

- Again most people in Isaiah's day would argue why would God want to bless in such a special way the area of the northern kingdom renowned for its sinfulness and pagan rituals. Surely this is the last area God would want to bless with His glorious light! But of course these are the people who need God most. These are *'the people who walk and live in the land of deep darkness'* (Isaiah 9:2)
- In Jesus' day people were of the same opinion: *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.* (John 1:46)
- Jesus grows up in Nazareth and makes Capernaum on the northern shores of Lake Galilee his ministry home base. He goes where he is most needed and thus Isaiah's prophesy comes true: *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.* (Isaiah 9:2)

2.5 Unexpected Purpose (Isaiah 9:3-5)

- Most Jews in Jesus's day believed that the purpose of the coming Messiah was to restore the Kingdom of Israel. They were looking forward to the coming of a new earthly king who would free them from Roman occupation and make the nation great once again as it had been in the days of David and Solomon.
- If only they had studied these verses of Isaiah a little more carefully they would have seen revealed two greater unexpected purposes of God.
- The first was that God was going to increase the Kingdom: *'You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.'* (Isaiah 9:3) It was certainly going to come as an unexpected shock that the spiritual Kingdom that Jesus was establishing would include both Jew and Gentile.
- Secondly that God, through the death of Jesus on the Cross, was going to release humankind from the oppression of sin. Jesus was personally going to lay down his life as a ransom for our sins. Using the defeat of the Midianites as a picture: *'For as in the day of Midian's defeat'* (Isaiah 9:4) God shows that he can do the unexpected and release us from our oppressors:

2.6 Conclusion

- The people of Isaiah's day were downtrodden and defeated as a result of their sin. Tiglath-Pileser III and the armies of Assyria had ransacked the northern kingdom. "Galilee of the Jews" had become "Galilee of the Gentiles." But Isaiah predicts a reversal. An unexpected child will be born from an unexpected place with an unexpected purpose. God in the form of Jesus His son was going to step into history and turn the darkness of sin into light. Isaiah could not have put it better: *'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.'* (Isaiah 9:2)

3. Questions to consider at home?

- 3.1 Who are the people *'walking in darkness?'* Who are they today?
- 3.2 What was unexpected about Jesus' ministry and character?
- 3.3 Why was it tough being a prophet like Isaiah? Why is it tough to be a Christian today?
- 3.4 In what ways were God's actions unexpected?
- 3.5 If Jesus went where he was most needed, where are we most needed today?
- 3.6 If God always uses the lowly to display His greatness, where will God be at work today?

Matthew Street 17th December 2023



The St J's Group

Isaiah 9:1-7 - A great light

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.



1. Talk Passage – Isaiah 9:1-7

1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan— 2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. 4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. 5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

2. Talk Notes

2.1 Introduction

- Do we expect God to do the unexpected? As we ponder the situation we find ourselves in today or that of our family, our neighbourhood and even our nation do we trust and hope in the God of the unexpected or are our horizons constrained by our human perspective.
- Through the prophet Isaiah God tells his people that he is going to do three unexpected things. He promises to raise up an:
 - a) Unexpected *Person* from an
 - b) Unexpected *Place* with an
 - c) Unexpected *Purpose*.

2.2 Context and Background

- Isaiah, probably like most of us, was not expecting God to personally enter into his life: *‘In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.’ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”* (Isaiah 6:1,5).
- God calls Isaiah to 60 years of prophetic ministry: *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”* (Isaiah 6:8).
- Being a prophet is easy when you have words of encouragement for those around you. A bit like being a Christian around other Christians. It harder to be an authentic Christian in a hostile world.
- Isaiah’s ministry begins as King Uzziah’s 50 year reign comes to an end in 740b.c. The outlook for the two Jewish nations, Israel in the north and Judah in the south was looking somewhat uncertain with the growing strength of Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria.
- Under King Uzziah in the south and Jeroboam II in the north the two Jewish nations had prospered greatly in the previous 50 years due to the weakness of their southern neighbour Egypt and their northern neighbour Assyria to the extent that the two kingdoms together occupied almost all the same territory as Solomon did during his reign.
- Unfortunately this time of prosperity had not led to an increase in faith with both nations continuing to give God ‘lip service’, to worship false gods, to oppress the poor and needy and to fail to be an example of what living in relationship with the living God was like. God through the prophet Amos warns both Israel and Judah of their failings: *‘This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed.’* (Amos 2:4) *‘For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.* (Amos 2:6-8)
- All sin has consequences and despite giving warning after warning God through Isaiah reveals that judgement is coming in a most unexpected way: *‘Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.* (Isaiah 10:5-6) God is raising up Tiglath-Pileser III and the armies of Assyria to be His instrument of judgement.

2.3 Unexpected Person (Isaiah 9:6-7)

- We know who this unexpected person is courtesy of the gospel writer Matthew: *When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”* (Matthew 4:12-17)
- Isaiah reveals in chapter 9 verses 6 and 7 five important descriptions about Jesus:

i) *‘A Child is Born’ but ‘a Son is Given’* (Isaiah 9:6a)

ii) He will rule over God’s people - *‘the government will be on his shoulders’* (Isaiah 9:6a)

iii) He will have four characteristics: *‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’* (Isaiah 9:6b)

iv) He will rule forever - *‘The greatness of his government and peace there will be no end’* (Isaiah 9:7a) *‘from that time on and forever’* (Isaiah 9:7b)

v) All this would be accomplished by God himself: *The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.* (Isaiah 9:7b)

- Firstly no one in Isaiah’s day or for that matter in Jesus’s day was expecting God to personally step into human history. But verse 6 is worded carefully... *‘a child is born’* which emphasises the humanity of Jesus, *‘but a son is given.’* which emphasises his deity. Jesus was none other than the Son of God. Isaiah prophesies 700 years before Jesus would be born that he would be fully human but also fully God. God with human flesh on.
- Secondly no one in Isaiah’s Day was expecting a reunification of the northern and southern kingdoms but Isaiah’s prophecy here anticipates this with the words *‘the government’* (Isaiah 9:6a).
- Thirdly Isaiah reveals four character traits of Jesus or the coming Messiah:
 - i) *‘Wonderful Counsellor’* (Isaiah 9:6b) Wherever Jesus went people flocked to listen to him. Matthew records *‘When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.’* (Matthew 7:28-9)
 - ii) *‘Mighty God’* (Isaiah 9:6b) Jesus is God with human flesh on. The Jewish people should have known that the Messiah was to be God. Thus the teachers of the law and the Pharisees should not have been surprised when Jesus made the claim of being God.
 - iii) *‘Everlasting Father’* (Isaiah 9:6b) Jesus is *‘everlasting.’* He is eternal. Yet another characteristic that underlines his deity and will be a father figure to those under his rule. He will care for them, be concerned for them and provide for them.
 - iv) *‘Prince of Peace.’* (Isaiah 9:6b) Jesus is the bringer of peace. Again wherever Jesus went he sought to bring divided parties together.
- Fourthly looking forward in time to when Jesus will return again Isaiah’s prophecy tells us that Jesus will reign forever: *‘He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.’* (Isaiah 9:7b)
- Finally the person who makes all of this possible is no other than God himself: *The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.* (Isaiah 9:7b)

2.4 Unexpected Place (Isaiah 9:1-2)

- Given that the Jews firmly believed that God was present in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem surely his son would have grown up in that city and his ministry would have centred on the Temple. That would seem to be the logical human thing to do. But God had yet another unexpected surprise up his sleeve. God always uses the lowly to display His greatness.
- The northernmost part of the northern kingdom: *‘the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali’* (Isaiah 9:1a) was the first to experience God’s judgement under Tiglath-Pileser III and the armies of Assyria but it is this very land, Isaiah says, that will no longer experience gloom and indeed God will make this land glorious once again: *‘but in the future he will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan’* (Isaiah 9:1b)