue to be faithful and will do all that He has said he will do.

Isiah drives this home with a reference to “the day of Midian” — He refers to the book of Judges here, and the story of Gideon. The people of God were oppressed horribly by the people of Midian. The Lord raises up Gideon, a cowardly and flawed man, but Gideon raises an army of roughly 32,000 to go against Midian, and the Lord declares that too many, specifically because he says the people might be tempted to think they were the real conquerors, as if the whole time they were oppressed they just needed to look deep inside and find their inner strength, no, the Lord reduces the number of soldiers to 300, a laughable and paltry force against the glory and power of Midian.

Then, in Jericho like fashion the warriors sound trumpets and break pots which startles the forces of Midian and they begin to slaughter themselves in the confusion, and when they flee the army of God's people follow and Gideon himself strikes down the kings, breaking their yoke or oppression, in the power of God. The shattering work of God is as sure as it was through Gideon, and if Gideon was weak and lowly and the army small and insignificant, the one who will break the oppression of God's people under God's wrath, will do so in no less dramatic fashion, and in a no less shocking way. The kingdom will be restored in a most unlikely fashion. And it will be Yahweh himself who will conquer, He will break the yoke, the staff and the rod. No enemy of God's people can stand before His wrath.

The people rejoice because in vs. 5, ***Our King brings Peace.*** Peace has come because all of the implements of war are discarded Tramping boots and blood rolled garments will have a use in this restored kingdom, but not for battle. They will be used as fuel for the fire. The implements of the battlefield become useful only to burn as fuel. Our peace bringing King will usher in peace in which battle is done, notice how specific Isaiah paints with his brush, “***every*** boot of the tramping warrior” & “***every*** garment rolled in blood” will be burned.

In this rebuilt kingdom the tools of war are not needed, because like in Eden, there really will be peace.

Not only do God's people rejoice because of freedom, and peace, but as we read in vs. 6, because ***Our King will come for us.***

— “***6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;***” (Is 9:6) —

Maybe your reading and you question how will a child will end war, bring multiplication of the people, and break the oppression even end darkness? Because this child is born a King. Not only will this child accomplish the restoration, He is the rightful ruler for, “***the government will be upon His shoulder***” — which government? All of it! Isaiah is speaking of total rule, one who has both the right and authority to rule govern everything. The only one we know who has the right as king to rule over everything that exists is the one true God.

This is not just any child or any mere son, this is a son who is unique in His names, or titles — “***and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***” (Is 9:6)

Wonderful Counselor — this son who is King will possess supernatural wisdom. This king will not need an abundance of counsel and counsellors to tell Him what to do, He will possess all the wisdom needed to rule. He will not need counsel because He himself is the counselor His people need.

Mighty God — This Son is the mighty God. Isaiah declares God is who will come, but as a child. The God of limitless power and might will come like His people, even as a child. We understand Mary’s question, “How can these things be?” The son who comes is Himself the Mighty God...

Everlasting Father — Wait, the son who is born will have the name everlasting father, what’s up with that? Well its not confusion of the trinity, but rather that the coming King will rule his people as a Father. This title describes ***the nature of the coming Kings rule***. One scholar noted that when the title “father” is applied to Yahweh in the Old Testament it points to “*his concern for the helpless, the care or discipline of his people, and their loyal and reverential response to Him.*”² He will rule not as a dictator over his people, but a Father who never fails, His fatherly care is eternal and he will be called...

Prince of Peace — this last title shows that this king will not be a war monger, nor will he be afraid of battle, but that this king will usher in the end of conflict & war. This son will bring freedom not only from darkness but from the fear and anxiety and loss of war because he himself is peace.

And the greatest peace the people of God needed was not with other nations, but with Yahweh their God. Like Adam and Eve before them, they had thrown off the authority of God and sought to be their own kings and rulers, acts of cosmic treason both small and large.

We each followed the pattern, our hearts reject the idea that someone else should instruct us how to live, how to feel or how to believe. We find it repulsive that any being would dare to tell us that we are wrong in our wants, our desires, our dreams. The Bible is clear we aren’t naturally faithful, we are naturally faithless. The idea of a prince of peace with brilliance and power who is a father to His children and will conquer all who oppose is terrible news if you are in His way...but what if there was a way to have peace with this God-King, and to be one of His own, well there is...this prince would make a way for peace with God through his own blood. The king would die as a rebel in the place of His enemies. Jesus, the coming King died to bring peace, that we who put our faith in Him would receive all the benefits of His kingdom, as Paul wrote centuries later, “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (Ro 5:1) The coming King who brings us peace with God brings peace from God to world He has the right to rule.

² Alec Moyter, Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary, pp. 102.

Vs. 7 far from a simple epilogue, gives us an even more full picture of the coming King... *“⁷Of 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.”* (Is 9:7) — The coming King is no “here today, gone tomorrow” King but the King who is the rightful heir to the throne of David promised in 2 Samuel 7, He is the king whose government and peace increase will never fail, who is just and right with power to uphold the kingdom for all eternity because He is the Lord.

The coming King is the anticipated King. The glad-tidings of Christmas are the tidings of a King who came to bring restoration to a broken Kingdom, because He is the true King, God himself, who alone can rebuild broken people and a broken kingdom, because He created them. The king of light piercing the darkness.

*It's dark, in the bible, when Christmas is spoken.
Always a bolt from the blue for the broken.
It's the valley of shadow, the land of the dead,
It's, "No place in the inn," so He stoops to the shed.
He's born to the shameful, bends to the weak,
becomes the lowly: the God who can't speak!
And yet, what a Word, this Saviour who comes,
Our dismal, abysmal depths He plumbs.
Through crib and then cross, to compass our life.
To carry and conquer. Our Brother in strife.
He became what we are: our failures He shouldered,
To bring us to His life: forever enfolded.
It's Christmas now... whatever the weather,
Some soak in the sun, some huddle together.
But fair days or foul, our plight He embraces.
Real Christmas can shine in the darkest of places.³*

That, church is our hope of Christmas. And our hope is not yet complete. There is still darkness to be conquered, still wars to end, still joy to multiply. Jesus did come, and he inaugurated the Kingdom, but our hope in Christmas is not a hope that is resigned to a stable in Bethlehem, but a hope fixed on the splitting of the sky and the trumpet sound. Hope for a king who was anticipated before and is still anticipated now. The one who came and will come again. This Christmas, look at your lovely nativities, but **not too much**... Christmas isn't a time for only looking back, but a time for us to look forward. We feel the weight of Isaiah 9 because though

³ Glen Scrivener, Christmas in Dark Places, <https://theadventusproject.wordpress.com/resources/poetry/glen-scrivener-christmas-in-dark-places/>

Jesus came and accomplished the work set before Him we still wait for the final restoration, for the final end to brokenness, the final end of every night and sorrow, the final triumphant joy that is eternal for all who believe. And just as sure as the Lord kept His promise to send His son for us the first time, He will surely keep His promise to send Jesus to come for us again. Dear church, He has promised He will return. So let's follow Isaiah's lead, let's see the manger and then look to the sky.

Would you pray with me?