

The Coming King

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[0 : 00] Amen. Welcome to the second Sunday in Advent.

Our reading for the sermon this morning is the book of Isaiah, chapter 9. Reading the first seven verses. If you want to look in your pew Bible, it's page 536.

If you will turn there with me, we will read it together. Isaiah 9, verse 1. 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. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

[1 : 21] 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 of 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 righteousness from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Will you pray with me? Amen. Lord, this morning, as we come to your word, we are humbled, humbled by the power and the majesty of the words that you give us, because they point us to you and your great power and your great majesty.

[2 : 58] Lord, I pray this morning that we would find comfort and joy, awe and wonder as we contemplate the coming of your son, Jesus, and the great things that you have done for us in him.

Lord, I pray for your help that you would give me words. Lord, I pray for all of us that our ears would be opened and our hearts would be ready to receive your word this morning.

Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. And they will be thrust into deep darkness.

If you look just before the passage, the end of chapter 8, those are the words that set up the passage that we're looking at this morning. This passage is a well-known prophecy.

We hear it in Handel's Messiah. This is one of those passages that if you've been around Christians, if you've been around Christmas, you've heard these. But to think about the context, it's important to recognize that 700 years before the coming of Jesus, the people of God were looking ahead for hope that they desperately needed because they had been thrust into deep darkness.

- [4 : 24] And I wonder if this Christmas season you can relate. I wonder if you have felt like you have been thrust into deep darkness.
- Maybe you open up your browser or you get your feed, RSS feed on your phone, and you see the news of the world where we see wars and rumors of wars, conflict and suffering from famine.
- And we think the world is a dark place to live. You read the news of society. And you hear about sex trafficking and the suffering of immigrants.
- We read about misbehavior in every level of society, from governments to Hollywood, from church leaders to sports stars to everyday homes.
- The darkness seems great at times. Maybe the darkness has come into your home as well as you live with chronic illness, as you struggle in a strained marriage, as you weep over broken friendships, as you face the fearsome reality of joblessness or homelessness, as you walk in the quiet suffering of deep aloneness, as you grieve the loss of ones you've loved.
- [5 : 49] Maybe the deep darkness that you know so deeply is the deep darkness of your own heart, where you've seen your own failures, and the worst of you come out, where you think, why can't I be better than that?
- Why do I always do that so poorly? Why do I hurt those that I love? Deep darkness is around us in every place.
- And in Israel, 730 years before Christ, they had been thrust into deep darkness, just as we today maybe feel the same way.
- And like them, we long for God to act decisively and to show that the darkness will not win. The darkness does not have the last word. It's to this that our text points to this morning.
- And the darkness, as we've alluded to already, but we want to unpack a little more. The darkness in the 8th century BC had a particular shape. If you were here last week, Pastor Greg gave a great explanation of the history.
- [7 : 03] I'm going to try to summarize it. King Ahaz, sitting on the throne of the southern kingdom of God's people in Jerusalem, had shown himself to be fearful and faithless before God.
- And in trying to save his own skin, he had made terrible allegiances with the Assyrian nation, the nation to the north of Israel to try to save him.
- And what we've seen in chapter 8, if you went back and you looked at the end, is that the prophet Isaiah came to Ahaz and said, because you have abandoned God, darkness will come to this land.
- The northern kingdom will be conquered by this Assyria. And you will be left wondering, has God abandoned me? You will be left wearing a heavy yoke of oppression by the Assyrian rule.
- You will know that it has been your own sin and faithlessness that has ruined you. And you will know the reality that evil now has the power over your land.
- [8 : 18] Now this never came to Jerusalem. It only happened to the northern kingdom from Assyria. And yet it is in this context that chapter 9 breaks into the narrative that Isaiah is giving and the message that he is giving to God's people.
- A message of hope comes that God has not abandoned his people, but will send one who will deliver his people and deliver them from the darkness. Two questions that this text answers this morning.
- One, whom will he send? And two, what will the one who he sends do? So that's what we're going to look at this morning in our next couple of minutes. First of all, whom will he send?

Well, verse 6 is the answer. And you, if you've heard Handel's Messiah, I hope the little, you know, soprano line is singing in your ears. Unto us the child is born.

Unto us. And so on and so forth. It's a beautiful place. If you don't know Handel's Messiah, if you're not familiar with classical music, this is your entree. Go listen to Handel's Messiah. It's a beautiful piece of music.

[9 : 25] Anyway, that's my aside. So verse 6, though, is the core of this hope in terms of who God will send. 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.

God says that though right now the darkness comes with this power that is ruling over you, this government that is oppressing you, this consequence for your own faithlessness and sinfulness where you are suffering, there is going to be one who will take a throne of government that will break these powers, that will lose the control that they have, and will establish himself as the rightful ruler.

This child is not going to be, as we saw earlier in chapter 7, a human baby. This is not the child of Isaiah and his wife, Mahar, Shalal, Hashbaz.

This is not even Hezekiah, the next king of Israel. The dates don't add up. You can do the math. We'll figure it out later. But what this is, is the fulfillment of the idea that God has begun to bring from chapter 7 that we looked at last week.

[10 : 52] This promise that God is going to use children as signs that He has not abandoned His people. That this Emmanuel isn't, in the Old Testament, simply just one child or one person, but it is a series of events where God is reminding His people, I will be with you.

And in the end, it is pointing towards one who will come and fulfill all of these things. But when you look at verse 6 and verse 7, you know that no human being will ever take this throne.

No human being will be able to fulfill this role where the increase of His government and the peace will have no end. Is there any human ruler who has ever established that?

No. And never will be. But He will come and He will establish a government. This promised one will come and His established government will bring the reign of God on earth.

And He will be a mighty counselor, one who is both the fount of all wisdom and also a great advocate for His people before a holy God.

[12 : 17] He will be a mighty God whose power has no rival where there is no power on this earth, whether it be governmental or societal, whether it be personal.

No power that He cannot overcome and that He will not overcome. He is the everlasting Father, the one who is from ages past and will live on to eternity so His kingdom will never fail.

And as a father, here is more of an image that He will be one who will provide and protect for His people like a perfect father ought to, provide and protect for His home, for His family, for His household, so God will do that for His creation, for His world.

And this one will come and sit on that throne and reign in that way. And He will be the Prince of Peace. The threats, the violence, the evil, the destruction, the suffering, they will end.

One commentator said, there are no titles enough to capture all that He is and all that He will bring. This is just a taste of the greatness of the one that God will send.

[13 : 39] And so God gives to the nation of Israel this hope that though they are experiencing now great darkness, God has not left them or abandoned them, but that He will send one who will establish a kingdom whereby the darkness will never return.

What will He do? What will this one do when He comes? This is what we're going to look at now. We look at these promises of as He comes broken up into three different things.

That He will come and He will deliver God's people from contempt to glory. In verse 1, He will deliver us from darkness to joy in verses 2 and 3.

He will deliver us from oppression to righteousness in 4 through 7. So let's look at these briefly together. First, the one who will come will deliver us from contempt to glory.

Now, you look at this first verse and you think, I'm not really sure what He is saying here. Right? What you need to know is that Zebulun and Naphtali, all right?

[14 : 57] Here's your map. Here's the Mediterranean Sea and here's the nation of Israel and at the northern end of the nation of Israel are Zebulun and Naphtali. In fact, they are on the route.

If you have a map of the Middle East and you're on, there's a fertile crescent, right? Out here is Devart. There's a fertile crescent that has to do with rivers and this is where all the civilizations were and up here is Assyria and over here is Babylon.

And so, the route, the trade routes and the invasion routes all come down this road and Zebulun and Naphtali were the entrance point for all the attacks from these great nations onto Israel.

They were also, because of that, the great place of interaction and in the view of Israel over time, the place of loss of purity or clarity of the nation of Israel.

There was interaction with these other nations in ways that God had wanted his people to be set apart. And so, in this northern area, this is where the nation of Israel lost its identity and became a byword.

[16 : 12] It became a place of shame and a place of contempt. Place of shame because this is where their nation had been conquered from and contempt because this is where they had lost their identity.

If you think about how Jews treated the Samaritans in the first century, if you know that story, you're not worth anything.

You're a half-breed. You're not really a part of this nation. You're soiled, defaced, disgraced, rejected, condemned, hated.

This was the contempt that fell upon this northern part because of their history. This was the way that they were viewed. And God says in the former time, that's right.

This is a place of contempt. But look with me again in verse 1. But in the latter time, he has made glorious the way to the sea. The way to the sea is that same trade route, that same invasion route, that same, that comes right through that place.

[17 : 31] God comes and when this child comes and establishes his government, that place that was known as the place of contempt and scorn, he will make it a place of glory.

What does that mean? What does that look like? You know, right down the street from the place where my kids go to school on Lenox Street over in Fairhaven, there's a house on the corner and I've been going there now for four years and you drive by this house and it's a fairly nice neighborhood until you get to the end of the street and the street on this house on the right-hand side, it was a disaster.

The windows were broken, the door was even open half of the time, the foundation had holes in it, the paint was peeling, the roof was slowly decaying.

It was a mess. It was a terrible, terrible blight on the neighborhood. The neighbors were worried about it. It was a mess. It was a mess. It was a mess. It was a mess.

It was a mess. Last year, Habitat for Humanity took on this house as a project. I get to see Antoine all the time as I'm picking my kids up from school.

[18 : 46] I stop and wave at Antoine because he's there. He's managing this project. If you don't know Antoine, he works for Habitat for Humanity in the city. He's a part of our church and that house has regained a glory.

It has been renewed in a beautiful way. It has new siding, new windows, a new door. The last week, a new front porch went in with steps. But not only did they fix the exterior, but they fixed the interior too.

You watch them pull it down to its studs. They actually raised the whole frame and relayed the foundation of the house so that the family that will move in, Lord willing, at the end of this month will move into a house that has a glory of a home where they will be able to be a family and to live.

Friends, this is what it looks like for God to restore glory to something that was contemptible and shameful. And this is what God is doing at the northern parts of Israel.

He's saying this place of invasion is now something else. No longer are you worthless, but you are valued. No longer are you soiled and defaced, but you are cleaned and renewed.

[20 : 11] No longer are you rejected, but you are welcomed. No longer hated and condemned, but loved and exalted. This is the pattern of the one who will come and establish his government.

and not only did he come and do this for the nation Israel, but he will do it for us. Christ has come for you who feel that you are the one who is called contemptible.

He has come to do a work of renovation in your life to restore the glory that God gave you in creation that has been marred by sin and suffering.

for those of you who feel outside, who look at the church and think, well, isn't that a group of people who look good and have it all together? I don't belong there.

Christ has come for you. For those of you who felt marginalized, well, whoever those people are, I'm sure I can't measure up to their standards.

[21 : 18] I'm not good enough. Christ has come for you to say, come in. Christ, when he came, said, I have not come for the healthy, but for the sick.

For those of you who know you need him, but feel like maybe you can't come in, know that Christ has come for you to bring glory to the contempt of your life, to restore you and to renew you, and to buy faith in him know the hope of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Not only does this one come to deliver us from contempt to glory, but he also in verses two and three turns us from darkness to joy.

Look with me again, verses two and three. The darkness here is related to the exile. It is related to the loss of the light of their identity as God's special people protected by God.

It is not only darkness, but deep darkness, if you see in verse two. And if you listened carefully earlier when John read from Matthew, the deep darkness is also the shadow of death.

[22 : 44] For in the Bible, darkness and death are often related thematically. In the experience of the exile, in the experience of the invasion of the series, in the experience of God's judgment, the nation of Israel felt that what had once been fair and flourishing, the people of God in the place of God, had now become ruined.

I have a fascination with natural disasters. It goes way back to my childhood. When I was 10, I was reading about tornadoes and hurricanes and stuff like that.

I don't know if you saw the pictures of the Florida Panhandle after the hurricane hit it. Places where once there was a community and neighborhoods, there is now simply concrete slabs.

Where there were trees and vegetation, there were at best sticks and stumps. And the power had gone out, like really gone out.

There would be no light there for weeks and weeks. This natural devastation maybe gives us a sense of how the people of Israel felt the darkness had descended on their land and on their nation.

[24 : 20] And into this darkness, God sends this one who will bring light. When you look at two and three, it's this picture of establishing and renewing the land.

The nation is multiplying and flourishing. Rather than it feeling like decay, destruction, and ruin, the nation is now flourishing and growing and expanding.

And not only is it expanding seemingly in size and in prosperity, but it's expanding in joy. Look with me at verse three. They rejoice before you, that is, the people of God as they see this one come.

They're rejoicing before God as with the joy of the harvest. As in, as they are reaping the fruits of God's abundant goodness and deliverance to them.

As they are glad when they divide the spoil, that is, as they have experienced victory over their enemies, as they have experienced the establishment of peace, the gladness is that they get to sit and be a part of the everlasting kingdom that will not end.

[25 : 34] This joy is characteristic and it's this joy that is so different from the darkness. For the darkness is often a deep darkness of despair and fear.

But this joy is in the rejoicing that God has not abandoned his people. He has not forgotten them and he has not failed them. But that he is sending this one.

How about you? Has the hurricane come through your life? Maybe you feel right now like the eye wall has just passed and it's looking pretty grim.

Maybe some of you have just had a glancing blow. Maybe you've seen the darkness of sorrow or depression, of abandonment or failure.

fear. You feel like life is over. You feel like the darkness will never get better. God speaks a better word. He has not abandoned his people but he has come for his people.

[26 : 47] The light shines most brightly for those who have lived in the darkness. The hope is sweetest to those who have tasted despair. And the love is most glorious for those who have known rejection.

in the midst of the darkness then the light has come. If you're a believer and you are going through a period where darkness seems to be the thing that is winning, the word here is hold on.

because Christ has come and he will be victorious over that darkness. Don't give up.

Don't give in. Don't despair and allow that darkness to rule you for Christ has come. If you're here this morning exploring Christianity, you're here because it's Christmas season, maybe you've come to recognize that there's something missing in your life.

Maybe there's a nagging sense that there's a darkness in your life, a yawning, aching, longing for something, a spiritual darkness, a lostness in your life.

[28 : 11] The reason why we celebrate Christmas every year is to remember that God has come for us. That this light of Jesus has come to save us and deliver us from the darkness and he invites you to come.

Come and know him. Come and know him and all of who he is. Come and find out more of what this book says about who he is. And we pray that in him you will find hope and by believing in him you will find life.

You will find him who is the real joy of Christmas. So not only from contempt to glory, not only from darkness to joy, but finally from oppression to righteousness.

Look with me at verses 4. 4 through 7. The images are striking, aren't they? The very tools and the weight of the Assyrian invasion, the yoke of his burden, the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppression.

Those are talking about the implements of war and the weight of a heavy government being brought upon God's people. slavery and servitude.

[29 : 37] Listen, if you haven't ever explored, I think Greg mentioned this last week, but if you've never explored how evil the Assyrian empire was, Wikipedia, do something, look it up. It was a truly horrific rule.

It was not a society that you would have wanted to be a part of. The boots of the soldiers trampled over the ground and the land of Israel and the garments of blood remind us that they came not as peaceful occupiers, but as warlike conquerors.

And they came with death. But the promise here is that all of those tools will end. The yoke is removed.

The staff is broken. The rod is broken. As on the day of Midian, which reminds us of the story of Gideon in Judges 6 and 7, when Gideon, with a very small army that God made even smaller, intervened and defeated the enemies of God's people in a miraculous way.

God did an unlooked for and surprising victory in ways that you could never have seen because he did it without military might and power.

[31 : 05] God is promising his people that those implements of warfare are not the last word, but that he will break them. God is promising his people that those implements of oppression will not continue forever.

Now, we live in a world where oppression does continue, doesn't it? It happens on a global scale. Socioeconomic, the rich oppress the poor.

Racial tribes oppress other racial tribes. Even in more genteel societies, we see gender discrimination and power struggle.

And in our personal lives, we see homes where oppressive abuse happens on a regular basis. Oppression does happen on a global and on a personal level in these ways.

We also recognize that the Bible says that the greatest oppressing force in our lives is actually the power of sin. That the thing that we most are powerless over and the thing that most drives and controls us is our own evil hearts and our intent to live apart from God and the destruction that it causes in our lives.

[32 : 35] It is the weighty hand that rules over us in our worst moments. And when we're honest, we recognize how often it still controls us and destroys us.

Our life with God and our life with others. But verse 7 tells us that a new power has come.

There will be a government that will increase and grow until there is no other government other than his. And he will establish a kingdom that will never fail but will go on forever.

And he will establish justice and righteousness. righteousness. The wrongs that we face and the wrongs that we do and the wrongs, the evil that wells up in our hearts will no longer control.

That he will break their power. And he will establish instead justice and righteousness which is not merely vengeance but it is a life-giving establishment of all that is right and true and good.

[33 : 41] That we are right with God and right with one another. And we as human beings under his rule will flourish and rejoice in one another.

It is the very opposite of our fallen world and our fallen hearts when he comes to break the oppression and to establish rightness in our world and in our hearts.

And friends, this is good news, isn't it? For we know how often we still face and experience the oppression.

We know that some of us are fighting today with addictions. Deep-seated patterns of sin. Long stretches of failure.

Where we feel helpless before our sin. Jesus has come to break those bonds. And to set you free from them.

[34 : 48] For is this not the very gospel that we preach and that we proclaim? That we are dead in our sins and trespasses. That sin has a power over us that we cannot free ourselves from.

And the only hope and the only help we will find is not from improving ourselves but from looking outside of ourselves. And God has come in the person of Jesus Christ to be that help from the outside.

And by his perfect life and by his death on the cross bearing the penalty for our sin and breaking the power of sin over us. By rising from the dead so that he might give new life.

This is the great hope of the gospel for us. And it's not just for us as individuals but it is for our society as well. We must not pit the oppression that he breaks of personal sin against the oppression of our society as if they're separate.

But in fact they are a weave of the power of sin in our world. And we know that God has come to break those. And we know that he's not done doing those.

[36 : 01] And so it is right for us as his children to act for righteousness and justice in this world. We know that we know one who has the power and who wields the power to break those patterns.

And we know that one day when his rule is fully established that those bonds of oppression, that that weight will be broken.

That the kingdom will come for the flourishing of all and flourishing of each one of us. But recognize at the very end, verse 7, the last line, to recognize that though we may work towards this, in the end, what will accomplish this?

It will be the zeal of the Lord. It will be the hand of the Lord who will bring this deliverance. It will be the person that God will send who will bring this final victory.

And friends, this is why in Matthew chapter 4, the passage that was read earlier this morning, the gospel writer refers to this passage.

[37 : 17] He says, Jesus is coming in the most unlikely way to bring a surprising redemption to remind you that God has not forgotten his promise.

But in fact, he will fulfill his promise. Jesus comes out of Galilee in the north, a place of contempt in the first century, to redeem him.

Jesus comes not as a conquering warlord on a white horse with an army at his back, but he comes to a stable. And in Matthew 4, he's just beginning his ministry.

And what has he started with? Temptation and exile in the wilderness. And he comes out of that. And Matthew says, do you see this one?

He's coming from the north. He's coming to redeem Zebulun and Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles. He's coming to bring the fulfillment of the promise that light will win over darkness because he is the child that will be born.

[38 : 33] He is the one upon whom the government will rest. He is the coming king who has come to rescue us and to save us and to deliver us.

But he does that not by great overpowering might and by fighting with the weapons of this warfare, but he does it with the incredible grace of offering himself to die in our place.

And he breaks the power of darkness and of contempt and of oppression by taking those things upon himself. He was scorned.

He was abandoned to the darkness by his friends. He was oppressed in his crucifixion, in his death. He took those things on himself to free us to come so that we might have life, so that we might have freedom, so that we might have glory and joy and righteousness in God.

Friends, this is the good news of Christmas. This is the good news of the gospel. And this is why we sing, Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

[39 : 50] Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. And heaven and nature sing. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for this word.

We thank you for the word of hope that you bring us. Lord, that you have remembered your promises and you have remembered your people. And you have come to us in love.

You have come to us in the person of Jesus. Who comes, Lord, as our savior, as our deliverer, as our king.

Lord, we do pray that as we walk through this season, Lord, we would be renewed in hope. Lord, and that in hope we would be renewed in our devotion and our love for Christ who has come for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.