

CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

For Unto Us a Child is Born

Isaiah 9:2-7

Pastor Danny Lee

SEASONAL SENTIMENT

This most certainly will be a year we all wish to forget, but none of us ever will. Looking at pictures from this time last year or reading articles and posts from a year ago, nothing could have predicted what we've seen or experienced in 2020. In fact, if 2020 were a *person* it would be like your least favorite character from a really bad movie; or that kid who reminds the teacher they forgot to pass out homework at the end of class; or like walking barefoot across a floor covered in Legos. It's been a pretty miserable year by any standard most of us have experienced, yet here we are on the last Sunday of 2020 coming together just like we've been doing (almost) every Sunday of this year. For all the turmoil, confusion, and frustration this year has produced, it has also brought clarity to our mission as a church, a conviction to shepherd and care for each another, and faithfulness in God's people to come together to worship and encourage one another.

Even in this year we have experienced God's abundant faithfulness in tangible ways. So far, year-to-date this will be our highest *giving* year according to bookkeeping records. This demonstrates God's work in your hearts to give to His church abundantly. We've also received a higher-than-normal offering of assistance to families in need which several of you have been recipients, revealing God's work in your hearts to give generously. And we've recorded 12 new births (matching last year's total!) to our families, displaying God's continued blessing of children to our church. Any time a child is born, it is a wonderful gift and blessing from God (Psa.127). There is also something sweet and delightful about children born in December that bring an extra sense of joy and hope in this season.

It is fitting that this season brings sentiments of joy, wonder, sincerity and hope since these are often the feelings we share when a baby is born. With the arrival of a new child, as a parent you experience joy and gladness while you sincerely anticipate what they will one day become. As parents our hearts are filled with hope for their future, wishing they will have better, do better and be better than ourselves. All these sentiments are fitting at Christmas since their source is found in the birth of THE Child who truly is all those things.

PROPHETS AND PROPHECIES

"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."

(Isaiah 9:6-7)

These verses have been immortalized in our culture thanks to the incredible work of Georg Fredreic Handel's *Messiah*, composed in 1741. They have also been the inspiration of other songs and hymns like "His Name is Wonderful" by Audrey Mieir written in the last century. As profound and impactful as these verses are, they stand in a larger context of God's greater work both in Israel's past and future, of which we are grafted in. Much like other portions of Isaiah that prominently speak about the coming Messiah and their subsequent fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the brilliance of this prophecy has been missed by those who choose not to see it. This did not prohibit Isaiah from proclaiming God's message in his day, nor does it deter from continuing to proclaim God's Messiah in our day.

When approaching prophecy there are a few "rules" one must follow. The first rule is **context**, *who* and *what* was the prophet writing for. Isaiah was a real man who served as God's mouthpiece under four Judean monarchies (1:1). He was personally called and commissioned by God to preach an unpopular message to a stubborn and unbelieving people (6:1-13). Prophets were not fortune-tellers but often revealed God's forthcoming plan as a call to repent and return to worship of the one true God. A second rule is **consistency**, *how* were the prophet's words fulfilled. According to Deuteronomy 18:20-22, if a prophet's words weren't literally fulfilled, they were to be labeled a "false prophet" and not to be believed. Some prophecies were local and nearer in time while others were farther away, but God always validated His prophets and Scripture attests to the veracity of each.

Another rule is **scope**, to *what extent* does the prophecy cover. All the prophets were nationalistic, willing to deliver God's message or rebuke sin no matter the setting. In dark hours they pleaded to persuade those who would listen to their message of worship and obedience to the one true God. All of them looked forward to the coming hope of God's appointed Messiah and His righteous kingdom.

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:10-13)

What did Isaiah know? It's obvious to us on this side of the cross to see how these passages point to Jesus Christ, but was it obvious to Isaiah? In short, YES! Although he did not know His birth name, Jesus, Isaiah knew he was telling about Messiah's coming, character and conquest. Isaiah is often referred to as the "5th evangelist" or "5th gospel" because the theme of his prophecies is about Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, 20 of 27 books refer to Isaiah, and 12 books contain direct quotations. Throughout his writings Isaiah continued to expand on his knowledge of the coming Messiah as God revealed it to him. Looking down the corridor of time, he could not

predict exact dates (unless revealed otherwise), but it was revealed to him what was to come and how we are to live in light of Messiah's coming.

Isaiah's prophecy absolutely resonates for us today. The national failure and deep darkness Israel experienced is reflected in our culture now. The threat of disaster and God's judgment echo in society's ears. But the great light and increased joy Israel was to find in her Messiah can be

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known in your heart today because of the person Jesus Christ. In Him hope is realized and grace is received at His revelation, first as a child then as a conquering King. **FROM ISAIAH 9 YOU CAN REJOICE THAT YOUR GLOOM WILL LEAD TO GOD'S GLORY, AND YOUR BONDAGE WILL BE BROKEN BY JESUS THE MESSIAH'S DELIVERANCE.**

I. FROM GLOOM TO GLORY

ISAIAH 8:22 - 9:3“And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. ^{9:1} 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.”

ISRAEL'S DISASTER

The message up to this point has been going from bad to worse. Because of the people's spiritual desertion and disobedience to the ways of God, their nation was on the brink of disaster. Just to the north of Judah, the kingdom of Israel was facing elimination at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. For years Israel and Judah battled each other, employed the help of neighboring countries to assist in attacking the other. But judgment time had finally come for the northern kingdom and God used the Assyrian armies to defeat and disperse the northern Israelite inhabitants throughout their empire. The tragedy of these circumstances is recorded in 2 Kings 17 explaining the reasons God was doing this and why Judah would face similar judgment for not learning the spiritual lessons of their relatives.

The judgments on Israel and Judah were times of deep darkness and gloom. Each had been given ample warning, each had been given many opportunities to repent and return to God. Each eventually faced God's just punishment for their sin. Even though it hadn't yet happened in Isaiah's time of writing, he prophesied with certainty that it would. His own children's names were a sign pointing to God's judgment (8:1-4). In the Bible sin is described as darkness, and gloom is oppressive and restricting. Those who love their sin are always walking darkness, they are always deceived by their evil works (Jn.3:19). The era has changed, but people have not. The empires have changed, but God's purposes do not.

"The end of those who live in the dark is to be driven into darkness. Sinners think that they are in the light and that they possess freedom, independence, truth, an unprejudiced mind; actually they walk in darkness and are the slaves of gloom, subject to falsehood and prejudiced in favor

*of evil."*¹

¹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* [1965], p.322

JUDAH'S CONSOLATION

Darkness always gives way to light! The Assyrians would eventually defeat Israel and lay waste to their territory. All attempts by northern kings would be thwarted by God's intention. This Assyrian threat would at some point turn its attention south toward Jerusalem. Such impending destruction for the whole people of Israel would be cause for fear and depression. But God would deliver! God would turn their gloom into a glorious way. God would reveal a light at the right time of deep darkness. God would multiply joy out of a season of anguish. There was temporary relief for Judah when the Assyrian commander, Sennacherib, tried to attack Jerusalem but met God's angel of death. However, this small victory didn't restore the nation as a whole, or produce lasting peace, or stop the Babylonian deportation. Isaiah's hope wasn't on a temporary reprieve of his circumstances, his hope was on the "great light" that could restore and bring abundant joy to all people.

"And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - 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.' From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matt.4:13-17)

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (Jn.1:4-5)

Isaiah exactly predicted where the Messiah would begin His glorious ministry. He rightly described the nature of His ministry as light and life giving. For those who see it and believe it, Jesus is the true light who shines in your darkness and brings increasing and abundant joy!

II. FROM BONDAGE TO DELIVERANCE

ISAIAH 9:4-5 "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. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire."

DELIVERANCE FROM OPPRESSOR AND FOE

Exceeding joy is a rare commodity and is experienced by those who have known great loss or deep sadness. Those on whom God's light shines will experience the joy He brings in fulfilling His promises. Their rejoicing will be because of His deliverance from their daunting oppressors.

Judah was facing an improbable foe in the Assyrians which they seemed destined to suffer under. But they had faced another improbable foe before in Gideon's day against the Midianites (Judges 6-7). Just as Israel and Gideon were delivered by God alone from Midian, so would God's people be delivered from their present oppressor by God alone. Not only would they be delivered, but the very tools that were against them would become useful resources for them.

Isaiah doesn't use terms lightly and his language is meant to refer to things both physical and spiritual. Terms such as "darkness", "gloom", "anguish", "yoke", "burden", "rod", "oppressor" also speak to a spiritual condition. Isaiah knew his own sinfulness and the sinfulness of his fellow people (6:5), he knew their present circumstances were a result of their spiritual condition,

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and he knew they were in need of rescue both nationally and spiritually. He knew this deliverance was impossible on their own effort and needed to be accomplished by God Himself.

DELIVERANCE BY GOD HIMSELF

ISAIAH 9:6-7 "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. 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."

The greatest reason for rejoicing would seem to come in the unlikeliest of forms – *a child*. Isaiah had already referred to this child as a sign to King Ahaz that the northern kingdom and alliances would be defeated by the Assyrians (7:10-17). Now Isaiah expands on the nature of this child who will be the promised deliverer.

HIS COMING

The hope of God's deliverance is to be found in a real person. In this brief description Isaiah depicts both the Messiah's humanity and deity. He would be a baby born to grow up like the rest of humanity (Gen. 3:15). He would be born a baby boy, a Son to inherit His Father's possessions. He wouldn't be just any Son; He would be God's Son to inherit the earth and take possession as rightful ruler (Psa. 2). His coming is for the purpose of taking on all responsibility of ruling and caring for His kingdom and people.

HIS CHARACTER

The Messiah's ability to rule is governed by His character. He is worthy to possess such lofty titles because they are accurate descriptions of His character. These qualities qualify Him to be the one true ruler of for this world.

"WONDERFUL COUNSELOR" - this title conveys His divine wisdom; the Hebrew term for "wonder" is used to describe God when appearing to Samson's parents (Judg. 13:18). The Messiah is unique, a wonder, incomprehensible, surpassing all others. Combined with His role as counselor, He is the storehouse of all knowledge and wisdom. His decision making is trustworthy and His guidance leads to the path of life.

“MIGHTY GOD” - this title conveys His divine power; the Hebrew term for “mighty” can also be translated as “hero”. The Messiah is better than a mere superhero, He is a hero whose chief characteristic is being God. His power is unmatched and His works are unparalleled. Only as God can He accomplish our deliverance.

“EVERLASTING FATHER” - not to confuse His personhood with God the Father, but simply He is the “Father of Eternity.” The emphasis is on His fatherly care for His people. He fulfills the role of being an eternal father to His people by protecting, providing and caring for them – similar to a Good Shepherd.

“PRINCE OF PEACE” - the true measure of any ruler is their ability to bring peace to their people. The Messiah is the only one able and worthy to be crowned the Prince of Peace because of His power to overthrow sin and sinful rulers, and establish genuine *shalom* to all the earth. His kingdom will be marked by such everlasting peace and prosperity.

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HIS CONQUEST

The final fulfillment of Messiah’s deliverance will come in the establishment of His righteous rule. His reign will be perpetual and progressive founded upon true justice and righteousness. He will rightfully take His place as David’s heir to the throne and fulfill God’s promise in 2 Samuel 7:12-17. No more unfair democracies, wicked dictators or tyrannical rulers. There will be one good, fair and true king to govern all and rule graciously, which can only be accomplished by God Himself.

JESUS CHRIST YOUR TRUE DELIVERER

Standing on this side of the historical cross we can confidently place our faith that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all these prophecies. From the angelic announcements to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds (Luke 1-2), the testimony of faithful witnesses such as Simeon and Anna (Luk.2), John the Baptist (Jn.1), Jesus Himself (Luk.24:25-27), to the Holy Spirit’s work in hearts of believers and authors of Scripture (Heb.1-2), only One fits the description of Isaiah’s child born to deliver us from the bondage of sin and rule the nations. Jesus Christ stands alone as the wonderful promised Messiah whom you can place your future hope in this life and the next.

