Out of the Darkness — Delivery Transcript

Isaiah 9:2 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, November 29, 2020 · *Advent 2020*

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If you have a Bible, you can open it up to Isaiah chapter 9. And we're going to be in Isaiah 9 and chapter 8. We'll spend most of our time in chapter 8 this morning. As we kick off this new series called Advent. We do an Advent series every year. We have for the last three or four years, and some people have asked the question, why do you do Advent every year? Doesn't it get old? Does it get a little bit repetitive, the same old themes over and over again? Well, one, we don't do the same themes over and over again.

It's an Advent series, but we switch it up a little bit in terms of what the text is and how we cover it. But two, even if it is the same old themes to some degree, we need to be reminded of certain truths over and over and over again. And certainly we need to be reminded of the truths surrounding Advent. And one of the truths that we're going to look at this morning is an Advent truth that I think gets overlooked quite a bit because of the sentimentality that gets conjured up during the Christmas season.

It's a wonderful holiday. It kind of gives you the warm fuzzies a little bit. You get the Christmas music playing in the department stores now that Thanksgiving is over. It just kind of puts you in a good mood, does it not? Unless you're a Grinch, which you may be, but for the most part, it's kind of this warm, sentimental spirit and there's a tendency because of that to forget one of the more important truths surrounding Advent and Christmas. And that's what we're looking at this morning in Isaiah chapter 9. I say on your notes that before Christmas was a national holiday and commercialized as it has become, it was first a promise, it was a guarantee and a promise to a group of people who were in a world that was full of brokenness and darkness.

And when we look at Isaiah chapter 9, it was written about 700 to 750 years before the birth of Christ. And culturally and nationally they had come to a point where they were facing a national crisis and it was just a very dark time. And into that darkness, and I'm not just

saying the culture in general, even God's people were in a tough, tough place. Spiritually compromised, you might say. And into that kind of situation, the prophet Isaiah speaks a word from the Lord, a promise about a light that will dawn in the darkness.

And it will give a great hope and will procure the salvation of God's people. So let's read it in Isaiah chapter 9. I'm just going to read the Christmas card version and I'm going to look at verse 2. And then we're going to read verse 6. But by the end of the sermon, we'll cover the whole thing, all right? So don't get nervous that I'm not reading all the verses. I just want to kind of frame this up, looking at verse 2 and verse 6. So Isaiah chapter 9, verse 2 says that "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."

Verse 6: "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." And so as I said, before Christmas was commercialized, it was a promise, a reminder, that even in this darkness there will be a light that dawns. And if you ever thought about Christmas, it is actually put on the calendar at one of the darkest seasons or darkest times of the year. And by that I mean literal darkness.

This is not as true in the States as it is in European countries or wherever Christmas was first originally inaugurated. But one of the reasons that we put on Christmas lights on our houses during the Christmas season is because it gets dark so fast this time of year. And those of you who like to do a little bit of deer hunting, you know this, that every time you go hunting, each week that passes, you have to get out of the field a little bit earlier because it's getting darker sooner and sooner and sooner.

And that's just the way the rotation of the sun goes. It just gets very dark very early, stays dark a very long time this time of year. So Christmas is surrounded by darkness in that literal sense. But when the Bible talks about darkness, it doesn't just talk about it in that literal sense, it talks about it in a deeper sense. Put in your notes, every time the Bible talks about darkness, it usually carries two basic connotations. The one is this idea of moral evil, and the other is what you might call spiritual ignorance.

Or you could say the one describes great moral horrendous evils, and the other is the lack of intellectual or spiritual resources to address and confront and overcome that evil. And that was certainly true of the culture in which Isaiah wrote. They had a good king who had passed away. You read Isaiah chapter 6. It talks about, in the year that King Uzziah died, he was a good king and kind of helped Israel get to a good place. But after he died another king came on the throne. He was not as good of a king and he spiritually compromised Israel to a place where they were syncretizing with some of the other religions of their day.

And there had been worship of this god named Molech. And one of the most horrendous evils that even God's people took part in to some degree was the sacrificing of children to this god Moloch. They would basically burn these children in a furnace at the temple there. There was not only that kind of evil, but other forms of injustice and homelessness. There were refugees going everywhere, families being ripped apart. There was moral evil all over the place. And the same is true in our culture. There's moral evil in our culture.

It doesn't look like it did back then necessarily, but we still have things like human trafficking. We have things like the taking of innocent human life, especially in the womb, with things like abortion. We have injustices that are committed right in front of our eyes, other injustices that get committed underneath our noses that we don't know about, but there's all kinds of horrendous moral evil in our culture. It was true in Jesus' culture, it was true in Isaiah's culture. And that's bad, but what's even worse than that is that not only did the moral evil exist, but that they didn't have the spiritual resources to confront and overcome it.

If you go back to Isaiah chapter 8, which is right before Isaiah chapter 9, it talks about in verse 22 how they were looking everywhere for some answers to overcome the challenges and the evil that they were facing. But they were looking towards the earth. They'd taken God out of the picture. God can't help us with these kinds of problems, and so let's figure out some other way to solve our problems. They look to the earth, but they don't find any answers, they find no solutions, they only find distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction.

And they are driven into thick darkness. So that's the context of Isaiah chapter 9. You have a group of people, even God's people, who were in the midst of great darkness. They had taken God out of the picture. They maybe worshipped him on some Saturday or the Sabbath. They maybe spoke about having a faith in God, but when it came to actually living their lives on a daily practical basis, there was no sense in which they depended on the Lord or experienced God in their everyday life. And as a result of that their problems were consuming them and they were shipwrecking in their faith and they were losing all of their hope and their world in many ways is the same as our world.

And the mistakes that they made in their world are the same mistakes that we make in our world. They were facing a national crisis and the choices that they made in light of that national crisis were similar choices that many of us make today in our crisis. 2020 has been somewhat of a national crisis, we might say, yeah. A global pandemic, things that we thought were sure and on firm footing, we're all of a sudden exposed to be not that sure and on firm footing. We had economic disaster in many areas of our nation, and the pandemic exposed that even the economy that we do have is somewhat built on a house of cards.

All it takes is one bad day in the stock market, one bad news headline, and the whole thing can tank and we're all of a sudden in a pickle. You personally may be in a situation where

you lost your job, or maybe you have your job, but you're not sure you're going to have it very much longer. Maybe now for the first time in a long time you're experiencing loneliness. During Thanksgiving, during Christmas, the holidays you're never lonely, but now all of a sudden you're lonely. It may be because there's been death in your family as a result of COVID-19, or there's been other sorts of complicated factors as a result of the national crisis that we're facing that puts you in a situation where you are surrounded by darkness.

And in that kind of a context, will we make the same kinds of mistakes that God's people made back then? And the answer, I hope, after spending time in God's word this morning is no. Because the Lord sent Isaiah to this people in this kind of situation to basically deliver a singular truth. And that was that as God's people, they needed to wake up to the fact that you're not going to be able to save yourselves. You can't continue to try and put your hope and your confidence in these worldly saviors, these false saviors.

You can't continue to allow these problems that you're facing to outweigh your confidence and trust in the Lord. You need to wake up to the fact that God does exist. He is on the throne. He is in control. He is able to deliver. He is able to save. And that the light will dawn. And that's the message that he has for us this morning. So what I want to do with our time together is to go back to chapter 8, and I want to show you the two big mistakes that they made.

And those two mistakes are mistakes that I think a lot of us are tempted to make today. And then we're going to close with chapter 9 and the dawning of the light and what God's deliverance actually looks like when it comes. And so if you'll go to Isaiah chapter 8, verse 11, you have this little section. Verses 11 down to verse 14 basically expose the first big problem that the people in Isaiah's day made. And in your notes, I think I put it that the first big problem, the first big mistake that they made when it came to facing their national crisis is that they had an outsized fear of their worldly problems.

They had legitimate worldly problems, economic disaster, spiritual compromise, other forms of potential calamity. But they took those things and they magnified those problems beyond what they deserved to be. They exaggerated the problem a little bit, a magnifying of the mind, if you will, and they made a bigger thing of it than what it actually was. And so if you look in verse 11, you see this. He uses this phrase, conspiracy. We talk about conspiracy theories. And you know how sometimes today conspiracy theories can get just big and outlandish and crazy.

The same kind of thing was happening in their culture. So God puts his hand on Isaiah and says, do not get sucked in to this kind of mindset. Verse 11 says, this is what the Lord said to me with great power. In other words, this was a transformative experience with the Lord that Isaiah had in this moment. This is what the Lord said to me with great power to keep

me from going the way of this people, talking about God's people. He says, do not call everything a conspiracy that these people say is a conspiracy.

Do not fear what they fear. Do not be terrified. Rather, verse 13, you are to regard only the Lord of armies as holy. Only he should be feared. Only he should be held in awe. He will be a sanctuary. Notice he's just drawing his attention to the Lord. But for the two houses of Israel the Lord will be a stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. So he starts out, he says, don't be like these people and don't call everything a conspiracy that these people say is a conspiracy.

And people raise the question, well, what is he talking about? What kind of conspiracy theories were going on in Israel's day and age at that time? And we don't really know for sure. Probably what most people think is that there were these political conspiracies about Assyria who was in the north at the time and they were very likely to invade Israel at some point or another. But the conspiracy was that Assyria was going to develop partnerships and allegiances with other surrounding countries surrounding Israel and in those and those and those partnerships and affiliations Israel would be invaded and overcome, and there was this unhealthy obsession with this potential reality.

And just like a lot of conspiracies take form, this unhealthy obsession, you see evidence that maybe isn't really pointing to the truth that you think it is, and then you find facts that support your hypothesis, you dismiss facts that don't support your hypothesis, and before you know it, you have this unhealthy, unholy fear that is dictating your life and controlling your mood and has totally subsumed you, and that's what had happened to the people of God in Israel. It was a legitimate fear, I'm not saying it was an illegitimate fear, but they had exaggerated that legitimate fear beyond what it needed to be.

And we do the same kinds of things in our day and age as well. They had basically taken God out of the picture, which was why they were so afraid. They were living as if God wasn't sovereign, as if God was no longer on his throne, he was no longer in control, as if he was uninterested in the affairs of man, not able to intervene, and there's a temptation for God's people to do the same thing today. And 2020 has been a test case, I think, for a lot of us, of whether or not we will allow legitimate concerning matters to birth in us an unholy, unwarranted fear that exceeds our confidence in the Lord.

And that's not to say you shouldn't live with wisdom. One of the first things that pops out in my mind, because I'm somewhat of a political animal. I read a lot of headlines, stay up on the news and stuff like that. And if you're not careful, the more news you watch, the more headlines you read, especially in this political climate. You can drive yourself crazy trying to impact things that you have no way of impacting, or controlling outcomes you have no real way of controlling. And there's a temptation to do that, and I think the warning from Isaiah is don't go there.

Don't allow yourself to get to such a place that you shipwreck in your faith and you lose your confidence in the Lord and you lose your trust in the Lord. Basically, you can get so wrapped up in these conspiracy theories that you think if we can only get this person elected, or if we can only get that platform inaugurated, or if we can only expose the evil of this, that, and the other thing, then we'll be saved. And if we don't expose it, if we don't get those people, if that platform isn't inaugurated, then we're doomed and all hope is lost.

And neither one of those things takes into consideration the fact that there is a God who exists that is on his throne, that is sovereign over the affairs of men, and who is our only true hope and salvation. And so he says, don't get caught up in those. Another one that we're facing today, not just the politics, is COVID-19 and it's a legitimate threat and a real threat. And depending on your personal situation, whether you're a high-risk person or you live with high-risk people, then the threat levels are different for different people.

That's one of the reasons I think there's so much disagreement over COVID because different people see it differently. But all of God's people should resist the temptation to amplify the fears of that pandemic beyond what it needs to be, to so elevate the fear of COVID that we're no longer trusting in the Lord or that we're putting an unwarranted amount of faith and trust in worldly saviors or human saviors instead of actually depending on the Lord. Now I don't want to get into particulars of what necessarily that looks like and how that should dictate your daily life because again every person's situation is a little bit different.

But at the end of the day, what God's people were doing in Isaiah's day was they were living as if God wasn't sovereign. They were living as if he wasn't on the throne and in control. And as a result of living as if he was not sovereign, they were magnifying their fears. Their fears had become so large in their life that it was dominating their daily experience. And so the word of the Lord to Isaiah, and Isaiah's word to his people, was, stop it. Don't call everything a conspiracy. Don't fear what these people fear.

Instead, he says in verse 13, you should regard only the Lord of armies as holy. Only he should be feared. Only he should be held in awe. In your notes I point out that when God's people have this tendency to get so wrapped up in our fears and our worldly problems, it leads to one of two extremes, at least in my mind it does. The one extreme is what you might call triumphalism, or this attitude that if we can just get our people in place, if we can just get our platform inaugurated, if we can just do it our way, then everything will be okay.

Everything evil will be overcome. Just let me control it. Let me run it. And everything's going to be fine. That's a triumphalist spirit. The other side of the pendulum is you might call it defeatism or despair or something along those lines that unless my people get in power, unless my platform gets inaugurated, unless the vaccine comes out or whatever the case may be, then it's all over. The world will end, the apocalypse will come, there's no salvation

whatsoever. It's utter and total destruction. And either one of those two extremes excludes the existence of a holy and competent and omnipotent God.

And so God's people must avoid that conspiracy theory kind of thinking. Instead, we need to make the Lord our sanctuary, which is a way of saying the Lord needs to be the one in your mind who is wholly set apart. He's the holiest one. Holiness means set apart. He's unlike any other. He is wholly other in his wisdom. He's wholly other in his power. He's wholly other in his ways. And I'm going to make him my shelter. I'm going to make him my confidence, the solid rock on which I stand, the shelter in which I rest.

And so the question we need to ask ourselves this morning is have we made the Lord our sanctuary? Is he my sanctuary or is he a stone of stumbling? Because in Isaiah's prophecy, he's one or the other, he can't be both. He will either in your life be a sanctuary in whom you rest, in whom you find shelter, in whom you find security, or he will be a stumbling block over which you trip. Because if you allow the fears of the world to get so big that they dominate your thinking, then you're going to end up tripping over the Lord.

It's like any other season of your life where you live as if God isn't on his throne or as if he doesn't exist or if he's not powerful. He will put things into your world that remind you of that fact. He'll bring a pandemic to expose the fact that we're not as strong as we thought we were. We're not as put together as we thought we were. He'll introduce hardship and suffering into your life that exposes your own weaknesses and your own tendency to not trust the Lord. It'll cause you to trip and cause you to fall.

And so you need to make the Lord your sanctuary, not a stone of stumbling. Look at Isaiah chapter 8 verse 15. He extrapolates this idea of stumbling. He says, many will stumble over these, they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured. So what's the answer? What should you do, Isaiah? Verse 16: you need to bind up the testimony. In other words, put God's word on your heart. Let his promises dictate your emotional response. Seal up the instruction among my disciples. Look at this verse 17. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob.

I will wait for him. So he recognizes God is disciplining us, he's punishing us, that this is a pruning season, this is a difficult season, but even though it feels as if God is absent, I will wait for the Lord. Even though it feels as if he has abandoned us, I will continue to trust his promises. I'll continue to hold fast to his word. Here I am, verse 18, with the children the Lord has given me to be signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of Armies who dwells on Mount Zion.

So big mistake número uno is that they had an outsized fear of the world and the problems of the world, and it dictated their response to their problems. The second big mistake that they made, in verses 19 and following, is that they had a misplaced faith in what I'm going to

call false saviors. They had a misplaced faith in false saviors or pseudo saviors. Look at verse 19. You get an idea of what these false saviors were. And it may not ring a bell with you because in West Texas we're not really into reading horoscopes and psychedelics and stuff like that.

At least last I checked you weren't. But if you go over to California, I remember on our vacation to California a couple of years ago, we were on I don't remember the exact location, but there was this strip and there was psychic after psychic after psychic after psychic. You know, get your horoscope read and figure out who you should date and marry and all that stuff. Same basic idea in Isaiah's day. He says in verse 19, when they say to you, inquire of the mediums and the spiritists who chirp and mutter, shouldn't a people inquire of their God?

Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? Of course the answer is no, they shouldn't. They should inquire of the Lord. But you had God's people who instead of inquiring of the Lord, instead of having confidence in the Word, instead of trusting the promises of God, they were going to these seances and these spiritists and these mediums, and they were interceding through those mediums to talk to dead people to figure out how they should live their life today. You see it all over the place. Like I said, you see it a little bit more in more spiritualized places like the West Coast or a little bit on the East Coast, but you see it when you go overseas; this is real ancestral worship, seeking the ancestors for how you oughta live your life today.

One of my favorite Marvel movies is Black Panther. When the Black Panther takes the go juice or whatever it's called, he goes into the desert realm and he talks to his dad and he seeks after his dad for how he's supposed to live his life today. That's the kind of mindset that God's people had adopted. They were syncretizing true religion with false religion and they were looking for these answers and these false saviors. And so the Lord tells Isaiah, that's nonsense. You need to, verse twenty, go to God's instruction and testimony.

If these people who are chirping and muttering and trying to talk on behalf of the dead, if they do not speak according to God's instruction or they don't speak according to this word, God's word, there will be no dawn for them. In other words, you'll never find the light you're looking for through them. Verse 21, they will wander through the land, dejected and hungry. When they are famished, they will become enraged. In other words, they're going to look for answers in all the wrong places, and when they don't find them, they're going to get mad at God.

And they're going to look upward and they will curse their king and their God. And they will look towards the earth and see only distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction, and they will be driven into thick darkness. So not only did God's people have an outsized fear of the world, they had a misplaced faith in these false saviors looking for answers through these

false saviors and when those false saviors finally failed to meet the problem, when they finally failed to deliver on what they said they would deliver, then they got angry.

And they got angry not at the false prophets, they got angry at God. They said, God, how dare you? And if there's really a God who exists, how dare he allow us to suffer in this way? If God really is good, if he really is wise, then why would he allow these kinds of things to happen? And when you see a culture drift from the Lord, you see all kinds of books written like on theodicy and the problem of evil and if God is good then why X, Y, and Z.

And all of that is indicative of a culture and even a group of people in the church, even God's people, who have shifted away from a confidence in the Lord, a confidence in his word, and have started to look to anyone and anything other than the Lord to try to face their fears and deal with their problems. And that is darkness. That's what the Bible refers to as darkness. And we today, even today, are living in a culture of darkness. And Christmas, Advent, reminds us of that. And it's a warning to us as the church to not make those same mistakes, to not have an outsized fear of the world or the problems of the world, but neither to have a misplaced faith in these false saviors.

And this is God's warning to Isaiah for how to resist that urge. And then in verse 9,[1] you see the contrast. He goes from this world and culture that's surrounded by darkness to this promise of the light that will come. He says people will never find the light looking for the light through all these false saviors, but if you will resist that and wait patiently on the Lord, then you will see the light. So he says in chapter 9, verse 1. Nevertheless, the gloom of the distressed land will not be like that of the former times when he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

But in the future he will bring honor to the way of the sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the Gentiles, or Galilee of the nations. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. A light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness. See this big contrast between darkness and light. And I want you to notice some things about the dawning of the light that I think are pretty interesting. First, the light comes at the most unlikely of times and the most unlikely of places in the most unlikely of ways.

It says that this light, and of course this is talking about the birth of the Messiah, the birth of Jesus Christ. But it happens in the most unlikely of places. And we pass right over it because they're hard-to-pronounce names, but it's these names of Zebulun and Naphtali. How do you pronounce that? Is it Nephtali? Naphtali? Who knows? I'm saying Naphtali. Naphtali. You say, where in the world is that? Well, if you were aware of your geography and if you were in that day and age, it was one of the most northernmost regions away from Jerusalem, and that's less important than this.

This was the area of Israel where it was the least Jewish. And by Jewish I don't just mean ethnically concentrated or ethnically pure, but in terms of their religious life, their religious adherence to the ways of Judaism. It was least likely to happen in a place called Galilee of the Gentiles, Naphtali and Zebulun. When Jesus comes on the scene in Matthew chapter 4, and he's about to inaugurate his ministry. It's right after the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, Matthew chapter 4. He comes out of that wilderness wandering. He begins to start his ministry.

And it says in Matthew chapter 4, verse 12, when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. He left Nazareth, and look at this, he went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of, same words, Zebulun and Naphtali. Why did he go there? To fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. And then he reads the prophecy, land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who live in darkness have seen a great light.

And for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. And from then on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near, or the kingdom of heaven is at hand. I don't know how to describe this to you. This was the place where there was the most intermarriage. This was the place where there was the most amount of spiritual confusion. There was the least amount of, quote unquote, God's presence. It was the most dark. It was the most culturally corrupt. It was the most spiritually compromised.

That was the region into which the light dawned. So that's why I say when the light dawns, it dawns in the most unlikely of places, in the most unlikely of ways, at the most unlikely of times. That's exactly what happens in Isaiah chapter 1, verse, Isaiah chapter 9, verse 1. It happens there. And in your life, the same is true. Now this was true of the birth of Christ. This will certainly be true of the second coming of Christ. It will happen in the most unlikely of places or the most unlikely of times, when the world is at its darkest, when it's at its most compromised moment when almost all hope is lost and in a moment when you think there's no hope whatsoever anymore, that's when the light dawns.

That's when the deliverance happens, and so that's why you can't lose your faith. You can't lose your hope. You have to maintain. You have to hold fast because you know the Lord will deliver. And when he delivers, it won't look like he's going to deliver it. It will look like anything but that. But in fact, that's when the light's going to dawn. And in your life, that's certainly been true in my life in other respects. When you talk about God's deliverance and God's salvation through these other matters of life of hardship and difficulty.

It's easy when you're at your lowest moment to give up in that moment, but that is the moment in which you've got to persevere and hold fast like we read about in Romans because God's deliverance comes at the moment and at the time and in the way that you least expect it to come. And so you've got to hold fast to hope. That's the first thing. The

second thing that I think is interesting about this light is that it produces what I'm going to call an irreversible and indestructible level of joy.

It produces an irreversible, indestructible level of joy. Look at verse 3. He says, you have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before you as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils, for you have shattered their oppressive yoke and the rod on their shoulders, the staff of their oppressor, just as you did in the day of Midian. So Isaiah's looking around for metaphors. He's saying, what's it going to be like when the light comes? When the light comes, it's going to produce this indestructible joy.

What's that joy like? It tastes a little bit like the joy you get after a long season of planting a crop and waiting and waiting and waiting for the crop to finally come. And then when the crop comes and you harvest, the joy that comes from the harvest of this waiting game, this patience has finally paid off, and now finally I'm able to experience the crop that I worked so hard to develop. And that's what it's going to be like. It's going to be like in a war where you fight and you fight and you lose your friends and you think you're not going to win, but then you finally end up winning the battle against all odds and you get to take the plunder and all the things that you lost are given back to you.

That's the kind of joy that you're going to experience when the light dawns. And then he closes and he says, it's going to be like the day of Midian, which those of you who know your Old Testament, the battle of Midian was the battle between Gideon and the enemy force and Gideon had 300 soldiers, right? And those 300 soldiers were facing tens of thousands of soldiers. And against all odds, there was no way Gideon was going to win the battle, but somehow, because of the Lord's deliverance and supernatural power, Gideon and his 300 soldiers overcame the tens of thousands of opposing forces and the joy that comes from that kind of victory, a victory in which you say there was no way we were going to win this battle.

There was no chance that we had any hope whatsoever. This is an absolute miracle from the Lord. Only God could have delivered us. And so since God is for us, I have a joy in me that is an indestructible joy. Who can be against us? That's the kind of joy that is in your heart when the light is dawned. When the light gives birth in your heart and in your life and the deliverance of Christ comes into you, it gives you a joy that is an unspeakable, unconquerable, irreversible kind of joy.

And that's the joy that came when Christ was born in the manger, and that's the joy that's ours when we receive Christ by faith, and that's the joy we will have when He comes again. The last thing that I think is interesting about this light is that it comes through the birth of a child who's given as a son and will one day reign as a king. It says in verse 6, for a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders.

He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this. We're going to spend a couple of weeks on this passage and unpack a lot of what Isaiah is talking about there, but I just want to point out the paradoxical nature of God's salvation.

You would think in the midst of this darkness, if the darkness is going to be overcome, it has to be like a flash of lightning, an overwhelming amount of good to conquer the evil. But that's not how the deliverance comes. It comes in the most unlikely of places. It produces an indestructible joy, but it happens through the birth of a baby. God in flesh, the unconquerable God, the creator of heaven and earth, comes and he makes himself vulnerable. He makes himself mortal. To us a child is born, but that child's not just a child, he's a son, meaning he's royalty.

He's given to us to serve as a king, but he's a king unlike any other kind of king. He's a king who advances his kingdom not through force but through love. He's a king who defeats his enemies not by crushing them with an iron fist, but by dying for them on a cross. He's a king who advances his kingdom through humility and through giving up his life on a cross to save the ones who are crucifying him, crying out on the cross, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

It's a paradox. It's one of the paradoxical ways that God works. You go up by going down. The transformation is not outside in, it's inside out. It happens through the birth of a child. And we'll spend a little bit more time on that in the weeks that come. But how are we to respond this morning in light of the darkness in which we live? A Christmas season of darkness, a culture that is facing a national crisis, a world in which even God's people have a temptation to live in fear or have a misplaced faith in false saviors.

How are we to wait? We need to, number one, we need to make the Lord our sanctuary. We've got to resist the temptation to be like Isaiah's culture and to live in fear and to let potential outcomes dominate our daily lives. We need to resist the temptation to live as if God is not sovereign, as if he's not on the throne, as if he's not in control. We need to resist that urge. And then we need to resist the temptation to put all of our confidence and all of our faith in things that are not the Lord.

The Lord needs to be the sanctuary. He needs to be the holy place. He needs to be the solid rock on which we stand. And as it relates to some of the challenges that we're facing today, that doesn't mean that you don't believe in medicine or you don't trust doctors or you don't exercise wisdom and live appropriately in light of the risk that you're facing. Those two things don't contradict. You can trust the Lord and make him your sanctuary and still live with wisdom and an appropriate amount of awareness of what's going on around you.

It's just that you don't let your heart be crippled by fear and you don't swing to one of those two extremes of triumphalism or defeatism and live as if God is not on the throne. God's people need to be people who are representative of faith, representative of a fear of the Lord and not a fear of the world and the world's problems. And when we are that, we are a light that'll shine in the darkness. So make the Lord your sanctuary. Number two, remember God's timing isn't our timing. God's timing is on a far larger scale than our own.

Isaiah's prophecy was written 700 or 750 years before the birth of Christ, which means people were given this promise and they were given a challenge to wait in hope, wait in faith, and they died not seeing the deliverance. In fact, these people who were worried about conspiracy theories of an invading army, their conspiracies came true. The Assyrians invaded, the Jews were dispersed. It wasn't until 200 years later that they finally came back. It wasn't until three hundred years until they rebuilt the wall and they rebuilt the temple. Even though they rebuilt the wall and the temple, they lived under oppressive regimes for hundreds of years.

It wasn't until the second century B.C and the Maccabean Revolt[2] that God's people were finally liberated in a political sense to not be oppressed by some invading army. And even after that you had the Romans come in and basically do the same thing, even though it was a little bit nicer. And so all that is to say, you may live your whole life in a season of waiting and hardship and suffering. Some of us will wait for the promise in good seasons. Some of us will wait for the promise in challenging seasons.

Whether it's a good time or a bad time, you wait knowing God's timing isn't my timing. The New Testament says that for the Lord a day is as a thousand years. He is not slow, but he's patient. He has a plan that he's working out. And so just because he doesn't operate according to your timetable doesn't mean he's not still on the throne and still has a plan. It just means that your part to play in that plan isn't what you may want it to be, but you can trust him anyway.

He works with a different time. And then the last thing, let's do so knowing that we have something that they don't have. And that is we have the gift of the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. I said earlier that right now we can experience this irreversible, unspeakable joy through the Holy Spirit. Christ did come through the first advent. He died on the cross for our sins. Three days later, God raised him from the dead. He ascended to the Father, and when he ascended, he sent his Holy Spirit to the earth so that you and I could have the presence of Christ with us right now.

Even as we wait for the second coming, we can wait in a way that's different from them because right now we can go to him as the Wonderful Counselor. Right now we can go to him as the Mighty God who can overcome the challenges that we're facing in life. Right now, we can know him as the Everlasting Father, a Father who will never cast us out, a Father

who will never leave us as an orphan, a father who will always accept us, who will always love us, and the Prince of Peace, a peace that is given to us that surpasses human understanding.

That even in the valley low, even in the face of incredible opposition, we can have a confidence in the Lord. Not because we're so great or we're so confident, but because God is in us. And he is with us, and he has given us through the Holy Spirit a peace that passes human understanding. And if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, then that's the kind of gift that God can give to you today, even in the midst of darkness. And for those of you that are Christians, or those of you who watch online, whether you're a Christian or not a Christian, this is the invitation we're given during Advent, to live as if God is with us, even as we wait, to know him as that Wonderful Counselor and that Mighty God.

And if there's a decision you want to make along that line, if you're not a Christian and you want to talk to somebody about that, you can certainly come up after the service. You can comment online and we'll follow up with you. You can text our church phone number 325-692-2360. You can connect with us on our website, broadview.life/next. All of those are ways you can make known a decision, a spiritual decision you're making to say, I'm not going to live by fear. I'm not going to have a misplaced faith. I'm going to make the Lord my sanctuary and I'm going to wait on the Lord.

And I just want to encourage us as we close as a church, imagine if God's people waited in this way. What if we resisted the mistakes that they made? And even in the midst of a global pandemic and a world that seems like it's teetering on the edge, we lived as people with great confidence and poise because our hope is in the Lord. And we know that our deliverance will surely come. And it may not come in my lifetime, it may not come in my child's lifetime, but I'm not living according to those timetables.

I'm living according to the Lord's timetable, 'cause my confidence is in the Lord. Let's pray together.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "verse 9"; the contrast that follows begins in chapter 9 (Isaiah 9:1–2), as he then reads. Source: Isaiah 8:22–9:2 (CSB). ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "two hundred A.D."; the Maccabean Revolt began in 167 B.C., and Judean independence came by about 141 B.C., well before Christ. Source: Wikipedia, "Maccabean Revolt" (167–141 BCE; Simon Thassi, 141 BCE). ↩