

Zealous for Our Salvation • Part One

Isaiah 8:11 – 9:7

Isaiah 8:11–22 — ¹¹ For the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: ¹² “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹³ But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. ¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

¹⁶ Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. ¹⁷ I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. ¹⁹ And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. 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.

Well, thanks for that, pastor. That was the right passage, right? Well, that was certainly encouraging and worth putting on a mask, and a dealing with a drafty room in the middle of a pandemic. My spirits are lifted already — I'm ready to joyfully head out. That last verse especially did it for me: And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. Ya, I'm good to go now. Praise the Lord!

The history of God's people is that they are a stiff-necked, rebellious lot who are always putting God to the test, always walking away, always producing more idols. And until we see and feel the darkness that comes from walking away from God in chapter 8, we'll never worship in the Light of salvation the covenant-keeping God brings as he zealously rescues us in chapter 9.

PRAY with me.

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The passage we just read is God's pronouncement of judgment against Israel, and ultimately Judah for their unrepentant departures from God and his word. The section actually begins in Chapter 7 with the promise to a wicked King Ahaz that Immanuel, God with us, would be born of a virgin. But before his birth God is going to judge his people for their recalcitrant disregard for his law, their ever-increasing contempt for God, himself, and their independent driven-ness to be like all the other nations rather than be God's people. Their centuries-long parade of dreadful human kings formed a rogue's gallery of Lead Idolaters who by and large did nothing to help God's people serve God. They just facilitate their departure from him. There were a few better than others, and we just looked at 3 of them. But even under the best of the kings in the best of times, God's people still sought to quench their soul-thirst from broken, filthy cisterns dug in idolatry instead of drinking deeply from the fountain of living water, as God describes himself in Jeremiah 2.

We don't have time to deal with all the background of chapter 8, but we don't have to know a lot to feel the darkness of what it is like to walk away from God, to refuse to come to God, and then have God impose a monstrous penalty by withholding the light of his word, his presence, his blessing.

In vs. 11–15 they are more confident of the King of Assyria's of strength than they are of God's. They have lost the fear of God, and he is going to prove that **he** is one to be feared. Their confidence in their own schemes is going to ultimately smash them against the Messiah, himself, when he comes and they stumble over him, still trying to work things out on their own.

In vs. 16–20 God is withholding his blessing from them — he hides his face — which means for this season he is giving them over to their own hardness of heart. He is gracious, and extends forgiveness and grace to those who will cry out and return to him, but they don't. They won't! Rather than pleading for God to return, they begin consulting lying mediums and necromancers. They are having seances in an effort to get wisdom from the dead about how to manage their living! God asks, "Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?" This is utter spiritual blindness. They are in spiritual darkness and they are looking to others in darkness to solve their darkness. And God is letting them languish in what they have chosen. They are mired in the misery of their own evil hearts.

In vs. 21–22, rather than crying out to God for mercy, they are enraged and invoke God's name in a curse. Rather than looking to God, who will turn the light of his countenance on those who will turn to him, they look to the earth. Talk about looking for answers in all the wrong places... They are

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hardened in their rebellion an unbelief and seek answers in created things rather than the Creator. They search, they look for answers there, but find distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.

Do you feel it? Do you feel what it's like to walk away from God?

- Can you sense the anguish of desperately trying to find wisdom and meaning in life but refusing to come to the source of wisdom and Author of Life, who created us with design and purpose?
- Do feel what it is like to refuse all knowledge of this God — reject every conscience-binding command and experience bondage rather than the freedom you sought?
- Can you feel the oppressive darkness and folly of rejecting holy God's authority and acting as though you are the only sovereign?
- Can you taste the bitterness that comes from consuming what you hoped would satisfy your soul, only to experience the rot of decay and death?
- Do you understand what it is like to be given over evil desires and thus thrust into thick darkness?

It is as though Isaiah is journaling not only the spiritual death of those who reject God in 700 B.C., but those who reject him in 2020.

But God is a covenant keeping God. God is a pursuing God. He loves the unlovely. He seeks the running rebel. He knows the utter incapacity of the human heart ever love and seek God as God commands and is worthy of. And God has a plan of redemption that he is birthing and executing with life-giving power, because even though God's people break faith with him, he gives faith that they may return to him and live.

Isaiah 9:1–7 — 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.

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⁶For 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.

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.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts... Doesn't that have a nice ring to it? After the silence and even the fearful withdrawal of God in chapter 8, **now the zeal of God** is going to be expressed toward his people. The zeal of God himself is going to accomplish the salvation of Adam's race.

Second Adam from above, reinstate us in Thy love.

When we read prophetic literature, we need to ask questions about the types of fulfillment the prophecy will have. For reasons that we will just barely have time to scratch, we know that Isaiah's prophecy is as massive as any prophecy in the Scripture. It foretells not just the salvation of the Jews, but the salvation of every tribe, language, people, and nation. That's us! We are in! There is a nothing of a greater magnitude. The redemptive plan of God unfolds in these verses!

In other places in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, in 2 Chronicles and Kings, we know that God set a limit on the sin that he allowed them to engage in, and decreed that they be hauled off into captivity for 70 years as punishment for their sin. The darkness described in chapter 8 will continue until they are sick of their sin and repent of their love affair with the rulers of the other nations they thought were so cool. At the end of that 70 years, they will return to Jerusalem. Chapter 9, however, speaks in a present tense of God's light that seems disconnected from the dark reality of God's imminent judgment. How can this be? Is the prophet confused?

I like Alistair Begg's way of outlining verses 1–5, so I'm using them as we unfold this great salvation.

Illumination • Liberation • Reconciliation

Illumination — Isaiah 9:1–2

The last 2 words of chapter 8 are "thick darkness." The darkness of spiritual blindness, and the withholding of God's illuminating blessing and wisdom. That is judgment, and that is what we deserve. God has written his truth in the creation itself. The skies, the trees were preaching as you came to church, way before I ever stood up. And God's word itself explains who God is and what his

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righteous requirements are in ways the creation cannot do on its own. When we suppress his truth, which is plain, God does not owe us another chance. He has given everything we need. But in mercy, and grace he does not treat us as our sins deserve. He seeks, he draws, he woos us to come behold his glory and grace and bow before him. **Chapter 9** opens with a description of this grace.

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. ...

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.

What did those who rejected God and his word, and cursed God in chapter 8 deserve? They deserved darkness. They rejected the light of God. But what did God give them? A great light! Those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone! Note that God did not come based on their merit, but on their misery. They had no merit. I suppose you could say they merited death, Hell, and the grave. All they had was misery. And God came into their misery. He comes into ours. We have no merit. We are not better than they. We are the same as they.

Their darkness is illuminated... by whom?

God undertakes to shine light on wicked, sinful people that they may see and know him and glorify him as he purposed for them. Light is a metaphor for God, his blessing, the beauty of his character, and his moral purity. Those in walking and living in darkness bankrupt of these very qualities, but in need of them: blessing and moral purity. The imagery of light conveys those qualities onto those in need. But the bible helps us zero in and define what this light is — or more accurately, **who** this light is. In the Old Testament light symbolized the blessing and nearness of God. In the New Testament, light is not a symbol, but a person. We read already in the Call to Worship who this light is. In Jesus, the Word of God, is life, and that life is the light of men. Jesus is the one through whom the beauty of God's character, his moral purity, his holiness comes to man. And we must have this moral purity and holiness. Without holiness no one will see God. Let's look at one other passage have our hearts stirred to worship the Light of Life.

2 Corinthians 4:6 — For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The light of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. When Isaiah says light has shone on them, he is talking about God the Son, Jesus Christ, shining his light on human hearts to dispel the thick darkness of sin and unbelief. Do you see the zeal of the Lord for his people unfolding. These

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blasphemers — we are just like them — these independent sinners who will not fear God — we are just like them... these idolaters who demand their own way and forsake God's laws — we are just like them... God is coming to intervene and interrupt their darkness and deliver them from death through the Light of men, Jesus Christ.

Hail the heav'n-born prince of Peace, Hail the Son of righteousness

Light and life to all he brings...

And I mentioned what appears to be this disconnected from the fact that they were going into judgment, but Isaiah speaks in the present tense. v. 2 — **the people who walked in darkness have seen**... They **have** seen. **On them has light shone**. That's not where we were in chapter 8. We were in thick darkness. We call that the *Prophetic Perfect Tense*. Christ will not come for 700 years after this is written, but because God has said it will happen, because God is zealous in his plan of redemption, because he alone is able to say, "I will it, I bring it to pass," Isaiah writes of the certainty of Christ's coming as though it is already a done deal, a *fait accompli*. The eye of faith to God and sees that it is complete from God's perspective. Jesus opens our blind eyes to see the truth, beauty, and the goodness of God. No one else does that. No one else can do that. Look to Christ! He is the Light of men! Looking to earth, as in Ch. 8, leaves you hopelessly in darkness.

Whom do you need to point to the light of Christ during these days of darkness? He is the only source of light. Who is languishing in the anger and bitterness of rejecting God only to find he is inescapable? Whom do you see broken and in gloom, looking for hope to the earth, and finding none, because hope is from heaven, not from the benighted earth? Declare his glory! Declare his wonderful works among the people that blind eyes will be opened to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Illumination. Now, Liberation.

Liberation — Isaiah 9:3–5

The language in these verses is language of slavery. **V. 4** — the yoke of his burden; the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor... these are terms of slavery and defeat harkening back to the Exodus out of Egypt. The Exodus looms large in Jewish history. Think, if you will, about the Old Testament as being a sort of kindergarten for learning about the fundamental, essential things of God in concrete ways and in object lessons. In the Exodus we learn that God loves and cares for his people and intervenes to bring them to himself. Egypt is the most powerful nation on the earth at that

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time, and the Hebrews are slaves whipped by task masters. They are no match for the Egyptians on any level. But God undertakes, against all human odds, to deliver his people from their powerful slave masters against whom they had no capacity to mount any resistance. So God sets them free against all odds and plunders the Egyptians, sending the Hebrews out with the gold and wealth. The power of Egypt is the Pharaoh's army. Where are they? Where is their technology, their chariots? God drowned them — utterly smashed the power of the enemy. So we have this elementary Old Testament object lesson of slavery a lesson about the coming salvation of God. He will, in a far more glorious way, smash the chains and destroy the power of slavery and oppression of spiritual darkness. Romans 5 talks about the tyranny of Death's reign through sin. Here Isaiah foretells God's salvation from the tyranny of death, and sin-chains, and from the oppression of Satan himself.

The end of v. 4 calls us to the deliverance God brought under Gideon in **Judges 7**. The Midianite army had been oppressing God's people for 7 years. God had orchestrated it. But now, God was undertaking to deliver his people, by himself, through his power, in a way that brought him all glory. At God's instruction, Gideon reduced the size of his army from over 30,000 to 300. 300 to face the entire army of Midianites who had successfully been oppressing them for years. When it was all said and done, the Midianites did not slaughter God's people, but turned and slaughtered themselves.

Through the Messiah, the rod of our oppressor is broken by God himself. He does not need our help. We cannot help ourselves. We do not have the capacity to break our own sin-chains. But as on the day of Midian, Jesus comes and breaks Satan's death-grip and frees from the oppression of sin.

Rise, the woman's conquering seed, Bruise in us the serpent's head;

Liberation. And finally, **Reconciliation**.

Reconciliation. v. 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.

The terrifying noise of war, the clothing of death-producing war, bloody battle clothing, the stuff of war... The Messiah will not only end war and make peace, his work will be so thorough, so complete that stuff of war will not ever be needed again.

There is a vertical and horizontal aspect of the peace and reconciliation Jesus brings.

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First, the vertical peace that Jesus makes is between us and God. To state it most precisely, it is not that ultimately destroys; it is God. Yes, sin produces death. But it is God who judges sin by his own holiness and righteousness. Death proceeds from sin by God's decree. He is the one who makes war on sin. From Genesis 3 we have been at war with God... and what hope do we have of winning? Apart from the peace-making work of the Messiah, we are children of wrath. But the Messiah ends the war vertically between us and God. The sin's price is paid, and the wrath of God is satisfied in his perfect atoning sacrifice. He ends the vertical war and makes peace by the blood of his cross.

Second, the coming Messiah makes horizontal peace. The world is constantly in conflict and war. Nation rises against nation endlessly. The first grave opened in the Scripture is because of jealous, angry hostility of a brother against his brother. That has expanded and translated to endless wars for all of time. But it will not always be so. The healing of the nations will. Here is a part of the prophecy we do not yet experience, but we will. The church will usher in this peace, and the Gospel is the instrument of peace to bring people from every tribe, language, people, and nation to worship at the foot of the Savior. The Messiah restores Edenic peace as all the nations come to worship, and we look forward to that in the New Creation, even as Isaiah looked forward to the peace of the cross that we now clearly see.

The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this.

Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.

Joyful, all you nations rise! Join the triumph of the skies.

PRAY

Gospel Thread