

Christmas Day 2018

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[0 : 00] This is, we've been going through a series in John, but today it's Christmas Day, so we're taking a break from our series and I'll be looking at Isaiah chapter 9. So if you have your Bibles or your phone apps, open it up to that and we'll be looking at that passage.

If you don't have a Bible or a phone app, there are some Bibles at the back, by all means grab one. If you don't have a Bible at all, then take that as our Christmas gift to you. Alrighty, as we go into this Christmas Day, I think it's really important just to point out something that's significant, but that we live with like it's not really true, not really there.

And that is that we live day by day with the truth we choose not to believe in, alongside the lies we choose to believe in.

I know Donald Trump has said there's truth and there's alternate truth, but that's not true. There is truth and there is lies. And I think it's amazing how easily and how regularly we choose to live with lies.

We know what the truth is, but we choose to live with lies. I find it particularly amazing on days like today, now if your kids don't know this, then I apologise, but a Christmas Day, we have this day where we either celebrate the birth of Jesus or the arrival of Santa.

[1 : 24] I won't go any further than that, just for your kids' sake, but go home and tell them the truth, parents, please. You know, we have this thing, and it's amazing because as a Christian who actually believes what I believe on the basis of evidence, I'm told not to actually present that.

I mean, I'm discouraged from presenting what I believe to be true and what I can actually see from evidence. At the same time, I'm not allowed to crush the dreams of people who have chosen to believe an alternate truth or a lie in this area.

It happens in a lot of different areas. We've had the last couple of years, one of the big issues in our society has been the issue of gender and how we understand that to work.

Shifted mightily away from the truth we know to the lie we would choose to believe. There are a whole bunch of other different areas like this.

I mean, I think your comment, Beth, this morning about how in a talk about not realizing there were going to be so many kids there because at 9 o'clock there weren't.

[2 : 31] I mean, that might be another truth or lie. Is that too close to the bone to say, you know, when church starts is actually versus when people arrive? No? Maybe that is too close to the truth.

It's a bit uncomfortable, isn't it? But, you know, I do welcoming regularly, and my record for people who have arrived after the church has started is 71. I count. I count. Yes, I count. Now I'm going to shame you.

No, I'm not. I'm not going to shame you. No, but it's, you know, there are a whole bunch of ways that we approach this, and we just go with it. We actually have the truth that we can actually choose to believe in, but we so often choose not to believe in it, versus the lie we actually choose to believe in.

And this passage in Isaiah is a point at which Israel, on our behalf in a sense, because they're the first, the forerunners of us actually realizing something about ourselves.

But this group of people actually chose to live and believe a lie about themselves when something was blatantly true. And so what we have in this passage is an account of how God is actually so fed up with Israel that he actually says, that Isaiah actually says in verse 17 of chapter 8, The Lord is hiding his face from Jacob.

[4 : 03] This is a nation who is described as being in the darkness of gloom, distress and darkness. They're fearing the attacks of Assyria from the north. They're scared for their lives of Assyria.

And so what do they do? Well, God actually points out to Isaiah what they're going to do instead of actually coming to God himself.

What they're going to do is this. In verse 19, God says to Isaiah, And when they say to you, inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter.

People who actually inquire of spirits, or actually the spirits of, specifically the spirits of dead people, the necromancers. Bit of an old-fashioned word, but that's what it's about. That's what people will choose to do.

There's a truth that they could actually believe in and trust in if they were willing to. The truth that God has always shown himself to be faithful. Or there's the lie they choose to believe, and they run to it.

[5 : 07] I've got to say that this issue of going to mediums is a huge thing. One of the last jobs I had as a physio, I used to work in a nursing home. And there were a whole bunch of people that used to come together for lunch around midday.

And we'd sit in the lunchroom and just chat about various different things. And I can tell you now that I was the only person in that room of more than a dozen people regularly.

I was the only person in that room who hadn't actually been to see a medium. And a number of them saw mediums regularly. So when we're talking about this stuff, the truth and the lie, I've got to tell you, this is ingrained into us.

It is there. And God is pointing it out to Isaiah 700 years before Christ. We're talking 2,700 years ago. This is what people like. And this is how he sums it up.

God sums it up to Isaiah in verse 22 of chapter 8. And they will look to the earth. That's their choice. They will look to the earth. Not to him. They will look to the earth.

[6 : 06] But behold, this is what they'll find. Distress and darkness. The gloom of anguish. As these people of Israel are faced with the crisis of Assyria coming to invade them, they look to everything and everyone but the one who can rescue them.

The truth we choose not to believe versus the lies we choose to believe. They actually have an end point. They lead somewhere.

God is hiding his face from these people. Why? Because they are people who look to the earth instead of heaven. A people who look to the earth instead of heaven in a world that looks to the earth instead of heaven.

And this anguish that these people are heading into is not the fact that they're caught up in this global conflict scenario where now Assyria is on the rise.

The anguish in the world is directly a consequence of rejecting God. This is the gloom that we find ourselves in in this world.

[7 : 20] But as Assyria is given this message by God, it does not end there. You see, he gives this image of the anguish of gloom and darkness. This kind of darkness, gloom, depressing sort of bad news sort of thing going on.

But then he actually breaks into that image with a kind of almost a sunrise type theme. And we read in verse 2 of chapter 9.

I'm into chapter 9 now. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Darkness and gloom. And suddenly light is dawning. Isaiah's prophecy, as he begins to prophesy to the people, the message to the people, projects himself forward into the future.

It's described as a new dawn. And he does it, if you notice that, he actually does it in past tense.

Now this isn't meant to mean that it's already happened. What it's meant to mean in terms of prophecy, in the language of prophecy and how the kind of the code they used to do it is, past tense means this is such a certainty that Isaiah can declare it as though it has already happened.

In verse 2, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. This is what is definitely coming for them. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

[8 : 46] Something is going to happen that will turn darkness to light, that will turn anguish to joy. And there are three reasons given in this passage for it. You'll see the three fours in beginning verses 4, 5 and 6.

For the yoke of the burden is lifted. The burden is lifted. Now if we're looking in an earthly direction, then we'd see this perhaps reading in this context as Israel's return from exile.

But historically we know that this didn't actually solve the problem of the darkness. Even though they did return from exile after 70 odd years, it still didn't resolve the issue.

They still lived in an oppressed state. So the people of God saw this prophecy and they looked beyond their return. They anticipated something else, something bigger. Something perhaps, or something definitely, I can say, to do with their relationship with God. The reason that they went into exile wasn't because Assyria just happened to be mighty at the time and God was on holiday.

[9 : 53] It was because God raised Assyria up to punish Israel, to remind them of who he was. They were living in a state where the burden was on them to maintain their relationship with God and they could not do it.

They kept failing. They anticipated something else as they saw this prophecy, something bigger. And Jesus said, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

When we think about this prophecy and we start to see a resonance in the life of Jesus, the one who said, yet that burden of the law is too heavy for you to bear. You cannot bear it up.

So I have come to take it from you. The burden is lifted, is the first four. The second one is the fighting is over.

[11 : 08] Again, if we were looking in an earthly direction, then the end of conflict would be our expectation that Assyria would either be conquered or by another power, or actually God would actually intervene in some significant way.

The passing of war, violence, and the fear and instability they bring into our lives. But again, historically we know this didn't come to pass.

Israel remained a tumultuous place right up until the arrival of Jesus. And we know that even during the arrival of Jesus, Israel was occupied by the Romans. And still, even now, in that area, let alone the rest of the world, war, oppression, threats of violence are very real.

So what's going on here? I think we're going to see a little bit more in the name of Jesus, one of the names that Jesus is given in this passage. What's going on here? What kind of peace is this child going to bring?

Well, in John 14, 27, Jesus said these words to his disciples, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.

[12 : 22] Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them not be afraid. Let them be afraid. Jesus breaks in and says, I'm actually the peace bringer. And I'm going to bring a peace, but it's not a peace that you're thinking about.

It's not actually a removal of the Romans, but it's actually a peace between you or me and God. And how does this come about? Well, we find out. The third four is a child will be born.

The child. Again, these prophecies had some bearing on the immediate circumstances of God's people. And in some way, Cyrus was actually the deliverer, who was later named in Isaiah, who will actually bring them out of exile.

But he's not the man who can fulfill these promises. They're too big for him. They're too far reaching. They're actually eternal in scope.

So there was always a hope for something better. Always an expectation for something more in the hearts and minds of God's people. The hope of a saviour. And here Isaiah is saying, keep hoping.

[13 : 30] He's coming. At that point when he comes, the reality of anguish in all its forms will be seen to have a conclusion.

And because it has a conclusion, this gloom will be replaced with joy. And this saviour will do it. Man, Israel must have felt they were caught up in the tides of forces way beyond their control. Will powers rising and falling and sweeping them up in their wake. But this saviour, regardless of what is going on in the world around us, regardless of what we fear, what we struggle with, this saviour will have the power to do it.

And we know because God named him before his birth. Gave him four names. That's pretty good going. I don't know about you guys, but Joe and I struggled to name our first child.

Our first child he called Tom. Did you have arguments? No, we had discussions. No arguments. But I think it was like five days in the hospital. He only got his name on the last day as we left.

[14 : 34] Is that right? So he was called Baby Patterson for five days in this hospital. And you imagine every time the nurse comes in and reminds you, because they're doing obs like multiple times a day, and they just keep reminding you, Baby Patterson.

Has the baby got a name yet? No. And you know the way that names work now? It seems like we name our kids more as a reflection of ourselves and as a reflection of the character of the children, not like things were done in these days.

There was an expectation that a name would impart character or at least reflect the character of someone. So we called Tom, you know, Tom. That means twin. You know Joe's a twin. We called Hannah, Hannah, because Joe's a bit dyslexic, and it doesn't matter which way you spell it.

It works out the same. You just, you know, and then there's all these hybrid names that people are using now, and you don't know how to spell them at all.

It doesn't matter which way you spell it. I don't know. But, you know, so names are a little bit different, aren't they? But when we look at this passage, the names are significant. There were three reasons for joy, and there are four names for this joy giver, and the four names speak to the character of this saviour, what he is going to be like, what he is going to do.

[15:46] They tell us who he is. They tell us what he'll accomplish. And the first one is wonderful counsellor. Wonderful is a specific word.

It means amazing. I mean, I call Joe this all the time. I say she's wonderful all the time, and she is. She's an amazing woman, beautiful. I used to call her precious, but then the Lord of the Rings came out and kind of made that a bit creepy.

So I switched to wonderful and beautiful, and it's better. And, you know, wonderful still has this meaning of amazing. It's someone or something you deeply admire, that you delight in, but it's more than that.

This particular word means beyond the power, so wonderful, that it's beyond the power of man to accomplish. It's almost exclusively used of God's work, God's handiwork in the Bible.

So wonderful, as in beyond the power of man to accomplish. And counsellor, a wonderful counsellor, a planner, a schemer, someone who is renowned for wisdom and who can use that wisdom to bring about great change.

[16:57] That's the sense of that word in the Hebrew. Linked with wonderful, it's meant to give us confidence. This saviour can solve the problem. And for them, the problem, the Israelites, the problem was right in front of them.

For us, it is too. To be God's people and yet to be exiled because they can't keep the law.

They were a holy nation, a holy nation of a holy God, but they couldn't live up to be holy. It's the same for us.

If you are not yet in relationship with God, he is a holy God and no matter how good you think you are and how good you strive to be, this is not the way to get there because it is just too far.

The bar is too high. A holy nation of a holy God, but they couldn't live up to being holy. But there was more. You see, this God has two characteristics in equal measure and these are the two characteristics that we find ourselves just bashing up against.

[18:02] That is this. God is a God of justice and covenant faithfulness. He's a God of justice and faithfulness, which means God does not look over any fault or flaw on the one hand.

But God is faithful to his promises to his people on the other. The Israelites had a law they cannot keep. We have an expectation on us.

We inherit it, which is the same. We fall far too short of God's character to be able to live and survive in his presence. We face a God who is a God of justice and we are a part of a world that cannot reach God.

So, this is the dilemma that this wonderful counsellor resolves for us. This saviour would be a wonderful counsellor. He would be able to solve the problem that we have no solution for.

The saviour had a plan that couldn't be undone by anyone but God. I don't know if you're aware of 1 John 1, 8 and 9.

[19:18] I was brought up in the Anglican church and so we had this green prayer book which we go through every week and it was great for just like pounding scripture into you. and one of the passages that was irregular was 1 John 1, 8 and 9.

If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin God is what? Faithful and just.

Those words come up again. To forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is the plan of our wonderful counsellor to deliver us from a dilemma that we cannot get out of.

The Israelites before us couldn't. We can't. We need Jesus. We need this child to rescue us. The saviour had a plan that couldn't be done by anyone but God.

And so that's who this child would be we read the next title is Mighty God. This is who God sends himself. This saviour would be called Mighty God.

[20 : 27] And this is a huge thing because we're talking about a child being born. So the people of Israel would have got this and I think if we think about it too it's a huge thing. Not only is he wise but he's powerful.

He doesn't rely on others to bring his plans to fruition. He has the power to see it done himself. And it's unlimited power because he is the mighty God. Isaiah's already alluded to this in 7.14 and I think in chapter 8 as well by calling him this saviour Emmanuel God with us.

But that could just be a name because Joshua shared the name that's the same as Jesus. Yahweh saves. But here it moves beyond the sense of oh this is just a name to this is who he is.

So therefore the Lord will give you a sign behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel in 7.14 is actually saying more than just give the kid the name this but this is God.

Emmanuel God with us. God in human form. This is an unbelievable claim. The creator of the universe becoming a creature. The one who is becoming who the one who wills everything into existence.

[21 : 48] But as incomprehensible as that is it's immensely comforting because God in all his power has come to save us.

And this is both significant but necessary. God is perfectly pure. He's holy. We are not. We can't be no matter how hard we try.

There may as well be a concrete wall between us. No matter how hard we try we cannot get through it. It's impregnable to us. So God breaks it down from his sight.

This promised saviour our mighty God doesn't wait for us to do the impossible. He breaks through this wall from his sight. It's the only way that wall could come down. Wonderful counsellor mighty God everlasting father.

I love this. The expression of that leadership of our saviour is described in terms of fatherhood.

[22 : 55] Now I know for some of you that this concept may not be a pleasant and welcome thought. But let me just say that as painful as it may be to remember an abusive father or a father who has failed you in so many ways every one of those jabs of pain should remind you that fatherhood should be something better.

It should be something greater than that. The nature of God in human form is to be our father. Father in the sense that he is our ultimate safe space.

A father in the sense that he provides us with existence identity family. Think about this. Father is integral to giving life to his children and then he nurtures them by protecting and providing for them. That's existence. He gives us identity. We are made in his image. With our own earthly fathers we share DNA. Unfortunately it goes beyond that because nature and nurture are at work and unfortunately our kids pick up our habits as well.

You'll know this. What a good thing to have a holy father then, a perfect father one whose habits are not actually going to alter your life to the negative. A father who we are made in the image of and we are being remade in the image of and a father gives us connection into family.

[24 : 15] He connects us into his family. We become brothers and sisters. We're not adrift in the world. We're never alone. Never alone at least because God is always with us.

that we're never dissociated or cut off from community because as God's children we are part of his family.

This Savior provides us with a connection deeper than we've ever known before and we know connections that we love and cherish. This is the relationship we were made for.

The family that goes deeper than even our DNA. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. Peace in Hebrew means more than simply the absence of hostility. It's actually the presence of harmony. It's a relational term. You ever been in that conflict where you're in a conflict with someone you just can't get out of? You just kind of keep missing each other and everything you say just seems to dig the hole deeper?

[25 : 20] No one else is married here? Come on guys, let's be serious, yeah? I find myself in conflicts at times and you just feel like everything I do is just like putting petrol on the flames.

Conflict just spirals out of control. Friends, this child doesn't just come with wise words. Wise words may resolve the dispute but they don't resolve the conflict at the heart level, do they?

He doesn't resolve the problem by force of might pushing us together to resolve things. This only changes the circumstances but not the reality of what's causing us to conflict in the first place.

His fatherly concern will mean that he will not ignore the problem. He reaches beyond the problem, beyond the surface and he deals with our hearts. The problem that holds us apart from each other and us from him is our iniquity.

Each of us has turned to his own way. We're all planets that demand that every other planet revolve around us. God becomes the new centre to our life, reorders everything and shows us how things should work.

[26 : 44] God, the new centre with Father and Son and Holy Spirit infinitely and permanently committed to each other, giving themselves to each other, showing us the example of how we too should live.

There's no peace with everyone turned in on themselves. Father but man, the peace that Jesus brings by transforming our hearts, teaching us how to give out instead of demanding and drawing in, that's a prince of peace.

Now in all of this, we've gone through all the four names now, the three fours and the four names, there's only one thing to say and that's the one driving force behind all of this and let me say this driving force gives us great encouragement, it's right at the end there, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts is what's at work in all of this. Now zeal is kind of a word that we don't use that much do we? But it actually means passion. If you look into it, the way that's actually applied, it means passion.

So the kind of passion that a husband and a wife will have for each other, the kind of that romantic passion. You know what that's like? It gets you doing all kinds of things.

[28 : 07] It got me vacuuming the house and cleaning the bathroom whenever Joe came over when we were dating. It gets you doing crazy things. Because they don't need cleaning or vacuuming, normally, really.

You know what I mean? Passion is one of those forces that causes us to do all kinds of things. things. The arrival of this child is God's plan for our salvation.

It's an act of love, an act of passion, the kind of love that will let nothing get in the way, the kind of love that will apply all his creativity to, the kind of love that will produce a mighty act of courage, the kind of love that will be expressed in tenderness, the kind of love that will bring peace.

That's God's love for you. And that's the truth we celebrate at Christmas rather than the lies that we could choose to believe.

Let me pray. Father God, we thank you for your saviour. We thank you that this child became a man and lived the life that we could never live, died the death that we deserved and brought peace between us.

[29 : 31] It's an unfathomable plan for us, Lord. It's a plan we could never have accomplished ourselves under our own strength. It's a plan that shows your tenderness and kindness toward us.

And it's the only plan that brings peace between us and you. So we thank you this day, Lord. We thank you for giving us your son. Amen. Amen.