

This morning is the second week in the season of Advent, the four weeks before Christmas where we look back at the coming of Jesus and look ahead to His return. I've entitled my Advent sermon series "The Names of the Messiah," and over these four weeks, I will be looking at the various names given to Jesus, the Messiah – the anointed king from David's line who would restore Israel to glory - in the various prophecies about his coming, and what significance they have for our lives and our world. This morning we will be looking at Isaiah 9.

If you're unfamiliar with Isaiah, it is a collection of prophecies by the prophet Isaiah from the 8th-7th century BC. Remember that after God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they met with God at Mt. Sinai, where God made a covenant with them. And whenever Israel was violating the covenant and experiencing the consequences, God would raise up a prophet to call the people to repentance. Isaiah came along at a time when Israel was very much in danger for a number of reasons:

1) Moral decay

Israel was in moral decay – idolatry, empty worship, and social injustice. Listen to Isaiah 1:10-17:

***Isaiah 1:10-17** - Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot **bear your evil assemblies.** ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; ¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, ¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*

Their worship is empty because of the injustice in the land. At other points, Isaiah will call out their idolatry and other sins as well. The land is in moral decay, straying away from God.

2) Foreign threats

Judah was also in danger from foreign tribes and nations. To set the historical scene: in those days Israel was broken into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, was facing pressure from Aram & Ephraim, two tribes in the northern kingdom, who in turn were facing pressure from a foreign power named Assyria. Judah, especially King Ahaz, was left with a decision, whether to ally with Assyria or stand against Aram & Ephraim on their own. We read about this in Isaiah 7:

*Isaiah 7:1-3,5-6 - When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. ² Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken **by the wind**...⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it."*

3) Spiritual confusion

Given the foreign threats, the people are looking everywhere for wisdom and answers about what to do, including mediums and spiritists. See Isaiah 8:

Isaiah 8:19-22 - When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. ²¹ Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. ²² Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

In their panic, they have turned from God to anything that might give them wisdom and insight. As a result, they are in utter darkness. There is no presence of God, no light, no wisdom, no hope. And finally, they are in trouble because of:

4) Ungodly and unwise leadership

King Ahaz, instead of turning to God to help with the foreign threats and moral decay, turns to Assyria for help and security.

2 Kings 16:7-9 - Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." ⁸ And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. ⁹ The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.

Assyria will come to their defense. But ultimately, this decision will lead to the destruction of Judah, as they will be taken into captivity before long.

Again, this is the state of Judah at this time. Moral decay, including injustice, empty worship, and idolatry. The threat of foreign invasion that has led to a lack of peace and security. Spiritual confusion that has led to people seeking anywhere for wisdom. And ungodly and unwise leadership on the part of the King, who does not lead His people to God but instead puts his trust in a foreign nation and army.

Now, I know that this is hard to relate to. Thank God we live in a country where all of our leaders exercise wisdom, where they make godly decisions, where God's blessing rests on us and we always live in peace. But imagine, if you will, living in a country where there is moral decay, foreign threats, spiritual confusion, and ungodly and unwise leadership. Of course, this is our reality as well. 2024 is shaping up to be a really difficult year on the national and international scene. Where is the hope? What is the answer?

Into this predicament comes the prophecy of 9:1-7

*Isaiah 9:1-7 - Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-- ² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when **dividing the plunder**. ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.*

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Look at the promises to this nation in turmoil – there will be no more gloom. He will honor Galilee of the Gentiles – these promises will not just be for Israel but for the nations. There will be a great light in the darkness, even in death's shadow. They will experience numerical growth and increased joy. They will be delivered from their enemies. They will experience peace, the presence of God, and safety. How will this happen?

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Remember the context – a king, full of fear and following earthly wisdom, is making an alliance with Assyria in the hopes that they will not destroy Judah. Even though God has promised that if they trust in him, he will protect them, he has decided to trust in the wisdom of the world. So, in Isaiah 9:2-7, in place of the unfaithful monarch whose shortsighted defensive policies will plunge the nation into more desperate straits, **there is lifted up the ideal king who**, though a child, will bring an end to all wars and establish an eternal kingdom based upon justice and righteousness.

This King, this Messiah, is Jesus:

Matthew 4:12-16 - *When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali-- ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

What do we learn from the names of this child?

1) Jesus gives supernatural wisdom

Wonderful refers to out of the ordinary or supernatural. He is the one giving supernatural counsel. Where is wisdom to be found? In Jesus. Remember what He said:

***John 14:5-6** - Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Truth is not a path. Truth is a person. Supernatural wisdom is found in Him, and in His Word, and in the Spirit He sends.

***John 14:16-17,26-27** - I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Counselor** to be with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you... the **Counselor**, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Ask Him for wisdom today:

***James 1:5** - If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

2) He fights our battles for us

This child will be el gibbor, the Mighty warrior, liberator. The Lord will fight our battles as we will trust Him.

***Psalm 18:2-3** - The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³ I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.*

***Romans 8:37** - No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

Ahaz refused to believe that. Isaiah references God's defeat of Midian in the time of Gideon in Judges 6-8, where Gideon led a small army with trumpets, jars, and torches. What battle are you facing? **What would it look like to trust in God and pray for Him to fight the battle for you?**

3) He cares for the helpless

Everlasting Father refers to His concern for the helpless, His care for His people. He will protect and He will provide. And He is everlasting. He will not come and go, and there will be no up and down. He will exercise righteousness and justice and compassion.

***Psalm 55:22** - **Cast your cares** on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.*

***Matthew 11:28-30** - "**Come to me**, all you who are weary and **burdened**, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Look to Him as your Father.

4) He gives perfect peace

In the midst of their distress, there will be no more gloom. In the darkness, there will be a great light. In the shadow of death, a light has dawned. Even in the midst of oppression and exile and suffering, He will bring peace and joy, a peace and joy that does not depend upon circumstances but is firmly rooted in the character and promises of God.

***Isaiah 26:3** - You will keep in **perfect peace** him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.*

***Philippians 4:4-7** - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

This peace will come not only from His birth but from His death for us. Consider *Isaiah 53:5 - But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* Through his punishment, through being pierced and crushed, he will bring peace. He will not bring peace through war and destruction but through dying for His enemies.

In your anxiety, pray to the Lord and receive His perfect peace.

2024 is shaping up to be a tough year. Election, world war, ongoing divisions in our country. Put your hope in Jesus. Jesus is the child who was born, who is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He is the perfect King the world is looking for.