

Christmas Through the Eyes of Isaiah

Christmas Begins in the Dark

Isaiah 9:1-7

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Christmas Through the Eyes of Isaiah. Today we see that Christmas Begins in the Dark, looking at Isaiah 9:1-7. The Christmas season is filled with lights. We have Christmas lights that light up houses and yards at night. In Alaska, we have winter lights that light up the darkness. But lights are more than decorative or functional, they are symbolic. We need to appreciate the symbolic nature of light to understand the message of Christmas. Turn with me to Isaiah 9:1-7 and listen as we read God's word together.

The Messiah Promised (1-3)

It is a very dark time in the life of Israel. Led by King Ahaz, who was a horrible 20-something year old king of Judah facing a national crisis. Judah was threatened in two ways: internally, moral and spiritual rot was corrupting God's people; externally, the threat of enemy armies was creating widespread panic. In the midst of this darkness God sent Isaiah to give Ahaz unshakable promises from God. In Isaiah 7, God offers Ahaz's bold assurances and an amazing sign, the virgin will give birth to a son (7:14). But there was also warning: If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all (Isa. 7:9). If Ahaz will not trust God, then everything he is trying will unravel. Foolishly, Ahaz turned from God and turned to an alliance with Assyria for help. As king Ahaz's plans were failing the people are looking for answers but instead of turning to God they too look to earthly wisdom and counsel (8:22) and the occult (8:19). It was a dark and hopeless time in Judah. Then something happens to Isaiah between Chapter 8 and Chapter 9. Right in the middle of describing what Judah can expect because of their rebellion against God, the Holy Spirit points Isaiah to a hopeful future. Suddenly, the prophet paints a hopeful and glorious future God will bring in stark contrast to the present darkness.

The hope comes in the promise to remove the darkness, there will be no gloom for the one who is in anguish (1). That is, in the former time he humbled Zebulun and Naphtali but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations (1). They walked in darkness but have seen a great light; they dwelt in darkness in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone (2). When foreign armies attacked and invaded Israel they came from the north, so the area of Galilee was hit first. Isaiah says he will make Galilee glorious by replacing their darkness with a light. The darkness points to Judah's sin and suffering. Israel could not escape or overcome their own darkness. None of us can fix or overcome our own spiritual darkness. We do not have the resources within us to do so. Israel tried to fix their darkness by turning to another form of darkness! Isn't that like our world today. Most recognize that things are dark, that we have problems, but we think we have it within us to solve those problems but every generation proves that wrong. The hope comes as the image of the sun coming up and dispelling the darkness. The message of Christmas is that while things are so bad that we cannot fix them there is hope because the light has come who can. The sun coming up shows us three things. First the sun shows us the truth. The sun coming up reveals the truth of things, the way they truly are so we see the world as it truly is. Without sunlight we cannot see our world clearly. Spiritual truth gives us a clear picture of reality. Secondly, the sun coming up tells us that God gives us life. We need the sun for life to exist in our world; without sunlight there would be no life. The message of Christmas offers the hope seeing reality and it really is and the offer of life. The result of this light is that instead of fears and tears God will multiply the remnant of believing Jews and their joy will abound like it does in a great harvest or a great victory in war (3). They rejoice in God because he has brought this about.

The Messiah Described

All of this happens because God has decisively broken the oppression of the enemy as he did on the day of Midian (4) so that Isaiah sees the end of constant war so that there is no need for the instruments of war (5). Then we are told that this light is a person, a great and powerful Deliverer, who

does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Read Isaiah's description: 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 (6-7). God's plan is a person, a Messianic king unlike any other previous Jewish king or world leader for that matter. He is both human (a child will be born) and divine (a son will be given). The government will be upon his shoulders, means He rules as a King. Israel's history is filled with imperfect and corrupt kings but King Jesus is the better and trustworthy King. Four titles describe the character of this King.

First, He is Wonderful Counselor. Kings had wise men in their court who gave them advice. But this King does not need one as he is infinitely wise and freely gives wisdom to those who ask for it. Next, He is Mighty God. Mighty tells us that he is a Warrior who wages war on behalf of his people. God tells us that there is no one greater than he; there are no threats to his rule and his plans. As Mighty God he brings hope, promising to overcome human darkness. He is the only one who can overcome the darkness, the power of sin in your life. He is also Everlasting Father. Everlasting because his rule is eternal and Father because the King is the protector of his people. He protects his people as a Father protects his children, now and for all eternity. And lastly, he is Prince of Peace, who overcomes our darkness to bring peace with God as he reconciles us to God. And he will bring everlasting peace and joy in his eternal kingdom in the New Creation. Jesus is the final and greatest King to end all kings and rulers whose kingdom and peace will never stop expanding. He is the deliverer you need to overcome your darkness; he is the ruler you long for who looks out for your best interests; he is the light of the world!

Life Group Questions:

1. Why was Israel going through a dark time?
2. What does darkness and light symbolize in the Bible?
3. With such audacious promises given to King Ahaz, why did he not trust him?
4. Why do we not trust God's promises?
5. Think of a time recently when you did not trust a promise of God?
6. How is Jesus the light in our world?
7. How is Jesus the light in your world?
8. Of the four characteristics that describe King Jesus, which one (s) mean the most to you?
9. How is God speaking to you from this text, sermon, discussion?
10. How is God asking you to obey him?

