

No More Gloom
Growth Group Discussion
Isaiah 9:1-7, Matthew 4:12-17

Begin with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you all through God's word, and to lead your discussion.

Opening Questions (get everyone involved in discussion):

- What is a favorite Christmas carol for you? What about that song makes it so special?
- This week's focal passage talks about "gloom." To what degree do you feel that life is gloomy right now? How are you weathering this dark season?

Read Isaiah 9:1-7, and then discuss the following.

1. The historical context of this passage is very important for understanding its meaning.
 - In case you missed the sermon, Josh summarized the historical context as follows: *Isaiah was a prophet from Jerusalem (in Judah, the Southern Kingdom). He was writing in the late 700's BC, in a time when the nation of Assyria was the most fearsome empire in the Middle East. Isaiah's immediate concern is to tell King Ahaz not to trust in other kings or other gods, but in the One True God. He uses what has happened in Northern Israel as a jumping-off point in Isaiah 9. Zebulun and Naphtali were two tribal regions in Northern Israel, in the larger area known as Galilee. Why were these areas experiencing gloom? Because God humbled them through the invasion of the Assyrians, led by Tiglath-Pileser. He captured and exiled the Jewish people, and exported them back to Assyria, and imported foreign peoples who he had conquered in other parts of the world.*
 - Isaiah had explained the practices that resulted in gloom, in 8:19-22, in an effort to counsel Ahaz to go a different way. Review those verses.
 - Would you say that our nation (or even our world) has lived "in a land of deep darkness" (v. 2) recently? Why or why not?
 - What do you see here about the danger of wrong alliances? How does misplacing your trust result in ever-increasing gloom? Can you think of a time when this was true for you?
 - As news has become (or remained) gloomy, in politics or public health, where have you looked for comfort and assurance?
 - Practically, what would it look like to turn back from these "alliances"?

2. Let's dig into the details of God's promise of light.
 - According to v. 3, what will be one result of God's fulfilling this promise?
 - Do you feel that this result has been true of you? Why or why not?
 - To what event is Isaiah alluding when he references the "day of Midian's defeat?" (v. 4) Check a concordance or Bible app if necessary.
 - What about that event will be true of the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise? [Leaders: God will save through vulnerability and weakness, rather than through force.]
 - How do we see this aspect fulfilled in Jesus' first coming?
 - The words of verse 5 imply that the fulfillment of this promise will put an end to war and violence. Certainly this will be true with the Second Coming of Christ, but how might the gospel *now* put an end to cycles of violence?
 - Light will break our darkness when it comes through a perfect King. In vv. 6-7, we see this King described. Which aspects of this description are most meaningful to you today? Why?
 - How do you think that we "*let in the light*" today?

3. **Read Matthew 4:12-17**, and discuss the following. In this section, Matthew is writing to show how the first coming of Jesus fulfills God's promise in Isaiah 9.
 - According to v. 12, what prompted Jesus to move to Galilee? Why do you think Jesus made this decision?
 - According to Matthew, in what way did God "honor Galilee of the Nations," in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy? In what way was Jesus' physical presence a great light that dawned on the people of that region?
 - What is the connection between the arrival of such great light in Christ, and the command to "repent" in v. 17?
 - Pastor Josh has previously described repentance as a re-orientation—turning away from all we've been orienting our lives around, and orienting them around the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.
 - What would it take for you to re-orient your life, today, around Jesus and his kingdom?
 - How might the light start to come into your life if you did this?

PRAYER

- Earlier, you all shared about the levels of gloom that you are experiencing. Be sure to lift these matters to God, asking for his light to break in.
- If appropriate, take time in prayer to confess how your hopes have been misplaced.
- Allow people to share other needs they may currently have, and pray for those needs specifically.