

Out of Darkness, Light (Isaiah 9:1-7)

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[0 : 00] A reading this morning is from Isaiah 9, which is in verses 4 to 7. That's on the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along, page 573.

Beginning of verse 1, chapter 9. But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

But in the later time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy. They rejoice before you, as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken, as on the day of Midian.

[1 : 20] For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult, and every garment rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government, and of peace, there will be no end.

On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it, with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Our Heavenly Father, as we contemplate in your word, as we think about it, as we understand its meaning for the people at the time and for us today, help us understand it with our heads, and please help apply it to our hearts, and believe it truly, so that we can live it out in our daily lives, all for your glory.

Amen. So, as I said, I'm from Northern Ireland.

[2 : 47] I've grown up in what's politely referred to by the army and police for the last 50 years as bandit country. I've preached in churches in rural sticks of Northern Ireland to East Belfast, Sky, or all across Central Belt.

And the one thing that I haven't met too many of is positive Christians. Positive Christians. Christians who think, do you know what?

In the future, it's going to go well for us. It's going to go well for us. I don't know if that's got anything to do with being Christian or more to do with being Scottish or Irish. But what I mean by that is, when I meet people, I talk to them and think, oh, you should have saw how things used to be.

Oh, if you'd came to us maybe 30 years ago, you know, place was full, Christmas time was buzzing, all the rest of it.

But it's like our golden age has passed. In fact, I met one woman up in Sky and she said something that stuck with me. Her feeling, and this isn't Sky, of being a Christian.

[4 : 03] It's like you almost have to apologize for being Christian. They're her words. That stuck with me. I go, it's true. But why is that? Why do we feel like our, it feels like what I get from most people is our time has passed.

We live in a post-Christian society. We're no longer, we no longer sit at the top. Maybe what a better, better way of putting it. But in Isaiah 9, you have a people who feel very similar.

A people who have had blessing upon blessing on them. And here they are about to be crushed. And that might be, mightn't be something we take away from Isaiah 9 because we think, this is a Christmas passage.

This is where we go to, we hear about Jesus being born and all the good things. And it is. I'm not taken away from that. But what I want to do is bring us back and understand what was happening for the people there and then.

When Isaiah, when Isaiah gave this message for them to go, what this means for them. And then therefore, what this means for us. Because the prophecy isn't done.

[5 : 21] Now, I don't normally preach in the prophets. For the main reason is it's like being parachuted into the middle of Europe, blindfolded, and being told to make your way home.

You just, where am I? And with the prophets especially, where they're so, well, prophetic, you can go, is he talking about the past? Has this happened already?

Is this to be happened? Has this been fulfilled? Are we waiting for it to be fulfilled? And so, before I get into Isaiah 9, I want to at least put some signposts up to where we are.

What's happened? Because just previous to Isaiah, to his lifetime, you've had 52 years of unparalleled peace for Israel.

52 years under King Uzziah. And to give us some context to where we are in the timeline, that's the 10th king after Solomon. So, King David, King Solomon, then the split, the northern tribe and the southern.

[6 : 28] So, this is the 10th king down the line in the southern kingdom. Politically, the king was good. He was a faithful king. Economically, they were flourishing.

Military, militarily, they had reclaimed all their borders that had been lost in the time past. Because Egypt, well, they had the big powerhouse in the south was no longer the big powerhouse.

See, they had internal disputes and problems with succession. So, they were keeping themselves to themselves. And then you had Assyria. So, I'm trying to flip the map. So, if Israel's here, you've got Egypt down here.

I'm not too sure if I'm doing it the wrong way around when I'm doing it this way. And then, up over here, you have Assyria. You think Iraq sort of region. They were the other big powerhouse.

But again, they had internal disputes and problems. Only able to shore up their borders. So, for 52 years, the Lord kept Israel right in the middle of all this flourishing.

[7 : 33] Because to get to Egypt, to get to all the other powers, you had to go through Israel. So, they flourished in this time. And then, King Uzziah dies. And that's in the same year where Isaiah gets his vision of being brought up into heaven.

You remember the story where he goes, Woe is me. I'm undone. I am an unclean man from an unclean people. And the angel brings a coal and touches him.

And he sees the vision of the robes of God going out across all the earth. That's the same year. But after this, there's a new king.

King Ahaz. And he had a choice. Egypt was still dealing with its own problems. But Assyria, well, they have now shored up their problems.

And they're expanding westward. And they conquer Syria. And so, Damascus and the northern kingdoms, well, they're looking around going, Well, I can see the writing on the wall.

[8 : 39] We're next. So, we need to make a pact. We need to come together. We need to defend against these guys. Because they're going to crush us. And so, Damascus and the northern kingdom, they get together.

And then they turn to Judah. And go, Judah, you need to join us. Because they're going to crush us. You've got a choice. Join us and defend yourself against Assyria.

Or join Assyria. Become a vassal state. Which means, well, you've got big tithes to give. Huge taxes. You're going to have to, all your freedom's lost.

You're going to have to worship their God. Basically, your whole culture's going to go. But Damascus and the northern kingdom, they weren't without a sharp end of a stick as well.

Well, they basically said, join us. And if you don't, well, we'll replace you. And put in a king who will do what we say.

[9 : 41] So, the king has a choice. Submit. Join the schemes of man. And try and figure out a way for his nation to survive their impending doom.

But the nation is spiritually bankrupt. They're spiritually bankrupt. So, Isaiah meets him.

Prophetically. Providentially. At a crossroads. At a literal crossroads. Because the king was at a crossroads. He had a choice to make. Trust in the schemes of man or trust in God.

And that's basically what chapter 7 is. Who are you going to trust? Trust the schemes of man or trust in God? King Ahaz trusts in the schemes of man.

And chapter 8 is just filled with, well, this is not going to happen. It's filled with woe to come to Israel.

[10 : 43] But then chapter 9 is hope. Hope. It won't always be this way. It won't always be this way. And so we join in with Isaiah in chapter 9, verse 1.

That's where we are. It's not exactly a pretty picture. If you were an Israelite. Going, well, my way of life is doomed.

And now Isaiah is saying, yep, now it's definitely going to be. Chapter 8. And then chapter 9. But. But. But. That's the big thing.

Chapter 9. But. There will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

But in a later time he has made glorious the way of the sea. The land beyond the Jordan. Galilee of the nations. Isaiah is now speaking of the future.

[11 : 42] But he's speaking of it in a way where he's almost looking back on it. It's really strange. He's speaking about the future. But it's like he's reading a history book. Going, won't always be that way.

Again, lots of geography to get into. Zebulun and Naphtali. Why is that important? What does it mean? Basically, if you imagine Israel. And more so you imagine Jesus' life.

Zebulun and Naphtali were to the left of the Sea of Galilee. That's the region. And it says that they were brought into contempt. This means they're the first places that are going to be crushed by Assyria.

The CSB, this other Bible, it uses the words humbled. Humbled is another term in the Old Testament where it's to bring something low. It's been haughty. It's been proud. And God brings it down to where it should be.

It's proper place. So this area, this is the first place to be crushed by the coming Assyrians. But this place isn't always to be gloom.

[12 : 50] It's not always to be destroyed. In fact, there's not really, from reading this you'd think, ah, there's not really even much hope. Because you'd wonder how there's to be.

Because it says Galilee of the nations, for example. Really strange term. Not used anywhere else. And I mean, it's Galilee of the goi.

So there's two words for people in the Old Testament. And one of them is used always of the people of Israel. Like, they're my people sort of thing. But then there's like the goi. And the goi just means everybody.

It can mean nations. It can mean people. But usually it's referred to as the heathens. The pagans. The non-Jews. The Gentiles. Those guys. So you've got the Galilee of the nations.

All of the peoples. And remember, the northern kingdom, they split off. They started to mix with all of the different cultures outside.

[13 : 47] They didn't keep themselves faithful to come into Jerusalem. These were now mixed people. These were now mixed people. They were no longer purely Jewish.

So here you've got these northern people who I'm sure the southern tribe would have looked at and went, as was said to Jesus, can anything good come from Galilee?

That's 700 years before or 700 years after. And the stereotype stuck. Can anything good come from this place? The place that was crushed by God?

The place that has mixed itself with, for a modern word, the world? They're mixed people. They're done for. Why?

There's no way anything good will come from Galilee. From there. But this is where Jesus' ministry starts. You've got part of Isaiah's prophecy based in what will happen in the near future.

[14 : 52] Then 700 years later, you have Jesus in Matthew 4 saying, When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

He left Nazareth and went to Capernaum by the sea, the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah.

From then on, Jesus began to preach, repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come. There's a power. In all these Old Testament prophecies, there's always a partial fulfillment and another fulfillment.

A fuller fulfillment. It's like the cup was made a bit over half full, then was filled. But I always say, there's always more to these prophecies.

There's almost an overflowing. So what is it about these people that it's not always going to be in darkness? The people walked in darkness.

[15 : 56] In fact, it says that their whole land was in deep darkness. Deep darkness. Right? So walking in the Old Testament, if you think of like Proverbs and other places, that means how one lives one's life.

That sounded very posh. How one lives one's life. How you do your life. That's what it means to walk in the Old Testament. It could mean, obviously, physical walking, but it means how you live your life.

What you think. How you believe. All these things is how you walk. And so these people walked in darkness. Darkness meaning they're cut off from God.

These people, they're without God. They're without his light. And they dwelt in deep darkness. The prophets trying to get out. No, there just weren't a wee bit gone wrong.

These people were seriously, they're rejecting everything of Yahweh. So it's not just the people were in darkness.

[17 : 01] Their whole land was in darkness. They had political corruption and religious nominalism in their land. Justice could be bought and sold. Religious nominalism, you want to think of Isaiah 1.11, where it says, where God says to his people, I do not delight in your sacrifices.

In fact, God goes on to say, I have had enough of them. I can't bear them anymore. I am, I am filled to the brim with your sacrifices. You're, you give me, you do what you're meant to do, but your hearts are far from me.

That's this people. That's who Isaiah is talking to. The people had departed God. God seemed to have, and then departed them.

Hence their land suffers. But the people here, I want to stress that they, that these people weren't just a wee bit lost. They weren't just a wee bit far away.

They, these people were in deep darkness. They were beyond blind. And if it was us looking at them today, we'd go, those people are beyond saving.

[18 : 15] That's what he's getting at. Those people are beyond saving. No hope. And yet, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

On them, a light has shone. Light meaning God's presence. His blessing. Then the next verse, you've multiplied the nation.

You've increased this joy. They rejoice before you as with the joy at harvest. They are glad. They are as glad as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

So you have the nation increasing. You have the joy of the time of harvest. The time when you bring in your first fruit. And speaking of someone who grew up rural, you realize that we bugs haven't destroyed your entire crop.

Because that can happen really, really easily. Your mice get in, and this was years before pesticide. When you got the first harvest and it was good, you rejoiced. It was great. As they are glad when they divide the spoil.

[19 : 17] The spoil being what you get after victory. Obviously, we don't do that anymore. But whenever you want to battle, well, if there were good swords and good armor, they were yours for the keeping.

If there was good gold, you came home richer for going out. All three of those things. The nation expanding, a harvest, and a victory in battle.

They're all promises of God's blessing in the Old Testament. That God's with them. And it's not that the people have joy because these things are happening.

They're having joy because it's as if they're happening. Why? God hasn't left them. These people who lived in complete darkness, and can anything good come from Galilee?

Those people, those people who are like, we would cast off going, there's no way the Spirit is going to impact them. They're joyous because God hasn't left them.

[20 : 20] He remembers His covenant still. And in fact, He blesses them so much that the light is shone in their land. In their land. I don't think I have anything to even compare it to.

At least nationally. Unless maybe it was, well, I don't know, our places of rule, all becoming Christian, if you could think of a more unimaginable thing.

It's a place so unexpected. And God goes, I haven't forgot them. I'm with them. My life is on them.

These people have abandoned God. They've left Him. 52 years of peace and prosperity given by God. And they start to think they're the thing.

They start to go, idolize the gift rather than the giver. And I don't know about you, but I don't see any more parallels to our own nation.

[21 : 19] Scotland, oh Scotland. The land that used to be known as the land of the book. The land where I've heard Christians since I've come over here going, ah, it used to be something.

The land where it used to have the highest literacy rates in Europe because of the Bible, because of their faith, because they taught people to read so they could read the Bible so that they could have faith.

The land that sent out missionaries to the forest flungs of the lands on the earth to the new outer Hebrides, the most remote parts of the world, you could find a Scottish speaker.

Edinburgh. The land that invented Presbyterianism. No, I'm, it's not that I'm biased in any way. Edinburgh was known as the Athens of the North.

If you've ever heard that before. There was such wisdom in Edinburgh. Can you imagine that now? Wisdom in Edinburgh. But it was all because of their faith in God.

[22 : 34] It was all because they trusted God and it led them to trust this. And because they trusted and studied this, they became wise. They became wise.

And because they became wise, God, and they trusted God, Scotland became blessed. But then 18th, 19th centuries, people started to trust in their gifts rather than the giver.

They started, David Hume in the hour going, ah, man, John Locke, man is the center. And we repeat the same sin again and again.

Now, John Knox is hidden out of view because our nation has become shamed. And now the queen who he rallied against is healed, who killed the faithful brothers and sisters is healed as a heroine.

Our nation couldn't have got more topsy-turvy. But we commit the same sins. We can trust our own gifts rather than the giver offer.

[23 : 46] We can trust our security. We can trust, well, I've got a bit of money in the bank. Rather than realizing every good gift comes from our gracious father.

So our chickens have come home to roost, have they? Is there no hope for us? Has the light, God's presence, left Scotland for good?

Not a hope. Not a hope. Not while there is one faithful church remaining in this country, has God not left us. Scotland may not be Israel, as John Knox so used to compare them.

But we, the church, we are the people of God. We are the continuation of Israel. Those promises that the church, was it that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, stand as much true for any other part of the nation that's going well as when ours is in complete darkness.

So yes, we are on the verge of becoming an unreached people group by open door standards. We're about to be less than 2% evangelicals in our nation.

[25 : 04] But that doesn't mean that these prophecies are still not for us to claim as the continuation of Israel. As God's people, his light will not leave us and he will not leave his people.

And then verses 4 to 6, we've got the reasons why. And it begins with three fours. 4, 4, 4. And you'll see them at verses 4, 5, and 6.

4, 4, 4. And again, these prophecies have a past, present, and future aspect to them. Verses 4, I'll briefly get through this.

The yoke of the burden, the staff of the shoulder, the rod of the oppressor. These are all, Isaiah's going, remember when you were slaves? You were slaves.

You were slaves under Egypt. You were slaves under the most powerful nation in the world and the most powerful nation that has ever been up to this point. You were slaves.

[26 : 14] But God says, you have broken as on the day of Midian. You have broken on the day of Midian. Midian, think to Judges 6 to 8, that's where Gideon, with 300 men, defeated the Philistines, with 120,000.

Isaiah is saying, just like Israel was humbled, was brought to contempt, was crushed, and just like the Philistines, who brought 120,000 men against 300, was sent fleeing, so their oppression, so their threat will be broken on you.

Verse 5, every boot of trampling warrior in tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. I want to read it from the CSB, which is maybe a wee bit clearer.

For every trampling boot of battle and the bloodied garments of war will be burned as fuel for the fire. What he's saying is, all their uniforms, there's going to be no use for them.

All their shields, all their swords, everything left behind, there's going to be no point in them. We don't need it. It has come to the land. It would be like if the Ukrainians, when they shelter from, come out to find the only thing that is left is Russian equipment, bloodied Russian garments, weapons of war, and they go, well, we have no use for these anymore.

[27 : 59] Someone has done the job for us and has sent the enemy running. They live in a land of peace. The only thing that these things of war are useful for is the fire to heat them.

They now live in a land of peace. They were under slavery. They found liberation. War? Well, someone brought them victory. There's no enemy.

They have peace. Why? Why? This is where Isaiah gets to verse 6. A child is born. A child is born.

And I know we always like to jump ahead. We go, yeah, Jesus. I know, I was brought up in Sunday school and every summer Bible club you could get to, yes, I want to jump to Jesus.

I go, yeah, Jesus. I want to be right. But how on earth, if you're reading this in the context of Assyria and Egypt and all the rest of it, you go, a child? Why?

[29 : 03] What's a child got to do with anything? And so, Isaiah goes down. Child is born. To us, a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Again, I'll briefly go through it. He's mean. The child, he is ancestry. He is a lineage. He's born. He's human. He is a human child born to us. Son, again, it talks about his ancestry and his royalty.

And then, and the government shall be upon his shoulders. Now, I want to point that out. That is a strange word. It is only used here in the whole of the Old Testament.

Nowhere else. It's a really strange word. And it basically means all authority is on his shoulders. It's his. Then, verse, or 6b, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Fire, Prince of Peace.

I'm sure you've heard them expounded before, so I'm not going to roll over them for you. But, this is, this is, a mighty king. He is power.

[30 : 29] He is wisdom. There are two things you want in a king. You want someone who's powerful enough to protect you from all of the, the forces out in the world. But you want someone wise enough who can lead you through times of peace, not just war.

For example, Winston Churchill, a great wartime leader. Afterwards, not so great peacetime leader. You want someone who's good at both, not just one or the other.

Everlasting Father, he's not going to be a tyrant. Prince of Peace, he will bring peace. And that is something you pray for every day out in this world.

Verse 7, increase of his government, that's the increase of his authority. There'll be no end. He'll sit in the throne of David. It'll be established with justice and righteousness.

And it's time forevermore. Look, these are all things. If you go back to Deuteronomy and Leviticus, they say, if I am with you, your borders are going to keep getting bigger.

[31 : 33] You're going to have prosperity. You're going to have blessing. These are all signs. God is with them. And they're not just signs God. They're saying, this is God.

This is going back to Exodus where he says, I will lead my people. I will lead my people. And then the final verse, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Have you noticed throughout this whole passage, what have the people done? Nada. Nada. They've done nothing.

They couldn't do anything. They couldn't do anything. Rather, the sun, this royal sun, shoulders all of the authority, all of the responsibility, all of the burden.

And while the sun shoulders the burden, the people find their freedom. And that is as true for Israel as it is today. While the sun shoulders the burden, the people finally find their freedom.

[32 : 42] Israel faced oppression and destruction. God saved them. This mongrel, unfaithful people. God freed them.

Christ came to free us from a greater oppression and destruction. Galatians 5, for freedom, Christ has set you free.

Stand firm. I always love finding that word. Stachete. It's a great word. Stand firm. Do not back down. You stand your ground. And do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

we like Israel. Israel, me, myself, mongrel, unfaithful person, the Lord has constantly blessed massively.

And I've saw this in my own life. Constantly blesses me massively. Even just in a car to get here today. It just so happened that my father-in-law was also driving out the same direction five minutes behind us.

[33 : 54] Providence. God's blessing. And I still betray him every day. Every day. I'm only 32.

That's 32 years of blessing. And I still betray him. And sometimes we get to the point where we think, oh, you can betray him and then you become a Christian and you don't do that anymore.

His grace is up to that point. We're sounding rather like St. Augustine really old Catholic kind of thing. His grace is up to that point and when you believe, oh, heavenly father, mad.

This unfaithful, this people who, I want to stress this, we would think of and go, there is no hope for them. God will never save them.

God does the exact opposite and brings the Savior from that very life. The Lord has a great sense of irony.

[35 : 04] And I've saw that so many times. So, Christ has grace and mercy for you. when you come in this morning, maybe you're like myself, very limited sleep, woke up, shouted at everyone around you, dogs in your way in your wee house tripping over it, car won't get past 30 miles an hour in the motorway, you have people going by swearing at you and you're sitting there going, totally living with peace and joy in your life.

Or not? Does God have grace and mercy for us? God has grace and mercy beyond what we can even understand because he had grace and mercy in these people which means he can have grace and mercy in me.

He can actually have that in me because I don't have it for myself. I know I'm a screw up and I keep screwing up and no matter what I do I can't seem to fix myself. But that's not the point.

The point is that Christ is meant to shoulder those burdens, not me. And all I'm meant to do is come under his authority to rest in that. And then I'll find freedom.

So is that it for Scotland? Have we passed our golden age? Has Christendom come and gone and we've sort of blinked and missed it? No.

[36 : 32] I will not have that. I will not have that because I know my God and my God never, never loses. He was always the victor. If someone crushes our nation it is because we got a bit too haughty.

We got a bit too proud. Trusting in our own gifts rather than the giver that blessed them for 400 years. But that doesn't mean Christ can still shine his light in our nation.

All it takes is for us to submit under his authority to believe his word as the first Christians did. This land was not a great place when St. Columbus or any others came over to it.

It was a land filled with paganism and destruction same as my own land. When St. Patrick came across it was filled with absolute wickedness greater than we have today and they transformed it.

God will always shine his light where his people are faithful to him. Where his people trust him and live under his peace and rule. And one day finally we will see that when Christ comes back and like Isaiah in Revelation there will be no battle because every knee will simply bow.

[37 : 50] So let's do that now. Bow our heads before God and come before him. Amen. Our heavenly father please help us realize that it is only under your authority when we give all authority over to you when we give all of our problems all of our struggles all of our doubts to you do we find freedom.

Please help us realize that. Help us realize that you have grace and mercy for us beyond anything we can imagine. if you had it for sinful people you can have it for me.

Please go with us Lord and please instill such zeal in us from you. Please instill the zeal of the Lord in us because we realize we've been forgiven so greatly and you're so good and we want to declare that from the world that your way is a light to all people not just Christians but for all humanity and for our nation in Jesus name.

Amen.