

Promise Keeper

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31 ESV)

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33 ESV)

For To Us A Child Is Born

December 10th, 2023

Isaiah 9:1-7

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Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 9.

I might be breaking a rule, but for our advent series this year we are going to pick up where we left off twelve months ago. We are going to view the Christmas story with a WIDE lens. In fact, we are zooming all the way out. The birth of the Son of God on Christmas morning was not a surprising twist in the story – it was the plan from the very beginning!

There is a thread of promise that runs from the first page of the Bible all the way to the last. To that end, we've titled this series "Promise Keeper". We are going to spend the next three weeks following these Old Testament threads of promise all the way to their fulfilment in Jesus.

This might feel like drinking through a firehose, but I want to attempt to give you a micro-survey of the ground that we covered this time last year. It might be helpful to imagine a big dartboard. In Genesis 3:15 God promises that a champion will be born of a woman and that he will once and for all defeat our spiritual enemy – the devil. So, from Genesis 3 onward, we are watching and waiting for the birth of a child who will fulfil this promise! But all we know is that he will be a child of a woman. That is a BROAD TARGET, to say the least.

But then, in Genesis 12:1-3, the focus narrows as God promises Abraham that through *his* seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed. So now, our expectation focuses in on a particular family.

That family becomes the nation of Israel and, 700 years after God's promise to Abraham, in 2 Samuel 7, the focus narrows yet again as God promises King David that the Messiah will reign on David's throne forever. So now, our eyes are on the house and the line of David.

300 years after God's promise to David, in Micah 5, God narrows the focus *even further* and tells us that the child of promise will be born in the city of Bethlehem. At this point, we're coming to the centre of the bullseye. The plan is coming into focus and the threads of promise are converging to one central point.

As we jump back into this series, I want to highlight two of the primary goals that I have for us this advent season. First, I want us to come away from this season with a greater appreciation for how this beautiful story fits together. The great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said:

It can never be pointed out too frequently that the great message of the Old Testament, and the great message of the New Testament, are really one.¹

That's why we're zooming out! My prayer is that this will help motivate you to read the *whole* Bible and to read it with great expectation.

But the most important goal of this series is that we would come away with a greater understanding of who Jesus is and why he is EVERYTHING that this world needs. He is the light of the world! He is our peace! We need to celebrate and share that this Christmas season!

To that end, please look with me now to Isaiah 9. We will be reading verses 1-7. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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.

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons* (East Peoria, IL: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 33.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
 and every garment rolled in blood
 will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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 with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:1-7 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This passage is one of the most frequently quoted passages from the Old Testament – and rightfully so. Here, Isaiah provides us with a beautiful glimpse of WHO the child of promise will be and WHAT he will accomplish. The contribution that Isaiah makes to this thread of promise is – to put it mildly – *paradigm shifting!* The other promises made some extraordinary claims – things like, “Through him all the nations will be blessed” or, “He will reign on David’s throne forever”. Those claims *hinted* at the divine nature of this coming child, but there is no subtlety in this text. Look again at verse 6 as we ask the question:

What Child Is This?

⁶ 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. (Isaiah 9:6 ESV)

In these four titles, Isaiah clearly and undeniably prophesies that the child that we are waiting for WILL BE GOD HIMSELF!

Living as we do on this side of Christmas, that statement might not shock us. But let me just remind you that this was not even close to being on the radar of the average worshiper in Israel! At this stage in the development of the promise, all they knew was that they were waiting for a king in the line of David who would be born in Bethlehem. They knew that he was going to crush the serpent's head, and that he was going to bless the nations, but they didn't know *how*.

They were still under the impression that the Messiah would simply be a *really good* king. But we needed more than that. We've *had* good kings, but even the best of them have fallen short. No, we need a GOD King! We need a DIVINE champion because we are being opposed by a spiritual enemy! We need a King who can get right to the *root* of the problem and SOLVE it once and for all! But the root of the problem resides in each and every one of our hearts. Only a God King could ever bring about worldwide heart transformation. In this incredible verse, 700 years before Jesus was born to Mary, Isaiah prophesied that the child of promise would somehow be God Himself! Let's briefly consider the titles that he ascribes to him. First, he tells us that he will be:

1. Wonderful Counsellor

We use the word "wonderful" differently in English than it is used in Hebrew. We use it as a synonym for "great" or "fantastic", but "wonderful" in Hebrew is:

the nearest word Hebrew has to the idea of 'supernatural', here bringing a wisdom far above the human.²

The child of promise will possess SUPERNATURAL wisdom! His words will cut right to the heart. When he gives counsel, he will speak with the voice of God Himself. Jesus is wisdom

² J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 20; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 102.

personified. He is the Word made flesh. He speaks and dead men come out of their tombs! Those who heard Jesus' teaching asked among themselves:

“What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” (Mark 1:27b ESV)

So many people in this world right now are listening to the wrong voices. The wisdom that you need is found in Jesus. Have you been taught by him? He is the way, the truth and the life and he is ready to lead you out of the mess that has you feeling trapped. Listen to the Wonderful Counsellor.

Isaiah goes on to tell us that this child will be:

2. Mighty God

The term “wonderful” *hinted* at the divinity of the coming child, but here all doubt is removed. This thread of promise that runs through the Old Testament points to seemingly impossible victories! How could a mortal defeat the devil? How could the entire world be blessed through one man? How could the child of promise ever accomplish these seemingly impossible victories?

He will accomplish these seemingly impossible victories because he will be mighty God!

There is no problem that Jesus cannot handle. There is no obstacle that he cannot overcome. He came to set the captives free and – while that would be an impossible assignment for any one of us – he will do it – in fact, he HAS ALREADY DONE IT! At the cross, he declared: “It is finished!” because it IS finished! He has won the battle, and now we wait for the day when he will return to once and for all establish his perfect reign and rule. He has done it because he is Mighty God!

Isaiah goes on to say that he will be called:

3. Everlasting Father

The term “Father” should not be understood in a trinitarian sense here. To say that Jesus is “the

Father” in that sense would be a heresy called modalism, and Isaiah is no heretic. No, “father” in this sense is meant to convey the protection and intimate care that will characterize the reign of this promised King.

At this point in Israel’s history, they had plenty of experience with self-serving kings. They knew what it was to be led well, and they knew what it was to be led poorly. They were waiting expectantly for this child of promise because they were eager for a truly *good* king. But God reveals here that He plans to give them so much more than what they asked for. He will give them a GOD King who will care for the people as a father cares for his children. His reign will be marked by familial love and protection.

And the reign of this king will not be temporary. The Israelites had suffered under many royal successions. Good kings and bad kings come and go leaving instability in their wake, but here God promises a perfect, compassionate king whose reign will be *eternal*.

He will be everlasting father. And, finally, Isaiah tells us that he will be:

4. Prince of Peace

The Israelites longed for peace but – as is still the case – peace seemed to be an impossibility. Peace is about more than our relationship with neighbouring nations. True, lasting peace requires transformed hearts. We need peace with God, peace with ourselves, peace with our families – but this peace is so allusive! How will we ever live in harmony with neighbouring nations if we can’t even live in harmony with ourselves?! But this child of promise will be the one to finally usher in true and lasting peace for the people of God. As one commentator notes here:

The Prince of Peace is himself, the whole man, the perfectly integrated, rounded personality, at one with God and humankind, but also as a Prince, these are the benefits he administers to his people.³

³ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 103.

The only way that the middle east will know peace – the only way that your family will know peace – the only way that we can have peace with God is by submitting ourselves to Jesus – the Prince of Peace.

This is who the promised child will be. Wonderful counsellor. Mighty God. Everlasting father. Prince of peace. With this prophecy, Israel has now been told in undeniable terms that the child that she is waiting for will be nothing less than God Himself. As I said earlier, to describe this development as a *paradigm shift* would be a massive understatement. This changes EVERYTHING!

Before we conclude, I want to draw your attention to what Isaiah has to say about what this child will accomplish. The miraculous things that he will do are the things that each and every one of us needs. So, let's ask one final question this morning:

What Will He Accomplish?

Isaiah celebrates three miraculous accomplishments. First:

1. He will bring light into our darkness

The promise of light is in verse 2, but in order to appreciate the light we need to understand the particular darkness that Isaiah was addressing. We find that in verse 1. Look there again with me:

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. (Isaiah 9:1 ESV)

The “contempt in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali” refers to the Assyrian invasion. You can read more about that in 2 Kings 15. The prophet Isaiah lived and ministered in a time when the people of God were being systematically wiped off the map by the most powerful army on the planet and Zebulun and Naphtali were the first regions to fall.

The people who first heard this prophecy *really were* living in a land of deep darkness. The realities of death and war and loss were at the forefront of their minds. This was the kind of darkness that swallows up any glimmer of hope; the kind of darkness that fundamentally changes people at the core of who they are.

Now, none of us have ever lived through *this* specific tragedy, but many of us know what it is to be brought down to the depths.

It's hard to believe in promises of hope and life when you're sitting in the dark.

As the nation grieved – as the promised deliverance was all but forgotten – God spoke a word of comfort through Isaiah. And that word of comfort was a promise that the place of darkness and defeat would soon bear witness to light and victory! We read in verse 2:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone. (Isaiah 9:2 ESV)

This word of comfort was delivered in a season of despair. Listen: Sometimes it's only when we've been brought to the deepest, darkest places that God's voice finally cuts through all the outside noise. He meets with us in the dark.

But, more than that, Jesus has come to LEAD US OUT of the dark! Perhaps you can't see it right now, but there IS light!

I know this is an advent sermon, but the greatest fulfillment of this prophecy can be seen – not in the manger of Christmas but in the empty tomb of Easter Sunday! Jesus DID enter into our dark and broken world, but then he descended *even further*. Our deepest fear – the darkest room – is death itself. And so, what did Jesus do? He descended to the dead – to the darkest place imaginable – FOR US – TO SAVE US – and then three days later the people who walked in darkness saw a GREAT LIGHT! He stepped out of the darkness of that tomb, and he declared that the darkness of death is no longer something that we need to fear if we are in him! Here is a light that cannot be snuffed out even by death itself!!

The light has come! Darkness is retreating! And when Jesus comes again, death and sin and darkness will once and for all be cast into the pit of hell where they belong!

This child of promise – Jesus – will bring light into our darkness. He will also:

2. He will bring peace into our chaos

Look with me again at verses 3-5:

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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire. (Isaiah 9:3-5 ESV)

Remember, Isaiah's first listeners were just entering into a season of war – a war that would lead to the destruction of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel. They had just heard the report of what had happened to Zebulun and Naphtali, and they knew that it was only a foretaste of the suffering that was to come.

Isaiah pointed forward to a day of joy and victory, but it wasn't simply a day when the war with *Assyria* would be over. No, he pointed forward to a day when EVERY war would be over! With illustrative language, he describes that coming day as a time when the people will enjoy the spoils of victory. They will warm themselves around a fire fuelled by the battle garments and army boots that are no longer needed because the days of PEACE have come!

The child of promise is going to end the war.

But how? War, after all, is complicated. We've been freshly reminded of that this year. Negotiating a temporary ceasefire in ONE region of conflict feels miraculous, so how could Jesus possibly bring an end to ALL war everywhere?

He will do it by rooting out the disease that animates everything that is wrong with us. He will end the war by ending sin. He will end the war by once and for all fulfilling the promise of Genesis 3 and crushing that serpent's head!

And that's exactly what Jesus did. He was the only one who could do it. If Jesus were not mighty God – if he were just a good man – then his death on the cross would not have accomplished anything. One man cannot atone for the sins of the world any more than one nickel can solve world hunger. The sin of the world is an *infinitely* large problem! People beyond number have sinned countless times against an *infinite* God! One, finite man could never serve as our substitute.

But the infinite MIGHTY God could. And he DID.

When the sinless Prince of Peace died on that cross bearing the sin of the world, he satisfied the justice of God and fulfilled the requirements of the law. He paid the infinite price and – in doing so – he knocked the only weapon that our enemy could wield against us out of his hand.

Our sin has been atoned for.

Our infinite debt has been settled.

Sin and death have been defeated!

The child of promise has crushed the serpent's head!

But even as I say that, I feel some dissonance. Because I don't need to look far to see that "peace" is not a word that any would choose to describe this present world. In fact, the geographical place where this promise was first spoken is in the midst of a bloody war as we speak! Where is this peace?

That leads us to the third and final accomplishment that Isaiah foresees in this prophecy:

3. He will reign forevermore

Look again at verse 7:

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 with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:7 ESV)

The benefits that this God King will bring about will only be felt by those who live under his rule and reign. Meaning – until the world bows down to King Jesus, it will continue to spiral in confusion and chaos.

That is not to say that Jesus is not reigning now. He IS! Before he ascended to his throne he declared “All authority on heaven and on earth have been given to me”. Right now, he is seated on his throne, but he is permitting the world to carry on in rebellion and chaos. He is permitting us to refuse to bow.

But why? Why doesn't he judge and punish us for our rebellion? Why doesn't he stand up and shout “ENOUGH!” Why does he sit and watch while so many reject his rule and go on living as gods unto themselves? We're told in 2 Peter that:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 ESV)

The Prince of Peace has extended his invitation to the world, and he is waiting. He is looking out over our broken lives and our dysfunctional families and our warring nations, and he is waiting for us to turn from the folly of our ways and to finally surrender to the King that we need. J. Alec Motyer says it so well:

His people's shoulders are delivered when his shoulders accept the burden of rule.⁴

Jesus says it even better.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV)

It sounds so simple, doesn't it? Too good to be true even! Are we to believe that by simply coming to Jesus – by turning away from our sins and believing in Christ as our saviour – that we can finally experience the peace that has alluded us for a lifetime?

Yes.

Does it seem impossible? Impossible that you could have peace with God after all that you've done? Impossible that there might be an answer for your weary soul? Impossible that your life could change in an instant? Well, with man it IS impossible. But this is no mere man. This, this is Christ the King. Whom shepherds guard and angels sing. This child is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy:

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. (Isaiah 9:6 ESV)

Haste. Haste to bring him laud – to bow your knee – to surrender your life to the babe, the son of Mary. He is our light. He is our peace. He is our King! And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

⁴ J. Alex Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 20; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 101.