

A LIGHT SHINES

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Scripture: Isaiah 9: 1-7

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.

You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder.

For you will break the yoke of their slavery and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders. You will break the oppressor's rod, just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

The boots of the warrior and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned. They will be fuel for the fire.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

What wonderful words! A prophecy that is filled with so much potential to bless and alleviate harm and all the anxiety and difficulties that we are facing. For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us. Will you join me as we pray and invite the Holy Spirit to help us with this passage and apply it to our hearts?

Heavenly Father, Your words were given to the prophet Isaiah as he penned it, and we now invite Your Holy Spirit to bring Your Son to life in a sense, for each one of us in fresh new ways, that we may understand what this passage has for us. So, Triune God, speak to us, we ask. Amen.

As we look at the ninth chapter of Isaiah, we must remember where he is coming from. The eighth chapter is filled with adversity, gloom, evil and so much despair, and in the midst of that, he comes into the ninth chapter and starts with this wonderful news: *"Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever."* Then he says, *"The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles which lies along the road, will be filled with glory."* Galilee was nothing compared to any of the other cities in Israel or Judah because it was considered the least spiritual of any of those cities, and yet, the prophet Isaiah's saying that it will be filled with glory. What a wonderful proclamation of the coming birth of Jesus and His ministry, that as Jesus is born and as He fulfills His ministry and the reason for His coming to earth, that glory will be attached to this lowly place which was considered to have zero spirituality among the children of Israel.

Then he goes on to say: *"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light."* There is a kind of parallelism here because the same thing is repeated: *"For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine."* Basically, saying that in this place of darkness, in this place of depravity, in this place of depression, and despair, and gloom, and evil, a light will shine.

The people who are part of this time, who are living in this kind of situation and circumstance, they will see this light and amidst them, this light will shine. To them, this light that is shining would have

meant that all of this despair and depravity and gloom and evil would disappear, and prosperity and joy and peace would come, because that was the association that light had for the children of Israel. Darkness will go and light will shine and situations will change for the better.

How will it change for the better? *"You will enlarge the nation of Israel and its people will rejoice."* Israel's borders will be enlarged and joy will come back and its people will rejoice. *"They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest."* He gives us two examples of how people rejoice. They rejoice when the harvest is ready. There is so much joy at that time to go out and harvest, and see the fruit of all that they have planted in the time that has gone by, to see the fruit ready for harvest. He gives another example: *"like warriors dividing the plunder they won at war."* To be able to go through the enemy's camps and see all that they have left behind, and to be able to take it and make it their own.

Why is this rejoicing going to be happening? *"Because you will break the yoke of their slavery and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders. You will break the oppressor's rod just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian. The boots of the warriors and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned. They will be fuel for the fire."* In other words, the oppression that was among them during this time of darkness will be lifted. The boot will be lifted from their necks and instead, there will be joy. The oppressor's rod will be broken.

I love the poetry that is associated with this language. It creates for us a wonderful picture of what will happen when God comes to bat for us. Oppression is lifted. The rod of oppression is broken and there is great joy. Why and how will this happen? He says, *"because a child is born to us, a Son is given to us."* We know that this is a Messianic passage, talking about the time when Jesus the Messiah will be born, and a new dispensation will be put in motion; a time when God will come down in the form of humanity and will usher in a new time of peace and joy and hope.

That's why as we look at this first Sunday in Advent, hope is what we are looking at. Hope, that no situation is set in stone as long as God is on the throne, that He can change the dismal settings that may surround us at this time because of a child who has been given to us, a Son who is born. Our very own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The people of Israel who heard this, 700 years before the birth of Jesus may not have understood it; and many didn't even when Jesus came. Whereas you and I, we are here celebrating Advent. The first Sunday in Advent, a day of hope, because we know that the Messiah has come in the form of Jesus. This is the good news for us that He is still the hope bearer, that He is still the one who can come into our darkness and bring light. He is still the one who can come into our despair and bring joy. He is still the one who can come into our turmoil and bring peace because of the words that are associated with Him.

"And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Wonderful Counselor! Let me ask you this, beloved, in all that you are going through today, the things that you are facing, the situation that you are enveloped in, do you need a wonderful counselor to speak words of wisdom into your situation? Do you need words of knowledge to help you make a decision that is right in front of you? Do you need to know how to unravel the mystery of things that are around you because you don't know which is the next step that you need to take? Do you need to have somebody listen to what you've gone through in terms of grief, in terms of conflict, in terms of a relationship that has broken? Wonderful Counselor is the name given to Jesus, and to you and me today, He affords us that counsel. I wonder whether today, hope can be resurrected in you because you realize that the one who is within you, you have never treated as Wonderful Counselor in your life. And to be able to say: My goodness! All that I am facing, this kind of darkness that I am dealing with, I can take to Him because He can bring light into my situation as Wonderful Counselor.

The Mighty God! What do you need broken, beloved? What chains hold you that you need to find and be unshackled? What is it that weighs so heavily on you that you need the hammer of heaven to come and break it? What is it that holds you captive that you need a mighty God to come and bat on your behalf, to break the things that are holding you down, and to set you free? What is it that you need might and power to come and be with you during this time? What is that thing that needs to be broken, that needs to be overcome, that needs to be crushed by the might of heaven? Because Jesus, Mighty God, is with you.

Everlasting Father! You know we have our earthly fathers, and most of the time we have had some wonderful memories with them. Then there may be some of you listening, who say: Well, I don't have very good memories of my father. I've gone through difficult times. Or maybe today you're saying: I enjoyed my father, but he's not with me anymore. It was too short. I didn't get to enjoy him for a long time. And you miss him. Beloved, Everlasting Father is the name that was given, and is what Jesus bears. He is your Father. He will always be your Father. What our earthly father can do for us in a limited sense, in a temporary sense, a Heavenly Father can do for you and for me in a permanent sense and with unlimited resources. He will always love you. He will always care. He will always uplift, eternally. Whether you've had a good, or a not so good experience, Jesus, our Everlasting Father, is there to bring out the very best in you, to help you become who you are intended to be, to support you, to provide for you, to help you reach those goals. Everlasting Father!

The Prince of Peace! I wonder whether peace is at a premium in your life today, that things aren't going too well, that there's conflict. Reconciliation doesn't seem to be near. You're living under constant fighting, back-biting, in the midst of anger, bitterness, harsh words. Peace is that elusive element that you are praying for and wishing that you could have. I wonder whether today, you can turn to Jesus and say: You are my Prince of Peace. Will you come in and bring peace – first to my troubled mind, then to the situations that are around me? Can you bring peace to people around me? Will you let peace prevail within me? Will you let peace be present in my life?

Beloved, this is the season of hope, and whatever you are facing today, the light has come and darkness must give way to light. Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace is here. Emmanuel, God with us!

The reason why this is so important is that in coming down to earth, God brought His divinity into our humanity, and in the form of Jesus, embodied them both. As fully human, He understands exactly what you're going through. As fully divine, He has the power and the resources of the Almighty God to help us navigate our time here on earth.

Was Jesus fully human? Yes, indeed He was fully human. He experienced the normal physical, mental, social and spiritual growth as all of us do. Luke 2:52 says, "Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people." He was just like us.

- He too grew in stature and in favor.
- He suffered pain. Remember when He wept when He heard about Lazarus.
- He experienced hunger. You remember in the wilderness, Satan tried to use that against Him.
- He experienced thirst on the cross. You remember He said, "I thirst."
- He experienced fatigue. You remember in carrying the cross up the slopes of Golgotha.
- He experienced temptation. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us, "For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. Yet He did not sin."

- He experienced pleasure, rest and even lack of knowledge, as we see in Mark 13:32 where He talks about His return – “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son Himself. Only the Father knows.

Because of His humanity, He can empathize with you and me, with what we are going through, and help us.

What about His divinity? He was fully divine as well. He was called God. John 1:1 states: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then He goes on to say: “The Word was with us as well.”

- He did works that only God could do – like forgiving sins. Remember the paralytic who was dropped in the midst of the room when He was teaching, and Jesus told him: “Son, your sins are forgiven.” But some of the scribes were sitting there and thinking it over in their hearts: Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins except God alone? Son, your sins are forgiven.
- He had attributes that only God could have – like truth. Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. no one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)
- His omniscience. John 2:24-25 “But Jesus didn’t trust them because He knew all about people. No one needed to tell him about human nature, for He knew what was in each person’s heart.
- He claimed equality with God. “The Father and I are one,” He said in John 10:13.

Jesus incarnate, Son of God came to earth, beloved, as the hope of our world – fully human, fully divine. Fully human so that He can empathize with every situation and circumstance that you’re going through and He understands it. Fully divine because as God, He has the resources of being God to help us navigate through these situations and circumstances that we are facing.

In closing, I would like to ask you two questions:

1. The light has come. Have you seen it?
2. The Son is born. Have you experienced Him?

The light has come, beloved; have you allowed that light into every situation and circumstance that you are facing? The Son has come, beloved; do you know Him as your Savior and Lord, so that He can bring change into your hearts and lives? The season of hope! Light has come and shines in our dark world. Let’s embrace it today. Amen.