

Isaiah 9:1-7 “Light in the Darkness”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Kids, we get to talk together this morning. If you'll join me up here on the stairs, we're going to talk for just a couple of minutes. Good morning.

Is anybody up here excited for Christmas? Do you like Christmas? Oh, y'all like Christmas, huh? Is that fun? I'm excited for Christmas.

I really like Christmas a lot. Here's what we're going to do this Christmas, okay? This is December the 1st. Every Sunday in December, we're going to come up here on these stairs and talk about Christmas together, okay?

And we're going to talk especially about one thing each week that kids love about Christmas. So you're going to have to help me with some things that you love about Christmas.

[0 : 54] I really am having a hard time thinking of anything. But we're going to celebrate Christmas because when we celebrate Christmas, we're celebrating Jesus' birth, aren't we?

Isn't that? We're going to talk about how these things that we love about Christmas teach us about Jesus. What do you think we might should talk about today? Hey, James, how are you? Hey, man, you want to sit with us?

Will you sit with me? Awesome. Perfect. I brought some of these things this year. Do y'all know what these are? What are they? Lights. Lights. Does anybody see any other Christmas lights in this room anywhere?

Yeah, there are some on the trees. That's good. There's another kind over there. You can't see it very well, but do you see the candles? One of them has a little light at the top of it that Miss Allison lit earlier.

Candles are special kinds of Christmas lights. There are even some fun Christmas lights on Pastor Will's socks. That's exciting, huh? Yeah, yeah. Christmas lights everywhere.

[1 : 59] Are there some up there on the screen? Yeah. Yeah. All over the place, lots of Christmas lights. Who likes to look at Christmas lights? Me. Yeah, me too. Every year, my family either goes and drives around to look at them or sometimes walks through to see Christmas lights.

And here's what I want you to think about. When you see Christmas lights, I want you to remember that Jesus is the light of the world. Did you hear Miss Lindsay just sing that?

The light of the world, glory to the light of the world. Why is it so important that Jesus is the light of the world? Because without light, it's dark.

Dark. And if it's dark, we can't see anything, can we? Well, except for very light things. Well, that's true. Only if there's light can we see in the dark, right?

Yeah. And so Jesus comes. Jesus comes to help us see God. To help us know what God is like. To know how much God loves us.

[3 : 06] And those are really important things that we need, aren't they? Isn't it awesome that Jesus comes to give us light so that we can know who God is and how he loves us? See, Jesus is a light that never goes out, isn't he?

So that when you trust him, you're never going to be completely in the dark. You can talk to him anytime. We call that praying, don't we? You can ask for his help.

You can trust that he loves you all the time. So when you see Christmas lights this year, you're going to remember that Jesus is the light of the world.

Very good. The light of the world. Let's pray and then I'll let you go. Jesus, we are so thankful that you are the light of the world. We're thankful that you being light, you didn't keep all that light up in heaven with you, but you came and at Christmas you were born.

You came into this world so that these kids could know light, could know God, and could know how much you love them. We're so thankful for that. And so we pray that this Christmas we would know you more.

[4 : 12] We would rejoice in you more and we would love your light. In Jesus' name, amen. All right. Some of you are going to go out the back doors. You see Miss Katie waving back there to go to kids worship with you, kindergarten and first grade.

Go with Miss Katie and the rest of you can go back to your seats, okay? Thank you so much. Don't trip. Thank you. Yeah. I do especially want to think about Christmas with our kids this year. I really want for them to be able to understand the good news of Christmas in their own words that they can follow along with.

But I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that kids are not the only ones here this morning who get excited about some of these Christmas things like lights.

Anybody else like Christmas lights? Okay. See, some of us still love Christmas things. So we're going to talk a little bit more too about these same themes.

[5 : 26] We're actually now, and kids, you can listen along and still learn with us. We're going to go beginning to end of the Bible's story this morning. But at the heart of the good news about the light of the world is Isaiah chapter 9.

That's where we're going to start. We heard part of it read for us earlier. And one of the reasons it's so helpful to us is that it makes the darkness of this world very tangible.

And we're going to feel that because then the light's going to shine into that darkness that we can understand a little bit more. Follow with me as I read the first five verses of Isaiah 9.

This is God's holy 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. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

[6 : 32] 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.

Thus far, God's holy word. On the way out, it was terrible, terrible.

I screamed. I just wanted to get out to see the light. That's the way Mario Sepulveda described enduring darkness for 10 weeks as one of 33 Chilean miners trapped 2,000 feet underground back in 2010.

You probably remember the news coverage. Those 33 miners had emergency rations. They had battery-operated headlamps. But many were convinced they would never survive the darkness long enough to be rescued.

[7 : 57] Thankfully, with the help of some experts from around the world, including many from NASA, some of you may have helped, they were rescued. Finally, light broke in to the darkness of the collapsed mine.

One by one, the miners were pulled up to safety, to the cheers of family and people watching around the world at that point. When you have been in darkness so complete and so oppressive for so long, terrible, terrible, you long for the light to break in.

And you rejoice when it does. That's the story of Advent. That's what we're celebrating in this season. It's the story of Isaiah chapter 9.

And what we can't afford to do at Christmastime or any other time is to underestimate the darkness. And therefore, as a result of underestimating the darkness, not rejoice the way we should in the light.

Maybe you have to know the darkness before you can appreciate the light, Madeline Lingle once wrote. I think we have a tendency, most of us, to ignore our need, our weakness, our darkness, to focus on our strengths, on our resources, on the great things about ourselves.

[9 : 30] Notice how for God's people, they have to face darkness, even as light is promised. In several different ways, they have to deal with it.

The most prominent aspect of darkness for them and for us, we have to acknowledge this. It's our sin. The context here in Isaiah 9 is that God's people have turned away from Him.

They have bowed down to idols. They have looked for life in their own pursuits, in their own priorities. They have forsaken the Lord, Isaiah says.

They've rebelled against Him. They are utterly estranged. Those are Isaiah's words, kids. That means they were far away from God.

Far, far away. Now, there's two different ways to get far away from God, at least two general ways. Some of them have gotten far from God just by trusting themselves.

[10:32] I mean, they were doing pretty well. They looked pretty good. They're very moral. They're quite humanly successful. Many of them probably would have been in church. All the while disregarding God's laws.

Neglecting the poor, for example. Worshiping their own power. Others of them were also far from God, but they've gotten there a different way.

They've gotten there by just running as fast as they could away from God. Turning their backs on God. Calling everything He said was good, evil. Calling everything He said was evil, good. And just mocking those who loved Yahweh and loved His Word.

Like their brothers and sisters, their hope was in man, in their internal wisdom and resources. It wasn't in God. But at the end of the day, both kinds of sinners end up far from God, don't they? And don't we? As a result, all around, Isaiah says, as he concludes this right up to the verses we just read, he says they're going to find distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.

[11:48] They'll be thrust into thick darkness. You understand why. God is light. In Him, there's no darkness at all. So darkness is distance from God.

And so when you run far away from God, sin separates us from God. I really want us to face up to this reality.

Y'all, there is enough darkness in each of us to keep us far, far away from God, trapped deep underground forever.

There is plenty of that in each of us. We're going to see that the story of the Bible is not one of problem outside of me, solution inside of me.

That's not the story of the Bible. That's the good news of modern America. That's what we like to think. No, the story of the Bible, the gospel of Jesus, is problem inside of me, solution from outside of me.

[12:54] It is light breaking into darkness. The Advent longing that we're feeling this morning, that we're living in as we sing, come, come, Emmanuel.

It's felt most by those who are most desperate to be rescued. People like me. People like me who get to pick the people that they'll love best and still let them down and hurt them because I love myself better.

People who do things that look good but do them just because they want to look good. Who pridefully think that the best path forward is typically, and if I'm honest, always, for everyone just to listen to me and do what I say, wouldn't it all be better?

The darkness of our sin, that I would think that's true. That has me far from God, right? The most terrible reality possible, that I would be far from Him.

Don't overlook that darkness in your own heart. Don't try to pretend it's okay or you're actually a lot better than Will. I know you are, but it doesn't actually make you perfect either.

[14:21] It's important to acknowledge, though, that sometimes darkness is not from our sin, but it's from our suffering, perhaps from the sin of others, maybe from injustice, from the attacks of the powers of darkness in this world.

Look at verse 4. They're dealing with this. For the yoke of His burden, the staff for His shoulder, the rod of His oppressor, you have broken. This is true of every single person in this room.

You're a sinner. And others have sinned against you. Those are true for every one of us.

You may feel darkness in this world like Job. Not because you're horrible, but because you're human. Satan and his minions and other sinners fight against you.

And the darkness of confusion and depression and despair is real. It's terrible. And you long for the light. Finally, there's a third category of darkness.

[15:36] I think it's the darkness of death. Verse 5. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult, every garment rolled in blood will be burned.

God's people have faced here the trauma of war. It's awful. Terrible. As a result, the fear of death, the grief of loved ones lost, as Assyrians have carried them into exile.

There's not much in this world that feels darker, more terrible, is there? Some of us feel that especially right now.

Especially around the holidays. We know that darkness. I hope that you're starting to identify some of the ways that you personally are presently experiencing darkness.

darkness. But I thought it'd be helpful as we struggle to do that to take a step back, look from 30,000 feet at the story of light and darkness in the Bible.

[16:41] We're just going to hit a few highlights. But it's one of the best lenses through which to read the Christmas story is this lens of darkness and light. You know plenty of books and movies that develop this theme as the centerpiece of great masterpieces.

But the reason that darkness and light, good and evil, resonate so deeply with us is that it is the great story of all of history.

Notice some important patterns from the very beginning of the Bible story. First, that light must break through into the darkness. It's always that way.

Darkness was over the face of the deep when God said what? Let there be light. Light breaking into the darkness as God speaks His perfect world into existence.

Of course, it's not long into the story till the powers of darkness invade. Our rebellion against God breaks His perfect creation. Sin starts to cast its shadow over this world.

[17:47] Darkness is palpable. It's spreading as we are driven out where? From God's presence far from Him into the darkness away from the one who's light.

I want you to see something in Exodus 10 because I want you to know that God knows how awful darkness is. He sends darkness as one of the plagues on Egypt over the whole land while He spares His beloved people from a darkness that He calls a darkness to be felt.

Some of you know that weight, that discouragement, the chains of emotional darkness, felt, heavy, overwhelming darkness.

Some of you, we've talked about this together. You've told me you liken yourself in many ways to Job. If you had to guess the book in the Bible where the word dark appears the most times, would you have guessed the book of Job?

Over 40 times. It's often the darkness of suffering, evil happening to you, that confusion part of darkness where there's a sovereign God that you love, but you don't understand Him.

[19:11] You can't figure Him out. I don't know what He's doing. That darkness just keeps getting worse. It grows through the story as Proverbs highlights the darkness that the wicked experience because they stumble and don't even know what tripped them.

That's how dark it is. They couldn't even see what they're falling over. It's deep darkness. That's where sinners live apart from God, right? Without His light.

So dark we can't even see what we're tripping on. It's where God's people are, far from Him in the darkness of exile for years and years. Oh come, oh come Emmanuel, disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight.

That's where they are. That's the longing that they have when God sends prophet after prophet after prophet to tell them what? to tell them where to look for light.

They are 2,000 feet underground so to speak. But He wants them to see glimmers of hope to know light is coming. He wants to say to them don't be foolish and just settle for darkness.

[20:26] Just give up and decide there's no hope and just settle for the darkness. But He also doesn't want them to look for light from their own battery operated headlamps. He knows they won't give you life for long if you just look to yourself and what you have there underground in your darkness and it won't last.

It might look like light for a few moments or days but you need real light He says. Isaiah chapter 60 darkness shall cover the earth thick darkness to peoples where's the hope?

But the Lord Yahweh will arise upon you. His glory will be seen upon you. That's the hope isn't it? It's rooted in what God is like.

The prophet Ezekiel compares Him to a shepherd. Look at this. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he's among his sheep that have been scattered so will I seek out my sheep and I will rescue them from all the places where they've been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

You notice this side of the stage for today is far from God. Okay? Far from God. He's over there somewhere just for the purpose of this sermon. There ain't no darkness strong enough God is saying that could tear you out from my heart.

[21 : 42] That's our hope that He would insist that He breaks into our darkness. The prophet Micah reminds us that when I fall I shall rise. When I sit in darkness the Lord Yahweh will be a light to me.

Light breaking in because the shepherd plunges into the darkness to rescue His sheep because the glory of the Lord is coming because God is light and in Him is no darkness at all and He will not have us stay far from Him will He?

He and His glory are coming and they are coming how? In a child Isaiah 9 says.

They're coming in a child. Are you feeling at this point in the story the back and forth battle between darkness and light in the Bible story?

You see how that unfolds? Darkness lands some punches early looking strong but then something happens right in the middle of the story right at the heart of it what we're celebrating in this season the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

[22 : 52] That's Christmas that in the dark streets of the little town of Bethlehem shines what? The everlasting light amen that keeps shining light really breaks through in the person of the Christ child in the manger and His light will not be snuffed out.

That's what it means the darkness will not overcome it it will not be snuffed out not even when the sun stops shining in the middle of the day while Jesus hangs on the cross when for all the world it appears that darkness has finally won no the light still shines again because the darker the night gets the brighter the light shines don't forget that especially those of you who are feeling dark right now the light is especially coming it will be especially bright He is coming to rescue and that in many ways that's for all of us because see the Bible says we love darkness not maybe all the time maybe it's scary to us but we love darkness because we love our sin and we love ourselves it's rebels like us who love darkness who need rescuing and what does Jesus say to people like that

I am the light of the world He explains what that means He's saying He's going to forgive the sins of desperate sin addicts like you and me He'll show the way to God for lost confused hurting wanderers in the dark He'll even bring life in the face of death for the fearfully hopelessly condemned glory to the light of the world we should sing that over and over Jesus comes and delivers us from the domain of darkness the dark world in which we live that's Colossians 1 and brings us where into His kingdom and so we are to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light breaking into our darkness so no more hiding in the dark as Derek reminded us that's from 1 John live in the light that is broken in to rescue you reflect it shine it live honestly hopefully because the light has come and the light will never leave

Jesus the judge in Revelation sets all things right all the unjust oppression and suffering that are a part of the darkness of this world will somehow be corrected once and for all as He makes all things new glory comes and death will be no more as everlasting life reigns glory comes and God Himself will be the light of the heavenly city forever so that darkness is banished to hell forever and we are always near the light of life forever glory to the light of the world He does that He makes that reality something that we know and look forward to that's the Cliff Notes version of the battle of darkness and light I hope it gets you excited for Christmas I hope you see in that the hope that we celebrate at least get you excited for seeing Christmas lights sometime soon and realizing that they are piercing the darkness of your neighborhood or your city the way that

Jesus in this story pierces the darkness of this world as the light of the world His breaking in as the light of the world is the highlight of that story so let's finish by going back to Isaiah 9 we stopped just short of the best part hang with me and follow the line of thought for just a minute what he's saying is that light is going to break into darkness joy is coming in the place of anguish and now he's going to say why that's what starts at verse 4 for first reason the unjust suffering and oppression will be over yay for war and death will be defeated finally yay and then this is the way the Hebrew works it builds to a third four that is at the foundation of those first two all of those things ultimately happen for enlightened people will finally figure out how to build an economically sustainable world to live in no for a strong leader will arise to set things straight for a few years with all the right policies no not really don't forget as as our hearts do go in those directions that those are human options they're they're like battery operated headlamps to those in underground darkness those are the things we're drawn to and you can understand it can't you because it's really really dark over here and when we get any glimmer we think that's the thing that's what I need that's going to give me life

that's going to rescue me and it won't the light has to break in from outside darkness can't drive out darkness only light can do that

[28 : 36] Martin Luther King Jr side note on that as we think about sitting over here in the darkness as you think about talking to your friends and your neighbors because we all feel this darkness at some level and in different ways we realize that our lights that we're attracted to have batteries that are going to run out that are already maybe running dim or flickering a little bit and we all know that so do our friends and our neighbors so it's actually a great way in conversation into the hope of the light of the world to be honest to ask where do you feel darkness despair discouragement if you're willing to get honest maybe then the two of you can be honest enough with one another that it gets dark enough that you'll both long for the real light for the light of the world together what a beautiful opportunity anyway back to the last four and the real thing that it says in verse six four at the root of all of it where's the light coming from a child is born a son is given this is the part you know there's a reason it's memorable the ruler of all the light of the world that's where the light's coming from see he is the wonderful counselor

I hope these names will make sense to you now that you'll understand who Jesus is being identified as in this story of light and dark literally he's a wonder of a counselor full of supernatural wisdom so when we feel that we're wandering in the darkness groping around for the best path forward where we're confused we're searching desperately for hope the child king breaks in as a brilliant light and what does he say he says follow me trust me order your entire life to know me to know my way of life when you know so little else for sure I will bring you home to God you just have to know me and he's also the mighty God it's a title used for Yahweh himself even in the next chapter it's perhaps the clearest of these four titles in highlighting the divinity of this promised child king he's doing God stuff isn't he what's the God stuff that he's doing in our story light powerfully breaking into darkness that's what

God does he doesn't just have wise plans he can make them happen he can deliver the weak and the oppressed he can break our bonds of sin and addiction and self obsession in fact his strength never wearies so nothing is impossible for him the darkness will not overcome the mighty God and he's the everlasting father a name speaking to his kind protection of his people maybe you don't think of light that way but this is what light is all of us who've been entrusted to his faithful care all of a sudden those of us who maybe your darkness feels like no one ever stands up for you speaks up to defend you argues your cause against the bully ever brings relief in the attack that you're facing maybe you feel that way listen this child king most certainly will do those things he is the everlasting father who holds you in his arms and never lets you go who defeats all of his and our enemies including the powers of darkness that you don't even know or understand that he drives out by his light and he welcomes you home again when you've sinned again when you've gone away from God because his love and commitment to you never fail and never end he's your everlasting father finally he's the prince of peace he makes wars cease to the ends of the earth he breaks the bow and shatters the spear death himself our last enemy is defeated as his light shines into our world and in the place of the darkness the reign of this child king brings a restoration of life the way that it was meant to be in God's good creation wrongs are now made right sad things come untrue hope springing eternal when the prince of peace is on the throne that's the light of the world that's who he is

Jesus the light of the world come so that we will not walk in terrible darkness that will not remain in bondage to our sin far from God that's why he came so that we will not remain hopeless and discouraged in our suffering and warfare against evil so that we will not remain fearful of death darkness is driven out because light breaks in and shines and keeps shining so listen don't look for that light anywhere else don't think this Christmas light will come from just some good holiday feelings it doesn't last you know that don't think Christmas light is going to come when you get the gift that you've been asking for and it's finally the thing you wanted under the tree and if you just could have afforded to make it a little bit bigger or better it would have been an even brighter light and that would have satisfied you don't think it's going to come when world leaders finally get it together sort out their differences stop fighting for global supremacy and decide to have peace on earth that way don't think it's going to come when your family is finally

Christmas miracle completely kind to one another for an entire day no no those are glimmers of light the light of the world is the light that we need the light we need because it's still pretty dark down here isn't it right it's easy to get discouraged to give up hope as we wait for the light God's

people did it often sometimes they gave up waiting that's where some of you are living right now I get that it's so hard it can feel so dark and what I want you to do is to imagine for me being one of those last 33 miners to be rescued especially if you're feeling darkness heavy this morning can you put yourself in their shoes you're one of the last ones being rescued you're there underground in the dark see they had to wait a while they could only bring up the miners in this rescue capsule one man at a time very slowly and very carefully and there were 33 of them this was a multi day operation it wasn't an immediate rescue what gave them hope think about that what would give you hope as you waited you're number 32 waiting underground what gives you hope well the light had broken in once which meant it could do so again it was no longer utter darkness around them now shafts of light could break in here and there and they were confident that that rescue capsule that came once would come again for every one of them because they knew there were people up there that were going to say we're not leaving him down there you can't leave him

[36 : 53] I love him I'm coming back for him that rescue capsule was going to come back till every last one of them had right listen friends especially friends feeling the darkness the light of the world has broken into this dark world once and we can still see some of the shafts of light breaking in bits of his glory some of them in you and me in this glorious creation as we reflect his image in this world bits of his love and righteousness and grace let your life shine his light but mostly mostly we see it in glimpses of his restoration of our relationship with him moments that he comforts us with the presence of his spirit moments he lifts our heart and worship together moments he shines the good news of the gospel into our lives and through our lips to others see the light of the world has come and has left us with so many reasons to believe that he will break in again for every single one of us to rescue us to bring us home if you can't see any of those lights even as

I talk about them it still feels dark to you see a Christmas light there will be a lot of them this year you won't be able to miss them they're brightest at night when it's dark when you see a Christmas light this year kids what are we remembering when we see a Christmas light Jesus is the light of the world very good it's harder to say out there remember that the light of the world came and so is coming back thank him for that hope even if it's all you've got reset your heart to find light and life there in Jesus the wonderful counselor the mighty God the everlasting father the prince of peace the light of the world let's pray Jesus forgive us for preferring our darkness to your light for thinking the things that we could grasp onto and find hope in we're going to satisfy us and show us the way home forever thank you that you do forgive us thank you that your light continues to shine thank you that we can celebrate that that your advent once assures us that your advent will happen again and so we wait and we pray come

Lord Jesus come quickly that we'll live in your light perfectly and fully forever we long to see darkness destroyed and light to shine and we thank you that we find that hope in you in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host)