

God's Greatest Gift

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[0 : 0 0] It never ceases to amaze me how talented so many of our people in this church are so grateful for the privilege of being in a place where music just comes front and center and we get to enjoy.

Quality music week after week after week. Thank you, John. Thank you, praise team. Thank you, orchestra. Thank you for playing the organ. I can't remember. I guess the last time was maybe a year ago.

So, and then going back to childhood, we had organ every single week. So, it's just such a refreshment to come into the Lord's house and to be encouraged by good music that has deep, rich theology.

And leads us to Christ. Leads us to scriptural principles that are transcendent. So, praise the Lord for that. Thank you for your ministry to us this morning through the word.

Jeff, thank you for your testimony this morning. I don't know what your experience is, but there may be times where we tend to think that some people have really great testimonies because God has saved them out of really terrible, sinful, ungodly, and wicked circumstances.

[1 : 3 7] But truth be told, in our heart of hearts, we all come from that place. Jeff talked about Ephesians chapter 5. Here is your condition and my condition this morning.

It says, For while we were still weak, at just the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. So, if you're here this morning and you have experienced the benefits of Christ's death, then this verse is talking about you.

And he describes you in not so sparkling terms. He speaks of you as one who is ungodly. One who is weak.

One who is in desperate need for Christ. That's how he talks about all of us in this room. But fortunately, the story doesn't stop there.

It says, For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, although perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die. But God shows his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[2 : 5 8] We were all enemies. We were all ungodly. We were all sinners. We were all rebels to the core. Whether you expressed it in a way that drew attention to yourself or not, you are, and I am, this morning, saved out of rebellion.

Saved out of ungodliness. Our situation was as desperate as it could have been. It could not have been worse. And yet, there is hope in the midst of despair.

There's hope in the midst of darkness. That hope is only found in the person of Jesus Christ. And that, this morning, is God's greatest gift.

In a nutshell, that's our message for today. My guess is, hey, great, let's pray and go home. But what I'd like to do is I'd like to elaborate on that great gift so that we can begin to understand the fullness of how wonderful that gift is.

We just sang about it. Thanks, John. What a great song. The wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

[4 : 17] And what is so phenomenal, what is so spectacular about that promise is when that promise is made and how that promise comes to be and who that promise is given to.

Because as we begin to recognize the context of the promise, we begin to appreciate that there is hope for me.

There is a divine intervention that can happen in my life where God can take me from the darkness of despair, from the gloominess and hopelessness of my situation, and God can create light, and God can create joy, and God can transform my circumstances, not by rearranging the situation per se, but rearranging my focus in the midst of that situation.

So I want to talk this morning about the great gift that God's given to us. And I want to look back at Isaiah, probably the two most prominent passages in Isaiah, and perhaps the two most prominent Christmas passages in all of the Old Testament that points forward to this promise of God's greatest gift, the promise of Jesus Christ, the promise of the Messiah.

So if you would, I would ask if you would please to turn with me. We'll begin in Isaiah chapter 7, and we'll look at this together.

[5 : 58] Isaiah chapter 7. If you're a guest with us this morning, you can find Isaiah on page 571. That's where we're going to be, at least for the first part of this message.

The promise of God's gift. It's found in Isaiah chapter 7. I said verse 1, but it's actually verses 10 through 14.

Okay? So just make that correction. It begins this way. It says, Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz. This is in verse 10, now in verse 11. Ask a sign of the Lord your God.

Let it be as deep as Sheol, or as high as the heavens. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. And he said, Hear then, O house of David, is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also?

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.

[7 : 04] Of course, we understand Emmanuel meaning God with us. Now turn over to chapter 9. There we're going to begin in verse 1, and 2, and 3, and then the promise of a son in verses 6 and 7.

It says this, But there shall 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 latter 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 dwell in the land of deep darkness, on them a light is shown. You have multiplied the nations. You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

Verse 6, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. In his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[8 : 15] Of the increase of his government, and of the 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 forever.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Now, right at the start, there should be some things that just jump out at your attention. Things about this promise that stand out as being absolutely mind-boggling.

First is, I want you to understand that hope comes from God, and this is just a part of this first point. I want you to understand, as we are moving through this entire passage of Scripture, that if you are looking for hope, you can only find it in one place.

There is only one source of hope, and that is God himself. The God of hope is the one who can give hope to you this morning. God himself, it says, the Lord himself will give you a sign.

King Ahaz, if you want to know hope, if you want to enjoy the benefits and the blessings of hope and a future of anticipating what God can do, look to God.

[9 : 32] Hope exists with him. The next is that hope is undeserved. Hope is undeserved. When we look at Romans chapter 5, and then we look at this passage before us this morning, we recognize that we don't deserve hope.

We'll see that a little bit more as we dig into the passage some more. But notice in verse 2, it is a people of darkness. Light is coming to a people of darkness, which means it's a people who do not deserve hope.

Because they have rebelled, because they have distanced themselves from God. But hope comes in spite of what they deserve. Next is that hope is bound up in God's ability to deliver.

Notice the end of verse 7. It says, the zeal of the Lord has done it. Now it's still coming. It is yet future. But in God's mind, it has been accomplished already.

And God is the one. He is not just the force, but the power and the strength to bring hope to his people. Not only the source of hope, but the strength by which hope will come.

[10 : 49] So I don't know your situation this morning. I don't know the crisis that may be looming on you as an individual or as a family.

I don't know the decisions that you're trying to make. I don't know the turmoil that you are experiencing right now. But what I do know is that there is an answer. There is an answer, and there is hope, and that hope can be found in Christ alone.

The Lord himself can and will do it. The zeal of the Lord is for you if you align yourself with him.

That's the start of this morning's message. That kind of becomes kind of the overarching theme as we walk through this passage today. As we look at the promise of God's gift, I want to point out just a couple of things to just mark your attention and make some observations about the timing of this promise.

I want you to notice the surprising timing of this promise. If you turn back to chapter 7, just flip a page, and this time we will go to verse 1.

[12 : 02] What does it say there? In the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah. Now, for most of us, King Ahaz is some anonymous individual we have very little familiarity with.

We can talk about King Saul. We can talk about King David. We can talk about Solomon and maybe some others like Josiah and Hezekiah and some others kind of sprinkled in there. For sure we know Ahab because he was that wicked king in Israel.

But Ahaz, who was a king in Judah, was very similar to Ahab who was in the northern ten tribes. This is not the time to give a promise.

This is not the time for God to show up and give favor and the promise of blessing to his people. In this kingdom, at this particular point in time, was about 730 years before Jesus Christ came.

And if you remember a little bit about the chronology and the history of the children of Israel, you'll remember that the light of the world was resident within the nation of Israel itself.

[13 : 21] Israel alone had the law. Israel alone had the temple. Israel alone had the priests. Israel alone had the revelation from God.

And now 10-12ths of the nation of Israel had abandoned their roots and had rejected the God of Israel. It's around 83%.

Darkness covered a people. The light of the world was beginning to dim.

The hope for the nations was beginning to fade as now 10-12ths of the light of the world had been obliterated, essentially obscured by the rebellion of a people.

And to make matters worse, the southern two tribes now under the leadership of King Ahaz was also closing the door on the light that God had given to them.

[14 : 26] A commentary on King Ahaz's leadership is found in 2 Chronicles chapter 28. It says this, Ahaz was 20 years old when he began to reign. He reigned 16 years in Jerusalem and he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord as his father David had done, but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.

He made metal images for the Baals and he made offerings in the valley of the son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering according to the abominations of the nation whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel and he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, on the hills and under every green tree.

And if that wasn't bad enough for him as a king, he led the people of Judah and Benjamin into the very same abominations. So that it says of the people that all of them followed after the wickedness of King Ahaz.

The light for the nations was being extinguished. So that now the other two twelfths, the remaining fraction of the light was beginning to be obscured.

Isaiah is writing in a dark day where only a hint of light remained with Isaiah and those who were faithful to Yahweh. It is safe to say that the nations and the light to the nations, the hope that they were to experience through the revelation of God, through his people, was almost virtually destroyed.

[16 : 10] But this, by the mercy of God, it was this dark day that hope begins to dawn. It was in this day, this hopeless day, that God sends his prophet Isaiah to send a messenger to this wicked king, Ahaz, to say, although you have rebelled against my commands, although you have led the people into wickedness, it will not get in the way, it will not obscure my plan to bring light to this people.

Which is to say that God is the author of light and nothing can shatter his light giving purposes. God is the author of light and nothing can shatter his light giving purposes.

I don't know about you, but that gives me special encouragement this morning. As I look around and I see the darkness of the day in which we live. And I think about the darkness that seems to be pressing in to every context, pressing into our school systems, pressing into our workplaces, pressing into our government and all of the things that surround the major decisions of this world.

I think, is there hope anymore for the church and is there hope for his people? And the answer is just look back to the hopelessness of King Ahaz's day.

And you can see where that hope comes. It comes not from people, it comes from Jesus himself. Light can come because of the author of light who desires to shine in to this world.

[17 : 58] Will you give him entrance into your home? Will you give him entrance into your life? Will you let the king of light shine in your heart today? But not only do we see the surprising timing of the promise, I want us just to take note of the unlikely origins of this promise.

The unlikely origins of this promise. For that, I want to point our attention to chapter 9, verse 1. There will be no more 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 latter time he made glorious the way of the sea and the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

Now, I don't know if that strikes you as it strikes me. But I want you to take note of this amazing promise. Who is Naphtali?

Who is Zebulun? Who are these anonymous individuals? Where are these random places? If you can remember back to the book of Genesis, if you can remember back to the sons of Jacob, perhaps you might recall a few of the names of his 12 sons.

[19 : 29] Certainly you could remember the name Levi, or the name Judah, or the name Benjamin. You might be hard pressed to remember the name Reuben, or the name Gad, or the name Dan, but at least they're somewhat familiar.

But Naphtali? And Zebulun? Who are these people? They're sons of Abraham. They're sons of Jacob.

Sons of Israel. And so the promise is coming to the people who are part of the children of God. But people who you wouldn't expect the least likely individuals.

The darkness that had surrounded this group of individuals, the light would dawn, the epicenter of light would come on the least likely group of individuals.

And what's also quite surprising is the epicenter of light would come in the least likely place. Because if you remember, where is Judah and Benjamin?

[20 : 38] We talk about the northern ten tribes, we talk about the southern two tribes. This was enemy territory. Naphtali and Zebulun was not in Judah.

It was not Jerusalem. The promise to King Ahaz was not going to be centered in Jerusalem, but centered in the furthest regions away from the center of Jerusalem.

In a place, as a matter of fact, that was first to fall to Assyria. And perhaps by the time of the writing of this prophecy, those two tribes in the regions surrounding their location had already been absorbed, had already been obliterated by Assyria.

And God says, okay, maybe obliterated by human standards, but preserved by my power, light would dawn to a people who were least to be expected.

A region and a territory least to be expected. Again, to emphasize that God is the author of light and nothing can get in the way of God's ability to make his promises complete.

[21 : 59] And then, a promise of a baby? Unto us a child is born? Is that what they're looking for? If you're in the middle of a military conflict, you're looking for a hero, not a baby.

If you're in the middle of a religious crisis, you're looking for a priest, you're looking for a spiritual leader, you're not looking for a baby. And if you're looking to join two nations that have been divided, if you're looking for a leader who can help unite those two regions together, you're looking for a king, you're not looking for a baby.

And yet, the promise of this son, as we will see in just a few moments, the promise of a son would deliver on all of those expectations, would provide a counselor to help them understand and know the direction that God wanted for them, a king who would come and who would lead the people as God had promised to lead, one who would unite the nations and would lead them into peace, that they had all so desperately longed for.

The first message this morning is this, your situation might be bad, but it's not as bad as it was in Judah. Your crisis may be overwhelming to you this morning, but it doesn't even begin to compare with the crisis in Jerusalem, the darkness that existed there.

the message for us this morning, the message of hope is that light can dawn for you today. In the midst of hardship and suffering and struggle, there is hope for all of us this morning through his son, Jesus Christ.

[24 : 03] Next, we turn to the purpose, the purpose of the gift. That was the promise of the gift, now the purpose of the gift. Why does God send his gift to us in the first place?

What is it meant to accomplish for us? We see there in verses 2 and 3, notice this, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who dwell in the land of darkness, on them a light has dawned. sorry, lost my plate.

You have multiplied the nations, you have increased its joy, they rejoice before you as with the joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

Now, I made a major blunder here. I forgot my phone so that I know what time it is. Thank you. This is very important for me and for you, especially for you.

[25 : 09] I want to keep check on that. Actually, I'll just put it right here so I can see what the time is. Good. Did you see the two-fold purpose there?

It's already up there on the screen for you. The purpose that God is giving you to send his special gift is a purpose of light and joy.

Is that what you would expect? Because that's not what the world would say. What would the world say is the reason that God gave his son?

Why would the world say that you should be a Christian? What is their perception of what it means to be a follower of God? Well, I'm not sure I want to be a Christian because, man, you've got to give up all your fun.

Who wants to do that? I mean, come on! There's so many rules and regulations, there's so many boundaries, and, man, you've got to give up your Sunday mornings, and you've got to give up your lifestyle, and all of these things.

[26 : 22] Who wants to be a Christian? Christian, it's certainly not for me. Maybe for those who are believers, our response might be a little bit better, but still not aligned with the purpose that God gives.

We might say so that God can create a people for himself, a people who learn to love, a people who learn to follow after God, a people who want to know him more, a people who do order their life, but are ambassadors for Christ.

And all of those are good answers, but at the heart of all of those things, the core motivation for God and the core motivation that keeps us moving into those things is that God wants to give you light, and God wants to give you joy.

God desires his best for you. God desires revelation for you. He desires you to be able to think clearly and to be able to work through life and to make good decisions about how to parent and how to love your spouse and how to respond effectively and appropriately in the work context.

He wants you to know how to make the big decisions of life, where to go and what to do. He wants you to be governed by his light in every interaction that you have with people.

[27 : 50] He came to give you light. He came to give you his best. Now, just the other day, and I keep picking on one of my kids.

I'll keep doing it. He makes for good illustrations. But you know when you go shopping with your kids? My mom and dad are here and their tradition is to give gifts, to give money to all their grandkids so that the kids can go out and do some shopping.

So we did that yesterday and we did that the day before. And the money is burning a hole in his pocket. So we walk in and no sooner do we get into the store, but he finds exactly what he wants.

Right? And then we walk down a couple more aisles and we find another thing that's exactly what he wants. And we go a step further and it just goes on this way, store after store after store, aisle after aisle after aisle, and everything that he puts his eyes on is exactly what's going to meet and fill his need for the moment.

Well, finally we found something, didn't we? What did we find? We found some nerf swords, which were great.

[29 : 18] You can put them together and they light up. It's really tremendous. And we found some other cool toys. But isn't that indicative of us? Whatever we seem to set our eyes on is what we think we need, but we find after a period of time that that relationship isn't actually accomplishing or satisfying me the way we thought it should.

that hobby or that job that was supposed to fill the void in your life, that was supposed to leave you with a sense of purpose and a sense of accomplishment.

You find that in actuality it is drudgery to go to work day by day. It is not filling the vacuum of your heart. That's why light has come.

The light of the world has come to shine into your heart, to shine into your heart what you truly need, to give you an awareness of what truly matters, and to awaken your heart to the joy that only God can give.

Joy that we find here in verse 3. You have multiplied the nations. You have increased its joy. God is the divine mover who is moving you into joy.

[30 : 42] It is passive on our part. We get to experience the benefits of joy. It is God's heart and passion to lead you into joy, but joy that can only be found in him.

And that leads us to this final, this final gift, the presence of God himself. That is the gift.

God looked and thought, how can I give them the best?

How can I give them the greatest? How can I give them the most supreme gift in the universe? And in order to accomplish that objective, he gave himself.

himself. He gave himself to you. We find this description of himself here in the end of verse 6.

[31 : 44] We find those four descriptions, the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the prince of peace. And we find in those descriptions everything that we need at the very heart of our being.

everything we desire at the core of who we are, are contained in Jesus Christ, are contained in this greatest gift, the gift of Emmanuel.

The wonderful counselor. Let me just touch on these briefly. Wonderful counselor. This passage leaves us with the question, well, who is this wonderful counselor?

Who is this child? It says a child is born, but it doesn't really give us a description of who he is beyond just a description of his person and what he will do.

But in Isaiah chapter 28, verse 29, it uses these same two words, wonderful and counselor, and it connects them directly to the person of God. Listen to this. It says, this also comes from the Lord of hosts.

[32 : 51] He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. Speaking of God, wonderful. You know, when we say wonderful, we think, oh, that's good, or that's beautiful, or that's really pleasant, that's really nice, that's wonderful.

But when the Hebrew speaks of wonderful, it means something more like supernatural, something more like miraculous, something more like spectacular.

It's the kind of term you would use as a Hebrew to say, it takes your breath away. That is the kind of counselor we have.

The kind of counselor, we don't even have words to describe, it's just, wow, wonderful. Look at this counselor. Look at who he is and the kind of instruction that he gives for those who are his people.

And immediately when this term was used, it would have conjured up in the minds of the listeners a Solomon-like figure, one who had that kind of wisdom, one who had that kind of prowess.

[34 : 13] Under Solomon's rule, the kingdom flourished. There was unimaginable prosperity. The reach and expanse of his kingdom reached its greatest extent during the time of Solomon.

An unprecedented peace. Nations who were paying tribute. People who were governed with justice. A time of unrivaled spiritual enthusiasm. The engineering accomplishments and military prowess during Solomon's reign was unprecedented.

because of the wisdom from God that he had given to King Solomon. But compared with Solomon's counsel, this new counselor would embody wisdom.

It would be his name. It would so, it would so characterize him as an individual that when you thought about wisdom, you would think about this individual, this son, this child, this Emmanuel.

The wonderful counselor. Not just like a Solomon, but he embodied everything that we would come to enjoy and know as wisdom. The women at the well noticed this about Jesus.

[35 : 32] She runs back into town. She says, come see a man who told me everything that I ever did. His wisdom to see inside my heart and to know exactly my situation and to orchestrate the conversation to lead me to God.

That was the wisdom that Jesus demonstrated. And Peter, in John chapter 6, as all the other followers were abandoning Jesus, Jesus turns to Peter and says, Peter, will you go as well?

And Peter says, no, you alone have the words of eternal life. How can I go? You are true wisdom. Couldn't imagine leaving you, Jesus.

The question for us this morning is not, does wisdom exist? The question for us this morning is, is Jesus enough for you?

Is his wisdom sufficient for you this morning? Well, he is not only the wonderful counselor, he is also the mighty God. The mighty God.

[36 : 40] The king will have God's true might about him. Power so great that it can absorb all the evil which can be hurled at it until none is left.

I love that statement. Every great king and every human leader is limited by power, but this king will not be limited in any way.

He will overcome the obstacles. He will overcome the adversaries. He will institute the help and the deliverance and the salvation that his people so desperately need.

But rather than a military conqueror, rather than one who would free them from the oppressor, this mighty God would be one who would free them from their greatest adversary.

The adversary of sin and death. The adversary that confronts and ruins every person that has ever walked this planet, including Adam and Eve.

[37 : 47] This mighty king, this mighty God, would vanquish the greatest enemy of humanity, the enemy of sin.

The enemy that destroys us to the very core. It ruins our thinking, ruins our relationships, ruins our joy, ruins God's design for our life, and inevitably ruins our future.

Only Jesus, only in Jesus can we experience the mighty God and his mighty strength. He's also the everlasting father. The title has always confused me as I think about Jesus as the everlasting father.

What does it mean for somebody who has a New Testament perspective? How can he be God the Son and God the Father? What is going on here? The Old Testament doesn't see things that way.

It may be more helpful as we look at the person of Jesus Christ to think about what this title really suggests. Christ. It might be better for us to think about him as more of the father of eternity, which is also another translation of this phrase, this word, the father of eternity.

[39 : 07] And in this respect, what it would mean is kind of what Paul says to the church. He says, you know, you have many counselors, you have many leaders, but you don't have many fathers.

I have been your father. I have been the one who has been used by God to lead you into spiritual life. And in this way, Jesus is the everlasting father.

One who leads us into everlasting life through his person, his death and resurrection. He ushers us into being children of God and in that way, he becomes our father.

And only through Jesus, only through him as the everlasting father, can we experience him as the prince of peace. The one who comes to make all things new.

It's a familiar word in the Old Testament. It's the word shalom. It's the word that talks about wholeness. The word that deals with the entire person, the body, the soul, the spirit, the mind, the emotions, everything about us that God desires to bring peace into our life.

[40 : 17] And of course, the greatest peace that we need is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And so I close the message with this question.

Do you know the greatest gift? Are you enjoying today the greatest gift that God could ever bring to us?

The gift of his son, Jesus Christ, who is the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, and the prince of peace? Let's pray. Let's pray.