

# The True Light in Deep Darkness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So last Sunday night, Derek showed us the meaning of a great passage in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah is in this wonderful vision in the throne room of God.

And where he beholds God on the throne, or rather he beholds the wings of the seraphim, that angelic being covering the face and the feet of the Lord.

And Isaiah was here commissioned to go preach, to go and prophesy to a people who would largely reject him, to refuse to hear the message that God had given to him.

Cities will be laid waste, people will be exiled, and it will seem as if all is lost. When the mighty oak is cut down and all that is left is this tiny stump.

But this stump is the holy seed. It is the small remnant of those who believe in the Lord, who fear and who trust Him. And if you've read through Isaiah recently, or if you're kind of reading it along with the series, you will have seen the sheer amounts of passages and verses of judgment and of destruction, judgment that follows the sinful acts of Judah, of Israel, and of the rest of the nations.

[ 1 : 3 0 ]     But surrounding these verses of judgment, we also find the mercy of God shining through. There's hope, or there's light and darkness, there is hope amid distress.

Now what is the situation facing God's people here in Isaiah 8 to 9? It's a prophecy of an Assyrian invasion. And I want you to put yourself in the situation of the people of God in this time.

Because the kingdom of God, or the kingdom has since the time of Solomon, the son of David, been divided into two. Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

And the great nations of this time are also Assyria and Assyria. You've got to really pronounce your A's there to make sure which one you're talking about.

Now Assyria is the greatest of these. It has already conquered large swaths of Israel in the north, conquering Galilee, the very place where Naphthali and Zebulun are located.

[ 2 : 3 9 ]     And Israel and Syria have come together to fight against Assyria. And they say, Judah, come along, join us in this, join the alliance.

But Judah says no. So now Israel and Syria go ahead and attack Judah. And amid this fear of suddenly being attacked by these two nations, the king of Judah, Ahas, takes gold.

He takes silver from the temple of God and sends it to the Assyrians and says, help us, be our deliverer.

So God here in Isaiah is saying that the king of Syria, the king of Israel, they will be defeated. They will be done away with. God is actually going to use the Assyrians to accomplish that.

But not only will those two nations be overcome, but Assyria is going to come for Judah as well. So the kingdom that Judah had made into their deliverer is going to turn and become their enemy, their oppressor.

[ 3 : 51 ] And you see the people of Judah are in terrible shape spiritually speaking. They're unbelieving, they're rebellious. And the king here, king Ahas, he even sacrificed his own son, an act that only the Canaanites would have done.

So we have a people here living in great darkness, spiritual darkness. They don't know God, the Lord, the one who made them and who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt and brought them into the promised land.

And judgment is coming. Now what can we in Edinburgh in 2023 glean from this passage? Well this passage centers on two themes that strike at the very heart of who we are, how we see the world and how we live, which is fear and hope.

Now what do you fear this evening and what do you hope in? Because I want to see, want for you to see this evening from this passage the hope of God.

And we will consider this hope threefold as we see the hope of the light of God, the light of God, the hope of the promise of God, the promise of God and thirdly the hope of the gospel of God.

[ 5 : 22 ] So first the hope of the light of God. And here we see the great contrast between darkness and light. So look with me at 822.

And what we see here is a description of the state of those in Judah who have rejected God, who rebel against him.

They don't acknowledge God as the one who made them. God of His great mercy and goodness delivered them. They instead exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped the creature rather than the Creator.

Their greatest desires are the very things they have made for themselves. And as they look around, what is it that they behold, what is it that they see?

They see distress, darkness, gloom of anguish, of terrible affliction, terrible circumstances. And all that they can do is curse the King and curse God himself.

[ 6 : 26 ] They're totally set in their ways and they're unable to see the work of God that is at hand here. So the darkness that surrounds them is indicative of the darkness of their own hearts.

They're spiritually blind, though hearing, they do not understand, though seeing, they do not perceive. Their fear is the fear of man, the fear of the Assyrians and their hope.

Well they have none. There had been their hope, material prosperity, social status, reputation. They're all empty and void at this time.

And because they're continuing down in their disobedience, what awaits them is thick darkness. Now what is this word, thick darkness?

It's the very same word that we find in Exodus 10, speaking of the ninth plague, the darkness that covered the land of Egypt for three days, which was a darkness to be felt.

[ 7 : 36 ] It's a word of judgment that we see youth again in Deuteronomy 28, the great chapter that lists all the many great blessings and benefits that people of God would enjoy if they followed God, if they trusted Him, if they believed in Him.

But that chapter also has a list of what would happen if they were disobedient, of the curses that would follow. And it's said that if they turned from the Lord, they'll be defeated by their enemies.

And like the blind, they'll be walking, groping in darkness. And this is what you may call the bad news, the judgment that is reserved for the vast majority of Israelites who have rejected the Lord their God.

And you may be here this evening, wondering thus far what this has to do with you. For you are not these Israelites.

But the bad news is that even though we are fearfully and wonderfully made as men and women, boys and girls in the image of God Himself, we have chosen to love that which is not God.

[ 8 : 53 ] We have chosen to worship the creature rather than the Creator. We have taken good things, gifts of God, and made them the ultimate thing, the ultimate good in our lives.

The place which really only belongs to God Himself. See, in our action, in our words, in our thoughts, we have rejected Him.

We have like Adam and Eve put ourselves above God's commands of wanting to be not just like God, but to be God ourselves.

And thus Paul and Roman says that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We are all sinners and not only sinners, but indeed the enemies of God.

And what we deserve is judgment and judgment alone. See, the story could have ended in Genesis 3. It could have ended in the garden with the fall.

[ 9 : 56 ] And the book of Isaiah could have been full of nothing but judgment, and God would be right, and God would be good.

But this takes us to the second part of the hope of the light of God, which is the light of God Himself. Look at verse 1 here with me of chapter 9.

Now when you read this, just a quick note, and you see this past tense being used, even though it's speaking of a future event, this is just a common prophetic way of speaking.

See, Isaiah is so confident in this prophecy that he writes in the past, even though it's a future event. Now when in the darkness a great light is seen, when in deep darkness we see a light has shown, see God does not leave His people to wander around groping in darkness.

As he in Genesis 1.1 said, let there be light. He equally, miraculously and powerfully brings a great light to shine on His people.

[ 11 : 10 ] But what is this light? What is this light that can penetrate thick and deep darkness? What is what John attests to in his prologue?

This light is the Word Himself in whom was life and who is the light of all humanity. It is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the light who shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. There's no darkness so deep or thick that the light of His nature cannot penetrate it.

And even though they walk in this deep darkness, which is actually the same Word used in Psalm 23, when it speaks of being in the valley of the shadow of death.

And that Psalm, it's the presence of God or shepherd that sustains us. And here in Isaiah 9, it is the presence of Jesus that will bring us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

[ 12 : 16 ] Now do you see who is the one acting here? Who is the one who brings about a change? It is not Israel. It is not you.

It is God Himself who brings the light, who enlightens us. But what does this mean? This means that once you are dead and your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us has shown His light on you.

And we are able to see this light. We are able to behold this beautiful ray of the Son Himself.

And this reality is what distinguishes walking by faith with walking by sight. For most of the Israelites are walking here by sight. They saw the Assyrians and they feared them.

They saw the misery and they cursed God. They looked to the earth and they beheld only darkness.

- [ 13 : 31 ] But what did the remnant do? The true people of God. They saw the Assyrians, but instead they feared the Lord.

They saw the misery and they prayed to God. They looked to the Word of God and they beheld the promises of God.

Now what are the promises of God? And that leads us to the second point, the hope of the promise of God. So look with me at verse three.

The great fear that we see throughout the Old Testament is that the people of God will be destroyed, in particular the end of the line of David, the kingly line, which is why in the very end of 2 Kings.

We read about the final king of Judah being released from prison and every day of his life he was dining regularly at the king's table.

- [ 14 : 32 ] Why put that there? But to show the line continues. Now with the Assyrians coming, the end of God's people is one of the great fears here.

What will happen to the people of God? Will they be slaughtered, taken into captivity, slowly wiped off the earth? But here we see the great promise that God will multiply the nation.

Even though the Assyrians are coming with terrible strength and cruelty, God will multiply his people. You see, God is faithful to his promises.

He promised Abraham that he will make him into a great nation, that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars and God is true to his promises.

God never changes. His promises are sure. The nation will persevere through the assault of Assyria, through the exile under the Babylonians, the role under the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, and the great nation of God, or rather the great people of God, will multiply far beyond the borders of Israel.

- [ 15 : 50 ] Not only to be confined to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, but indeed to the ends of the earth. A people that is not even confined by the Old Testament chosen people, the Jews, but expanded to all.

So on that final day, people for every tribe, tongue, and nation will be gathered together, singing praises to our God. This is how John accounts the great and awesome day as he says, the voice of a great multitude was heard crying out, Hallelujah.

Through the Lord our God, the almighty reigns, let us rejoice and exalt and give him glory. You see on that day, at the fulfillment of all God's promises, there will be a great rejoicing.

And that rejoicing is really the culmination of what we call the goodness, the gospel, which takes us to the third point, the hope of the gospel of God.

And this gospel is really threefold here in Isaiah 9, because first of all, in verse 4, we see the end of oppression.

- [ 17 : 11 ] Because here, the suffering of God's people is described. The yoke is heavy, the weight brings them down, the oppressor has his rod and his staff, the instruments to beat them down and keep them low.

Now where is his imagery taken from, but from Exodus as an account of the time when the people were enslaved in Egypt, where they were worked to death, literally, and beaten harshly.

Isaiah here brings to mind the very state and the condition from which they had been saved, from which they had been delivered. You'll remember that not soon after the Exodus, during the people's wanderings in the wilderness, the people longed to return to Egypt.

They were so miserable, wandering in the wilderness, which, as you remember, was due to their own sin, that they had this false sense of nostalgia.

The people said, would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full?

[ 18 : 25 ] And we remember the fish that we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.

And of course, they had none of these. See, we quickly forget the state from which God delivered us. We forget the bondage that we used to live under, the bondage of sin and of the devil, when we lived by the lust of the flesh by the heavy yoke and the oppressive rod.

So God, he recounts this state, and he promises that these all shall be shattered, as on the day of Midian. The day of Midian from the book of Judges is when God called Gideon, and with only 300 men defeated an entire Midianite army who had oppressed the people of God for seven years.

A wonderful work, impossible for men, impossible only with God. And next we see this end of war.

So look with me at verse five. Now here, in the midst of this prophecy that this terrible war is coming, God gives the good news here of peace.

[ 19 : 45 ] Now how will this peace come about? It will not be a peace that comes from being the greatest nation on the earth, so no one dares attack it.

It will not be a peace that comes from excellent diplomatic skills. It will not be a peace like the Roman peace, like the Pax Romana, which was mostly peaceful, but which still included the oppression of people in the nation.

Rather, it will be a peace that comes about by the Lord Himself. He is the one who will accomplish this peace. And it's what we read of in Psalm 46, when it says, common, behold the works of God, how He has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow, He shatters the spear, He burns the chariots with fire, be still, and know that I am God.

We see here that the good news shows the end of oppression, it shows the end of war, and finally it shows the beginning of a new age.

[ 20 : 54 ] So look at verses six and seven with me. Now when I read this to my wife last week, we began singing the tune of Handel's Messiah, which to spare you, I will not do so, because I mean, these verses are familiar, especially come Christmas time.

And what we see here is the promise of a child, one who will be a leader, who will be a king, who will rule with justice and righteousness for all eternity.

And this here is at the heart of the gospel that we see here in Isaiah 9. It is indeed a new age as a son to be given is not just a son of David, but the son of God Himself.

So the people already had a son of David. They'd had Solomon, who had brought great prosperity to the people of God, but also because of David's and his own sins, set the nation for a trajectory of division, of oppression, and war.

But the son prophesied here is different. There will be no end to his government. The kingdom will be established and upheld forever.

[ 22 : 10 ] And what are the things that will characterize this kingdom? It is justice and it is righteousness. It's the very opposite of the injustice and unrighteousness that led to the downfall of Israel and Judah.

See injustice and unrighteousness were all over the place. That's why the prophet Micah says, what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

See, these are the marks of the kingdom that God has brought, that he is bringing, one in which righteousness and justice like Amos says will roll down like an ever-flowing stream, one in which peace, true peace reigns forever.

And that is the hope of the gospel here in Isaiah 9, that by the son of God, the king of kings and the Lord of lords, righteousness, justice and peace will reign forever.

And as we conclude, we may ask, what do we take away from this? We must acknowledge the state that we are in apart from the light of Christ.

[ 23 : 28 ] We must also see the goodness and the mercy of God because there's no amount of thick or deep darkness into which his light cannot shine.

His light can shine into the heart of a prostitute like Rahab, a thief like Zakeyus, a murderer like Paul. But my main caution is this, when you see the light, do not ignore it because this text speaks of the light going out to Galilee of the nations.

And we see this passage cited by Jesus when he begins his ministry in Matthew 4. He begins his ministry in Galilee as a demonstration, the light itself first shining in Galilee.

There in Capernaum, they were their very first ones to see the light shine, to hear the gospel from Jesus himself.

Like that, Jesus in Matthew 11 says, and you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

[ 24 : 49 ] But I tell you, it will be more tolerable on a day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. See, even though they were the first ones to see this great light, they ignored it.

They rejected Jesus. They refused to repent and instead cling to their own loves and their own desires. So may we not ignore the light.

May we not say, maybe tomorrow I will confess my sins and come to Jesus. Because in Hebrews, we get the warning, you know, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

So come to Christ because there's no one like him who pardons iniquity, who passes over transgression, who delights in steadfast love, who is full of compassion, who has cast indeed all of your sins into the depths of the sea.

So why would you endure the yoke of your oppressor when Christ says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?

[ 26 : 11 ] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. And you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Now, why would you fear the rod and the staff of the oppressor when God is our shepherd? And even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil.

For his rod and his staff are with us and they comfort us. Now why would you continue as an enemy of God when you can be a child of God?

For to us a child is given so that through him many more may become children of God. Or even though the light came and was rejected by many to all who did receive Christ, for all who will receive Christ, who believe in his name, he will give the right to become children of God.

And how is it that God does this? Why is it that he shines the light into the darkness to keep his promise, to break the oppressors, to stop the war and give us his Son?

[ 27 : 34 ] Well, the very last line, verse 7, gives us the answer. It is by his zeal. It is by his great desire.

It is by the love for his people that he will accomplish this. He is the Lord of hosts, the Lord of armies, the one who has all the might, has all the power who can accomplish all things.

There's nothing that can stop him from making these things come true. It will surely happen. See, we don't put our hope in the greatest earthly hope that there is.

Like Judah putting their trust in the Assurians, the greatest military power at the time. We don't put our hope in the greatest whatever of our time, the greatest politician, nation.

We don't put it in our abilities, in our career, in our wealth, but we put it only in the Lord. So we are then able to hold on to this hope in God because as written in the Scriptures, let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering because he who promised is faithful.

[ 28 : 52 ] Amen and amen. Let us pray. Father God, we come humbly.

We come as ones who are awestruck at the message, at the truth, that you love people like us, that you want and that you seek after people like us.

We thank you that you've given us your Scriptures so that we can read through the Old Testament and see you dealing with people who constantly turn away from you and yet you continue to pursue them.

Father may we be comforted by these things. May we be comforted as we know that if one of your sheep wanders off and yet you have the 99 that you will go and you will find that one who has wandered off.

Oh Father, may we see your lights, may it shine brightly into the darkness. And Lord, even in the dark times, Lord, give us hope.

[ 30 : 24 ] Give us joy. Give us a vision of the day that is to come, the day in which we get to see the Lord Jesus face to face.

And we pray this in His name. Amen.