

Our Need for Hope

Isaiah 9:1-7

Advent is the time of year when we celebrate the first coming of Christ 2,000 years ago and when we anticipate the second coming of Christ in the future. This Advent season we are going to study four passages in the book of Isaiah that talk about how the coming Messiah would meet our deepest needs. We all have legitimate felt needs (physical, financial, relational, etc.), but even if all of those needs are met, we have needs that can only be met by God. Isaiah says that God will meet those needs through the Messiah.

Specifically, we are going to see how the Messiah (Jesus) meets our need for hope (Isaiah 9), our need for deliverance (Isaiah 42), our need for forgiveness (Isaiah 53), and our need for a sinless eternity (Isaiah 59).

Whether you are a devoted follower of Christ or whether you are cautiously considering the claims of Christ, these messages will encourage you to allow God Himself to give you hope, deliverance, forgiveness, and a sinless eternity. Today's passage is Isaiah 9:1-7. Please stand for the reading of this Scripture.

READ Isaiah 9:1-7.

At the time of Isaiah's prophecy, the people of Israel were largely living in prosperity, and they were performing all their religious duties. But it was all an external show. They were like rebellious children (1:2) or an unfaithful spouse (1:21). Instead of justice, the leaders and people alike were full of injustice, especially toward orphans and widows (1:23). Instead of being a light to the nations, they had become like the nations, worshiping idols and consulting mediums instead of consulting God and His word (2:6ff, 8:19-20). They had every advantage (Isaiah 5), and yet they were faithless. And they were blind to their faithlessness.

Their condition would be analogous to good "church people" who do all the right "Christian things" but whose hearts are far from God. They sing the songs, say the prayers, listen to the sermon, give tithes and offerings, go to Bible studies. . . but it's all an external show. They eat and drink at the Lord's table and then go out and eat and drink at every other table that the world lays before them.

In other words, it's possible that some of us (or many of us) are just like the people of Isaiah's day. We too have a type of prosperity that often masks our true condition. Consequently, Isaiah's warning to them should also be a warning to us. At the end of Isaiah 8, Isaiah tells the nation of Israel that one day they would experience distress, darkness, gloom and anguish. This is the condition of everyone in every age whose religion is just a show.

22 Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be driven away into darkness.

If our religion is just a show, one day our circumstances (in this life or the next) will mirror the true condition of our hearts. That's the bad news.

But beginning in chapter 9 Isaiah looks farther into the future and sees good news. In verses 1 through 3 we read of The Promise of Hope and in verses 4 through 7 we read The Explanation of Hope (why Isaiah could promise the hope he did).

The *Promise of Hope* (Isaiah 9:1-3) In his mercy and grace, God promises a remedy: Darkness will be dispelled by a great light; gloom will turn to gladness. (Isaiah 9:1-3)

1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

Here is a map that shows where each of the twelve tribes of Israel settled in the Promised Land. [MAP on screen] You can see that the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were located to the north, near the Sea of Galilee. Theirs would have been among the first lands to be conquered when armies came from the north. We'll come back to these geographical references in a minute.

Whereas God had treated these lands with contempt *in earlier times* because of their rebellion, *later on* "there will be no more gloom . . . [or] anguish"; the Lord would make those lands glorious. All of history can be divided between the earlier times and the later days (after the death and resurrection of Christ).

Beginning in verse 2 Isaiah describes what would happen in the "later days."

2 The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.

Again in verse 3:

3 You shall multiply the nation,
You shall increase their gladness;
They will be glad in Your presence
As with the gladness of harvest,
As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

This is the opposite of gloom and anguish. Isaiah says to God, "They will be glad *in Your presence*"; there would come a day when the very presence of God would make them glad. It would be the type of gladness that people experience when the crops have yielded a harvest or when warriors divide up the spoils of war. People living in darkness would see a great light and would experience gladness/joy in God's presence.

Please turn over to Matthew 4. Matthew tells us very specifically when this prophecy was fulfilled. No speculation or guesswork is needed. The geographical details will sound very familiar:

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

16 “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light,
And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death,
Upon them a Light dawned.”

Matthew is saying that when Jesus settled in that region, he was the “great Light” that they saw. He was the One who would turn their gloom and anguish into gladness. How specifically did Jesus do this? Look at verse 17:

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Jesus announced that God was establishing a kingdom on earth. Jesus told them that their gloom would turn to gladness when they repented and entered the kingdom of heaven/God. Their newfound hope was not circumstantial. Jesus didn’t set them free from the Romans; he set them free from something far more insidious and destructive, namely the darkness of their own hearts (i.e., their indwelling sin).

In John 8:12 Jesus announced:

12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

Jesus is the light of Isaiah 9 who shines in the darkness. If you are sick and tired of walking in darkness, if you are in anguish and gloom because of your sin, repent and follow Jesus who is the Light of the world.

If you’re thinking, “Maybe you’re right, Pastor Steve. . . maybe I should do God a big favor by not misbehaving so much and by keeping a few more commands,” you’re completely missing the point of what Isaiah and Jesus were saying. Walking in darkness is like drinking poison that leaves you sick and lethargic (see Isaiah 1 for a medical analogy). The point isn’t that you need to drink a little less poison. The point is that you need to turn from drinking poison altogether so that you can begin experiencing **life**. You need a new heart and new appetites and the power to obey God. When you are born from above you receive all of those things.

If you repent, believe the gospel, and begin following Jesus, you will be walking in the light and you will experience abundance of life. And you will have a type of hope that transcends your circumstances - beyond COVID and beyond this election cycle and beyond the grave. Jesus will give you this very hope.

Let's return to Isaiah 9 to see

The *Explanation of Hope* (Isaiah 9:4-7) We find in these verses HOW God delivers on this hope. Verses 4, 5, and 6 each begin with the word "For" - indicating that Isaiah is giving an explanation of the hope he's just described.

4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden
and the staff on their shoulders,
The rod of their oppressor,
as at the battle of Midian.

"The battle of Midian" is an event described in Judges 6-7. There you will read that God's battle plan was to reduce the army to 300 soldiers and "attack" the Midianites by blowing trumpets and smashing pots. That's how God delivered the nation. With that battle plan, nobody but God would get the credit. That's Isaiah's point: the deliverance of those sitting in darkness would come exclusively through God.

In verse 5 Isaiah looks forward to the day when war itself is obsolete:

5 For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult,
And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

If the warriors' boots and cloaks are gathered and burned, it means that armies would no longer march into war. True peace/*shalom* would be established.

You have to wonder how much Isaiah understood of what he wrote verse 6. Here's the third and ultimate reason why people walking in darkness would see a great light:

6 For a child will be born to us,
a son will be given to us. . .

The fact that "a child will be born" indicates that he would come into the world in the same manner as every other child; he would be born through a woman. The fact that "a son will be given" indicates that he would be a gift from God. The fact that this child would be born and this son would be given "to us" indicates that the people of God would reap the benefits of his life. We know that this given Son was Jesus (John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but would have eternal life).

Isaiah adds:

6. . . And the government will rest on His shoulders . . .

This child and son would shoulder the entire “government.” The term government is found in the OT only here and in the next verse. Ultimately Isaiah is saying that this child/son would rule the entire world. But what kind of ruler would he be? In the rest of verse 6 we find out. Isaiah uses terms that were normally used of God Himself.

6. . . And His name will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

This child/son is characterized by four names/qualities. First, he is **Wonderful Counselor**. Unlike other rulers of Israel (and America for that matter), this ruler would have supernatural wisdom. He wouldn't take counsel; he would give counsel. Second, he is **Mighty God**. This very same term is used of the Lord Himself in Isaiah 10:21. Isaiah is saying that this son/child would have the type of might that only God has. There are hints like this throughout the Old Testament that YHWH would one day take on flesh and blood to identify with humanity. One way that the early church summarized Jesus' identify was by saying that He is “fully God and fully man.”

Third, he is **Eternal Father**. This king would have the qualities of a father that God had, such as his concern for the helpless (Psalm 68:5) and his compassion for his children (Psalm 103:13). And he would have those qualities eternally. Fourth, he is **Prince of Peace**. Prince is a term used throughout Isaiah for those who administer the will of the king (see 32:1). The Prince of Peace spreads peace/shalom in a comprehensive way. At Jesus' birth the angels cried out (Luke 2:14):

14 “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Verse 7 expresses how the reign of this King would be comprehensive and permanent.

7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace. . .

The government and kingdom of this son/child will continue to increase until he rules over all. In the same way, shalom/wholeness will also increase.

7 . . . On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

Notice that this Davidic king will establish an eternal kingdom “with justice and righteousness.” We'll talk more about justice and righteousness in coming weeks, but I want to say a few words this morning about those two terms as they're used biblically. I suspect all of us would say that we want justice. And by justice we mean basic fairness in this life: we don't want to see the strong taking advantage of the weak, we don't want to see people getting away with murder, we don't want a lenient set of laws for some

and a harsh set of laws for everybody else. We want everybody to be rewarded and punished fairly.

But when the Bible says that God is setting up a kingdom based on justice and righteousness, it means that **God** won't play favorites; it means that everybody will be rewarded or punished fairly - both rich and poor, people from every ethnicity and every culture. Since every single human is sinful by nature and by choice, we all deserve the wrath of God. When it comes to ourselves, we want mercy, not justice. I don't want God's **justice** concerning everything I've ever thought and said and done; I want God's **mercy**. And in His infinite grace, God does offer us mercy through the child who was born and the Son who was given. He died on the cross as our substitute, as payment for our sins. In Romans 3 Paul writes that through the death of Jesus God is just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus.

This is the staggering truth about Christmas. Our gloom can be turned to gladness and our darkness to light through Jesus. This hope is available to all who repent and believe the gospel. The hope God offers is exclusively for those who enter the kingdom by faith. Enter the kingdom of God by faith and seek first that kingdom with every ounce of your being.

I hope that you've benefitted from the message. But I hope more that you press into this topic of hope this coming week. We are providing a Reading and Meditation Guide each week in Advent. This guide will give you a Scripture each day (Monday through Friday) that reinforces the passage in Isaiah taught on the previous Sunday morning; this guide will also contain videotaped meditations to go along with those Scriptures on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. This Guide will be sent early tomorrow morning to everyone who already receives the eBlast; it is also available on the Church Center App.