

Isaiah 9:1-7 - The Commitment of a Zealous God

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Preacher: Will Spink

- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Amen. That is beautiful. Thank you all so much. It is really hard when it's 75 degrees to feel like Christmas, and music of Christmas makes me excited.
- So thank you all for serving us so well and leading us in worship. I do love the songs of Christmas. They have so much rich there about what God is actually doing in this time.
- And we've been talking about that this Christmas season. If you're visiting with us this weekend, here at Southwood, we have been talking from Isaiah chapter 9 during the Christmas season, looking at this wonderful prophecy of Isaiah, the titles given to Jesus in verse 6, Wonderful Counselor.
- Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We've been talking about who Jesus is promised to be as the one coming to rescue God's people and to rule righteously forever.
- [1 : 1 1] However, we're going to focus this morning on the end of the passage, but let me read the whole thing for us one more time so we get the full picture of what God is promising through the prophet Isaiah.
- I thought about that as I was preparing for this morning. We're just looking at the last verse. Do we need to read the whole thing again? I've read it so many weeks in a row. And my second thought was, if Isaiah 9 ever gets old to me, there's something really wrong going on.
- You need to come check on me, okay? This is a glorious passage, a beautiful promise of what God is doing. On top of that, it is God's holy word.
- It is his word. So Isaiah chapter 9, we'll start at verse 1. Give your attention to the reading of God's word. But there will 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.
- [2 : 1 7] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy.
- They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.
- For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- Of the increase of his government and of 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 forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Will you pray with me? Father, we do thank you for your word.

[3 : 31] We thank you that it teaches us. We thank you that it guides us in truth. We thank you that it shows us who you are and how you love us.

Would you teach us those things again this morning? Father, send your spirit to teach our hearts your word that we might know you more, that we might love you more, that we might serve you more.

Would you do that? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isaiah gets to the end of all this glorious prophecy, this wonderful, hopeful words, and he concludes with the statement of God's zeal.

It's going to see that all of this gets accomplished. I want to talk this morning about God's zeal and what God is zealous for. But first, let's make sure we know what the this is at the end.

[4 : 35] Will do this. What is this? What has God promised will happen? This is going to be somewhat of a review from what we've seen in this passage the past few weeks.

But as you read through the first few verses, you see this is light coming into darkness, verse 2. Joy coming into sorrow, verse 3.

Peace coming into conflict, verses 4 and 5. All, all of those things coming through a child born to be king forever. What Isaiah is prophesying about is really God's fulfillment of his promises to redeem his people and be their faithful covenant-keeping God.

Remember, all the way back to Abraham, God has promised his people that he will be their God, that they'll have this special relationship with him. He promised them a land, a place they could settle and call home.

And they'd inhabit it as a great nation, being his special people. That's what it was going to look like to be blessed by their God. In Exodus 19, God says it this way, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

[5 : 57] What a beautiful way to picture what God did in the Exodus, right? Not just delivering his people from slavery, but bringing them to himself to be his special people.

Now, if you'll obey my voice, keep my covenant, you'll be what? My treasured possession among all peoples. All the earth is mine, but you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

We're going to have a special relationship, God says. I will love you and protect you. You will be my treasured possession, the ones I value and cherish.

Now have no other gods before me. That's what comes next, right? Trust me. Worship me. Obey my commandments. But Israel doesn't do that, do they?

Over and over again, running after other gods, disobeying God's commands. After many years, they even ask for a king like the rest of the nations.

[6 : 58] They're not pleased with this God that they have that they don't see. They want a king like the nations. And after a bad experience with Saul, God gives them David, a man after his heart, to lead his people in following after him and following his commands.

And through David, God renews his promise to his people. Look at 2 Samuel chapter 7. God's great promise to Israel through David. God says, You hear the promise of a land of their own again?

And I'll give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you, the Lord will make you a house, David. I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I'll be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. My steadfast love will not depart from him as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. Forever. The promises of God again, right?

[8 : 14] A land of their own. A great and prosperous nation going to be protected from their enemies and have this wonderful place. And now a king who's going to reign forever.

Not one who's going to be up and down, who just will last for a little while, but stability and security and a leader you can count on forever. All of those things happening.

Why? Because God was going to be their God. They were his special people, and God would make all of this happen as they follow him.

They get all the promises again, but again, they go their own way, don't they? They turn from God to idols. Their kings even lead them astray.

They begin to get overpowered by surrounding nations, and so they will find themselves not in a promised land flowing with milk and honey, but far away.

[9 : 15] Not as a powerful nation, but scattered abroad and under the thumb of Babylonians and Assyrians. Not seeing much evidence of their God and all his wonderful promises, right?

Israel would await that promised king for a long time. And that's what this in verse 7 is. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this, is that he will keep his promise and send that king.

He's going to be the righteous ruler on David's throne who indeed reigns forever. Do the words look familiar now in verse 7? His rule is going to keep increasing.

It will never end. He will make God's way clear. He will make the way to God clear. He will be that way to God. God himself come in might to protect his people forever.

To lead them into peace. That's what's going to happen, God says. This is what I'm promising. All my promises will be fulfilled. Despite your failures, Israel, I'm still going to keep all my promises.

[10 : 28] Despite your failures, my special people will be redeemed and led to follow me into all goodness and joy forever. I'm still going to do it. The Messiah is coming, right?

The one that's going to make this happen, I'm sending him. It's the hope and the joy of Christmas. Rejoice. Rejoice, Emmanuel. God with us has come to Israel.

The God that was our hope, that made us special, that he was with us, he has come. That's what Isaiah promises. Generations of waiting, of anticipation.

That's what the previous seven verses hold in them. All summed up in the this that God will do. You've waited so long. He's coming.

I will do it. If you were Israel, do you think you might have been at least a little bit skeptical? I mean, really, God?

[11 : 32] Really? Again? I've heard those promises before, and I just, I'm tired of getting my hopes up and being let down. I feel like I'm just getting disappointed.

This is not what I expected. I mean, we have a good king, and I get worked up and think, this is the guy, and then he, he all of a sudden turns rotten, and then he dies, and then we get two bad ones after him.

And now here we are sitting in Babylon. Have you read Psalm 137, the picture of God's people in Babylon? It says they sat by the rivers and wept.

They wept, being in exile from God's promised land. Why? They said things like, how can we sing the songs of God in a foreign land? How can we praise Yahweh when we're not in the place He promised us we were going to be when we look around and don't see His goodness to us?

Is this the prosperity and the peace He had in mind for us? This God seems to have lots of wonderful ideas, but very little commitment to following through.

[12 : 44] Can you feel how they might have felt, what they might have thought, hearing the prophecy of Isaiah, the promise of a king to come? We can feel those thoughts because we know what it's like to hear a commitment and see it not followed through on, don't we?

This Christmas, I was told very clearly in black and white that my Christmas cards would come in the mail no later than December 18. Now, I'll grant you, I was a little behind.

That's not exactly an ideal time to get your Christmas cards that you're then wanting to send out, but December 18th. And as that day drew near and there was no progress showing up, as I began to call on the 17th and the 18th, no matter whom I called, no matter where I showed up, the post office didn't seem to have the zeal that I was hoping for for getting my Christmas cards to me on the 18th.

Their commitment to the promise I had received was pretty low. Ah, they were going to come when they got there. And nobody really knew where they were. Remember, we see promises of unending love discarded.

We hear campaign promises and we joke about them as things that will never happen. That's almost the definition of a campaign promise, right? Something that will certainly never come true.

[14 : 08] In a culture of low commitment even to our promises, is it any wonder that we doubt God's commitment to our good? Do you look around at your life sometimes and look at a particular situation you've been praying for and you wonder if God really cares?

If He really has your best interest in mind? Do you disclaim God's promises to yourself and to others and hesitate even to take them seriously because you hate being let down or disappointed and you think, oh, this is not going to go well and I'm just going to get disappointed again?

Have you stopped thinking about God's commitment to you at all? When you think about God's commitment to you and to your good as His child, do you see it as nonchalant?

Is God being just kind of half-hearted like, oh yeah, sure. I mean, a little capricious. If it works out, if things go well for them, great.

If not, well, we'll do something else. Is that how God feels about you? Is that how you think about His commitment to you? God wants us to hear clearly this morning something very, very different from that level of commitment.

[15 : 31] Something much more deeply passionate, much more deeply secure than that. He wants us to hear clearly the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

His zeal, it's a Hebrew word that speaks of ardent love, of deep fervor. It's a word translated usually in the Scriptures either zeal or jealousy.

Speaking of God being a jealous God, like a lover who is deeply committed to His beloved. I love the way commentator Alec Motier describes the word in this passage.

I want to show it to you. He says, it's the power of love moving the Lord to make His people's cause His own and the passionate commitment of His nature to fulfill His purposes for them.

That's what God's zeal means. That He makes His people's cause His own. That your good is the thing that becomes His driving force, His desire for you.

[16 : 43] God makes His people's cause His own. Motier says it's His very nature that makes God passionately committed to His people and His promises. That's who He is.

It's not He's pretending to be like this. It is His very nature to save His people, to overthrow His foes, and He has the power to do it. He will do it.

He's unwilling to leave His people stuck in their idolatry of other gods. Stuck apart from Him and His glory. He won't let you stay there. He's unwilling to leave His people stuck in captivity to other nations.

Stuck apart from the blessings of His long-standing covenant promises. He won't leave you there. So in Zechariah 1.14, He uses this same word, zeal, to say this.

He says, cry out, thus says the Lord of hosts, I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. That's the way He feels about His people.

[17 : 53] Exceedingly jealous for them. I'm telling you, this is no mild feeling of a placid grandfather in the sky just with some well wishes.

This is the Lord of hosts. The title used for God is the commander of all of heaven's armies getting passionate about someone and something.

You know who? About His people and you know what? About their salvation. Isaiah tells us in other parts of his prophecy what it looks like when God gets zealous for this.

Chapter 42, the Lord goes out like a mighty man, like a man of war, He stirs up His zeal. He cries out, He shouts aloud, He shows Himself mighty against His foes because of His zeal for His people.

Chapter 59, He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on His head. He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself in zeal as a cloak.

[18 : 55] What's God doing when He gets zealous for His people? He's getting ready for battle, isn't He? God who's ready to fight, He's going to fight for His people to rescue the ones He loves, to move heaven and earth to see His purposes for them achieved.

Listen, He may be coming as a baby in a manger, but be assured that Christmas is no weak move on the part of an impotent deity. Christmas is the strong battle plan of the omnipotent Lord of hosts.

He will do this and He has begun. I want you to hear John Calvin's words on this because I couldn't say more beautifully or poetically if I tried for a long time.

Calvin says, God is absolutely inflamed. These words aren't on the screen yet. He's inflamed with an uncommon and extraordinary desire to promote the salvation of the church.

He says, there's no feeling of our own that matches this zeal that God has, that we're trying to use human words to describe a divine passion that is so intense it is wonderful and inconceivable.

[20 : 15] And then He finishes this way. God will come with no light or slow arm to redeem His church for He will be all on flame with amazing love of believers and anxiety about their salvation.

Did you hear that? all on flame with amazing love for believers. So committed to your well-being that He entered into this world of pain and distress Himself to rescue you.

He really did want to be your God. Yes, your God. dear one who's struggling, who feels like you've failed Him again and you're stuck in a cycle of sin and chasing after your own gods.

Yes, you. He feels that way about you. He came for you. This wasn't just a passing thought.

This was not a, well, maybe I will, maybe that's a good idea, maybe I won't. A cosmic coin flip in heaven, God thinking, heads one day, tails the next day, maybe, maybe I'll care about them.

[21 : 37] It's very, very different. Since before the creation of the world, He loved you with an everlasting love so intense that He was willing to die to have you live with Him.

That's how He feels about you. He has your best interest at heart so much so that He was willing to put all of His omniscient wisdom, all of His omnipotent might, all of His eternal perspective to work to plan your greatest shalom, your greatest peace, your complete wholeness in His perfect world forever.

That's what this passage says. That's what God has been doing. He really is good. He really does love you. He really will do this.

He's committed to this. You can be assured of it. Two questions for us by way of application this morning. First, do you share God's commitment?

Are you zealous for the things that He is zealous for? Does the kingdom of King Jesus, the well-being of His creation, the redemption of other people get you fired up?

[23 : 01] Does it make you laugh when I say that? Or does that actually get you excited? What excites your passion and engages your interest? your intense concentration and excitement?

This passage says God is zealous to see His light come into darkness, His joy come into sorrow, His peace come into conflict, all through His Son coming into our lives.

Are you zealous for that too? Do you rejoice in how He's come into your life? Are you committed to seeing Him come into the lives of everyone you know, even those who keep failing you?

Are you committed to seeing them know Him? Or do you think, ah, yeah, I mean, that would be nice. Wouldn't that be cool if someone else met Jesus?

Do you feel like, you know, maybe if it happened, it'd be neat to be a part of? Or are you longing for that? Does your heart ache to be a part of that?

[24 : 07] Do you want to see that happen? Do you pray for His kingdom to come? Do you work to see it advanced in the lives of others? God's heart is for people to be blessed, for a rule of justice and peace and righteousness to impact Huntsville and the rest of the world.

Is that your heart? Is that what you want to see happen and be a part of? Would you pray with me that God would give us some of His zeal for the redemption of people?

I think if we just, if we just had an ounce of it, just a fraction of God's passionate, burning zeal, the way His heart is aflame for believers in Calvin's words.

If we just had a piece of that, I think Huntsville would be a different place. Would you pray with me that God would make our hearts beat like His for people in this city and in this world?

Would we share God's commitment? That's certainly important. Of course it's important to share God's commitment. Having our hearts and priorities match His.

[25 : 18] But you know, I think this passage would ask us another question even perhaps more importantly. Even perhaps more at the heart of Isaiah's prophecy. Do you share His commitment?

Yes. But also do you trust His commitment? Do you trust His commitment? Why do you think the last sentence in verse 7 is there?

Why that sentence at the end of these great promises that the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this? Why is that needed? I mean, God's promised.

He's given you His word, right? He's given you beautiful promises. He's told you it's going to happen through this child who's going to be born and is going to be a king. Why the last sentence?

I think perhaps the primary reason is so that our hearts will be encouraged to trust God's commitment. that we will trust God's commitment enough to have hope in the dark times.

[26 : 22] Because God never promised we wouldn't struggle, right? In fact, He promised that in many ways we would struggle and suffer. But when we do, if you're anything like me, it's easy to look around and it's easy to think like God's people in the Old Testament.

God, you're not looking faithful to your promises right now. I'm tempted to wonder if your commitment is wavering. Our circumstances often tell us that, don't they?

Our repeated sin and failure tell us that, don't they? Satan accuses us. And we say, surely God's commitment to a failure like me must be wavering right now.

And God says what? I'm committed to you zealously and eternally. I sent my Son for you. Don't forget that.

What does Paul say in Romans 8? What should we say to these things, to God's wonderful redemption? We should say this. If God is for us, who can be against us?

[27 : 35] If God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?

He may not give us what we think is best in every situation, but the gift of Jesus at Christmas says He will graciously give us all things, never letting us be separated from His love, Romans 8, right?

No matter how we feel, no matter what life looks like, no matter what our hearts accuse us of and our failures, He sent His Son. You can count on His love.

He really does know what is ultimately best for us. and He really is zealously committed to loving us forever. We can trust Him. Do we trust God's commitment enough to have hope even in the hard times?

And also, do we trust God's commitment enough not to think that we will accomplish these things in our own strength? As important as it is for us to share God's commitment to the redemption of His people and the coming of Christ's kingdom, it's equally important that we remember this work rests on His shoulders and not ours.

[29 : 00] His promise is not that we will be strong enough, smart enough, holy enough to make it happen. That's not the guarantee at the end of this passage, is it?

That we will be strong enough, smart enough, holy enough. In fact, if you'll note the baby in the manger at Christmas, you'll see He loves to work through weakness and humility.

No, His promise is not that we will be strong enough. His promise is that He will be committed enough, zealous to accomplish His purposes.

Maybe Christmas can be a reminder to us that when He kicked off His earthly portion of this mission with the miraculous wonder of the incarnation, He didn't need our strategy, did He?

Did He ask for, was that your idea? Was that my idea? Did we help make, He didn't need our strategy, He didn't need our strength, He didn't need our permission.

[30 : 04] Redemption comes as a gift from Him, not as a cooperative agreement, not a partnership where we fulfill our part of the bargain.

Israel never fulfilled their part of the bargain, did they? That's what we mean when we talk about salvation by grace alone. It's something accomplished by the zeal of the Lord of hosts as it always has been.

His passionate commitment to redeeming the people He loves so much knows no bounds. He won't be turned away by our rebellion. He won't be turned aside by Satan's temptation.

He won't be turned back by the agony of the cross. He will never stop loving you. Amen? He will have you to be with Him forever.

So we have to acknowledge our weakness in order to trust His strength. We have to acknowledge our foolishness to trust His wisdom.

[31 : 10] And when we do, He saves us. Not because we worked hard enough, but because He loved us passionately enough. That's why He saves us.

We trust Him. And He promises that to us a child will be born. And to us trusting Him, a son will be given, one upon whose shoulders the government of His kingdom will rest so that it doesn't weigh on yours or on mine.

He will be the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for being zealous. Thank You for caring passionately about Your people.

Thank You for Your commitment to the kingdom of Your Son coming in great power and for us knowing the rich blessings that are ours as a part of that.

[32 : 26] we pray Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Bring it today, Lord Jesus. Bring it in our hearts, in our city, in our world.

Would we be confident today that You have come to see that happen and that You're coming again to make it true forever? May that encourage our hearts and give us great joy.

we ask in Your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Thank you.