

Isaiah 9:2-7 A Light in the Darkness

I.

Dark days. Dark, dark days. That's what they faced. Lots of problems were evident in the nation.

Rather than people helping one another, neighbor turned against neighbor. Always fighting among themselves, each one oppressed the other. There was a delightful turn of phrase in use: "heroes at drinking wine." Substance abuse was widespread and out of control. Sexual immorality was also rampant and out of control. Nobody cared about marriage the way God instituted it, but each, instead, did his or her own thing without regard to God's will. Poor and destitute people were in evidence everywhere, but there was little mercy or compassion for them. The elderly were mocked and ridiculed—no one seemed to respect those who were older anymore. Most telling of all in the situation—many people had walked away from the *true* religion and had either become agnostic or had embraced the occult.

Dark, dark days.

II.

Does the description seem familiar? The things just mentioned were Isaiah's portrait of Judah in the days in which he penned his prophecy. Dark days. Rampant unbelief. All the sins that come with a lack of regard for what God wants, like substance abuse and sexual misconduct of every kind and hatred and mistreatment of others.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. We see in our world the collapse of the family and an anything goes attitude toward human sexuality; it has been in evidence for decades. Neighbor turns against neighbor for all kinds of reasons, including that they belong to the wrong political party, or that they embrace ideas that the so-called mainstream of society has decided should be banned.

Dark, dark days.

But are things really so bad? I mean...we are surviving, aren't we? We have made the best of the situation. Things aren't really so horrible.

Isaiah's words of the people of his day serve for us, too. He called them: "The people walking in darkness...those living in the land of the shadow of death" (Isaiah 9:2, EHV). The word for darkness can mean "distress" or "dread" or "ignorance." People in living in distress or dread are just trying to survive—to get by. Those living in ignorance aren't *stupid*, they just don't know what they don't know.

But then Isaiah continues to mention those same people as "living in the land of the shadow of death." Sometimes you don't have to live very long to see the shadow of death. Loved ones die. It happens to us all—some sooner, some later, but everyone must deal with it eventually. When you sit around your Christmas table you can look around the room and realize that one person there will eventually be the last one left.

Dark days. Dark, dark days.

The problem is, we don't only *deal* with and try to make the best of the bad situation we have been dealt, Isaiah said we are "The people *walking* in darkness." We didn't really fight against the darkness, but rolled around in it and embraced it—we tried to become one with darkness. When someone hurts us, that's the darkness encroaching on our lives; but rather than dealing with it and pushing darkness away, we embrace the darkness and try to get back at the one who has hurt us.

III.

Dark days. Dark, dark days. The world is a dark place and we convince ourselves that we can change things—we are the ones who can make it better. Just try a little harder. Just be the one who

does good. Be the one who works to get rid of things like oppression and violence and poverty.

But can you drive the darkness out of your own heart? Permanently? Can you stop yourself from growing older and dying?

Let's read the *full* first verse of the lesson from Isaiah: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. For those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2, EHV), A light has dawned. It isn't something any human being produced, it just appeared. A light has dawned.

No program created by human beings can rid the world completely of darkness. The light is not a program.

"For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, EHV). The light is a person. He is a human being, for he was born of a mother. But he is more. He is also God, as we learn from the titles and authority Isaiah says belong to him.

He is the Wonderful Counselor. That is, he is the best counselor there is, since he knows all the details about everything—the Baby Isaiah prophesied knows everything—he is omniscient.

He is the Mighty God. He can do everything, he is omnipotent.

He is the Everlasting Father. Though he was born in time, he is eternal, with no beginning. Beyond that, as Father, the Baby Isaiah prophesied is the author and source of life.

He is the Prince of Peace. The peace that is most difficult to obtain is the peace between a human being and God. It is an impossible peace because we know, deep down, that we relish all those sins that live in the dark world around us—we embrace them and are part of them—at least, some of them. This Baby brings peace between human beings and God. He is the Prince of Peace.

The government will be on his shoulders. Not *a* government, but *the* government. He is the real King, the ultimate King. He has authority over *all* people.

IV.

The Light in the darkness is Jesus. He has come. Why did the light have to be both God and human?

If God had wanted to tell us about darkness and how to live a more meaningful life, he could have sent just a man. The prophets taught people to live according to God's laws. If God wanted to give us an example of a righteous and upstanding life, he could have just sent some angels to give us a demonstration.

The world needed something more. The world needed a light that was even brighter. The world needed a light that could snuff out the darkness and drive it back. Darkness and light really have nothing to do with each other. Light and darkness can't really exist in the same space. Darkness is cold and scary and lonely. Light is necessary for life to exist. We needed *real* life. Not just life that walks around in a daze in the semi-darkness or the pitch black darkness of night, but the light of life.

To snuff out the darkness, we needed the Light to be the God-man. Jesus needed to be a man so that he could be sacrificed for our sins. He needed to have a human heart so that it would stop beating when he hung on the cross. He needed blood in his veins to be shed as the price for our sins. But...so that his sacrifice would be enough to pay for the sins of the whole world, the life that is the Light of the world needed to be true God.

Jesus came. He is the Light that dawned. He has paid for the sins of the world.

This is what makes Christmas a time of more than just cookies and cakes and tinsels and trees and a great meal and some gifts. The greatest gift of all was given by God to the world. Jesus, the Light has dawned to bring forgiveness for all.

Believe it. He came for you!

You know, we need not only the Light of Christ, we need each other. “You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy” (Isaiah 9:3, EHV). Jesus not only establishes the peace of our individual relationships with God, he also creates relationships which enlarge the nation of believers.

John said in our Fourth Lesson this evening: “But if we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7, EHV). We are not to walk in the light alone. Each believer *needs* the encouragement of other believers to remain in the Light of the gospel of Jesus, who came to destroy darkness. We walk together in this Christian congregation to give support to one another to continue the walk in the Light.

A reading from the book of Isaiah, chapter 9:

Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
For those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned.
³You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy.
They rejoice before you like the joy at harvest time,
like the celebration when people divide the plunder.
⁴For you have shattered the yoke that burdened them.
You have broken the bar on their shoulders and
the rod of their oppressor,
as you did in the day of Midian.
⁵Every boot that marched in battle
and the garments rolled in blood will be burned.
They will be fuel for the fire.
⁶For to us a child is born.
To us a son is given.
The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders.
He will be named:
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
⁷There will be no limit to his authority
and no end to the peace he brings.
He will rule on David’s throne and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
from now on, into eternity.
The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.