



Isaiah 9:1-7
God's Plans for Christmas

Last year, around this time, a movie about The Justice League came out. The Justice League is formed by a group of DC comic heroes including Batman, Wonder Woman, the Flash, Aquaman, and others who join together to fight bad guys. Listen to what Ben Affleck, who played Batman, said in an interview about the movie:

“We certainly are in need of heroes in 2017, there’s a lot of stuff going on in the world, from natural to man-made disasters, and it’s really scary. Part of the appeal of this genre [superhero movies] is wish fulfillment: Wouldn’t it be nice if there was somebody who can save us from all this, save us from ourselves, save us from the consequences of our actions and save us from people who are evil?”¹

Well Ben, the good news, the gospel is: Somebody can. God sent His Son to save us from all this, from ourselves, from our actions, and from people who are evil. He sent us Jesus.

And that’s what I would like to talk with you about this morning – I’d like to talk with you about God’s plans for Christmas. Plans to send us the real life superhero that we so desperately need.

God began planning for the first Christmas before the world was even created. When He made the world, He knew we would make a mess of it, and our lives. And He knew that we wouldn’t be able to fix it, so He planned to send His Son as our Savior. The babe who lay in the manger would grow up to become the Messiah who hung on a cross - and it was all according to God’s plan.

As human history unfolded God began to reveal the details of the plan, often sending prophets to tell us what to expect. And so now, when we look back to that first Christmas in Bethlehem, we include the words of those prophets in our celebrations.

As a result, many of you are familiar with words like these from Isaiah that are often read in church, printed on Christmas cards, and sung in Handel’s famous Messiah:

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2017/11/13/how-justice-league-weathered-supersized-setbacks-assemble-dcs-greatest-heroes/856019001/>

But let me read that verse to you in it's context because there's so much more here to appreciate about what Christmas means, there's so much more you need to know about why the first Christmas happened.

Isaiah lived 700 years before Jesus was born and he wrote this at a time when Israel was struggling against it's neighbors and enemies. They were looking for a savior who could protect them and deliver them. And so God sent Isaiah to tell the people He would do that. God would provide someone to get them out of their immediate circumstances, but He would also provide someone greater, a true Savior who would address the *sources* of their suffering and difficulties and not just the symptoms. Here's what God had to say in it's context:

*Isaiah 9:1...By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
In Galilee of the Gentiles.*

*2 The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.*

*3 You have multiplied the nation
And increased its joy;
They rejoice before You
According to the joy of harvest,
As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.*

*4 For You have broken the yoke of his burden
And the staff of his shoulder,
The rod of his oppressor,
As in the day of Midian.*

*5 For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle,
And garments rolled in blood,
Will be used for burning and fuel of fire.*

*6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name 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,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
to order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*

This is what we celebrate each Christmas – it’s more than just the fact that a baby came - we celebrate what the baby grew up to do and be. We celebrate the fact that Jesus brings light into the darkness, joy and rejoicing, deliverance from oppression; we celebrate the fact that His kingdom and influence continue to grow, and that He brings justice and judgment to all.

So let’s take a little time to consider each of those this morning.

First, notice that God had a plan to bring us light.

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

It’s interesting to me how many parallels there are between the situation people faced in Isaiah’s day, and the situation we face today. We live in difficult days. We see dark and terrible things in the headlines all the time. It’s easy to feel depressed and frustrated, even if you’re Batman.

So where do you go to try and find light? To find understanding? To find answers? For many people today, the answer is: the Internet. We turn to Siri or Alexa or old fashioned Google search and we look for answers or we look for information. But how much of it can you trust?

Just this past week I had a moment where I saw an ad online and it said “we’re showing you this based on your age and preferences, to see more click here.” So I did, and it took me to this section where Google had all these all ad suggestions of things they thought I would be interested in based on my profile and prior searches. But the funny thing is, I gave a fake age when I created my account, and it throws the algorithm was off.

The whole thing got me thinking though. You know people pay to get their site listed higher in your results when you search online. When you do a Google search you notice the first links always belong to people who paid to put them there. And perhaps you have noticed that Amazon is now recommending certain products to you, but did you know that they’re often recommending products from other companies they own? Amazon is pushing it’s own products higher up in your search results.

Here’s the point – you can’t trust everything you find online. In a day and age of manipulated algorithms and fake news, you can’t trust every source of light, but Jesus never changes. Let Him and His truth be the source of light in your dark days.

Whether that darkness is caused by depression, anxiety, or external circumstances, it doesn’t matter. God offers to bring light into the darkness of your life. Jesus said:

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

If you need hope, if you need guidance and direction, trust God’s plan for Christmas, to shine a light in the darkness, and turn to Jesus.

And notice that God’s plan for Christmas also includes joy. Isaiah writes:

3 You have multiplied the nation
And increased its joy;
They rejoice before You
According to the joy of harvest,
As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

Isaiah is talking in terms they would understand – these were people who would celebrate at harvest time. Remember, they didn’t have stores to shop at. They worked hard for months planting and tending crops and then they would harvest the crops and use the grain or fruit to sustain them until the next crops were ready. Feasts were often associated with the harvest, like our modern idea of going out on Friday night after all working week, or staying home and having pizza and a movie – it’s a way to celebrate all we’ve been through. The work of the week is over, now it’s time to have some fun. Isaiah says God’s plan for Christmas was to increase our joy like that, but more.

Joy is a common theme of Jesus. The angels announced to the shepherds

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Luke 2:10)

As you read the Bible you discover that when people received Jesus as their Savior, they rejoiced, or there was great joy in the city. It’s a common response, a common reaction to find joy in Jesus as He transforms our lives.

And one of the great things about the joy Jesus gives, is that it can never be taken away from us. On the night before He was crucified, in the Upper Room, Jesus told His disciples:

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.” (John 15:11)

If you’re feeling empty, a little low on joy and peace, come to Jesus and ask for more. There’s a lot of pressure at Christmas, and a lot of depression actually. We hear these songs telling us “it’s the most wonderful time of the year. It’s hap-happiest season of all.” But we don’t always feel it, do we? Maybe this is your first Christmas without the person you love. Or maybe you’re swamped by work and you just don’t feel the Christmas spirit. Maybe you haven’t even gotten the tree up yet. Or maybe you’re frustrated by the gifts. Whatever the reason, you might feel like you’re running low on joy.

Well, if you are in Christ, He has spoken things recorded in Scripture that **His joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full**. God wants you to have joy. In fact, He's running an all you can eat buffet of Joy and Peace for all believers, so if your plate seems empty, come back for another helping and keep coming until you actually feel full. You won't be turned away, but need to come and get it from Him.

And when you do, you begin to learn that the joy Jesus gives is durable joy. When you read the Bible and get to know people who really and truly know Jesus, you find they have a joy that endures, even in times of difficulty and opposition.

Jesus described it like this – at times we go through difficulties, like a woman in labor, and in the middle of it all, things are difficult, truly difficult, but there is a joy that comes afterward like when the woman who was in so much pain holds that newborn baby in her arms.

So God tells us to count it all joy when we face difficulty in life – not because we learn to love pain, but because He is there with us and He's going to use what we're facing to refine us, strengthen us, and perfect us.

God wants to be the source and provider of our greatest joy – you don't have to paint it on yourself. You don't have to try and work it up on your own. Paul prayed for Christians in Rome:

Rom 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace.” I love the promise of this verse so much I named my daughter Karisa Hope Schlenz.

Here's the point: God's plan for Christmas was to bring us joy, and increase our joy, in Jesus. But He also has plans to ultimately deliver you from the things that are sucking all the joy out of you:

**4 For You have broken the yoke of his burden
And the staff of his shoulder,
The rod of his oppressor,
As in the day of Midian.**

The day of Midian might not mean much to you, but this was written to people who knew exactly what it meant – it referred to the time when God used a man named Gideon and small group of men to run off an entire invading army. To the people of Israel, it was seen as a reminder of God's ability to bring deliverance even in the face of overwhelming odds, when victory and salvation seemed least likely.

But it's not just a promise that hostility will cease, it's a promise that oppression will cease. God tells them, you won't be struggling under tremendous economic pressures, you won't

have a demanding boss that's a jerk, the yoke of your burden will be broken. Compare that to what Jesus says, maybe you read this on the back wall on your way in:

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

God knows we are often driven by the tyrannical demands of an ungrateful boss or a meaningless process and bureaucracy, but His plan for Christmas is to bring us a gentle master, a kind, just, merciful, and generous eternal master, who will reward us for our labor. God wants to breathe value and meaning into the tasks of your everyday life as you do everything you do as if you were doing it directly for Him.

And, now we get to that famous part:

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

But there's some important stuff after the famous part too.

7 Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,

The plan that God has been unfolding, the plan that brought us Christmas, was first mentioned to mankind in the Garden of Eden, it was then explained in greater detail through prophets sent to the nation of Israel, it was made plain in Jesus who lived in Israel, but it has always been a plan to reach the entire world – that people from every tribe, tongue, and nature, every culture and country would know and praise God.

After His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus said:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" – Matthew 28:18-19

God's Christmas plan is for His kingdom, and it's benefits to be increasingly available to people around the world and to last for all eternity: **Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end.** This is why Christians share their faith. This is why we invite people in. This is why we support missionaries around the world – it's because there are people outside of God's kingdom, outside of His plan, who need to be brought in. There are

people who do not know the benefits of being a child of God. There are people who don't know what Christmas is really all about.

Perhaps that's you this morning – perhaps you know the story of Christmas, maybe Christmas is even your favorite time of the year, you love to decorate and to give gifts, you love the music, you even love cute children's choirs in church – but do you love Jesus? Has there ever been a definite moment in your life when you realized you were outside of His kingdom and asked Him to bring you in? Has there ever been a moment when you said, Jesus, I want you to be the king of my life? I want to live for you, and live with you, aware of you, every day of my life?

Friends, do you know you are saved? Do you know you are a citizen of God's kingdom? Have you been brought in, or are you still outside? Isaiah says His kingdom will [increase](#). That's because there are people who are not in it yet – are you? Jesus sent the disciples out to go and make disciples of people from every nation who were not disciples yet – is that you? Are you sure? You can know, and you need to know, because there will be a judgment one day. As Isaiah says:

[Isaiah 9:7 \(cont.\) Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
to order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.](#)

There's a lot of talk today about social justice, about righting wrongs, about fighting inequality, prejudice, discrimination and domination. And some of it is good. Some of it is right and righteous. But if you care about justice, if you really, truly, care about it, then Jesus is your man.

He is going to bring judgment and justice. He will right all the wrongs. He will avenge the oppressed and bring justice to the oppressor, the victimizer, the abuser, the jerk.

No one in the Kingdom of Heaven looks down on anyone else. We all look up to Jesus.

No one takes advantage of anyone else. We love one another as Christ loves us.

No one in the Kingdom of Heaven puts anyone else down, leaves anyone else out, or uses anyone for their own purposes. We seek one another's good, because that is what God has done for us, it's all part of His plan for Christmas.

And how does all this great stuff happen? How does it all come about? Well, look at the last line of verse 7:

[The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.](#)

In other words, God will do it, He'll make it happen. He invented Christmas and He's offering it as a gift to you. It's fun to get gifts at Christmas, but it's even more fun to give, and that is what God is doing – giving Jesus to you.

Jesus really is the reason for the season. He is God's plan. The babe of Christmas will grow to become the Lamb of Good Friday, the victorious living Lord of Easter, and the coming King of eternity. This is what Christians celebrate at Christmas.

If you don't have all of this, if you didn't know God's plan for Christmas, I want to encourage you to receive it. You've heard of making a wish list for Santa, well, make a wish list for God – turn to Him, pray to Him, and talk about your needs and tell Him you've been naughty.

The Bible says

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You don't have to go up to Heaven to find Him, He comes down to us – **unto us a Child is born, unto to us a Son is given.**

Amazon makes ordering easy, but God makes it even easier. And even better, if you want to receive from Him, you don't have to wait three days, two days, or even next or same day delivery, God delivers salvation and citizenship in His kingdom immediately to all who ask:

If you have any questions, if there is anything we can help you out with, let us know. We're happy to pray with you, and to help you in any way we can.

Let's pray.