

Darkness to Joy to Rejoicing

Christmas 2023

Isaiah 9:1-7

Though Halloween has increased in popularity as the second most popular holiday pushing for first place.... Americans spent some 12.2 billion dollars on Halloween this last year... Christmas is still overwhelmingly the most popular... Americans spent over 950 billion dollars on Christmas last year.

Even with all the money spent on Christmas things ...add the elaborate pageantry of nativity scenes... Christmas concerts, media, Hallmark “mush”....sorry... the gifts... the food... fewer and fewer realize the true... the real... “reason for the season”...

I say this every year... the day after Thanksgiving, the boxed up Christmas of every year past comes out of the closets, unpacked and we do it all again... the tree...stockings the wreaths...the lights... the nativities scenes... candy canes...it all comes out! I’ve been through 68 of these!

When did all this start?... when did celebrating Christmas begin?... the year after Jesus was born?... no... five years after?...ten?...50?... 100?... no!... you may have never thought of this before... but there is not one Christmas celebration or a Christmas memorial of ...or Christmas activity found anywhere in the Bible after the magi left the baby Jesus.

I find that interesting... God throughout the Old Testament instructed Israel to remember certain important events.... Usually by establishing a physical memorial so as to remember the event...

Memorials were often stones put up as a marker, or piled together to stand out in a place. Stones were easy to come by in the Holy Land, milk and honey being a dream and a promise, but rocks were always right there....to remind the people of God what He has done for them.

On the journey from Egypt to the Land of Promise, in the wilderness, there were memorials placed by Moses and the people Israel to honor manna’s appearance to feed the people, or to mark a revelation of God’s word to the people.

Joshua had the 12 tribes mound stones from the streambed of the Jordan River to mark where they crossed, dry shod, into the new countryside. Altars, places of worship or assembly, all had their memorial observances.

Passover, itself, grew in the life of the people as a memorial in time, the date and circumstances of the event God did not want to forget, when the Angel of Death struck Egypt but spared the Hebrews....with blood on the doorposts....

The Jerusalem Temple in a real sense a memorial...it was meant to mark the very spot where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice Isaac... an association Muslims still connect with the Dome of the Rock on the same spot.

For the disciples, they came to the Mount of Transfiguration (some say it was Mt. Tabor, others Mt. Hermon) and the appearance of Moses and Elijah was so striking to them flanking Jesus that they said to him “*we should build something*” to mark this event, a suggestion Jesus mercifully ignored....memorials... annual celebrations of remembrance... everywhere in the Bible...

But nowhere in the Bible is there mentioned any memorial... any celebration of the Christ being born.... We recognize His death and resurrection through the memorial of Communion... but Christ’s birth? Nothing...

Nowhere do we see the disciples roasting chestnuts on an open fire or sipping on eggnog memorializing the birth of their Savior they had followed for three intense years...

[By the way...the first Christmas celebration was 336 years after His birth... The church in Rome began celebrating Christmas on December 25 in the 4th century during the reign of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, possibly to weaken pagan traditions.]

The birth is mentioned of course in the Bible...The four gospels... where we find the story of Jesus...

Matthew gives us seven verses regarding the birth of Jesus.... Mark doesn’t mention the birth of Jesus... he begins with Jesus as an adult... Luke is where we go to for the most detailed account of Christmas... two full chapters.

John... does not give us the Christmas story...no Joseph and Mary...no manger... no angels... no wisemen... rather the most profound words regarding the incarnation of Jesus... but no Christmas story.

But that is not to say that God’s word is almost silent regarding the birth of Jesus Christ... it is anything but silent...and it certainly is not to say that the incarnation... the birth of Jesus is not on the short list of the most important events in all of history.

Without the birth of Jesus there would never had been the crucifixion... without the birth of Jesus to a virgin there would have never been a perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of man.

Christmas was a defining event in all of history.... I could spend much time giving example after example of how Jesus Christ... His birth... has defined all of history.

One obvious example is the world’s dating system... All of history has been marked as being either BC... *Before Christ*... referring to all of history up to the birth of Christ... and AD... which stands for the Latin *anno domini* ... which refers to the “*Year of our Lord*”...Lord referring to Jesus Christ... which begins after the birth and final the completion of Jesus’s earthly life...all history after Jesus is AD.

Of course the secular world has not been crazy about that... so a few hundred years ago introduced BCE... *Before the Common Era*... and CE referring to *the Common Era*... nice attempt... but that dating system still is marked by the birth and life of Jesus Christ!

Interesting that before BC and AD became the dating system... people marked the years by who was in power. Ancient Romans named their years based off of how long a consul or emperor had ruled, while Egyptians similarly counted their years based on the years a king ruled.

The King of Kings was born of a virgin in the year 1!... for the next two weeks I've selected the Scripture and it is Isaiah...mostly chapter 9:1-7...over the next three Sundays I hope to show us just how crucial the birth of our Lord and Savior is for all of us... so if you would like to turn there and read with me.

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

This is God's word!...I want us to bask in the meaning of those words... Isaiah is a profound...remarkable book... some call it the Gospel of the Old Testament... because it is full of Jesus Christ...the details of His birth... His life... His purpose... why He came to earth...who Jesus is.... How and why He died...and even how He will return...the passage we're looking at today has both advents mentioned in it..... specifics...all this is... now get this... 700 centuries before Jesus was born!..... 700 years!

700 years ago... Isaiah prophesied Jesus Christ... and most of it...HAS HAPPENED EXACTLY THE WAY HE SAID IT WOULD... that should be a faith builder for each and every one of us!...we can look back 2000 years ago and see the fulfillment of many of Isaiah's prophesies from 700 years before that!...

That should give us confidence that what hasn't yet happened will indeed happen..... when Jesus will return again... When He completes His permanent eternal kingdom.

This is about Jesus

Look at it as a "birth announcement"... there have been many babies born recently... notice that?... what else I've noticed is when someone has a baby... they don't say to us... "*well.. we had a baby... oh well*"... "*How was your weekend?*"... *oh not bad... didn't do much... oh...wait.... We had a baby*"...

Take a look around!.... this church has never seen a baby boom as the one we are experiencing right now!.... look at all the pregnant women!... we get so excited at the announcement of the pregnancy... we ask them over and over how they are doing?... are you ready to get this over with?...

you look so..... uncomfortable... we have baby showers... the birth of a baby is a big...huge... deal!

When we send out a birth announcement... everyone who gets one we know will rejoice with us!... Here... God sends out a birth announcement... some 700 years before the birth... and the

announcement is one of the most joyous announcements in all of history!... along with the birth of this baby is the cure for the entire world!...**the displacement of darkness with light.**

Let me give you the message... the theme... the crux of this message up front in case your mind drifts away... here is a sentence... Isaiah's day...*Even though the world is dark, a light is coming...the coming light is hope... and that hope is sure.*

You could look at this passage this way... you come home from work... you get the mail... you turn on the news... the news stinks!...always does!... that is...well... most of Isaiah... but especially chapter 8.... All is doom and gloom... all is dark... very dark... all is apparently hopeless...

The government is a mess... there's fighting and unrest all over the world... there are no good guys... there is no honest news... it's all dark...and you're blood pressure goes up... you start to get angry... you open a piece of the mail... a letter... it's a birth announcement... not just any birth announcement...

This is the announcement of a baby that will wipe away all that darkness... all the bad news... all the hopelessness...that's chapter 8....then chapter 9...these first 7 verses we see our great hope... that light comes into the darkness... the light of the world came into... a very dark world.

Here's my goal... it would be so easy to intellectualize this passage... get hung up in the "eschatology"... the minutia.... But I want us to receive the great news of the birth of Jesus Christ... I want us all to rejoice in Jesus Christ today and for the rest of this year... and beyond...this passage is pure 100% gospel... it is completely GOOD NEWS!... **this passage doesn't tell us to do ANYTHING!**

This passage is not ABOUT US... we are the benefactors of what this passage says... but it is not about us... **God is not calling out for our help**...though the world is totally messed up...God is not up there sweating it all out... *What am I going to do... the world has turned in such a mess... I need your help...Please help Me!*

What God reveals here is that He has it all covered... He is in complete control...He's always had a plan... He is sovereign... And even though mankind through the ages have totally messed up this world...and still are... and even though each one of us have failed in many ways in our own lives... God has a rescue plan available for all of us... and it will come to past... and not by the skin of His teeth....He's got it all.

We are presented here the one thing worth believing in... the One thing we can have confidence in...the One who IS Good News... this is Good news FOR US!...You and me!... notice it says (6) **For a child is born TO US.... a son is given TO US.**

That's you and me... this child... this son....this Jesus is given to US!

Much like what the angel said to the shepherds in Luke **For today in the city of David there has been born FOR YOU a Savior...** In Matthew **Behold the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel which means GOD WITH _____ US!**

For a child is born to us..... a Son given to US!...HE IS OURS.... I'm going to give you a challenge at the end of this... but start getting your minds wrapped around the idea of having the most amazing Christmas EVER...by wrapping your brains around and embracing the truth in this passage...that will give you the most outrageously great Christmas EVER!

These words here in Isaiah are a blood sealed covenant by God Himself... this is reality.... Our part here seems to be to simply fall into God's arms.... **Believe it and receive it... and rejoice in it...**

Now... this is not about the teachings of Jesus... the work of Jesus on the cross... this is all about the person of Jesus... WHO HE IS... and WHO HE IS FOR US... let's walk our way through this....

With the child comes a new kingdom

Kingdom here referred to as government... some think this is saying all governments in history rest on the shoulders of Jesus... that is true... but here we are introduced to a new government....a future kingdom.

First notice in verse 6 there are two semicolons... remember that a semicolon joins together two independent ideas THAT ARE RELATED TO EACH OTHER together... All that is to say... is that **For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;** is tightly related to **and the government will rest on His shoulders;**

The reason they are attached is that the two thoughts equal a much greater thought... it's like 2 plus 2 equals five... what's this mean?... when Jesus was born... we know he was born into basic poverty... in a manger... poor Mary and Joseph... born in weakness...

But even though that's the case... there's this baby in a manger... His Kingdom is already established... not physically... but it is an inevitability... IT'S GOING TO BE!...how do we know that?

Because God is outside of time and space... there is no yesterday or tomorrow with God... all this has already happened... we read this all as God's future promise to US... in reality... as far as God is concerned... it had already happened....that is why His promises are absolute!

To God they've already happened!

This passage actually is telling us about both advents of Jesus Christ... the first advent, which we are celebrating at Christmas... Jesus coming to earth as a baby... a human baby (fully God!)...

and the second coming of Jesus Christ.... The second advent which is yet in the future... this truly is an amazing passage...first advent told 700 years before the first advent.... Still counting for the next.

(verse 6)...The government....all government will **rest on His shoulder**...To rest on a shoulder means full responsibility... [To the father, “your family rest on your shoulders... it is your responsibility...you own a business...the business is on your shoulders.]

Notice “government” is in the singular... this is not saying that all the governments of the world will sit on His shoulders... the Chinese, Russian... US... Europe... no... IT IS ONE GOVERNEMENT... GOD’S GOVERNEMENT.... IT’S ALREADY INEVITABLE!...

Why and how?.... How can this be guaranteed?..... end of verse 7 **the zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.** [We’ll talk about zeal next time.]

He’s a baby.... But His kingdom is already guaranteed by Almighty God...**the zeal** of God WILL accomplish all this! [Not the Lord will accomplish this.... But His zeal!... wow!]

Read verse 7

You take all of human history... everything BC and everything AD... by the way... human history has **not** been ALL about political engagement.... It has not been ALL about strife between the “classes”... it’s not been ALL about racial and gender iniquities... or religion infighting... **all of human history has been all about GOOD VS EVIL... that’s why the world is dark!**

That’s what is playing out here.... And all of us... every single one of us was born on the evil side...we see all that here...

Isaiah reveals here the very dark world...a very specific time in Israel’s history... but it represents all of history... we think it's dark now... it's always been dark...I saw a meme this week that said “*Let’s all pray for the world to go back to normal*”...

Now I hear what is being said... the older you get the more you see how much the world is changing...and romanticize the past... and we long for “those days” when it was better... but the fact is ... THIS IS NORMAL FOLKS!

I have 21 years of Christmas messages in my files... about 58... I browsed through most of them this week... in every single one on said the world is a dark place... the world is messed up...get this:

The world was dark in Isaiah’s time... it was dark in Jesus’s time... it is dark in our time... it has always been dark!

Isaiah reveals a very dark world... in chapter eight.... Turn back to the beginning of chapter 8... Quickly... Israel is a divided kingdom... the Northern and Southern Kingdoms... Isaiah is prophesying to the Northern Kingdom.

In the beginning of chapter 8 Isaiah said that God told him to write down the events prophesied in the previous chapters about God's future judgement on His people Israel... write it all down on a large placard and put it on public display..... *I want my people to know what is going to happen to them!*

I love verse 6 of chapter 8.... It shows both the immense love of God.... and His terrible wrath... here's something to take away... **To ignore God's love and guidance results in sin and invites His wrath!**

(6) Inasmuch as these people rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloh... In Genesis 49:10, the word "Shiloh" is used as a name for the Messiah—a name that likely meant "tranquil" or "peaceful" in the original Hebrew.....

Here is represents God's gentle, sustaining care... His great love for His people.... the people rejected that!.... instead they... **rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah** [Rem-a-lie-a]... who was the king of their enemy Syria!

They chose to rely on... and call on their enemy rather than the one true God of the universe who was RIGHT THERE!

And because of that... ignoring God's love and guidance... their sin was inviting God's wrath... which happened... **Read 8:7-8**

I read two important quotes this week... the first one I can't remember who said it:

1. *"If one strives to find salvation in anything other than the one true God of the universe... he will find only chaos and eternal disaster."*

2. The second one from R.C. Sproul in his great book *The Holiness of God*... *"God's kingdom will never come where His name is not considered holy. In heaven the name of God is holy. It is breathed by angels in a sacred hush. Heaven is a place where reverence for God is total. **IT IS FOOLISH TO LOOK FOR THE KINGDOM ANYWHERE GOD IS NOT REVERED.**"*

You can attend church every Sunday for the entirety of your life... but if you do not revere God in your life... quit expecting to find His kingdom!

Israel exchanged the kingdom of God for God's wrath.

The Assyrians are ready to destroy the kingdom... God is going to judge Israel... eventually the Southern kingdom is taken into captivity... here Isaiah is describing this future invasion by Assyria... it will be a very, very dark time for Israel... the Assyrians were the most evil of Israel's enemies... ruthless.

I've shared this before in a different context... but it gives some insight into the Assyrian leadership of that day... the enemy of Israel.

Adad Nurrari II was one of the treacherous Assyrian emperors had these words etched into his palace wall... listen to these... *I am royal...I am lordly...I am mighty...I am honored...I am exalted... I am glorified.. I am powerful, I am **all** powerful...I am brilliant...I am lion brave... I am manly...I am supreme, I am noble... I'm humble...no,, not the last one.*

Let me add to that... If Adad could talk he would say I AM DEAD!...I'm gone.

The world thinks it's so powerful... so strong... so in control...it intimidates us... it zaps our faith... it seems so powerful to us.... God seems so distant...Israel looked at that power and embraced it over God's!!!! [and that continues on today!]

Here in 8:21 and 22 Isaiah describes Israel ...

Read 8:21-22

Dark, dark, world...But through the prophet Isaiah... God makes a proclamation... a promise...

Read 9:1

The one area of the Northern Kingdom that was attacked and tortured the most was the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali... God allowed the invaders to practically destroy these two lands... Zebulun and Naphtali are in Galilee...the sea of Galilee... Here it says that God promised Naphtali and Zebulun to make them "glorious"...

Those words when read by an Israelite in that day would have ticked them off!... Galilee was gentile world... Jews world have nothing to do with gentiles...lowest of life!... Do you remember in John 1...

When Nathanael (one of the 12 disciples) eventually is introduced to Jesus? They are trying to get him to meet Jesus, and they say, "*He is this rabbi. He is this great guy. He is from Nazareth in Galilee.*" Nathanael says, "Nazareth!" **can anything good come out of Nazareth?**

Well... it was Galilee that Jesus began His ministry... bringing LIGHT to the gentiles...the very promise God is making here in verse 1...the light will come into the world via Galillee..... the promise goes on:

Read 9:2

The light is shining throughout the world today... people can see it... they might and do ignore it... they turn their eyes from it... Romans 1 talks about this...

Read Romans 1:18-21

But there is a promise for everyone who embraces the light...

Read verse 3

By the way... everyone Isaiah is talking to here is never going to realize this promise of this amazing child... that happens 700 years later... they will go into captivity or be killed.

That bothers some... why did God wait so long?... we don't know really... but we are told later in Isaiah 49:8 that the coming of this child... the coming of light and salvation will be at **an acceptable time...** go to the New Testament... 2 Corinthians 6:2... Paul quotes Isaiah **At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you...** Right from Isaiah 49... then Paul says **Behold NOW is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation.**

Paul in Galatians says...

Galatians 4:4-7

(4) But when the fullness of time had come, the birth of Jesus was providential... it wasn't a fluke... an accident... it was planned and happened exactly how God planned it to... in the exact moment the exact second... just as God planned it...

God wasn't sitting up there all of a sudden worrying about how messed up things were and He had to do something... He was not sweating beads of sweat because the world was not turning out so good... God has it all in His plan...

(Gl.4:4-7) God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

The birth of Jesus was providential.... In other words... a part of a long established plan.

700 years after Isaiah's words we're looking at in chapter 9 became the acceptable time... and it has been the acceptable time ever since!... today is the day of our salvation!...the light has come!

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders...

Jesus brought the light... light has been coexisting with darkness ever since... the light has been victorious over darkness... **there is coming a time when the light will completely consume the darkness....**

Ray Ortlund... Painted a great picture of this..... This massive army, decked out to the hilt with weapons and armor... set for battle... this represents all of the history of man influenced by Satan... Satan and all his forces... man has always been in battle with God... this is a formidable army.... There is no way we could ever go up against this army.... On the other side...

God walks over the hill with his barely walking child... His Son... that is God's weapon to against this gigantic army... the army looks at the Father and Son... The Father and Son look at the army.... And God says to the army... *"That's all you got?"*

God's answer to the world's darkness... is a baby born of a virgin in Bethlehem... God knows what we are all up against and He is not afraid... Why should we be?...what He is presenting to us is a whole new world...the birth of Jesus launched a new world... and we all have an invitation to this new world...the Son is given to you! Will you take Him?

I love that the government rests on His shoulders... that says there will be a new politic... this is an entirely new political order... amen!... no more will Trump and Biden run again?...total integrity... no lies...no hidden secrets... total truth... no Fox News or CNN...won't that be wonderful!

No more political parties... I don't know if you know this... we have basically two political parties in our country... it is a nightmare with two political parties... Israel has There are a total of 149 registered political parties in Israel, but only 13 political parties have earned enough votes to attain seats in the Israeli government on their proportional system.

But wouldn't you think they would welcome the news that there will be ONE government.... Not the One World Government you hear about... but God's One government!

Isaiah gives us some names for this child... we'll look at those next week... but lets end with this

Jesus is inviting us to His world that only increases in all good, great things... **There will be no end to the increase to His government...** to His kingdom that He holds up on His shoulders.... He bears all responsibility... **On the throne of David and over His kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness...**

I said I have a challenge for you... we know the world is a mess... we know it is dark... but I challenge each one of you as you leave this place this morning... all your focus for the next 15 days **be all consumed with light...**

This may be hard for some of you... I challenge you to turn off the news for the week...avoid the negativity that is so pervasive all around us... replace it with God's wonderful word...with prayer...Focus on Jesus!...

Focus on Jesus this week... what He has done and what He is doing...and what He will do.,

I know some of you are going through real tough times... Isaiah says in verse 4...**For You (God) shall shatter the yoke of their burden...** all that stuff of life... the suffering... the toilsome way of life

He adds...**and the staff on their shoulders...** which is a picture of suffering being inflicted on you by an oppressor... they would fasten a long stick...a run a rod...through the arms, across the back... Coming is a time when God shatters all of that!

The rod of their taskmaster.... The picture of suffering from personal hostility by an oppressor... for a child will be born... and has been.... The light is in the world.... And there is coming a day for us to have great hope in... when light completely takes over the darkness.

Darkness to Joy to Rejoicing

Walk= live in it

1 John 1:5-7

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Ephesians 5:8-14

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the [a]Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather [b]expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are [c]exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,

Arise from the dead,

And Christ will give you light.”