

Unto Us a Child is Born

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[0 : 00] Open your Bibles. Where? I want you to start by going to Luke chapter 1.

! Luke chapter 1, there in verse 68.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophet from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant.

The oath which He swore to our father Abraham to grant us, that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercies of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

[1 : 43] I want you to stop just for a moment and think of the absolute exuberance, the overwhelming of the spirit of Zachariah, who had for a number of months been quiet.

He had not been able to speak. And suddenly, His tongue was loosed and He made this prophecy right at the point of John the Baptist's birth and naming.

And the heart of this prophecy has its roots back in Isaiah chapter 9. Here was Zachariah referencing the promise that God had made to Isaiah hundreds of years ago.

And in this prophecy that Zachariah brings on that day, he is referencing the fact that God was in the process of fulfilling His promise in real time and Jesus was coming.

I want you now, with that background in hand, to go back to the passage Isaiah chapter 9.

[3 : 04] And we are going to take the time this morning to look at this passage that kind of lays out for us the promise of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and in particular the incarnation.

And if you ever want something to kind of struggle to put your head around, I'd certainly say this. The incarnation fits into that little picture of how do you process all of this wonderful information.

But we're going to work at it and allow the Scripture to speak to us clearly this morning. Let me begin by having you look there at chapter 8 and verse 21 and 22.

Verse 22.

Tomorrow we're going to celebrate Christmas.

[4 : 32] Christmas. And I don't know all of the different ways in which your families play this out. Each of us have our own little dynamic. And I can tell you that it changes from year to year to a certain degree in terms of who's in town and who's not in town and how all that works together.

But generally, one of the things that goes along with Christmas, whether the culture and business push it or not, we're going to give gifts to one another. We're going to show our love and our interest and affection for one another by giving gifts.

There's a reason for that. And it's really rooted in the fact that God gave us His Son as the gift that we desperately need because of our sin. And He solved the remedy of our broken and ruined hearts by virtue of giving us His Son and through the incarnation.

And that's what this passage is all about. It's really interesting to stop just for a moment. And I tell you kind of a broad picture here that Isaiah chapter 8, picking up there in verse 20 and carrying on down through 9-6, is a little bit like a rheostat, or let me use it this way, a dimmer.

It starts out real dark and it ends up pretty light. The passage begins by speaking about people who are in darkness and the reality of that very difficult situation is then remedied by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 57] And so when we work our way through this passage, the thing that I want us to begin with is recognizing that Isaiah the prophet speaks clearly to the problems of that day. I want you to understand that historically, Israel was in a very bad way.

The wicked king, Ahaz, had descended into the worship of the pagan god, Molech. And one of the things that characterized the worship of Molech was actually the matter of burning infants as a sacrifice to him.

And in that process, the thing that characterized that infant murder was that they would worship, and their worship was just making more and more and more noise to eventually when they actually threw the child into the sacrificial altar, the screaming of God's people, not God's people, but the pagan worshipers was so loud that it drowned out the screaming of the child that was being sacrificed and burned.

Wicked, wicked world that it was. Furthermore, those in high office, whether you're talking about the priesthood or in politics, were just absolutely engaged in all kinds of wicked behavior across the board.

Demon worship, seeking of signs from the dead, had replaced a dependence in Israel on the word of God and relying upon what God had to say.

[7 : 23] And so you'd have to recognize, looking back at that day, that civil government and religious leadership was absolutely morally bankrupt. Sounds a little bit like today, doesn't it? Every time you pick up the news or read the news or listen to the news, you're hearing about one scandal and one mess after another, and it wasn't any different back then in the time that Isaiah was writing about in the nation of Israel.

There was no soundness anywhere. And so here we are. It may be Christmas Eve for us, but it deserves to be said that the nation that you and I live in is not unlike the ancient Israel.

Messy, broken, corrupt, and everywhere we look, we kind of see that the spiritual tenor of our nation is not radically different from the nation of Israel back many, many years ago.

It's interesting to recognize that the biblical stability and the foundations that Alex de Tocqueville once so respected as being cohesive in our nation and our culture are largely gone.

The things that held us together as a people today have dissipated and are on the margins. When you come down to the things that are at least supposedly held in common by us, it's not there anymore.

[8 : 46] And it is interesting to stop and realize that when you look over the history of God's dealing with his people, you recognize that the preface of every revelation of his gifting and his care for us has always been set against the backdrop of some very difficult times.

Let me encourage you to kind of hold on to that because there are probably some of you sitting here this morning that in reality, as you think about the life that you're living at the moment, it seems that while you're here in this lighted room, there's a pall, there's a dark cloud over you, and you're wondering, where is God in the middle of this?

A broad review of Bible prophecies and God's interaction with us would reveal that over and over again, the times in which he has stepped in and showed himself so faithful and so wonderful has always been against the backdrop of really messy situations.

Let me begin by reminding you of what happened in the garden with the fall, and right after that, we have the promise of the coming someday of God's son, the provision through his son coming to the earth.

The Genesis promise was given against the backdrop of sin entering the world. Interestingly enough, the imagery of the Passover and the lamb and the blood put on the doorpost and on the lentil came against the backdrop of the nation of Israel suffering tremendously under the slavery that they were subjected to there in Egypt.

[10 : 16] And the images of Isaiah that we've been working our way through in our study of the cornerstone and of the righteous branch that would be a blessing to the nation of Israel, those very things that were given as promises and hopes were given against the backdrop of an absolutely rotten spiritual state in the nation.

And so as we look around this morning, I think one of the things that we need to do is not just kind of, well, Christmas is coming, but let's realize that against the backdrop of the messiness of the world we live in, we can trust him.

We can trust him to make and have victory over sin in his perfect time. He who brought about the birth of our Savior at the perfect time is working in our world and working in our life.

And we need to remember that as we struggle from time to time. So you look here and you find in this passage kind of the opening statement is, the world's a mess back then, now, and yet we have the promise of his coming.

And I want us to focus the majority of our time on that. Pick up there, if you will, in 9.6. For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given.

[11 : 37] Now, Isaiah was directed to prophesy the fact that a child would come. And the text makes it clear that in the incarnation, Jesus was born and took on full humanity.

He who created this world, the one who chose all things to be as they are and has been in complete control of all of history, is the one who also willingly came and went through the same process of being born that you and I have.

I was talking with one of our men yesterday, and he was sharing that his daughter and son-in-law had gone through the birth of their seventh child at home.

Okay? I got to tell you, it was a little scary for me to... Where's Judith? She's out here somewhere? Yeah, hi. I didn't have much to do with our births other than just kind of being a...

I'll get myself in trouble. We'll stop while I'm ahead. Okay. But when you think about it, birth is a little messy and a little painful, right?

[12 : 45] I mean, if you had to choose to go through the process of coming into the world and you were in control, how would you do it? I'd just arrive moderately adult, right?

It's like, boom, there I am. 30 and never get any older, and that'd be it. Not Jesus. He came as a child. He came as an infant. He came the same way that you and I were born.

And here is Isaiah telling us that our triune God chose to give us his only begotten son and to send him into this earth, to this world. So I want you to stop just for a minute as you ponder what it says here in verse 6.

A child is born and a son is given. And I want you to step back in your thinking to Isaiah chapter 6. Here in Isaiah 9, we hear about the coming of our Savior and the incarnation.

But in Isaiah 6, what do we hear? We hear of Isaiah's vision of the glory of the Lord, and we see him high and lifted up.

[13 : 47] His train filled the temple and his glory over the entire earth and his reign as well. And so here we have the same sovereign Lord of this universe willingly coming and being born in human flesh and willing to take our sins upon himself.

There is really no similar idea anywhere else in any other religion in this world. A couple weeks ago, I was having a conversation with a young man about the subject of faith.

And interestingly, we got into the subject, not into the details of how that happened, but as we were kind of working our way through, he was talking about how most religions, all religions actually are all pretty much the same.

And I said, the fact of the matter is, there is an aspect to which every religion is similar. Every religion recognizes that there's a problem with sin. Isn't that right? In fact, whether or not you believe in religion, I've had people say, well, I'm an atheist.

And, oh, that's all well and good, but do you believe that there's a problem with sin? Well, not really. Okay, so if I do this to you, are you offended by it?

[15 : 02] Well, yeah. What if I lie about you and I steal from you or I harm you? Is that wrong? Well, if you do it to me, it's wrong.

If I do it to you, well, you can blame it on my upbringing, you can blame it on my genetics, you can blame it on my biology, you can blame it on my chemistry, but it's not sin.

Really? Okay, he didn't go there, but my point is this. We're actually better than we think at identifying sin in other people. We're not real good in seeing it ourselves. Talking about the issue, I said every religion recognizes the problem with sin, but all come to one conclusion of how to remedy it except for faith in Christ.

Every other religion proposes that the way you solve the sin problem is by doing something about it yourself. And so you work at it a little bit, you try to be a little better person, you get a little better education.

There are a lot of ways you can go about solving the sin problem if what the idea is is that you can kind of work your way through it. Reality of it is that we cannot work our way through it because we do not have the capacity.

[16 : 19] And God, recognizing that we could not solve our sin problem, sent his only begotten son to be the remedy for our sins.

And as you look at Isaiah in 6, we see the Lord high and lifted up, the one that is the controller and sovereign of this universe. And then in Isaiah chapter 9, we see that he is ready and willing to come as our Savior.

Now, before we go further, I'd like you to stop and think forward a little bit. And I know Pastor is going to preach Isaiah chapter 53 on Easter.

Am I right? I'm telling you ahead of time, we'll get there. It's great. So in Isaiah, you see the Lord high and lifted up. In Isaiah, you see the coming of our Savior as a baby and ready to be our sacrifice.

In Isaiah chapter 53, you hear about him willingly being the sacrifice for our sins. And so I want you to imagine just for a moment that here we are stuck in the middle or standing in the middle, looking at the reality of Jesus coming to this earth to be our Savior.

[17 : 27] And that's what we find here in Isaiah chapter 6 or 9. Let's take a look further at what the passage tells us about the promise of his return and reign.

And what we find in Isaiah chapter 9, the remainder of 6 and 7, is really pointing to the future that we look forward to in Christ's return. So here's what we find.

Isaiah speaks of Christ's coming in the flesh. And then he steps forward and explains what the benefit ultimately is going to be of Jesus' coming. Let me read it to you here for a moment.

And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

So let's think about some of the things that come about by virtue of Jesus' coming and being our Savior. For one, he is going to govern justly.

[18 : 24] He's going to govern justly. The government will be upon his shoulders. And what it's saying is that the weight of responsibility of leadership that is for the good of the people will be on those perfect shoulders, wise, caring, loving, merciful, just.

His government will be one of peace and justice and righteousness. The words are packed. And I want you to stop and think about the government that we enjoy.

And I want to speak with all respect to the president that we have at the moment. I sometimes find myself just a little embarrassed by some of the tweets. Any of you struggle with that?

And I think to myself, oh, Lord, I want Jesus back sooner than later. But lest you think I have a bias towards the present president, let me tell you that I found myself equally embarrassed by every other one that I've lived under.

Why? Because they're men of like passion as I am, and they're not the Lord Jesus Christ. I look forward to the day that he will govern with absolute justice, and he will govern in a way that leaves no shadow or question.

[19 : 42] I want you to recognize the four little words that are used to describe our Savior there in Isaiah chapter 9. Picking up there in the latter part of 6, it says, He will be called Wonderful Counselor.

Wonderful Counselor. If you were to ask a person, what is it that you really need? I've bumped into people that say, well, what I need is a million dollars.

And people would say, well, I just need a little more money. I need this. I need that. The truth of the matter is, is that's not the primary need we have. We need direction. We need counsel. We need to know what to do.

Isn't that right? Tell me what to do. And when we think about the Lord Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor, I want you to recognize that in saying this about him, the Scripture is confessing that he alone is the one that we can absolutely rely on to give us the counsel that we need.

He is the one that you can trust to give you counsel for the decisions of your life, for the direction of what you should do, for handling the challenges, dealing with your own heart.

[20 : 52] And by the way, in that he is the Wonderful Counselor, we can understand his counsel already by virtue of the word that he has given us.

His wonderful counsel that we have received and that we will receive is given to us in the word. You're there in Isaiah chapter 8, but I want you to put your finger just for a moment on Isaiah chapter 8 verse 20.

Let me read it to you carefully. And I would ask that you underline it. Before we actually get there, in James chapter 1 it says, If any man lacks wisdom, let him what?

Ask of God. Hey, I'm not sure should I buy the red car or the blue car. Give me a break. If you lack wisdom, ask of God.

And asking of God invariably should direct us back to the scriptures themselves. So we read in Isaiah chapter 8 verse 20, and I'm curious whether you have this underlined.

[22 : 01] It is worth underlining in your Bible. To the teaching and to the testimony, if they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

They're not on page. They're not clear. And so one of the ways in which you can know whether or not the counsel you're receiving reflects the wonderful counselor is by taking what you hear and stacking it up against the word of God itself.

Right? Right? Sadly, sadly, there are people that live their lives without much attention at all, professing believers to what the scripture has to say.

Whether it has to do with their marriage, whether it has to do with their jobs, whether it has to deal with solving interpersonal relationships within the body of Christ, within the family, it's like, I'd rather consult a psychologist than the Bible.

Really? Here we are professing that we are blessed to have the wonderful counselor, and we can rely upon his word to give us counsel. So, he is the wonderful counselor.

[23 : 26] The second word that is used here is that he will be also known as the mighty God. Good counsel is valuable. And one of the things that I can tell you as a pastor now of many years is that on occasion when Pastor Saul and I were working together, and I see this also happening with Pastor Shearer and I, sometimes people would not like what Pastor Saul had to say.

You know. And they would come to me. Or sometimes they wouldn't like what I had to say, and they would go to pastor. And the stunning thing is that we both read the same book.

And we both believed its sufficiency. And we irritated them both times. It's like, that's just what Pastor Saul said. Really? He must read the same book.

Pastor, we've had that experience already. Oh, I better go check with Pastor Knoyer because I didn't like what Pastor Shearer said. Really? Oh, okay. Well, I better go check with Pastor Shearer because I didn't like it. Hey, we read the same book.

Good counsel only is valuable to a certain point, particularly when it comes from a person, because the person can give you good counsel but can't help you get there. I like the fact that not only is he the wonderful counselor, but he's the mighty God.

[24 : 47] Now, what do I mean by that? He can get us there. I like that. Well, Tim, you have a problem with your anger. Yeah, I know.

That's not my phone. Okay. Tim, you have a problem with your anger. Yeah, I do. But I can't help it.

My dad was an angry man, and I grew up in an angry environment, and you don't know my biology, and blah, blah, blah. Really? Really? Here's the beauty of my Savior.

Not only can he save me, but he can help me change. I want you to turn in your Bibles just for a moment to what our mighty God does to help us with this little problem we have. Turn to Philippians 2, verse 12 and 13.

One of the unbelievable blessings of being a believer, listen carefully, is you are not stuck being who you are. Philippians 2.

[25 : 51] My pages are not sticking together. It's just taking me time. Okay, here we go.

Philippians 2, verse 12. You know what?

Get to work. You know what? As I get older, I probably am getting a little impatient with people who tell me, well, that's just the way I am. You know.

If you're an unregenerate person, all I can do is encourage you to know Jesus. But when you're a believer and you tell me, well, that's just the way I am, I'm less patient than I used to be.

It's like, really? You mean the Savior who saved you just can't help you much? Philippians 2, verse 12. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

[26 : 51] Here's the really, really, really good part. You can underline this one. For it is God who works in you both to will. How many of you would like to really have the will to lose more weight?

I'm just trying out. A little practical application here. Okay. He will give you the will, I think that's what it's saying, and to work for his good pleasure.

Get to work. And how am I going to get to work? It's because God is working in me to help me change. How does that relate to Isaiah chapter 6 or 9?

Here's what it says. He's going to be the wonderful counselor. He's going to be the mighty God. He's going to help you. I love that fact. And here, as we think about our Lord Jesus Christ, Isaiah wants us to understand that the one who is coming that will be our Savior and is our Savior is not only the one who gives us wise counsel that matches up with the word of God, but also is actively engaged in helping us change to be like Jesus.

Third, he will be the everlasting Father. And I have to tell you that probably a little hard for us to kind of think through this, but because we think about God being our Father, and here is Jesus being called our Father.

[28 : 18] What's the deal? Probably the best way to frame that is to understand that here is this statement about our Lord Jesus Christ that is communicating the idea that he is really the one who is behind our existence and behind our salvation.

He is the one who is the creator and sustainer of who we are, and we owe our being and our life to him. That's it.

The Father relationship. And again, you look at that passage that we just referenced earlier in Philippians 2, verse 12, and he's at work helping us be different than we would be.

One other thing that we find here in this passage in Isaiah, and I want you to look at that, he will be the prince of peace. Isaiah 9, verse 7, he will be the prince of peace.

Kind of a sobering thought when you stop and really think about it. I remember reading on the Internet yesterday of, I forget where the Marine General was, and we have a tendency to kind of believe the Marines are serious people about warfare.

[29 : 33] And this Marine General was kind of making the comment at one of the bases about there's a war coming. How many of you like the idea of that? I mean, it's fine to watch on the History Channel, but to be really involved in one?

No, it's not. And if you're a student of history, you'll really know that there really have not been very many times of peace. The fact of the matter is, if you kind of chronicle all the warfare that takes place in the world, you recognize that what we would perceive as peace tends to be just little respites where, because of exhaustion or victory for a temporary period of time, people kind of sit back and they don't go at it, but sooner or later, guess what happens?

There you are again. Why? Because of the depraved and hardened hearts of mankind, there will be no peace until Christ comes back.

And here, Isaiah refers to the fact that the day is coming when Jesus will be the one who brings about lasting peace, and he will cause warfare to cease forever.

Why is that? Can you stop and think just for a moment? Can you stop and think about how radically our community and our economy would be changed if sin were completely removed?

[31 : 01] We'd have lots of people looking for new jobs. Poor John Higgins. Probably have to figure out something else besides being a police officer.

Poor Greg. You know, it's like, I can't be an officer anymore? You know, it's like, my son, Seth, can't be a soldier anymore? How many of you would mind having a change of plans like that, right?

The Lord come back and solve the problem for us. And here's what it says. It says, when he comes, he is going to be the prince of peace. So let me ask you this, as we kind of push this forward.

Isaiah tells us that Jesus would come. And you and I know that he did. Tomorrow we're going to celebrate that fact. The passage that we're looking at in particular here in 6 and 7 is really talking about the fact of his incarnation, but then the predominant focus is on the fact he's coming back again.

And so two things in relationship to that that I want to press together and then leave with you. Number one, those of us who know Christ, it says in 1 John, they that have this hope in them, they that have this hope in them purify themselves even as he is pure.

[32 : 23] The anticipation of Jesus coming back is something that makes a difference in the life of the believer. Isn't that right? Hey, it's going to be all right.

I know Jesus is coming back. I want to live with my eye on his return. I want to have an ambition and an interest in his supremacy, not my own.

On the other hand, if you are here today and do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, let me tell you, the reality of the matter is this, is he is coming back. And when he comes, the reason that peace will come to the entire world is he is going to throw Satan and his followers into eternity in hell and suffering forever.

There will be punishment for sin. And here I have the privilege of announcing to you that you have a window of opportunity of coming with a contrite and broken heart and saying, I know my life is a mess and I need Jesus and I want him to forgive me and to save me before it's too late.

There may be a small percentage of you here today that haven't finished your Christmas shopping. This morning as Judith and I were having coffee, she said to me, oh, hey, look at this.

[33 : 57] She did mention the store and I'm not going to mention it. It wasn't Meyer, just in case you're wondering. But she says, look at this. You can order from blah, blah, and you can go pick it up today and have it in time for Christmas.

Not having presents for Christmas is no biggie in comparison to not having come to grips with the reality that you stand condemned before a holy God and have no hope of salvation apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The day is coming. Jesus is coming back. And so when we look at this passage that reminds us, first of all, of a promise made that's been fulfilled, this passage also reminds us of a promise made that may even take place today.

Waleed Bitar, who is our missionary in Ottawa, he called me the other day, and you who know Waleed know that pretty much every time he talks, he says, he didn't come.

I can't do it with that Lebanese accent that he did, but it blows me up every time. You're right, Waleed, but maybe tomorrow. The fact of the matter is, is Jesus is coming back.

[35 : 32] And it should be something that causes each of us here who know Christ to anticipate and live in the shadow of that expectation.

He's coming back. He's coming back. He's coming back. On the other hand, there are those that are here today that don't know Christ. And I don't want you to walk out of here thinking that I'm indifferent to your unregenerate and hopeless heart.

And it is in Christ's stead that I plead with you to be reconciled to him who died and rose again and is the only hope of salvation that we have.

And that's the Christmas message. Let's close in prayer. Father God, I am overwhelmed when I stop and think that tomorrow we're going to celebrate the reminder that you sent your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of glory, to take on human flesh, that he could justly die for our sins and satisfy the penalty that we have incurred.

And I'm thankful for the privilege of being able to preach on Christmas Eve of the fact that you, having provided your Son, have offered to all who will confess their sins and believe in Jesus complete forgiveness and salvation.

[37 : 23] And I would pray that this morning, as we close off our service with singing, that we who are believers would have our hearts lifted up to say thank you and that those that are here that do not know Christ would be drawn to the cross to repentance and faith.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.