

The Light of the World - John 8:12

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Jason. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

And I think we can draw a parallel between this passage and John chapter 8. Look, for example, Isaiah 9 speaks of walking in darkness.

John 8 says, shall not walk in darkness. Isaiah 9, have seen a great light. A light has dawned.

And Jesus says, the light of the world. Isaiah 9, living in the shadow of death. And John 8 speaks of the light of life.

But there's a commonality of language and a contrast of meaning in these passages, isn't there? There's almost the one speaking to the other.

[1 : 03] Do you not feel that way? And it seems to me that indirectly in the words of John 8. And excuse me if I'm imagining things here.

But we'll discuss this perhaps later. It seems to me that in the words of John 8, Jesus may have been pointing to a prophecy concerning him. And if so, we have here a case study of biblical prophecy which he has validated.

And which touches on the meaning of those terms, Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment. And the connection between those two, it seems to me so interesting that if we have time later, perhaps we might speak about that.

How do the two connect? They're obviously not identical. But how do they connect? And what is the essence of each? But in the meantime, let's consider what Isaiah would have meant by writing about the people walking in darkness has seen a great light.

And we could ask perhaps three questions. Who were these people? And what kind of darkness were they in? And what was the great light that Isaiah foresaw?

[2 : 22] And we've got some background in this, don't we? We have the first 12 chapters of Isaiah to tell us about the people. We have their history laid out in the books of Kings and the Chronicles.

And I made a few notes here just to summarize something of their background and their state. And it is very moving to see the kind of darkness they were in.

First of all, Isaiah was writing in the kingdom of Judah somewhere between 722 and 700 B.C. And Judah was what was left after two great historical disasters.

The first of these was the split of the formerly united nation of Israel, God's chosen people, after the death of Solomon some 200 or 250 years before this.

Solomon had become a tyrant, enslaving his own people to build his grandiose projects. And when he died, and the heir to the throne promised to be even worse, 10 of the 12 tribes broke away, forming the northern kingdom called Israel, entirely separate politically, militarily, and religiously from the kingdom of Judah, which included the small tribe of Benjamin.

[3 : 46] And Judah then and Benjamin were all that was left of that once great kingdom under David. All that were left in the area around Jerusalem in the south.

So that was the first enormous disaster. And the second was even more panaclysmic. The second great disaster was the Assyrian invasion and the mass deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel in the middle of Isaiah's ministry about 722 B.C.

It seems that the mass of the population was taken captive to Assyria and foreigners were brought in to occupy the land. And the nation of Israel, as it was then called, was never heard from again as a coherent nation.

We don't, as I recall, read of any return, any restoration. In fact, we do hear this term, the 10 lost tribes of Israel. Assimilated, lost, and totally lost their identity.

Now, a third disaster was expected at any time during Isaiah's life, and that was that this weak, vulnerable nation surrounded by powerful, aggressive neighbors would suffer a similar invasion. [5 : 05] And they could see not only their own political and military weaknesses, but they could see all too well, because it would happen next door.

They could all see well the likelihood that they would be invaded, the mass of their population carried off, deaths and captivity and so on.

And there was a major attack in 700 B.C., a major assault, which would have been victorious except for a miraculous destruction of the enemy army at that time.

But the invasion did occur, perhaps a century later, when Judah was brought into captivity. So the people to whom Isaiah spoke had every reason for horrific uncertainty.

And there was more to it than that, even. You could say days were dark times. I mean, that would be a gross understatement.

[6 : 21] But the darkness was even deeper, because they knew not only that they were suffering and vulnerable and in colossal danger, but they knew, worse than that, they were being punished by God.

They had been alienated from God as a rebellious society, and Isaiah wrote about them in the beginning of this 12-chapter oracle. He writes, O sinful nation, he's speaking to Judah, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption, they have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel.

They were, he says, loaded with guilt. Why? Well, they knew that God had created the world and created mankind to be in communion with him.

They also knew that God was a righteous God, implacably opposed to evil, and that justice had to be done and was being done.

They were already suffering. It wasn't just fear. Isaiah writes, Jerusalem staggers. Judah is falling.

[7 : 43] Their words and deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. They parade their sin like Sodom. They do not hide it. Woe to them. They brought disaster upon themselves.

This is the most painful part. One thing to suffer, but to know that you are to blame. This was a deep darkness.

It was the darkness of estrangement from God and not having any real idea how one could be in fellowship with him when evil had to be paid for.

Judgment had to be endured. Now, Isaiah wrote scathingly about their present state, but he also wrote longingly of what might have been.

And there's some grand poetry in those few opening chapters of his vision of only, if only, this had happened and that had happened.

[8 : 45] But he also writes of hope that they might someday repent and revert to being a holy people of a loving God.

But the question was, could they repent and reform? There have been eight to ten generations of more or less progressive disobedience since the high point of the kingdom of David.

And they actually had no idea, probably, how their problem could be solved. The central problem was how to become righteous, to become acceptable to God who could deliver them.

They were in the dark because they had no way to answer that question. Isaiah points out that their religious ceremonies had become an abomination to God. Judah seemed neither to have the will nor the strength to repent and convert themselves to be truly God's people.

Now, if we attempt to summarize what Isaiah knew, perhaps we could put it under these brief statements. What Isaiah knew was, first of all, the rigor and exactitude of God's standard of righteousness.

[10 : 06] And secondly, the hopelessness that his people could ever do this by their own effort. And thirdly, the doomful realization that evil had to be punished.

But fourthly, it was the recognition that not only was there here a humanly insoluble dilemma, but here's where Isaiah's faith is astonishing.

He foresees that somehow God would provide a solution. And he's so original and so amazing in that vision that that was Isaiah.

But anyway, those are a few words about who were the people and what exactly was the darkness they were in. and maybe we've said enough about that. But how about Isaiah's great light that he saw?

Looking forward to a future time, he wrote, the people that walked in darkness have seen a, he's speaking of the future, have seen a great light. what was the essence of the great light that Isaiah saw?

[11:19] And I'm thinking that the core of it was this, that God himself would enter the human scene by being born as a human child and grow up to be the Savior of Israel.

Now, the greatness of that vision, which as far as I know, was absolutely unprecedented in the whole of the prior corpus of Jewish scriptures and prophets and everything else, absolutely knew, no, maybe others will have a different view on that.

I'd like to hear more about that later. But it seemed to me radically, drastically knew that God himself would enter the human scene and grow up to be the Savior of Israel.

that was this great light. There's a key verse here in, I think, the 12th chapter where Isaiah says that God has become my salvation.

There was a time in my life when that verse had a huge meaning for me. And I won't go into that now, but it's one of the reasons why. I have such a high view of Isaiah's visions.

[12:45] And what was that vision? Let's just have a look at it. people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

And those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. And I'm going to skip verses 2, 3, 3, 4, and 5 right now. He says, a light has dawned for unto us a child is born.

To us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders and he'll be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. he will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever and the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

And how would he accomplish it? And now we have to turn back to these very difficult passages in 3, 4, and 5 and very uncomfortable to read.

[14:06] What Isaiah thought would be the mechanism by which God would become the Savior of Israel. You have enlarged the nation, he says, addressing words to God, and increased their joy.

They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

Every warrior's boot used in battle, every garment rolled in blood, will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

And I guess as we read this, we say, ah, his vision was then that the Savior would be one who smashed the enemies of Israel, destroyed them in a bloody battle, Israel.

And that that would be the prelude to him setting up a kingdom in which he could rule in righteousness. And we shudder to read that, I think, because we say, no, that's not what actually happened.

[15:18] And we have to wonder then that if Isaiah, having seen the great light, actually only saw part of the story. If this was all we had of Isaiah, I think we would have to say that though his insight was absolutely brilliant, and as I say, I feel, anyway, unprecedented, it was, in some notable respects, quite wrong.

If we had only this chapter to think about. But of course, there's a very different version of Isaiah's vision in chapter 53 of a sacrificial sepher whose origin is not stated, so far as I can see.

He's coming not as a conquering king. Now, I would like to read with you the words which I have treasured ever since I was a boy, 13 or 14.

And I might say years before I even knew there was such a thing as Hamlet's Messiah. But they've been a rich source of meaning to me.

They are, we have to agree, they are a brilliant description of the sacrificial sufferer. He is despised and rejected of men.

[16:50] What an astounding thing to say. The mighty God, rejected. I've got to stop making comments here. He's despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And we hid, as it were, our faces from him. he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely, he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He's saying this to Judah.

He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone into his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, brought as a lamb to the slaughter.

[18:02] He was cut off out of the land of the living. For the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, and neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him. He hath put him to grief. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death.

And he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

And you see, here, the brilliance of Isaiah's vision is that he sees what only could ultimately satisfy the need of a people loaded with guilt.

[19:19] But could he have imagined that the mighty God incarnate of his vision of chapter 9, and the sacrificial sufferer of chapter 53, could he have imagined they were one and the same person?

Now, it seems to me no, perhaps we can discuss this later, because there may well be considerations on both sides of this question. It seems to me at this moment, no, that he hadn't still not put it all together.

to understand the amazing nature of the atonement, we had to wait 700 years or so, until the light of the world had come to explain through his own death as the divine human sufferer, vindicated by the resurrection as the mighty God and the everlasting father, the prince of peace.

We had to wait to understand that these two were the same person. And surely if we have to say that if that is so, Isaiah wrote better than he knew.

But we mustn't fail to appreciate the great insight of Isaiah that God himself would have to provide the solution and would come into the human frame to do it.

[20:41] Even if he did not clearly see that God did this by becoming himself. the sacrificial sufferer.

Of course, this was so overwhelming to the mind, I mean even today. Great scholars and thinkers and writers are struggling to articulate the mystery of the atonement.

Joseph Radinger in his book last year called Jesus of Nazareth wrote, he's only one of many writers who attempted to explain to us the atonement.

He writes, the reality of evil and injustice that disfigures the world exists because of our sin. it cannot be ignored.

It must be addressed. And here I'm going to paraphrase some of his sentences and I think the essence of what he's saying is this. Our sin must be punished.

[21:46] What the atonement means is that the cross, God was punishing himself instead of us. And now as to the intensity of that punishment, here's an 18th century poet striving to express the suffering of our Savior.

It's a certain J. Hawaii to Brewer writing in 1776. And he has these words which I remember hearing years ago. And there is, one can see what he's doing here.

He writes of Jesus on the cross, on him, Almighty vengeance fell that must have sunk a world to hell. He bore it for a sinful race that he might be our hiding place.

But we're back with the problem of Isaac Watts. There aren't words good enough to comprehensively and definitively express the meaning of the atonement.

but not knowing the sublime doctrine of the atonement was not the only kind of darkness these Old Testament people were in.

[23:02] They were, I think we can say, seriously in the dark about the meaning of life and death. They seemed to have had no idea that there was life after death. Merely an indefinite suspension of existence in a place called Sheol, which Tom Wright in his book on the resurrection describes, after thinking a lot about the meanings of the Old Testament words about the future.

He describes Sheol as the place of next to nothingness. So the Old Testament people were in the dark in that sense, very serious, very serious kind of darkness.

Further, they had no understanding of the possibility of a glorious resurrection, of a future eternal life in fellowship with God.

There may be certain hints of this, but I think we cannot say there is any widespread understanding that these people had accessible to.

Further, they had no understanding of an intimate, personal, present relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. And of course, what all this adds up to is they had only a partial, it is a tiny portion of the whole, a partial understanding of the absolute goodness and grace of God.

[24 : 31] Not even being able to imagine how he would become poor, that we might be made rich. I think sometimes we forget how deep was the darkness in which the people walked before Jesus came, or in what deep darkness we would now be had we not known him as Lord and Savior.

Savior. Now, in closing then, can we, and I want to come to the light of the world, but just briefly state, what would be some of the highlights, if you'll use the term, of the exposure to the light of the world that we enjoy?

First of all, concerning the atonement. And here's Isaac Watts phrase coming up to me again, how Jesus teaches by using, as he called, gentle words.

Concerning the atonement to his disciples, he uses these words, my body, which is given for you. Doesn't that capture a lot?

Concerning the possibility of intimate, personal relationship with God, he says, and he's using words that we might be able to conceptualize.

[26 : 07] He says, it's like this, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit. Thirdly, concerning the Holy Spirit, he says that on his departure from earth, he will provide the personal, indwelling strength giver.

earth, he will live with you and shall be in you. Amazing statement. He will guide you into all truth.

Fourthly, concerning our instinctive fear of death, it's part of being human, isn't it?

He says, I am, here's these loaded words again, overtones of deity, I am the resurrection and the life.

He that believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Fifthly, concerning, wondering what will happen after death.

He says to his disciples, he said, don't be troubled about that question. I go to prepare a place for you in my father's house.

[27 : 20] I'll come back and take you to be with me, that you may be with me where I am. Amazing piece of illumination, isn't it? Concerning his present priestly prayer on our behalf, we see the pouring out of it even before his death in the long passages of John chapter 17.

Finally, concerning our need from time to time, and maybe frequently to be reminded about the meaning of life and death, let's remember that he said, I am the light of life.

He that, I am the light of the world, that he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. But, as you can see, I need help on this question.

of, did Isaiah foresee the identity, did he understand the identity of the sacrificial sufferer?

I'd like to turn that question over to you. Can you help me? Anyone like to contribute to that question?

[28 : 37] question? And if you think it's a non-question, don't hesitate to say so. When, go ahead.

When us human beings listen to the voice of God, which all of the Old Testament writers had to do, you have to be extremely brave to articulate to the extent that you see what God's done.

Yes. So, and even away from that subject, we never get to an end of who God is. Yes. So, Isaiah shared the two separate things.

I'm trying to remember something about the Joseph or the Benjamin thing about Jesus fulfilling, but I haven't got that in my mind at the moment.

But, anyway, he foresaw the suffering servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he saw what we expect him in time of the Messiah coming in glory and the others.

[29 : 54] Yes, yes. But he himself didn't relate probably to the two joining each other. Right. Thank you for that. Is there another view that others have here?

Yeah, please, Sheila. Well, I'm just overwhelmed by what you've given us. And I'm wondering, a discussion for another time, why did you choose to be an engineer?

That having been said, I have been thinking as you went through this, in Sunday school, like many years ago, I was taught that prophets gave messages from God to the people. Nobody said anything at that time about did they understand everything that they were saying? And I think maybe my own personal answer is that sometimes they did not, that they may have felt strongly that they should be giving a message of a certain kind without necessarily knowing its implications.

Now, springing to my mind, and I hope it's related, is Simeon, who did not seemingly live long enough to hear Jesus preach, to get involved in his teaching, but when he saw this baby, he said, a light to lighten the Gentiles.

[31 : 18] how could he have known that this was going to be a worldwide message, and the hope of his people Israel. So he had never given up that hope, and somehow he knew what he was looking at.

I mean, a little tiny baby, how could he know that? How could he know the implications? And how could Isaiah know the implications? But he felt strongly about the message that he had to give. That's a wonderful point. So in a sense, it was obvious to, to, to, excuse me, the person who... Oh, Simeon. The Simeon mother, yes, right. Yes. Well, but he, I don't know that he would have understood the implications of what he was saying. Yeah. He actually may even have meant something different from that.

Yes. It could be, and then I'm reading something into it that I did not intend, but it's almost like an unintentional truth. Yes. Harvey.

[32 : 24] I take it, Isaiah would say, I'm witnessing to the light. And as your question, if Isaiah had heard the creed we said today, if he had heard, I know, Phil, you said them and I said them, because we were at the same service, light from light.

Yes. Would he have said, oh, that's what I didn't know. Yeah. Was he expecting another witness to the light of God? Yeah. Or was he, we say no, as it turns out, and Isaiah says, light from light.

Yeah. And does our mind, our minds go beyond that? That's right. Does anyone think that he actually did know, but he was afraid to say?

that this truth was so revolutionary that God would be despised and rejected?

Do you think that he was in danger of being stoned for blasphemy? Is it possible? Jim, what do you think? I don't dare venture in answer to that question.

[33 : 35] I mean, I just don't know. But what I would like to say, to follow on from what you said to us, is that here he is, Isaiah, prompted by God to spell out the oracle of chapter 53.

and it doesn't end with the death of the servant. It ends with the servant alive, honored, triumphant, it pleased the Lord to bruise him, the Lord put him to grief.

Yes, but now here he is, seeing of the travel of his soul, being satisfied, justifying many, after, it seems, or through bearing their iniquities.

And it seems to be God who is speaking in verse 12, therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoiled with the strong.

That isn't Isaiah dividing, that is God. ordaining, and executing. So there are two persons here, and the second person, the person who is sent to bear the iniquities of the people, is alive, triumphant, and bestowing blessings, following his death.

[35 : 25] the resurrection, it seems to me, is as clearly foretold in Isaiah 53, as the cross, and the what we call the substitution of the atonement.

And there were certainly two people here, Isaiah couldn't have missed that. so I think that in his mind and heart, he must have understood the essence of what he was saying, because otherwise, well, phrase it, clause by clause, and sentence by sentence, he could hardly have said it.

how it was going to happen, who it was going to be, of course, you're right, I'm sure, to say he couldn't have known that, but that it's going to be in some shape and form with God, let me pick up Harvey's phrase, or Harvey's comment, God, who is light, sending another person to die and then to live and justify many and so bring a new quality of life to the many.

He, the second person, could fairly be called light, from light, just as Harvey says.

I don't see how Isaiah could have finished putting down on paper this oracle without some sense, with awe in his heart, as it would be, some sense that this is what God is going to do.

[37 : 34] Light from light, he wouldn't have known that formula, but it's the formula that fits so beautifully because the dignity of the person who is sent and who dies and then who appears alive

and blesses, justifies many on the basis of what he's done, this is integral to the picture and light from light is a phrase which catches the glory of this whole oracle so beautifully.

You can't limit the dignity of the God who in his mercy makes all this happen and you can't limit the dignity of the one who in his love and mercy and concern for people in their sins accepts the vocation, dies and then rises and saves.

It's overwhelming to see that I can't believe that Isaiah had got a notion, a clear notion that believe it or not I believe it Lord because you're telling me this is what's going to happen.

A miraculous deposition which he may have thought is so good and so true I mustn't comment on it myself. Is that what you're suggesting Jim?

Well I'm suggesting that he received this whole oracle from God and the way that the prophets did. There's an element of them putting it into their own sort of poetry.

[39 : 35] A lot of this is Hebrew poetry but the substance comes from God and they know in their hearts it comes from God they've been given it given it to relay.

And Isaiah takes a deep breath takes his pen and relays it. He writes this chapter and if anybody asked him after he'd written it he would have said well sometime somehow this is what's going to happen.

There are two persons I don't know the details but I am clear that there are two persons light from light. Terry, you want to without contradicting either one of you, I'd like to answer your question by saying that you're asking a question which has an unknowable answer.

Unknowable, yeah. In the sense, first of all, this is the prophet Isaiah and the prophet speaks or predicts and the difficulty here is whether that prediction can be identified specifically with Christ and that's much of what does the packages so that's a matter of faith not a matter of fact at least for our purposes or our extent we can handle.

if my friend the rabbi had heard exactly had been in the room in the last hour, he would have been polite but not at all pleased by what you said because he still has great respect for the prophet Isaiah but his answer to your question is he's still waiting.

[41 : 47] he would say that the sufferer was Israel. Yes, that he's still waiting for whatever is being predicted here whatever that is.

And that's one of the critical differences between if you will the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament put it that way. So we don't really know and we can't know but it's a matter of faith by definition it makes sense to us.

Jason. Can I flip?

Sorry. Sure. Go ahead. I think it's another hard question I've been thinking about this for a little while. Verse 6 for to us for unto us a child is born.

child son is implying a human and the government will be on the shoulder and this is a human child who will be called wonderful counselor that's okay but almighty god everlasting father so it's a child who will be called almighty god it speaks it shouts to us incarnation god Jesus being 100% god 100% man how would Isaiah or even Jews how would a rabbi read it how would they read it in shouts incarnation or perhaps we're schooled by a church and it seems in the times of the time of Jesus that this chapter was very much in the minds of the people who were looking for a messiah wouldn't you agree they looked for someone who would set up a militarily successful victorious kingdom rid them of these hated Romans and so on yeah yeah any other comments

[44 : 09] I didn't mean to focus only on this question perhaps others want to share something that would be related yeah so back to I am the light of the world yes correct me if I want to back there I think that that was also said in the context of a Jewish festival which they light lanterns and read verses from the Old Testament which illustrate God as the light and in the midst of it Jesus says I am the light the world and we know that is the Septuagint translation for Yahweh yes into Greek yes that's a good thought Jason interesting to look up just what those Old Testament readings were that time

I didn't do that but that would be a good thing to do I mean yeah Harvey Douglas Pharaoh I love this he talks he ponders our Lord's resurrection body just in passing in humility I'm sure he says apparently here we're looking at a new spiritual physics that but you brought to our attention I've never really thought of this thank you very much he was wounded yeah and we read this morning that the Lord says see my wounds that even in his spiritual body there's a continuity with were they thinking of Isaiah when they saw those wounds I think maybe they were when they came to the

woundedness right from Isaiah right we know that chapter that we call chapter 53 was very much in Jesus' mind and I suppose it's impossible that he would not have discussed it with them on different occasions improbable yeah well

I can't answer your question Phil but it seems to me that the scripture readings over the last two Sundays have been extraordinarily relevant in wonderful bible study on the road to Emmaus and the opening of the scriptures to the disciples in the upper room the way in which the revelation of who Jesus is was brought to the disciples through the old testament scriptures you've done for us I think there's something you thought you'll level of to actually relate our new testament scriptures to the old testament I know that some people are scared of this because some exaggerated analogies maybe have been used in the past there's no reason for us to avoid it you've illustrated the depths of that revelation and in some ways it's the most profound validation of the

God-breathed nature of scripture I think whether or not Isaiah knew precisely what was going on is somewhat irrelevant it's God who knew what was going on and he was communicating to his prophet and the prophet after all is human but he is simply repeating the revelation of the Spirit it's a marvelous example of something we should do a lot more of and thank you for thank you there are no more comments yes sorry my favorite rabbi Sid Roth calls Christianity the true branch of Judaism I like that well he's a Christian rabbi yeah there's a lot of people who do a church in the belief really that's very interesting well thank you all come thank you
I'll see you bye bye I'll go subscribe