

Isaiah 9:2-7

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[0 : 00] So the idea for our Bible camp this year and every seventh year comes from a book written in 1950, published in 1950 called *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

And it's a great favourite for lots of people, but my guess is that a whole number of us have not read it yet. It's a children's fantasy written by C.S. Lewis.

It's about children who travel from this world into another world, a fantasy world called Narnia. It's a world of talking animals and mythical creatures and it's under the power of the evil white witch.

And the way she exercises her power and makes herself queen is by bringing darkness and winter and ice on the land and never Christmas. And when the children first come into this world, they hear about the great figure, the great lion Aslan.

And he's like a Jesus figure. He's not a symbol and he's not an allegory. Lewis called Aslan a supposal of what it would be like if Jesus entered into Narnia.

[1 : 15] But he's the great king and he comes to rescue Edmund who has been taken captive and deceived by the witch, breaking her power by dying.

He returns from the dead to remake the world. And I think it's now sold something like 100 million copies around the world. And I discovered it used to be on the public school curriculum for elementary readers here in Canada.

And the point is that it was written to stir our hearts and our imaginations toward the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel. Lewis said he wanted to get past the, what did he call them, the watchful dragons that people have against the gospel.

The first time in the book the kids hear about Aslan is in chapter 7 from Mr. Beaver. And Mr. Beaver says, they say Aslan is on the move but has already landed.

And I'm going to read you a long paragraph so just settle down. Okay. Story time. And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do.

[2 : 28] But the moment the beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it had sometimes, it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something that you don't understand but in the dream it fills you as if it had some enormous meaning.

Either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words which makes the dream so beautiful you remember it all your life and you're always wishing you could get into that dream again.

It was like that now. At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump up inside them. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realise that it's the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.

I'm going to stop reading there because it would take too long to read the rest of the book. Now the Old Testament speaks about the coming of Jesus in a way that is meant to stir our hearts and our hopes.

[3 : 45] And it does this by picturing our world and our lives as being stuck in darkness. thick, deep darkness.

And God sends his son as the light of the world to bring the joy and the blessing of God into the darkness. And perhaps nowhere better in the Old Testament is this expressed than in Isaiah 9.

So if you look down at verse 2, this very familiar passage says this. Now I don't know if you have ever been in complete darkness.

It's very difficult in a city to do that. When I was a young person, I visited Port Arthur, which is on the southernmost tip of Tasmania.

It was a special prison for convicts. The British were experts at building these kinds of things. And at the centre of the prison was a circular cell about as wide, about half as wide as this room, I guess, sandstone.

[4 : 58] And when the door of sandstone was closed, it was absolute, absolutely dark and you couldn't hear anything outside. And I went with a tour group and we went in, we were asked to be silent.

And when the door closed, I remember thinking after about 30 seconds, I think I'd like to get out now. It's very, very scary. And one of the things that happened after a few days was that people lost their minds in that cell.

And that happens in absolute darkness. So Jesus has come as the light into this very dark world to bring the joy and the life and the presence of God.

And so I've got two simple points for the rest of our few minutes together. One is, what is darkness? And the second, what is light? So firstly then, what is darkness?

Darkness. And in the Bible, a darkness means a whole group of things together. It primarily means spiritual ignorance. It can mean tragedy and calamity. It can be evil.

[6 : 02] It can be the forces of darkness and Satan and death. And you can see it in the context. In Isaiah's day, the teachers and preachers were trying to be relevant and they were embarrassed by the light of God's truth.

So they preached everything except God's word. In fact, they turned to horoscopes and seances, thinking that would put them in touch with spiritual reality.

So just cast your eye back to 8, chapter 8, and I'll read it if you don't have your Bible open. In verse 20, God says, It says, Because when the word of God is ignored, there is no real light.

There are no answers. And the mark of that is people treat God with contempt and God's people with contempt, and they believe anything rather than coming to the revelation of God.

And that means spiritual darkness is always self-chosen. We're not innocent in this. It's a conscious rejection of God by rejecting his truth.

[7 : 49] As Jesus says, we love darkness because our deeds are evil. Or as the New Testament more widely says, our minds were futile in their thinking.

Our spiritual understanding was darkened. And we are ignorant of the life of God. Now, it's very difficult for us to hear this today.

We think we are the cleverest generation that's ever lived. We have the best medicine, the best science, the best technology can offer.

And if there's anything we don't know, we've got chat, GBT, and AI. And I'm very glad for science and medicine and technology. I'm glad I didn't live 200 years ago.

But neither science nor technology nor artificial general intelligence have anything to say about the deep issues or the deepest problems and questions of life.

[8 : 47] They scratch around on the surface. If anything, they make us more passive and lazy while we move more deeply into spiritual darkness. And the New Testament tells us that spiritual darkness is sponsored by Satan himself, who oversees all anti-God action and thinking in the world.

Jesus said that Satan is a murderer and the father of lies. He was the original liar and he sponsors all subsequent falsehoods. He hates God. He hates his truth.

He hates the people of God and the churches of God. And he works hard to deceive us and distract us and to damage us and to destroy every true church of Jesus Christ. And in the Narnia books, the picture of the white witch, while it's a clever picture, is a little bit weak, I think, in terms of the picture of Satan.

Forgive me. I know there's lots of C.S. Lewis fans here. I think the New Testament likens Satan to a roaring lion, actually, who roams about devouring believers if he can.

And he does it by deceit, disguising himself as an angel of light. And when the coming of Jesus, Jesus comes, he perfectly unites the vertical dimension with the horizontal dimension.

[10 : 10] We want to keep separating them as though we can fix the world without God, thank you very much. But the Bible keeps exposing the root cause of violence and viciousness and cruelty.

It comes from our rejection of the truth of God and God himself. So spiritual ignorance, spiritual darkness, is the source of evil deeds.

Rejecting the light of God vertically will show itself on how we live morally. And unless we have peace with God, there can be no peace with each other.

And we'll continue to treat one another with contempt and hostility, which shows our contempt for God and his revelation. And I think that's why Isaiah uses this amazing word, thick darkness, because it affects us.

It means distress and gloom and anxiety and fear and even terror. When you're in darkness, we saw a couple of second illustration of this.

[11 : 15] You can't really move forward with confidence. The darkness wraps around you. But what did Mr. Beaver say? He said, Aslan is on the move. So there's a darkness that blinds our eyes and there's a darkness that blinds the heart and the mind and the soul.

And this is the thing that Jesus has come to deal with. And because he's come to deal with it, there is a solution to it. And the coming of Jesus in this passage and through the rest of the Bible is like the brilliance, the full brilliance of the sun, shining into the deepest, darkest caves of the earth, more powerful than any darkness there is, which I think is a great joy and encouragement to all of us who are experiencing darkness in our lives.

What has Jesus come to do? This is my second point, and it's much shorter than the first. It's to be the light of the world. And what does that mean? Well, verse 6, which you all just said, this is what it means for Jesus.

This is what he's come to do. To us a child is born. To us a son is given. The government will be on his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Now, it's pretty clear we're not talking about an ordinary human ruler, isn't it? Some time ago I realised that Kim Jong-un had called himself the dear supreme leader, the symbol of mightiness of his country, the banner of all victory and glory, the brilliant comrade.

[12 : 51] The problem is that he gave all these titles to himself, whereas this child is named, gets these four names from God.

And there's only one child that's born that fits this description, and every one of these names shines with the light of the glory of God. You think about Wonderful Counselor. It's the perfect name for driving away all darkness.

The word wonder in wonderful simply means supernatural. It means from God. It's the wonder of God's wisdom. Counsel is the revelation and encouragement of God's wisdom.

So when Jesus came, he dealt with people with breathtaking power and beauty. And nobody had ever spoken as he did. Nobody ever taught as he did.

He said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. All the power of God has come to deal with our darkness and our death.

[13 : 57] So if you open the New Testament and read Mark's Gospel, he talks like God and he drives back all the enemies of God. And one by one, the enemies of God rise up and the enemies of humanity rise up and say, you shall not pass.

But he does. But he does. And he heals the sick. And he cures the lame. And he stills the storm. And he forgives sins. And he raises from the dead.

This is the power of the mighty God in him. He's everlasting father, which doesn't... We use father to mean biological father. But in the Old Testament, God became the father of his children of Israel when he rescued them, set his name upon them.

And now Jesus has rescued us with a much greater redemption and creates a new people. And now through us shines his light out into the world. And of course, Prince of Peace brings it all together as he comes to build the bridge between heaven and earth.

And the real peace of the light of Christ then shines into the dark place through him. Boys and girls, just one...

[15 : 07] Oh, I can see some terrific drawings there. Just one minute before Will comes and asks you to show some of your drawings. These words in Isaiah were spoken 700 years before the coming of Jesus.

But Matthew's gospel tells us that when Jesus started his ministry, it was to fulfill these words. He came as the light into the world to rescue us from darkness and sin.

And on the cross, he takes our darkness and our sin and our death and our evil into himself. And all heaven turned away from him and even darkness covered the land.

But he rose again because the light cannot be extinguished. And now he turns to each of us and he says to us again this morning, follow me. I'm the Alpha.

I'm the Omega. I'm the beginning. I am the end. I'm now seated at the right hand of God. I'm coming to bring all who belong to me into the light of the new creation where there will be no darkness, no evil, no death, no dismay.

[16:14] Where God himself will be our light. So follow me. And the astonishing thing for us this morning is that our hope is not in a fantasy book written for children, but in the living and ascended Jesus Christ, who makes us shine with his light more and more as we see his face and the glory of God in the gospel.

So. So. So.