

Sermon Manuscript of Isaiah 8:17-9:5—The Light Shines in the Darkness

Outline:

Sermon Title: The Light Shines in the Darkness

Point One: The Need of the Light

Point Two: The Promise of the Light

Point Three: The Victory of the Light

INTRODUCTION:

In the movie the Lord of the Rings, Gandalf instructs Aragorn before the siege of Helms deep, “Look for my coming on the dawn of the fifth day. At dawn, look to the east.” Then in the midst of the battle for Helms Deep the soldiers have come to the last of their strength and orcs have almost finished breaking the door to the keep. The city is all but destroyed and its leaders are tempted to give into despair. Then, in the midst of all this darkness, Aragorn remembers the words of Gandalf and as he looks up—there is Gandalf with the riders of Rohan shining in a blaze of light. And as the Rohirim charge the soldiers regain their courage as they see the light of Gandalf shining in the darkness.

The ideas of light and salvation are inextricably linked in our thinking. Even secular counselors instruct those struggling with grief or depression to look for the light at the end of the tunnel. The human capacity for hope is enormous. We are hard-wired for a light at the end of the tunnel. We are wired for hope. The laborer hopes for a promotion. The child looks forward to his high school years. We are adept at producing lights to get us out of the darkness of whatever tunnel we find ourselves in. But our tendency to hope can also blindside us. Think of the serfs prior to the Russian revolution who were sold a hope of communist utopia, but ended up malnourished slaves as famine dominated the land. Think about the Chinese girl who put her hope in an advertisement to make money in Indonesia only to be trafficked to work in an underground brothel. It is important that our hope is rooted, not in a mirage, but in the light for which our capacity to hope exists.

We were made to hope. We have the capacity for hope because there is something objective we were meant to hope in. But as you can see there are also false hopes. *Christ is the great hope, the great light of the world. It is Him*

in which we should trust. So let me ask you: where is your hope this morning? What are you hoping in? As you think right now, what is the thing that you think of and say, “If I just had that, then everything would be alright?” What is the light have you set up at the end of the tunnel?

This is the question that the prophet Isaiah is considering in our passage today. He is asking His Jewish audience where their hope is in Isaiah 8:19, “And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?” The Israelites had placed their hope in the wrong place and it led to ruinous destruction and deep darkness. But Isaiah also points His audience to the great and true light that is coming at the end of the tunnel that is coming in the person of the LORD Jesus Christ. He says in 9:2, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them a light has shone.” Isaiah uses this idea of light to challenge his audience’s misplaced hope.

Normally a sermon on Isaiah 8 and 9 would focus on Isaiah 9:6 and 7 but because of our familiarity with those verses and our tendency, like the Israelites, to misplace our hope I would like to focus our study this Christmas morning on the idea of light. In this passage we can see: the light needed, the light promised, and the light’s victory. We will look at each of these ideas separately. The need of the light. The promise of the light. The victory of the light.

Let’s begin by thinking about the need of the light from Isaiah 8:19-22. If you’re not already there, turn there with me now. If you didn’t bring your bible with you or don’t have a bible. Open the black bible on the back of the seat in front of you to page 572.

MAIN POINT ONE: THE NEED OF THE LIGHT

The people of Judah are on death row in the day of Isaiah. Moses had decreed that if the Israelites broke the covenant that God had made with them, and rejected His Word, then God would send them into bondage and captivity. They stayed in the land by their obedience. And they were to be removed from the land for their disobedience. Their relationship to God in the land of Canaan was like that of tenants. If they rejected of the terms of their lease of God’s land and would not listen to His word they were also rejecting and despising God.

Their rejection of His teaching and testimony, and their choice to fear man instead of Him, was a rejection of God Himself. They had chosen darkness rather than light.

So as Isaiah writes our section he has already proclaimed that the Assyrian Army will sweep like a flood through Israel and Judah and destroy them all the way up to their neck; only the city of Jerusalem will survive the onslaught of Assyria. And this context of the people choosing destruction rather than God Isaiah speaks. Verse sixteen shows Isaiah's response to the unfaithfulness of Judah:

“Bind up the testimony; seal up the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in Him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion.”

Isaiah's response to the widespread rejection of God's Word by the culture around him is to feed the hope offered in God's Word to those that will listen. That is what he means when he says, “seal up the teaching among my disciples.” Isaiah, while not rejecting his role of a prophet to the people of Israel, would continue to train his disciples who gladly listened to God's counsel. He calls these disciples “the children whom LORD had given” him. And in the midst of the pervasive darkness of the situation he would “wait for the LORD . . . and Hope in Him.” Isaiah has placed His hope firmly on the God who does not fail to keep His promises, or go back on His Word.

Isaiah continues in verses 19-22 to summarize the verdict against Judah,

“And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.”

1. These verses show the wickedness of the people's rejection of God's Word. In their desperation to find another source of guidance the people go to the We-gee Board. They go to the necromancers and those who

serve as mediums between the living and the dead. They mingle with voodoo and divination.

2. Let's consider this for a moment. One thinker has said mankind is *homo religiosus*. What he means by that phrase is that we have a profound tendency to worship. We must find somewhere to place our hope, and when we reject God's testimony, we will attempt to find trustworthy divine guidance from somewhere else. This is the great folly of the people of Israel. They have rejected the light of God's Word and the grope in the darkness for someone to show them the way.
3. They are like the mouse who wriggles while python swallows it. The more they search for a way out the darker it gets. They have no hope. And as they grope around for advice they only end up more deeply deceived. They have rejected God and He has given them over in judgement to the darkness they desired. They have become fools and their struggling attempts to save themselves without God have only exasperated the problem.
4. Think about these devastating words from Isaiah for a moment. "Should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?" What a stinging rebuke. In that last phrase the real foolishness of the people's sin is shown for what it is.
5. Isaiah's comment here is profound. Think with me for a moment. If you had to compile a "*World War Two Survival Guide*" who would you interview? Say you could have conversations with the dead soldiers and get inside their heads and ask them what their survival strategies were and how they attempted to put them into practice. Would you consult them in putting together your book?
 - No, that would be completely absurd. These people are dead precisely because they did not survive the war. To compile a survival guide you need to interview those who lived through the war. You need to get inside the heads of the people who developed strategies to survive. You need to interview men who endured and men who strategized like William Churchill. A survival guide written by casualties of war is useless. And consulting the dead in order to know how to live is useless.

Is this not also our folly when we reject God's WORD? God has told us how to live. He put Adam in the garden and He gave him clear instructions. He has written our law on our hearts so that we know what right and wrong is. And we all knowing right and wrong walk contrary to the standards we set. We say the thief is wrong, but we desire other people's houses, cars, and clothing in our hearts. We say we hate unfaithfulness in marriage, but in our hearts we lust after the guy at our work or the girl at the supermarket check-out. We all like sheep have gone astray. And God's judgement has been to give us over to our self-chosen deception. Darkness is the consequence when we reject the light of God's word. This is the point that God is trying to illustrate with the history of the Israelites. This is what He is sovereignly spelling out in Old Testament Redemptive History. The Old Testament is about us and our sin. We are hopelessly trapped in our own self-deceiving darkness and desperately need a light. And we need a savior! We need someone to pay for our sin. We need someone to make away for former rebels to be reconciled to the God whose counsel they have despised to their own ruin.

I want us to pause for a moment here—because every single one of us has lived every Christmas of our lives on this side of the cross. We are far too quick to just assume the end of the story. We have no idea to know what it is like in the words of C.S. Lewis for it to be “always winter and never Christmas.” We assume God owed us the baby in manger. But that is not the case God would have been purposefully just to leave us in our self-deceived darkness and never send us the hope of Christ. He didn't owe a way of salvation to anyone!

And this is the need of the light. As Isaiah concludes concerning people of Israel, “they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.” The outlook looks bleak. But in the very next verse we see a glorious promise of a coming light.

MAIN POINT TWO: THE PROMISE OF THE LIGHT

Continue reading with me from verse one of chapter nine. *“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 a light has shone!”*

Here we see the great gospel promise of the prophet Isaiah. The book of Isaiah has often been called the Gospel of the Old Testament. And here Isaiah promises that one day a hope filled sun will rise and give light and hope to those who walk in darkness.

- Notice the way that these two verses deliberately echo verse 22 of chapter 8. “They look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.” And then in the beginning of verse one, “But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish.” I mean this is amazing. This is the crowd that verses earlier were seeking enlightenment through necromancy. And yet in this verse there will be “no more gloom for her who was in anguish.”
- These are the people that God, in his just judgement of their rejection of His teaching, has “thrust into thick darkness”. And yet in verse two we read “those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has shone!”

Think about it. Consistently, throughout the history of the bible, when mankind has been at its darkest God has offered the most amazing promises to His people.

1. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and gave into the temptation of Satan. It was there that God promised that the seed of the Women will “crush the head of the serpent.”
2. When God had determined to flood the earth because he saw “that every intention of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually.” He gave a covenant promise to Noah that He would save Him and His family.
3. When Noah’s descendants proudly turn their back on God and attempt to make a name for themselves by building a tower at Babel with its top in the heavens. God disperses them across the face of the earth. But then just one chapter later he calls Abraham and promises that through “Him all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” He has promised to bless the families He has just scattered one chapter earlier.

Do you not see here the unchanging nature of God. He is unceasingly faithful to judge sin. And unceasingly gracious in the midst of mankind's darkest moments. As Nick was explaining to me this week, grace is not just *unmerited* favor it is *demerited* favor. God's promises come to us when we least deserve them.

- So let me ask me today have you demerited God's favor this morning? Have you set yourself up as His enemy? Have you despised His counsel? Have you rejected His teaching? Have you accumulated for yourself teachers in accordance with your own desire?
- Well let me warn you, God will not cease to exist because you turn your back, close your eyes like a little child and yell in a fit of rage "I'm not listening!"
- But let me also encourage you that God's hand is open in grace to all who will turn to Him. It is in the darkest situations of human sin that the promises of God have stood forth in the most efficacy.
- Listen to these word's by A. W. Tozer, "God never changes moods or cools off in His affections . . . 1) His attitude towards sin is now the same was it was when he drove man from the eastward garden, and 2) His attitude towards the sinner the same as when He stretched forth His hands and cried, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
- God's promises extend to us in darkness. And His faithfulness is unceasing. The promise of his grace has extended itself to the darkest sinners. He extended grace to the thief who died beside him on the cross. He extended his arms to the apostle Paul a Pharisee who used to persecute the church and supervised the stoning of Stephen. The bible calls Paul the chief of sinners and if there was hope for him then there is hope for you if you will but turn and put your trust in His promise "Come unto me and I will give you rest."

Consider this also believer. Have you grown lazy and distracted in your faith? Specifically, all of you who have children home for Christmas. Have you set your hope on a perfect family meal? Have you worked to find your joy in a Christmas that goes without argument? While I was in America, the night before

thanksgiving there was a piece on the News where they had asked psychologists to draw up a number of topics to avoid so that you could get along with your family this Christmas. Number one on the list was politics as you can imagine! But just as surely as the Israelites could trust God's promise that He would come the first time we can trust God's promise that He will come the second time. Are you like Isaiah who resolved, "I will wait for the LORD . . . and hope in Him," back in verse 17? These are the words of the apostle Peter, "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So where's your hope? Family or Christ? Or some concoction of both? There is grace coming when Christ comes that is far more satisfying than a family meal. There is a meal there that will cannot compare. And sitting at the table is the one whom your soul loves. Christ sits at the table and all the promises of God are yes and amen in Him. There, as one song writer has sung our joy ever full will ever rise. Where is your hope? Is it in your own schemes or is it in God's promise?

Having addressed the Israelites need of light and promised that a light will shine on those who dwell in deep darkness. Isaiah continues to describe the victory of that light. Let's consider the victory of the light in verses 3-5.

MAIN POINT THREE: THE VICTORY OF THE LIGHT

In these next three verses we have three main ways in which this victory is described. It is described through the lens of the joy that is produced in verse three. It is described through the lens of the delivery from oppression in verse four. And it is described through the lens of the peace that will result in verse five as Israel's battle clothing will forever be burned. The way that you as a Christian, looking at it from a stand point beyond Christ and the cross, interpret this depends, on how you understand the multiplication of the nation in verse three. How does Christ multiply the people of God? Because that is the key to the kind of victory these verses are describing.

- So what does Christ's kingdom look like? In what way does He multiply the nation?
- Will He give Israel total victory over all foreign oppressors?
- Will He raise an army to conquer the Romans?

No, he looks a Roman ruler in the face and tells Him, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). So if He doesn't deliver the Jews from foreign oppression, how does Jesus fulfill this prophecy and multiply the nation. Well two get this answer I think we have to consult two places. The first is this text. And the second is in Revelation. Let's look at this text first:

1. What is the great problem for the people of God in this text? Foreign oppression, or unbelief? Which one came first? Unbelief right!? Their unbelief caused their foreign oppression. Therefore their unbelief must be a greater problem than their oppression. Their greatest problem is their sin and unbelief. So, if Christ is to solve their problem He must come as one who is able to save them from their sin. And that is exactly how Christ did come the angel tells Joseph, "His name shall be called Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
2. But let's also look at Revelation 5:9 where a heavenly host, rejoice and sing "a new song, saying, *"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals for you were slain, and by your blood you have ransomed people for God from every tribe and tongue and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*
3. Here we see here how Christ multiplies the people of God. He has saved them from their sins and "by his blood . . . made them a kingdom and priest to God." So although Christ fights all of our enemies and will one day come in a robe dipped in blood to make war on the kings of the world. And although it is there that the full force of Christ's oppression breaking will be fully realized. I think the most significant victory that He accomplishes and the heart of the way that he fulfils the promises of these verses is by shedding his blood for our sins. It is this sacrifice that multiplies the nation, and it is from the cross that all of Christ's other saving work flows.
4. This is the way that Christ multiplies the nation and increases their joy. The angel that comes to visit the shepherds sings the same tune as Isaiah when he says to them in Luke 2:10-11, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

I think that it is likely that the greatest joy that New Zealand has ever experienced, maybe aside from the All Blacks winning the Rugby World Cup twice in a row, is WWII V-E day. On the 9th of May 1945, after Winston Churchill had officially declared that the allied forces had achieved victory in Europe, New Zealand began two days of national holidays to celebrate. In Christchurch 25,000 people marched from Latimer Square to Cathedral Square singing patriotic songs. Church and town hall bells were rung and almost every major in the country gave a speech. This victory was the greatest joy that New Zealand had ever experienced.

How then do you think we should remember the one who has come to save us not from a sinful human dictator but from sin itself? I just urge you this morning to remember Christ by rejoicing. The joy of Christmas is that the light of the world has come and has come to get victory over sin. So we really ought to rejoice. It is so easy to be so busy making Christmas happen that we are unable to rejoice. We have an argument on the way home and then we struggle to get the gravy ready, and the peas cooked. And you get your presents and your sister gave you a shirt that's too small. But you see the joy of Christmas is not shirts, or gravy. It's not food or clothing it is that Christ has come to give us victory over sin. So I urge you to rejoice. Christian, you are the only person who can really rejoice in Christmas, because you are the only person who has been delivered by Christ's work from the domain darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son. You are the only one who can know truly the hope of Christmas. You are the only one whose heart knows the hope brought by the light of the world who has pierced the darkness of sin that our text describes.

CONCLUSION: The Light Has Shone in the Darkness

We have seen in our text the need, promise and victory of the light. The light has dawned on the people dwelling in darkness. To see this prophecy fulfilled turn with me to Matthew 4:13. Matthew 4:13. Where it says,

“And leaving Nazareth He [that's Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

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

*the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”*

And from that time He began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”” (Matthew 4:13-17).

So I finish where we began this morning. Where is your hope? What is the one thing that you think if I could just get that then I would be happy? Is your hope in the objective light of the world? Or have you set up for yourself a subjective light at the end of the tunnel?

Listen to these word from the apostle John “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him”

The true light has come into the world. And His own people did not receive him. The vast majority of the people of Israel choose to stay in the darkness rather than come to the light because they loved their sin. Have you received him? Or do you still live in darkness? John offers you this promise in the very next verse: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Will you turn from your sin and trust Christ this morning? If you will you will find a true hope for your soul. And be enabled to rejoice in true Christmas light.

Let us pray,