

Christmas Light

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[0 : 00] If you're in Isaiah chapter 9, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

! Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shown. 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. 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.

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

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.

[1 : 32] From this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? When I was a kid, one of my family's Christmas traditions was to drive around and look at the Christmas light displays after our Christmas Eve service at church was over.

And I hated that tradition. Because we had another family tradition. And that was that each one of us kids got to open a Christmas present on Christmas Eve.

And so I wanted to go open that present. I didn't share the rest of my family's enthusiasm for Christmas light displays. But that has changed since I've gotten older.

I appreciate the efforts that many take to illumine both the insides and the outsides of their homes with hundreds and in some cases thousands of Christmas lights.

I'm also thankful for Christmas lights because of how early the sun sets this time of year. Christmas lights make the world seem like less of a dark place.

[2 : 49] Christmas lights. And I believe that Christmas lights ultimately serve a greater purpose than just decoration. They are a symbol, a reminder of a spiritual reality.

A truth contained in God's word. A truth contained in our passage today that we've just read. A reality that communicates the true meaning of Christmas and what we have to celebrate.

What we have to rejoice in. Not just at Christmas time, but at all times. And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is this. Light has come to a world shrouded in darkness.

Light has come to a world shrouded in darkness. The true meaning of Christmas is that Jesus Christ, the light of the world, has descended into darkness to escort his people into God's glorious and eternal light.

Maybe this morning you've celebrated Christmas without knowing its true significance. Like so many, you have bought into what people call the Christmas spirit.

[4 : 04] Many songs and shows and movies come out this time of year or are replayed this time of year, promoting the thought that people should be more generous, more caring, and less selfish.

You're encouraged to not be a Scrooge or to act like a Grinch. But even those characters are redeemed in the end of their stories when they are struck by the Christmas spirit.

And the thought being communicated is that the ability to unite and have peace with one another is within you, is within us, that we can make the world a less dark place.

But then January comes around. And all of our decorations are put up. Our lights are taken down and stored away.

And before long, people revert back to their same old Grinchy and Scrooge-like ways. The truth is that the promotion of the Christmas spirit this time of year has brought humanity no closer to achieving unity and peace with one another.

[5 : 26] And so I pray that today God reveals to you the only way to true peace, which comes through understanding the true meaning of Christmas, which our text reveals.

On the other hand, many of you this morning have been born again. You know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You understand the true meaning of what we have to celebrate at Christmas. But it's easy to get distracted and to have that truth buried underneath all of the planning and preparations that you've made in celebrating Christmas.

And so I hope that today God will use his word to remind you of the truth of what you truly have to celebrate and rejoice in, again, not just this time of year, but at all times.

Our scripture comes from Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet who ministered in and around Jerusalem from 739 to 686 BC.

[6 : 31] He served during a dark time in Israel's history. Israel had fallen into idolatry. And so his book contains warnings of God's judgments for their sin and for their rebelling against God and for their half-hearted worship of him.

He tells them that they will be judged for this. But scattered throughout his book are promises of a future day of deliverance and a future deliverer who is the Messiah.

A Messiah who would come and would save his people. A Messiah whose light would remove their darkness. He would be a king like no other.

A savior who suffered to save his people. A light who would dispel their darkness. A child born and a son given.

Who would be the true prince of peace. These words that Isaiah wrote, inspired by the Holy Spirit, prophesy the coming of Jesus Christ 700 years before his birth.

[7 : 46] And they contain three realities that you must grasp in order to understand the true meaning of Christmas.

The first reality that we see from this text is that the world is a dark place. The world is a dark place. And beginning in verse 2, Isaiah says, The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. In the Bible, darkness is used to describe evil and ignorance. Back up with me to Isaiah chapter 8, verses 19 through 22.

That text that comes right before what I've read this morning. Let's read that together. 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.

[8 : 57] 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.

These verses define the darkness experienced by the people. They describe violence, injustice, abuse, grief, poverty, distress, and disharmony.

They are experiencing the opposite of unity and peace. Verse 22 of chapter 8 says that the people look to the earth for solutions to their problems.

They are looking to their experts, their mystics, and their scholars for help. They are looking to the people of the earth, people cloaked in the same darkness as them for solutions.

They are looking to everyone but to God. And you know, people are doing the same thing today.

They look to the government. They look to the stock market.

[10 : 09] They look to technology with the same assumption that they can bring unity and peace to humanity and put an end to our darkness, to evil.

Those things are believed to hold the answers that will enlighten us. In other words, they believe that the light is within us.

And that's the message that so many promote at Christmastime. That love will triumph. And we have the ability to fix society, to heal the world, and to make it a better place.

We can overcome poverty and injustice and violence and evil if we'll just work together. That's the message. But can we?

Can we? Some think so. Some have thought we were close. H.G. Wells was one of those who thought that way.

[11:14] H.G. Wells was born in 1886, died in 1946. He was best known for his novels, which included literary classics like *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The War of the Worlds*.

He was also famous during his time for his forward-looking and progressive thinking. And in 1937, he believed that humanity was on the verge of achieving utopia, unity, peace with one another.

This is what he said. Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, and that our children will live in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength in an ever-widening circle of achievement?

Sounds pretty optimistic, doesn't it?

But just nine years later, Wells had an entirely different perspective of humanity. In 1946, he wrote, *The cold-blooded massacres of the defenseless, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment, and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well-nigh banished has come near to breaking my spirit altogether.*

[12:53] *Homo sapiens*, as he has been pleased to call himself, is played out. Do you know what event changed Wells' perspective? World War II. World War II.

All the advancements of humanity, all the achievements could not curtail the atrocities that the world experienced as it entered into a massive conflict with itself for the second time.

Still many look to the earth, believing we will be illumined by scientific advancement. People speak of science today as if it is the light switch that will illumine us and lead us to unity and peace with one another.

Many believe that science has disproven any belief in God or in the supernatural. And we've experienced many great scientific advancements and achievements.

But it seems to me that despite them, we are closer to experiencing another world war, more so than we are closer to experiencing peace and unity with one another on a global scale.

[14:06] In fact, I think those who have attempted to use science to reject God have ventured down a path to deeper darkness.

For example, Bertrand Russell, the famous 20th century mathematician and philosopher, speaking as an atheist, once said this, *Such in outlines, but even more purposeless, move void of meaning is the world which science presents for our belief.*

That man is the produce of causes which have no provision of the end they were achieving. That his origin, his growth, his hopes and his fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms.

That no fire, no heroism, no intensity of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noontide brightness of human genius are destined to extinction and the vast death of the solar system.

And that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. And he concludes by saying this, Only within the scaffolding of these truths, Only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

[15:31] Sounds pretty dark, doesn't it? Basically what he's saying is, *All things have come from nothing.*

Order results from chaos. Purpose in life is discovered in understanding the purposelessness of everything. Does that sound true to you?

As those verses in Isaiah 8 and as the beginning of verse 2 in chapter 9 disclose, *If we look only to the earth and human resources, the darkness only gets darker.*

You don't need me to tell you that the world is a dark place. Watch the news. Read the newspaper. If you still read the newspaper. Go on social media. You'll see what man is doing to man. The wars that are taking place.

[16:34] *The rumors of wars that may soon be taking place. People everywhere are suffering at the hands of other people. The true meaning of Christmas isn't cheer up.*

We can do it. We can pull together. And we can make this world a better place. Now, this whole sermon isn't doom and gloom.

That's not my intent. That's not the message of this text. And it's not the message of Christianity. We don't promote notions that humanity is capable of achieving utopia because of the sin nature that we're all born with.

But we also don't promote dystopian views of a future devoid of any hope whatsoever. Instead, the message of Christianity is that things really are this dark.

This bad. And we can't heal or save ourselves. Yet there is hope. And it's the hope communicated here in Isaiah chapter 9.

[17 : 43] The people who walked in great darkness have seen a great light. So now let's turn our attention to the second half of verse 2. For the second reality that we must grasp in order to understand the true meaning of Christmas.

The world is a dark place. But secondly, a great light has shown. Second half of verse 2. Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness on them has light shown.

And so here Isaiah pictures a light source outside of the earth shining down upon it, which makes us automatically think of our sun.

And sunlight is necessary and it produces life. Without the sun, we would freeze to death. Just as the sun is necessary for life, so ultimately God, the one who created it, is the source of all life.

John begins his gospel communicating this reality about Jesus, the pre-incarnate word of God, the second person of the Trinity.

[18 : 51] He says in John 1, 1 through 5, In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Sunlight gives life, and sunlight also reveals truth.

Imagine driving your car at night without your headlights on. You would likely crash. Why? Well, because light reveals things as they are.

And without headlights, you wouldn't be able to see enough truth to steer your car safely. And so the Bible says that God is the source of all truth.

1 John 1, 5 through 6. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie, and we do not practice the truth.

[20 : 06] Truly, the only reason you can know anything at all is because of God. God has created humanity in his image, giving humanity the ability to reason, to think, to have cognitive abilities.

But at another level, we can't really know God unless God reveals himself to us, which he has primarily through his son, Jesus Christ, who the Bible says has fully revealed him or disclosed him. And John 1, 14 says, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.

In John 8, Jesus declared this of himself. John 8, 12. Again, Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

If you remember, Jesus began his public ministry in the synagogue of Galilee, saying that the spirit of the Lord was on him, not only to be a light shining in dark places, but to recover sight to the blind by releasing prisoners from their dark cells of sin and direct fulfillment of the prophecy regarding him in Isaiah chapter 61.

[21 : 33] Light gives life. Light reveals truth. And light also reveals beauty. We need light for joy. You know, there are some places in the world where they only experience a few hours of sunlight during the day.

And in those places, many people suffer from depression. The Bible says that God is the source of all beauty and the source of all joy. Augustine famously said of God, Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.

True joy, lasting joy, satisfying joy is truly and only found in knowing God. And there is no truth more beautiful than the gospel of his son, Jesus Christ.

People are looking for joy in this world, but they're looking for it in all of the wrong places. When what they are truly looking for, I believe, is him, though they don't know it.

Which brings us now to the third reality to be grasped in order to understand the true meaning of Christmas. A son has been given. A son has been given.

[22 : 50] Look again at verse 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. As we've seen, God alone has the life, the truth, and joy that we lack and cannot generate

ourselves.

Verse 6 tells us that the light has come to us. For to us a child is born. This child brings this light because he is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Note that these four titles given to this child are titles that belong to God alone. He is Mighty God. He is the Everlasting Father, which means he is creator, and yet he is born.

This is amazing. There's no other claim in any other major religion in this world like this one. He is a human being. However, he's more.

[23 : 58] He's also God. What does this mean? First, that Jesus Christ really is Mighty God and truly is Everlasting Father.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John's Gospels reveal that when people encountered Jesus, they never left with an attitude of indifference towards him. Once they realized what he was claiming about himself, they responded either in fear of him, hatred towards him, or they knelt down before him and worshipped him.

Nobody ever left a meeting with Jesus saying things like this. Well, he's such an inspiration. Man, that Jesus is a really neat guy. If the baby born at Christmas is Mighty God, then the only appropriate response you can have is to worship him and to serve him completely.

Second, if Jesus is wonderful counselor and prince of peace, you should want to worship him and serve him completely. A counselor is someone who you go to when you're going through a difficult time.

And I think that those who give the best counsel are those who have walked through whatever it is that you are currently going through. Someone who has personally experienced the same tragedy, the same hardship that you are presently enduring.

[25 : 29] If God has really been born in a manger, then we have something that no other religion ever claims to have. It's a God who truly understands us.

It's a God who truly understands you. No other religion claims to have or know a God who has suffered, who has experienced the abandonment of his friends, who has been tortured and who died.

We have a God who knows us because he became one of us. And when you talk to him, when you pray to him, he knows and he understands exactly what you are going through.

He knows our darkness. And he saved us from it by going to the cross. And he did it voluntarily. Why?

John 3.16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

[26 : 44] That's beautiful, isn't it? Beautiful things are things that you're not forced to look at.

They're things that you want to look at because they're things that capture your attention. They are things that make you want to dwell consistently in their presence.

Five years ago, Danny and I took a cruise to celebrate our 10th anniversary. It was a carnival cruise in the Bahamas.

And one of the islands we visited was Half Moon Cay or Half Moon Cay, whatever it is. I don't remember. But I remember the place. It was a private island owned by carnival cruise lines.

And if you've been there, man, it is beautiful. The beaches are white, white sand, palm trees. The water is this crystal clear blue.

[27 : 53] Amazing. It's not like the water that we have in Oklahoma. You know what I'm saying? It's amazing. And I remember just going out on the beach and sitting down where, you know, the water came up to about our way.

So we were sitting down. So, you know, we weren't drowning, but we were sitting in it. And I remember just looking out. It was a beautiful day and just thinking, I could dwell here forever. This is beautiful.

That's what we do when we see beauty. Don't we just dwell on it? It captures our hearts. When it comes to this child given to us, when you know him, when you know who he is, when you know what he has done for you, when you've experienced the beauty of the gospel, it transforms you.

You want to obey Jesus. Not simply because you feel like you have to, but because you want to. In light of what Jesus has done for you, you know that he truly is wonderful.

He is the divine light of the world because he reveals the truth concerning our spiritual blindness. And the peace he's made between humanity and God breaks sin's hold on us.

[29 : 19] He is a wonderful counselor who walks with us even through the shadow of the valley of death. His light never flickers.

His light never goes out. Notice what our text says about how this light becomes ours. Isaiah says that to us, a son is given.

It's a gift. It can be yours, but only if you are willing to receive it as a gift of grace. Back up with me to verse five.

This verse speaks of a great battle. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

So the imagery Isaiah uses here is meant to communicate that the great victory over evil will not require your strength or our strength.

[30 : 18] Someone else will do the fighting for you, for us. Later in Isaiah 53, we learn about how this child born and given has secured this victory for us.

Isaiah 53, three through five. Speaking of Jesus, he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, spinted by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds, we are healed. When Jesus went to the cross, he paid the penalty for sin with his life. The Bible says that when we trust in Christ, work on our behalf, rather than in our own efforts or good works, that God forgives us, accepts us, adopts us, and plants his Holy Spirit within us and renews us from the inside out.

[31 : 34] This great salvation, this light that brings life and truth and beauty comes as a gift. And the only way to receive it is to admit it's an undeserved gift of God's grace.

Now, you know how some gifts are harder to receive than others. Imagine this Christmas. You open up a present from a friend. And inside is a membership to a gym and a dieting book. In order to accept it and be truly thankful for it, you must admit that the giver of the gift has accurately assessed that you need to lose weight.

To accept it means admitting, I have flaws. The same thing goes with money. When you are experiencing financial hardship and a friend hands you an envelope full of money, to accept it means that you have to swallow your pride, acknowledging your need.

[32 : 56] And there has never been a gift offered that makes you swallow your pride to the depths that the gift of Jesus Christ requires you to do.

Christmas means that we are lost. So unable to save ourselves that nothing less than the death of God's only son could save us.

To accept the true Christmas gift, you must admit that you are a sinner and that you need to be saved by grace. You need to give up control of your life.

You must admit, I can't do it. You must confess that you are flawed. And it is in being brought down, being brought low, it is through this repentance that his light comes.

It is in receiving this gift that we are instantly brought high in understanding the depths to which Jesus lowered himself to bring many sons and daughters to glory.

[34 : 04] C.S. Lewis, I think, described this truth really well. It's a quote I want to share with you. It's a little lengthy, but it's good. In the incarnation, we catch sight of a new key principle, the power of the higher, just insofar as it is truly higher to come down, the power of the greater to include the less.

Everywhere the great enters the little, its power to do so is almost the test of its greatness. In the Christian story, God comes down, down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity, down further still if embryologists are right to recapitulate in the womb, ancient and pre-human phases of life, down to the very roots and seedbed of the nature he has created. But he goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with him. One may think of a diver first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in midair, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay, then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting until suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hands the dripping precious thing that he went down to recover.

On the day when Jesus was crucified, the Bible says that darkness fell over the land. The light of the world descended into the darkest darkness to bring us into God's glorious light.

As 1 Peter 2.9 says, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of whom who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[36 : 25] This is what Christmas is truly all about. God is a giver of good things. A world in darkness, a great light has shown, the child has been given, and his name is Jesus.

Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. Have you received this gift of salvation?

Has his light shone upon you? Have you repented of your sins? Have you seen your need for what only he can give, only what he can supply?

So the main point of application is this. Light and life come by faith in Jesus Christ. And if I could edit this, I would edit the end alone.

Light and life come by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Do you know him?

[37 : 44] Do you know how wonderful he is? He is a good and gracious king. He is mighty God. He is wonderful counselor. He is everlasting father.

He is the one who brings us peace. I pray that you know him and I pray that you will, as he has commanded you to do, go and share this light in a world in darkness that they would have the same hope and the same joy that we have eternally in Jesus Christ.

Two questions of application. Question number one. Isaiah 9, 2 through 7 reveals that darkness gives way to light, gloom turns to joy, oppression gives way to freedom, and war gives way to peace.

How did these promises bring comfort to God's people then and how should they bring comfort to God's people now? Question two.

How should knowing and grasping the three realities about Christmas expressed in Isaiah 9, 2 through 7 change how you celebrate Christmas?

[38 : 58] I encourage you to think and pray about that. Right now, let's pray together. Lord God, we thank you for the hope that we have eternally in Jesus Christ, your son, that he is the light of the world, and it is only through him that we see, see us for who we really are, see the world for what it truly is.

God, it's only by your grace that we are saved in your bringing us to understand these things. So God, I pray for us that, you know, this time of year we can be so easily distracted by so many things that take our attention off of you.

Lord, help us not to lose that focus. Lord, I pray that instead we would rethink how we celebrate, not just this time of year, but also how we live our lives in celebration of you always because of what you've done for us.

And Lord, may we take every opportunity you give us to share this light, this truth, this beautiful gospel with those whom you bring into our lives, and that we also would go to them and share, that we would know, that people would know the true peace, the true unity that can only be found and experienced through Jesus Christ, your Son, in whose name we pray.

Amen.