

Isaiah 9

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[0:00] Hope can be defined as a desire accompanied by expectation of belief in fulfillment.

! A desire but it's accompanied by the fact that you think it's going to happen.! So can I ask you a question just to think about what are you looking forward to?

What do you hope for? Perhaps on the global scale, the end of a war between Russia and Ukraine, lives lost in both of those countries, impacts of that conflict all around the world are felt, displacement of people, shortage of food, all sorts of things.

I hope global warming will slow and stop. I hope poor people in the world will find food and shelter. I hope the economy will recover. I hope a bit more nearer home in our own family. I hope I will be able to cope with rising prices.

[1:16] I'm able to keep warm this winter. I hope I can have a long life, stay healthy. Many of us feel we are in dark times.

We desire these things. These are quite, yeah, very healthy things to desire. But if we go back to that definition, can we be sure that they will happen?

No. We can't, can we? We're left hoping. But it's an uncertain thing. And in our Western culture, particularly with the media and the internet, the idea of waiting for anything, oh dear, no, we're not very good at that.

Not when you can, with two flicks of a button, you can get things. Anyone who says that you might have to wait, dear, oh dear. So I want to take you back to the time of Israel and Judah, about 700 years before Jesus came.

And the first part of what I am doing, and I will skim this a little bit more quickly because I'm just covering some of the history that I think Daniel coped with very well last time. But I will just remind you of it.

[2:40] This is how dark was it for God's people in those days. Here is a map. You can probably see in, in the, between Sidon and Jerusalem, that's, that's Israel.

And the bottom bit of that would be Judah. But notice in terms of where Aram, which was Syria, just above it. And particularly Assyria, a little bit to the right.

Can you see those? Because these are nations that we talk about in what was going on here. Pica was the king of Israel.

This I'll skim quickly because I think Daniel handled this last time. Ahaz was the king of Israel.

Assyria was threatening Israel. And that led Israel to make an alliance with Syria.

Israel actually wanted Judah to join in that alliance, but Ahaz declined. Israel and Syria planned to attack Judah. They wanted to put a puppet king there in who would be pro-Assyria.

[3:47] But Ahaz was afraid. And so if you recall, I hope I'm, anyone who was here last time, I hope you're, you're not needing too much reminder. But there was a prophecy.

Anyone remember roughly what was said to Isaiah to try, to Ahaz to encourage him? I will help you. I will help you. Well, no, this was the, this was the, this invasion that's about to come from Israel and Syria.

It's not, it's not going to work. It's not going to happen. The gist of it was trust God, not Assyria. If you do not stand firm in your faith was the challenge that Ahaz, you will not stand at all.

But instead, I'm afraid Ahaz didn't do very well in this sort of faith test, trust test. He went, do you remember bigger Assyria on, on that right hand side of that map?

He went, um, looking for help there. And they did initially help by invading Israel. But then it, then it went on and they invaded Judah.

[4:55] But the damage to Judah did have a limit. And I will just read if we go to Isaiah eight and verses six to eight. Because the people had rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloh.

And rejoices over resin and the son of Romalia. Therefore, the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty flood waters of the Euphrates.

And it wasn't pointed out on that map, but that's over near Assyria. That's the people of Assyria. The king of Assyria, with all his pomp, it will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks and sweep into Judah.

Swirling over it, passing through it, but the critical point, reaching up to the neck. So it's not a total devastation. And in 732 BC, Assyria does attack Israel.

Initially, that's Zebulun and Naphtali towards the north. But the whole northern kingdom, it was, it was deported around 722 BC, I think, thereabouts.

[6:09] Now, why? Why did this happen? So you picture God's people. They've been overrun and they've been taken off into another land. Why did this happen? I won't read it all, but if you wanted to thumb it through, you could look in 2 Kings 17.

But I'm just going to give you some headlines of what was going on. The Israelites were deported and overrun because of their sin. They worshipped other gods. They followed the practices of the nations that they had driven out.

What they were told, just what they were told not to do. They made their own high places and Asherah poles. The Lord actually used prophets to warn them, but they would not listen. They made idols shaped like calves and bowed down to them. They worshipped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters.

Can't quite imagine following other practices of another religion to go that far, but some of them did. So it says the Lord was very angry with them.

[7:20] And he removed them from his presence. The people of Israel and Judah were overrun and deported. And that's just a map. The purple arrows show the direction of people being taken off to Assyria.

So a difficult time, dark times indeed. But I just want to draw your attention to two responses from the people of God.

One is cursing God. And if you look in verse 20 of chapter 8.

They were, I'll read from verse 19. They'd been consulting mediums and spirit. When somebody tells you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God?

Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

[8:29] And without reading it a little bit earlier in chapter 8, there is verse 13. Well, I will read a little bit. Verse 13. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy. He is the one you are to fear.

He is the one you are to dread. But back where we were, verse 21. Verse 21. Distressed and hungry, these people who ignore God's word, will roam through the land.

Then when they are famished, they will become enraged, look upward, will curse the king and their God. And then they will look towards the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom.

And they will be thrust into utter darkness. So what a grim picture. But one of the responses amongst the people, cursing God.

But the other response, which is a much better one, is waiting for God. And again, keeping that idea I read from earlier about the Lord Almighty is the one you are to fear.

[9:35] Verses 16 and 17. So, bind up this testimony of warning and seal up God's instruction among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the descendants of Jacob.

There was a realism here. They knew God was hiding his face. I will put my trust in him. So, two responses from the people of God in this darkness.

Their homeland was a disgrace. It had been overrun. Other people were in it now. God's face, his light had turned away.

Only a few of the people of Israel were still faithful to God. I'm not sure if it's coming on the screen. I've lost the last one, I think.

But the... Never mind, we'll keep going. I think just some of the last line I've lost. But into this catastrophe, God speaks a message of hope.

[10:38] And that's what's coming in the last part of what we're doing. Verses 1 to 3. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.

In the past, he humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. But in the future, he will honor Galilee of the nations. That is actually the same area by the way of the sea. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

So the first thing here is there is honor to a land where there was contempt, where Israel was a place that no one respected as the home of the people of God.

Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to be hit by the Assyrians. But it was the place that Nazareth, where Jesus came from, was in this area.

[11:52] So looking ahead to the future, but in the future, he will honor Galilee. And then I'll put the next three up together.

There was light, light has dawned, that's in verse 2. The nation enlarged and joy increased. And just notice the tense.

This is all described as if it's happened. But it's most clearly pointing to the time of the Messiah coming. But it's spoken as if it's happened because it is so certain that it will happen.

Light has dawned where there was darkness. Nation enlarged where there was, they were feeling, sometimes we might feel it, a very small number. When will God's people grow again?

So the last three spoken of is already done. But they do point to this future time. And we are led to three reasons for the light and joy.

[12:54] If you look in verses 4 to 6. And you will find, let me just get to verses 4, 5 and 6. The NIV hides a little bit.

I think the original word at the start of verse 4, 5 and 6 is like, because. In my NIV it says for, as in the days, verse 5, every warrior.

But it's for every warrior's boot or because. So there are three because's here. And the first one is because the Lord has acted to deliver.

And as in the days of Midian's defeat, this is verse 4, you have shattered. And note these words that remind you of the Exodus, I would think.

The yoke, the bar, the rod, the people who beat them when they weren't working hard enough. The oppressor. And Midian's defeat, which involved Gideon and God's helping him.

[13:53] And of course that is the area around Zebulun and Naphtali. The land now being honored. But notice if you remember those stories.

Of course in the Exodus from Egypt and in the overthrow of Midian by Gideon and his people with God's help. God acted in power.

The people respond by and large poorly. There is a little bit of initial rejoicing. But actually very soon they're complaining.

And they went after other gods. But in this prophecy about the coming Messiah, I think I'm going to be losing a line or two. I'll have to try and remember what I said. God acts and he has made the light dawn.

He has increased their joy. And the people respond positively. And I can remember what's going on here. That if you look at verses.

[14:55] Where are we? Where are we? Nine verse. As well as saying, you have enlarged the nations. Well, we knew it was a remnant. But you have increased their joy.

And then it says, they rejoice before you. So not only had God done it. But the people were rejoicing. So there is this completeness. About what is going on. In this future of the Messiah.

but what does the Messiah deliver us from? Of course, in Jesus' day, it was what was the greatest fear, the Roman occupation.

That was certainly one of the things they thought, this man who can work miracles, he's surely going to rescue us from this, but actually he came to deliver us from the power of sin and death. And actually the way it happened on earth and the way it started, even the way it's still going on now, it might seem rather low-key and it might not seem like it's conquering large areas of our world, but he came to deliver from the power of sin and death.

[16:10] That was the first of the three because. The second one, because the enemy has been utterly defeated, verse 5, every warrior's boot used in battle, every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning.

But who is our enemy as we think of the Messiah? Well, it is the devil who will be utterly defeated one day, but nevertheless at the cross, a key battle decisively won already.

And yet we go back to the end of verse 3, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder, the people have actually entered this battlefield after God has won the victory, and the spoils of the victory, the things that Jesus has won, are ours to enjoy.

And then the last because, verse 4, 5, and verse 6, because a child has been born, and to us a son is given. Has been born makes you think of the mother, but the son given is God giving this son. Who is this child? A perfect king. The mere fact of the birth means that all that results from it is considered like it's certain.

[17:39] That's the way the phrases come. So, whatever picture I might put up here, if it makes you think of English monarchy, it's going to be rather imperfect.

It's not really a very perfect monarchy, is it? But I think compared to many parts of the world, we probably have reason to be very thankful for a king who by and large supports the Christian ways. The perfect king, let's look at verses 6 to 7. He will be called, and there are several names given, Wonderful Counselor.

Now, that could be literally wonder, a counselor and a wonder. So, it certainly comes up, the idea of a very wise ruler.

Someone, and goodness me, as you look around and see the number of people trying to lead us, and we see the consequences, don't we, of people making bad decisions. What a great thing it would be if the king, the almighty king, can rule with great wisdom, and in himself, and in himself, a wonder anyway.

[18:57] The king is wise. Ahaz was clever and able, but not wise. The second one is mighty God.

There is a name for warrior in there. So, not only wise, but anyone who's going to try and overthrow him, get him out the way, dealing with a mighty God who no one can really, no one has a chance to move him aside.

King is strong. And terminology that's not so often used in the Old Testament about father is used of the Lord, and I can just give some examples.

I don't think we'll look these up, but there is a concern for the helpless. You can look them up if you wish. Care or discipline of his people is there in the idea of a father, and their loyal and reverential sort of response to him.

And there are examples of that. And of course, Israel was used to stop-go between kings. And as you know from their history, that some of these kings were far from good.

[20:15] So, it was not only stop-go, but sometimes the next one was really a lot worse than the last one. But this father, with all this care and love and concern, an everlasting father.

And then the last one, Prince of Peace. On a personal level, this is, we know about wanting the sense of well-being, freedom from anxiety.

I'm sure many of us are not free from anxiety in our times. What's the Hebrew, the Jewish phrase, shalom, which is wishing a sort of sense of wholeness and completeness on people.

That sense of peace. In relationships, it's goodwill and harmony. Quite the opposite of war. And you don't need to look far on the international stage to see how little the world knows of relationships in harmony.

And towards God, it is the full realization of his favor. This Messiah coming, this wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, he is the Prince of Peace.

[21:37] But the thing about following God is that he is the Prince of Peace, that he can instill this peace in his people as we follow him.

So it's a kingdom with no end. Where did we read that? In the first part of verse 7, to the increase of his princely rule and to peace there is no limit.

And I give you a quote here from Alec Mateer, a very helpful one, I think, about the nature of this rule. It is an empire indeed, but not, no imperialism here.

There is rule, but not exploitation. Rather, the endless sharing of his own perfect fulfillment in bringing those under his rule to perfection.

perfection. That's a lovely picture of this godly rule. So much wisdom, so much love and care, so much strength, and able to share his own perfect fulfillment, bringing those under his rule to perfection.

[22:55] perfection. He will reign on David's throne with justice and righteousness, and it says towards the end of our passage, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

So, I think I've covered what's in our text. I just want to spend the last bit of time thinking about what we might learn.

The darkness, their darkness, was very much a result of their disobedience. Relief was not available immediately for them, but there was a certain hope for the future.

But they were being told in the middle of these dark times and this is really where the hard thing is. You might have your eyes on the immediate darkness around you, but the real message here is, although you are in darkness, I'll be with you in that darkness, but look beyond and there is a certain hope of what happens beyond death.

There is a certain hope of what will happen forever, the new heavens and the new earth. The best response we've read so far amongst God's people then, I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the descendants of Jacob.

[24:16] I will put my trust in him. But let me draw your attention to something else a little bit later in Isaiah, and this is in Isaiah 50 because we did have this theme of what you do in darkness.

Now this will need a little bit of explaining because it doesn't read, it doesn't sound, I think it needs a little bit of understanding how you read this. Chapter 50 and verses 10 and 11 says, Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant?

And here is advice to someone walking in the dark. Let the one who walks in the dark and who has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on their God.

But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze.

This is what you shall receive from my hand. You will lie down in torment. Now, plain enough, who among you fears the Lord if you walk in the dark?

[25:26] Trust the name of the Lord. And I think we have to have the idea here not of you've been at home and all the electricity went off and you need to get to the shed and you want to use a torch.

Well, of course you will. That's not lighting your own fires. The idea here is of people who when God has brought some darkness you turn away from God and you just say I'm going to find my own way out of this.

I'm going to do anything I can. Perhaps me in that basement it was like the first thing I'd do is say I'm going to trip over everything and I'm just going to get my way out of this where really I just had to wait.

It was a trick. It didn't last long. But I just had to wait. But that's the idea here. The reason there is such ferocious condemnation it's people who say in the darkness I will not trust God.

I'm going to find my own way out of this. But measure up the wisdom of course when you're in difficulty you use some reasonable common sense to find your way forward. but remember God in it all.

[26:39] Those who light their own fires those in a sense who find their own way forgetting God will lie down in torment. So how dark is it for

us? We touched on some of this early on.

We have a national debt from COVID. I can't tell you how much it is but I think it's a lot. Brexit I think is not working quite as planned. I think financially it's just not quite working as we thought.

NHS and many council departments they need more money don't they? And we're not sure where it's coming from. High inflation everything costs more. Global warming not much hope we're going to do anything about it really is it?

We're not going to coordinate all our responses in time to really slow it. Wars that cost many lives and reduce availability of resources energy costs out of control nearer to home health concerns we're familiar with many of those in our midst heartache in the family bereavement difficulty perhaps finding work maybe prone to depression we are familiar I don't think I need to persuade you with dark times and there are two responses one is trusting God in the dark and I just underline again that's not that straightforward we might need the help of a good mature friend to help us keep going when sometimes things around us are looking very very difficult or you ignore

God and you just find your own way lighting your own torches it may be dark at the moment but this king has come he was born died he was raised to life I think many in the world would just quickly skim over that of course it didn't happen they would say this Jesus was raised to life and ascended to heaven his kingdom has started already a light has dawned a child is born are you prepared to wait for this Lord for the Lord nothing can stop this kingdom growing there is no wiser more powerful more caring king the prince of peace who endlessly shares his nature with those under his rule and here is another quote from

[29:28] Alec Matier that I'll finish with the people of God must decide what reading of their experiences they will live by are they to look at the darkness the hopelessness the dreams shattered and conclude that God has forgotten them or are they to recall his past mercies to remember his present promises and to make great affirmations of faith will you trust this perfect king to make a to make a of the of the will you the peace and peace and