

Hope is on the Horizon

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Date: 08 December 2024

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The tension, the contrast between the sweetness of silent night alongside the harsh realities of the 7 o'clock news.

And the point of the song is to demonstrate that it's very hard to experience the life of a silent night when it keeps getting interrupted by the 7 o'clock news.

And I wonder if there's anyone here this evening that could relate to that. Oh, I would imagine there are a few of you that can relate to that. That just when life seemed to be calm and bright and things seemed to be going fine, your life was interrupted by your own version of the 7 o'clock news.

[9 : 34] Life was going fine and then came the diagnosis. You thought the relationship was going great and then came the conversation. You had just recorded your best quarter ever at work and then came the layoffs.

The church was booming and then came the spiritual attack. Every one of us in one way or another knows what it's like to be experiencing a silent night only to have it interrupted by the 7 o'clock news.

And I imagine there are some of you tonight that's in that place right now. That's exactly what the people of God are experiencing in the historical context of Isaiah chapter 9.

The breaking news here in Judah is this. King Uzziah has died. King Uzziah was a good and godly king.

He was a man under whom the nation of Judah had prospered. He was faithful to God and he ushered in a time of peace, a time of calm. It was for the nation of Judah a silent night.

[10 : 54] But I don't know if you've ever experienced something that happened in life where you lost someone and losing that individual changed everything. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Like you had a family member that passed and the family never really was quite the same. The boss left the company and the culture of where you work was never quite the same.

The coach retired and the program fell into mediocrity. That's what's happened in Judah.

You see, because of Uzziah's death, everything in Judah starts to change. Notice here on this map, I get to play like weatherman up here and interact with this, all right?

So you've got Judah right here and northern kingdom or big brother Israel. And you notice that they occupy a very important part of land that's in between where Assyria is and where Egypt is.

[11 : 56] Now Assyria wants to take into captivity Egypt. In fact, you'll notice even by these different shades of color that Assyria eventually will get all the way down into part of Egypt.

Well, guess who is right in the way? Israel and Judah. And so rather than teaming up together, the northern kingdom, bigger brother Israel, decides to join forces with Syria, not to be confused with us Syria, or Israel, joins forces with Syria to have some level of protection.

And listen, that leaves Judah all alone. She's afraid. She doesn't know what to do.

And now there's a new king over Judah. His name is Ahaz. Ahaz. And Ahaz does not trust in God the way Uzziah does.

Rather, Ahaz disregards the godly counsel of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 8. And instead of trusting in Yahweh, seeks security by aligning with the pagan nation of Assyria.

[13:16] Submitting to the pagan king. And as a result of this alliance, as a result of this act of rebellion, God gives judgment upon the nation of Judah.

In fact, Judah will go into exile to Assyria. And notice how chapter 8 ends. Isaiah chapter 8 and verse 21.

They will pass through the land greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God and turn their faces upward.

And they will look to the earth. But behold, watch this, faith family. Distress and darkness. The gloom of anguish.

And they will be thrust into thick darkness. Let me summarize it this way. Silent night in the life of Judah has been interrupted by the 7 o'clock news.

[14:28] What was once all and calm and bright is now gloomy and dark and full of anguish.

If you're with me, say yes. Then in chapter 9, most unexpectedly and even surprisingly, God has His prophet Isaiah give to His people a message of hope.

Right off of the heels of the darkness and anguish and gloom of the end of chapter 8. Notice what the prophet prophesies in chapter 9 and verse 2.

But the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. And those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you with a joy at the harvest. And they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder and the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

[15:37] In other words, the prophet wants to encourage the people of God that hope is on the horizon. And it's shocking because it's almost like whiplash.

Look right here. You've got silent night, the days of Uzziah, that get interrupted with the 7 o'clock news, now the days of Ahaz, only to have the 7 o'clock news, the days of Ahaz, get interrupted with silent night.

A coming day of hope. A coming day when this darkness will be no more and light will come busting through.

You notice three metaphors here in the verses that I just read that really speak to the hope that the people of God have as they're surrounded by the 7 o'clock news.

First, light will shine in the darkness. Light will shine in the darkness. You see it in verse 2. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

[16:45] Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them light shined. Have you ever been in a dark place where you experience just a little glimmer of light?

I've experienced this. I may have shared this with some of you before, but this goes back many years. I was leading a mission trip to Juarez, Mexico.

And when we came back across the border from building a home, we had a day to spare before we had to fly back. And so I decided we'd take the group to visit Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico.

Now, one of the members of our team was a lady by the name of Michelle, and she was claustrophobic. She did not want to take the tour. She did not want to go down. And I said, listen, you'll be fine.

There's nothing to be afraid of. You can trust me. I'm a pastor. I would never lead you astray. And so the tour begins with this big kind of wide open area, and everything's fine until we get about 1,000 feet below.

[17:49] And what do they do? They turn off the lights. And this picture doesn't even do justice. It was total darkness. And in the midst of that total darkness, a bat bit me.

Then the bat spoke. The bat said, Pastor, I will never trust you again. This is the last time I'm going anywhere with you.

And so fearing my death, because Michelle's right there terrified, literally like I know I'm getting it when we're done, and so all I know to do is reach down to my watch, and I just turned it on.

And this little bit of light that honestly at any other time would have been hard to see was all Michelle needed to get safely back.

You know what I learned from that moment? Here's what I learned. Notice it on the screen. Faith family, it only takes a little light when you're in a dark place to give you a lot of hope.

[18 : 58] Amen? I mean, it only takes a little light. You don't always have to have a spotlight. Sometimes just a little bit of light when you're surrounded by so much darkness is all you need to give you a lot of hope.

Well, oh, listen, my friend. Can the preacher preach for just a moment? Isaiah doesn't speak of a little light. He speaks of a great light, that which is coming, and it will shatter the darkness of Judah's experience.

The darkness of the 7 o'clock news will be shattered by the light of silent night. That's the first metaphor.

The second metaphor is not just a light shining in darkness, but an abundant harvest. In verse 3, he speaks about this increase of joy. They rejoice before as with the joy at a harvest, and they're glad when they divide the spoil.

The language here pictures someone who gets more than they expected. It would be like, if I were to take verse 3 and translate it into our context, it would be like getting to the end of the year and getting a sizable bonus from your job that you had no idea was coming.

[20 : 23] You didn't expect it. It was a harvest that you didn't foresee, and you're overjoyed at the result of it. And isn't that how it is with God?

Oh, come on, faith family. With God, with God, we do not expect a bonus. We don't expect a bonus only to receive a supply of the jelly of the month club.

Oh, God. Clark, that's the gift that keeps on giving the whole year. Rather, we expect nothing. We know that we deserve nothing. And what does God give His people but a bountiful harvest?

That's called grace. When you get so much more than you know you deserve. Listen to what Peter says in 2 Peter 1.3.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Ephesians 3.20.

Now, to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we could ask or even think, according to the power at work within us.

[21 : 39] John 10.10. You know this. A thief comes to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it, say it, abundantly.

Oh, my. This vision of hope in Isaiah is one of light that comes busting through the darkness. It is one of an abundant harvest that you did not expect, nor do you deserve.

And the third metaphor is that of a victorious freedom. A victorious freedom. In verse 4, you'll notice there's a reference to the day of Midian.

The day of Midian. And if you know your Old Testament, you know that's a reference to Judges chapter 7, where you remember the story of Gideon. Gideon, who's going up against the Midianites, has an army of 32,000 soldiers.

And what does God do? God whittles that army down from 32,000 to 300. Translation, ain't no way they're going to win.

[22 : 43] They have no hope at all. But what does God do in their helpless, despairing situation? He gives them a victory.

How? By fighting for them. God comes and gives them a victory. They could not win by their might, but only by the power of God.

Are you listening? Are you listening? Is everybody listening tonight? Come on, listen. Some of you here tonight, you're in a battle, and you feel completely hopeless. Your enemy is too strong.

You're too weak in your strength. You are outnumbered, and your back is against the wall. And what I want you to do tonight, like the people of Judah, is rest in the knowledge that your God fights for you.

There will be. There will be. There will be a freedom, a victory that comes. And in that victory comes the freedom your heart desires.

[23 : 47] The point of verses 2 through 4 is that in all the darkness and gloom of the 7 o'clock news, of how chapter 8 ends, God gives His people one of the greatest gifts you can give anyone.

The gift of hope. The gift of hope. It has been said, notice this on the screen, that man can live 40 days without food, about 3 days without water, about 8 minutes without air, but only 1 second without hope.

Back in Europe during World War II, there were three very, very famous Jewish psychiatrists. And these psychiatrists studied as to what the basic, the very core basic need of humanity really was.

And they all had different views. You've heard of Sigmund Freud before. He argued that man's most basic need was pleasure. That what we were all ultimately after is to feel good and to enjoy the pleasures of life.

Then another psychiatrist, a man by the name of Alfred Adler, he argued that no, it's not pleasure, it's power. That what human beings really need the most is this sense of control and significance.

[25 : 08] But do you know what neither of those two men lived through? The Holocaust. The third psychiatrist, a man by the name of Viktor Frankl, endured four years of concentration camps.

And he said what kept people alive was not their need for pleasure and not their need for power. He said those that never stopped believing in their future were the only ones that made it.

Quote, The prisoner that lost faith in the future was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he lost his spiritual hold.

He let himself decline and become the subject of mental and physical decay. No physical blows or threats had any effect. He just lay there hardly moving.

He simply gave up. We could say most men in the concentration camps believed the opportunities of life had passed. Listen.

[26 : 14] Which provided the real reason for their death. It wasn't sickness. It wasn't illness. It was that they gave up hope.

Like the movie Shawshank Redemption. Yes, I reference this movie all the time. Except for maybe Dumb and Dumber. I reference this all the time.

And that's because it is full of so many good illustrations. One appropriately I trust placed here.

Where Andy returns after doing some time in solitary.

Because he, remember when he turns on the music for all the courtyard to hear? Don't act like you haven't seen the movie. It's on every channel every day. He turns on the music and everybody in the courtyard hears the music.

And as a result he gets put in solitary. And when he comes back to the lunchroom when he's finally released. He has a conversation where he makes the point to all the men.

[27 : 19] That hope is the most important thing. So they let you tote that record player down there, huh? Just in here.

In here. That's the beauty of music. They can't get that from you. Haven't you ever felt that way about music?

Well, I play the mean harmonica as a younger man. Lost interest in it though. Didn't make much sense in here. Here's where it makes the most sense. You need it so you don't forget.

Forget? Forget? Forget that there are places in the world that aren't made out of stone. But there's a...

There's something inside that they can't get to. That they can't touch. It's yours. What are you talking about?

[28 : 24] Hope. Hope. Hope. Let me tell you something, my friend. Hope is a dangerous thing.

Hope can drive a man insane. It's got no use on the inside. I better get used to that idea. Like Brooks did.

Faith family, have you lost your hope? Have you lost your hope? I want to encourage you this evening, if you're living in the midst of the 7 o'clock news of your life, I want to tell you based on the authority of God's Word that light can break through that darkness.

That you can enjoy an abundant harvest. And that you can know a victorious freedom. And you ask, how?

Verse 6. For unto us a child is born, and 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.

[29 : 48] And on the increase of his government of peace, there will be no end. And on the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

Isaiah here now goes on to show how God is going to specifically fulfill this promise of hope. And this promise of hope, of this light breaking through, and this abundant harvest, and this victorious freedom, comes through a child that is born.

And even though the people of God do not deserve this hope, no, no, no, they deserve the judgment of God, God, in his grace, will not listen, faith family, leave his people without hope.

And so he gives them hope in a child. And this child is not the first time it's been mentioned in Isaiah here in chapter 9.

Isaiah references it earlier in Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.

[31 : 02] So Isaiah has already introduced this child to us. But now in chapter 9, Isaiah gives more details regarding the nature, as well as the names of this child.

First, his nature. A child is born, a son is given. That phrase is simply a reference to the fact that this child is both human and divine.

The child is given speaks to his humanity. The son is given speaks to his divinity. Now, sonship in the ancient Near East, I've talked about this a lot, we don't really understand it because we tend to think a son is just simply a biological term.

But it had more to do with biology in the ancient Near East, it had to do with your identity. In a very real sense, if you were a son, you did what your father did.

Right? If your father was a shepherd, guess what you were going to be? A shepherd. Why was Jesus a carpenter? Because his father, Joseph, was a carpenter.

[32 : 12] In other words, you are what your father is. It's your very identity. John even says, by this we know we are children of God, that we love one another.

In other words, how do you know that you're a child of God? Answer, you do what your father does. You love the way your father loves. And so in a very real sense, this child is who his father is.

You with me? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This is his nature, fully human, fully divine.

And then Isaiah gives us his names. Some of them, wonderful counselor, which speaks to this child having supernatural wisdom. If you want to think about it this way, this is the book of Proverbs in a person.

Are you tracking with me? It's the book of Proverbs in a person. He is wonderful, supernatural, counselor, wisdom giver.

[33 : 20] In other words, this child has a supernatural wisdom by which to guide your life. Come on, get excited. Mighty God.

Not just wonderful counselor, but mighty God. This child also has power and strength. Oh, in this child, there is nothing that's impossible for him to do.

He is able to deliver you from any and every situation. Thirdly, everlasting father. This is not mixing up the Trinity here. It's simply speaking to the fatherly care, the protector and provider that this child will be.

But he will not only be a source of wisdom, and he will not only be a source of power. Are you listening, faith family? He's the type of person you can find safety in. You can come under him as your shelter because he is everlasting father.

And fourthly, prince of peace. You see, under Ahaz's rule, the nation has experienced crisis. But in this child, true peace is found because he will not only give you the wisdom to navigate life, he will bring you peace with God.

[34 : 41] I want you to imagine for just a moment how relevant this would have been to the original audience. War is all around. Darkness is lingering. The future is uncertain.

Assyria is on the way. All the sounds of the 7 o'clock news. And out of all of that darkness comes the promise that there is going to be one to give you the wisdom to navigate the darkness, power to overcome the darkness, a fatherly shelter in the darkness, and peace through it all.

That's hope. That's the hope found in this child. Now, who is this child?

And all God's people said, Jesus, right? Because you've heard a hundred messages on Isaiah 9, and you know that this is in reference to Jesus. But, but, but, but, what if I asked you, how do you know?

If someone asked you, prove to me that Isaiah 9 is talking about Jesus and not some other child.

[35 : 50] Well, of course, you could go to the reference to David's kingdom and go to Matthew, early in Matthew. But, but I want to show you something else as to makes the identity of this child very, very clear, and then I'll be done.

So there's your 30 minute warning. Look at verse 1 that I intentionally left out earlier. Look at chapter 1 in verse 9. There will be no gloom for her who is in anguish.

In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of what? Zebulun. And the land of Naphtali. Do those two places ring a bell?

Well, you might say, well, yeah, they're the, they're the northernmost territories of Judah. Meaning, when Assyria comes and takes them into exile, these would have been the two territories that would have experienced the gloom, the anguish, and the darkness first.

And that's true. Historically, that's true. But theologically, they should ring a bell as well. Listen to Matthew chapter 4 and verse 12.

[37 : 03] You still with me? All right. I actually believed you with that response. Here we go. Matthew 4, 12. Now, when they heard John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee, leaving Nazareth.

He went and lived in Capernaum by the sea in the territory of, huh, Zebulun and Naphtali. Why? Why did Jesus do this? So that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled. What that was spoken by the prophet Isaiah? This.

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, away by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light.

For those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death, on them a light has dawned. Now watch. From that time, Jesus began to preach, saying, repent, the kingdom of heaven heaven is at hand.

[38 : 10] Hold on. I don't know if you're connecting the dots, but let me connect you the dots for you. This is so exciting. Listen, listen. The very first area where Assyria invaded Judah was the same place that Jesus first preached the gospel.

the very first place Israel would have brought this anguish and darkness and gloom of Isaiah chapter 8. Well then, how does the light, how does the abundant harvest, how does the victorious freedom of chapter 9 come?

It comes when Jesus starts preaching the gospel. He is the hope of Isaiah 9.

And if you didn't already know that, you know that now because Matthew makes it clear as he reaches back to Isaiah 9 and says, that hope that was promised long ago is found now in Jesus through believing and receiving the gospel that he preaches.

So, what is our hope this holiday? What does all of this mean for us? Well, this really is my prayer. My prayer is that no matter what you're going through right now, Faith Family, that this would be the best Christmas ever.

[39 : 36] That's why it's titled the best Christmas ever because I want you to have the best Christmas ever and that doesn't mean that circumstantially it's the best Christmas ever. Here's what makes it the best Christmas ever.

Do you want me to say just once more the best Christmas ever? What makes it the best Christmas ever is that you can realize and rest in the hope you have in Jesus.

In his book Knowing God, J.I. Packer writes, quote, the Christmas message is that there is hope for ruined humanity. Hope for pardon, hope for peace with God, hope of glory, hope of glory, because at the Father's will, Jesus Christ became poor.

He was born in a stable so that 30 years later he might hang on a cross. It's the most wonderful message the world has ever heard or will ever hear.

So my prayer, faith family is simply this and I mean this as your pastor, from your pastor to you as your pastor is this, is that in the middle of your 7 o'clock news, whatever that may be, that you will know that God has not left you without hope and that you can have a silent night in Jesus Christ.

[41 : 07] He is the light that can penetrate your darkness. He is the harvest that gives you not just life, but life abundantly. And he is the victory that has set you free all because of what he did on the cross of Calvary.

And that's what makes this the best Christmas ever. I close with this.

Peter Cropper was one of the most accomplished violinists ever in Britain. In 1981, he was invited to perform at the prestigious musical festival in Finland.

In recognition of this outstanding career that he'd had, the Royal Academy of Music offered him a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to play a 258-year-old Stradivarius.

If you know violins, you know that Stradivarius is one of the top of the line and Peter was in awe of the moment and of the gift.

[42 : 21] And so you can imagine his horror when he's walking on stage with that 258-year-old Stradivarius.

And he trips and falls to the ground, shattering the neck of the violin.

He performed with a borrowed violin, but after the concert, he was inconsolable. He was devastated. He returns home to London.

There he's contacted by a violin dealer by the name of Charles Baer. Charles offers to restore the violin, but Peter, as well as the academy, assured him it could never be repaired, but they would let him try.

For two months, Baer dedicated himself to restoring that violin, and afterwards, he presented it to Peter. And Peter was overjoyed.

[43 : 24] Do you know why? Because it sounded even better than it did before. After a few weeks later, Peter Cropper would take the Lindsay Quartet on an international tour.

Night after night, playing beautiful music on an instrument he thought there was no hope it could ever be restored.

Music that sounded like this. skill skill ¶¶ Dear Faith Family, if like Judah in Isaiah chapter 8, if like Peter, you find yourself today in a place of hopelessness, life shattered in pieces, and all you can hear is the 7 o'clock news, listen, to you has come a silent night.

How? Because to you a child was born. To you a son was given. And his name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You this evening that You have reminded us of the hope we have in Jesus.

[45 : 58] No matter how dark, no matter how gloomy it gets, we know that light has come through the darkness. That we have been given an abundant harvest and a victorious freedom in this child that was born.

There's not a person in this room, there is not a person in this room that does not need the Wonderful Counselor and the Mighty God and the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace.

You're the only one that gives us hope in a world full of 7 o'clock news. And I pray this evening as we come now to the cross and we're reminded of how this hope in this child came to take our sin and was crucified on the cross so that we would never, ever, ever have to doubt our future.

Let us come now in remembrance. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.