

A Great Light

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[0 : 00] If we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that first portion of scripture that we read, the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 9.

Isaiah chapter 9, page 692 in the Pew Bible. Isaiah chapter 9, and if we take as our text the words of verse 2, where it says, The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. What is it all about?

Everyone's talking about it. Everyone's excited about it. Everyone's gearing up and getting ready for its arrival. Everyone is getting ready for this one day in the year.

There's so much hype. There's so much preparation. There's so much excitement. There's this last minute rush in order to make this Christmas an extra special Christmas.

[1 : 26] But you know, what's it all about? For some people, well, there's so much pressure and stress involved for this one day of the year. They not only have to buy presents and maybe host people for dinner, but sometimes there's that financial pressure upon families.

But you know, Christmas is a great time of the year. It's a great opportunity and a great occasion for families to come together, where people come together and families spend time together.

But you know, the question that confronts us in this passage is, well, what's it all about? Because the greatest irony in our nation today is that many people will celebrate Christmas without a thought towards Jesus Christ.

Many will sing carols about the virgin birth, but they will have no thought or care towards the one who was born. And yet, you know, we have to concede that Christmas is upon everyone's mind. Everyone's talking about it. But what's it all about? Because if Christmas is meant to be about the birth of Jesus, then why is he often overshadowed by all the other things?

[2 : 40] Why is Jesus being pushed out and pushed to one side? Why is Jesus being rejected? And you know, when you think about it, there's nothing new under the sun.

Jesus has always been rejected. There has never been any room for Jesus. There was no room for Jesus when he was born. He was born in a stable. There was no room for Jesus when he was only a few days old.

King Herod wanted to kill him. And even when they did crucify Jesus, there was still no room for him. They had to bury him in a borrowed grave.

Jesus has always been rejected. He's never had any room. No one has ever had any room for Jesus. And so it's no surprise to us that for many people in our nation, there's still no room for Jesus.

But you know, what's remarkable is that even though Jesus is rejected by a lost and a sinful world living in a dark day, the wonderful thing is that Jesus is a great light.

[3 : 44] Jesus is a great light. And that's what Isaiah is prophesying about here. That 800 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied about his birth.

And what Isaiah says is that the birth of Jesus will be like light shining in the darkness. The birth of Jesus will be like light shining in the darkness.

He says in verse 2, The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

So what is Christmas all about? My friend, Christmas is all about the gloom, the gift, and the government. Christmas is all about the gloom, the gift, and the government.

And there are three headings this morning. The gloom, the gift, and the government. So let's look first of all at the gloom. The gloom that's spoken about in verses 1 and 2.

[4 : 43] We're told there, 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 the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. Now the book of Isaiah, it's probably one of the most well-known and much-loved books in the Old Testament.

And for an Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, he proclaims so much about Jesus Christ. And he speaks about Jesus so much that when you read this book, you would be certain that he actually wrote the book when Jesus was walking upon the earth.

And yet, this book was written 800 years before Jesus was born. And we see here that Isaiah, he wrote about the birth of Christ. He writes about the ministry of Christ.

He writes about the rejection of Christ. He speaks about the sufferings of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ. And he even speaks about the kingship of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 56] Isaiah wrote so much about Jesus Christ that his book has often been referred to as the fifth gospel. But even though Isaiah's ministry was a Christ-centered ministry, it was a difficult ministry.

And it was a difficult ministry because of the sin and rebellion of the people. They were walking in darkness. And you know, when Isaiah was called to be the Lord's prophet, he was called as a prophet to foretell and to forth tell.

He was to speak the Lord's message to the Lord's people. Isaiah was to preach a message. The message that Isaiah was given was a message of judgment.

And that message was given to a people who weren't listening and a people who weren't interested.

Isaiah had been called to a people who had turned their back upon the Lord to serve other gods.

They were walking in darkness. But Isaiah, he had to keep preaching to them. He even asked the Lord, how long do I have to keep preaching to them? And the Lord said to them, until the cities lie in ruins.

[7 : 05] He said, you keep preaching to them. Keep telling them. Keep pleading with them. Keep calling them to come. And Isaiah had to keep doing it because that was his calling.

And you know, the problem though for the people of Israel was that judgment was coming. And they knew it. Judgment was coming and they needed to repent. But they were walking in darkness.

And they were ignoring all the warnings that were being given to them. Because their hearts and their home life, it was very far away from the Lord. Yes, they had this outward appearance of religion.

But they had no love for the Lord in their heart. And that's what Isaiah was facing. A people who were paying lip service to the Lord and yet walking in darkness.

And my friend, you should never come to church to pay lip service to the Lord. Because the Lord knows your heart. And the Lord knows the condition of your soul. And if you're only here this morning to maybe please yourself or to ease your conscience or to just make an appearance.

[8 : 15] If you're only here with your lips and you're not here with your heart, then the Lord knows that. And he knows that you're walking in darkness. The Lord knows that your problem, as it was for the people of Israel, your problem is that your heart is divided.

You're not committed to the Lord. You're not putting the Lord first. You're not seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. You're double-minded.

And as the Bible tells us, a double-minded man or woman is unstable in all their ways. And that was the problem for the Israelites. They wanted to please the Lord, but they also wanted to please themselves.

And in order to please both, they would worship the Lord and they would worship, well, all their other gods. They would attend to all their other wants and desires and idols.

And sometimes they would try and do both at the same time. But they were walking in darkness.

And, you know, we can do the same. Even as Christians, we can do the same.

[9 : 23] Because we can claim that we're too busy to read our Bible, but, you know, we're never too busy to watch TV. We can claim that we're too tired to come to church, but we're never too tired to stay up late.

We can claim that we don't have time for visiting or speaking to people about their soul, and yet we can waste all our time on a whole manner of things that are of no eternal benefit whatsoever.

But, you know, the problem is, as it was for Israel, is that we're not putting the Lord first in our life. Our heart is divided. We want the best of both worlds.

We want to please the Lord, and we want to please ourselves. And the result is, we're walking in darkness. We've turned our back upon the Lord. Maybe not completely, but we're going our own way.

We're trying to do our own thing. We're not putting the Lord first. We're only giving lip service to the Lord. And that's what the Israelites were doing. And because of their disobedience, foreign kings had invaded the land, and they had taken over parts of the nation.

[10 : 32] In fact, the gloom that's spoken about in verse 1, the gloom in the land of Naphtali, in the land of Zebulun, it highlights a lack of commitment from the Lord's people.

And it was their lack of commitment that had left them in a deep darkness. You could say that they're in distress, they're in despair, because of their disobedience to the Lord.

We're told that they're literally walking in the valley of the shadow of death. My friend, the church in Isaiah's day was aimlessly wandering, completely double-minded, and living with a divided heart. They were aimlessly wandering, completely double-minded, and living with a divided heart. Then you look at the church today, and it seems to be walking in darkness, not knowing which way to turn.

And yet, you know, this is how gracious and loving and merciful the Lord is. This is how good the Lord is towards His people, that in the midst of their darkness, He promises light.

[11 : 44] The Lord says, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.

You know, the Lord promises to His people that He will dispel and disperse the darkness over all the nations. The Lord promises to remove the gloom by providing the gift.

The Lord promises to remove the gloom by providing the gift. And the gift, of course, is the promise of a royal son. It's the promise of a messianic king.

It's the promise of a saviour. And that's what Matthew picked up on in our reading in Matthew chapter 4. Matthew told us that after Jesus had been tempted by the devil, He went into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet here in Isaiah chapter 9 would be fulfilled.

[12 : 48] The land of Zebulun, 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 the shadow of death, on them light has dawned.

And you know what we're told after that? It was from that time on that Jesus began to preach the gospel, saying, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

But you know, this promise that a royal son will come and dispel and disperse the darkness, you know, it's something that the apostle John even picked up on in his gospel.

One of the first things John says about Jesus, John begins his gospel and he says, in the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God.

But then one, the first thing that John says about the Word is that in him was life. And the life was the light of men. And the light shined in the darkness.

[13 : 52] And the darkness could not overcome it. John says that when Jesus entered into this world of darkness and gloom, he came to bring light and life.

He came to dispel the darkness. He came to disperse the gloom. That's why Jesus could stand up and say, I am the light of the world.

He who believes in me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. And you know, my friend, the Lord's prerogative is always to bring light into your darkness.

He's been doing it since the beginning of creation. He spoke into the darkness, let there be light.

And the Lord has continued to bring light into the darkness of our sin and the darkness of our situations.

And maybe for you today, you feel that you're walking in darkness. Darkness because of your sin. Darkness because of illness. Darkness because of worry.

[14 : 54] Darkness because of loneliness. Darkness. My friend, whatever darkness you may be in, the word of God is reminding you that the God who said, let light shine out of darkness, he is able to shine into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And you know, it's no wonder the Apostle John, having explained that Jesus is the light of the world, he then wrote in his letter to the churches. He pleaded with the church. He says, if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. And so into the darkness of a distressed, despairing, double-minded and disobedient people, the Lord promised to remove the gloom by providing the gift.

It's wonderful. The Lord promised to remove the gloom by providing the gift, the gift of a royal son. And that's what I want us to see secondly.

So we've seen the gloom, secondly, the gift. The gift. Look at verse 6. We're told in 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.

[16:28] Now this verse, it's very familiar to us because it's often read at this time of year. It's often read at this time of year in connection to the birth of Jesus.

And this verse, along with other verses from Isaiah, particularly Isaiah chapter 7 at verse 14, which reads, The Lord himself shall give you a sign.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Emmanuel. And there's also another verse in chapter 11, verses 1 and 2, which reads, There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

And these verses in chapters 7, 9, and 11, they're all about the royal son, Jesus Christ. They're all about the gift of a saviour that was promised to remove the gloom of sin.

And what's interesting is that chapters 7 to 12 in the book of Isaiah, they're often, they form this section called the book of Emmanuel. The book of Emmanuel, because as you can expect and as you can guess, these chapters in Isaiah, they describe the one who is called Emmanuel.

[17:52] Emmanuel, he is God with us. He is the God-man. He's God in the person of Jesus Christ. But you know, here in the middle of the book of Emmanuel, we're told that the royal son is a gift.

He's the gift of a saviour. And he's given, the gift of the saviour is given in order to remove the gloom of sin. But who is the gift being given to?

It says in verse 6, For to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. The emphasis is that the gift of a royal son, the gift of Emmanuel, the gift of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, he has been given to us. The gift has been given to those who are in the gloom of sin and walking in darkness. My friend, the gift of Emmanuel has been given to us.

For to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. And you know, God's gift of his only begotten son, it's something that people have struggled with throughout their life.

[19:05] We all know what John 3.16 says. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

We learned the verse as a child. We know the verse. We can even quote the verse. But do we understand the verse? And do we live out the verse?

Because the emphasis here on the gift of Emmanuel, the gift of God's son, the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. And let's not forget it's a gift.

It's a free gift. That's what the Bible says. The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So the gift, it costs you nothing because it's graciously and freely given to you.

And it's being held out to you. All you have to do is receive the gift. You don't have to work for it. That's what the Bible emphasizes. You don't have to try and earn favor with God in order to receive it.

[20:13] You don't have to make sure that you're a good person in order that God will give it to you. You don't even have to try and pay for it because it's a gift. It's freely and graciously and lovingly being held out to you.

Now as you know there's less than ten days until Christmas Day. But on Christmas Day when you receive a gift maybe from your spouse or a friend or whoever it may be when you receive that nicely wrapped gift from someone and you open it and you see what it is are you going to turn to them and maybe ask them or text them whatever it is ask the giver of that gift are you going to say to them how much do I owe you?

Would you say that? No. That would be very rude. That would be disrespectful. That would be very impolite. No. You just receive the gift.

You accept the gift. You're thankful for the gift because you know that the gift has been lovingly graciously and freely given to you. And yes it costs the giver of that gift.

there was a cost involved. There was a price to pay. There was a fee that had to be transacted. But when the cost was met and the price was paid and the fee was transacted the giver of that gift could give to whosoever they wanted that gift.

[21 : 44] They could give it to you. And you know the wonder of it is this is the gospel. that's what the gospel reminds us.

The gift of Emmanuel. God's gift of his son. The gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. It has been lovingly freely and graciously given to us.

To us those who are walking in darkness. God so loved the world that he gave. And he has given this wonderful gift and you're to receive this gift.

You're to accept this gift. You're to be thankful for this wonderful gift. You're not to ask God who is the giver of this gift. You're not to ask him what do I have to do to receive this gift.

You're not to ask God how much do I have to pay you. You're not to ask God how good do I have to be to get it. You don't have to ask God how many times do I have to be in church in order to make sure this gift is mine.

[22 : 49] You're not to ask God how well do I have to know my Bible and my catechism in order to make sure this gift is all mine. No you're not to ask these questions. You're not even to think these questions.

Because that would be rude. That would be disrespectful. That would be impolite. You're not even to reject this gift. You're not to reject it.

No you're to receive the gift accept the gift be thankful for the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Because you know that the gift has been lovingly graciously and freely handed to you.

You know that. And you also know you know that it cost the giver of that gift. You know that it cost God his own son.

You know that it cost his son his life. Because there was a cost involved. there was a price to pay. There was a fee that had to be transacted in order to bring you from darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel.

[23 : 56] From sin into being a follower of the saviour. I know my friend what a cost it was. It was Calvary's great transaction. where the worst about you was laid upon him and the best about him was laid upon you.

Your sins transferred to Christ. His righteousness transferred to you. He was credited with your sin and you were credited with his righteousness.

The darkness and hell that you deserve. He took it. He took it all so that you could be justified by faith in him.

My friend what a cost it was. But when the cost was met and the price was paid and the fee was transacted sinners could be redeemed by precious blood.

The precious blood of this Emmanuel the royal son Jesus Christ. And my friend the gift has been held out to you. The gift of eternal life is being held out to you today through Jesus Christ.

[25 : 07] It's a gift. It costs you nothing because it's graciously freely and lovingly given to you.

It's being held out to you. All you have to do is receive it. That's what Jesus says is it not? Ask and you shall receive.

Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened. My unconverted friend the gift of God is a wonderful gift.

It costs you nothing to receive it but it will cost you your soul to reject it. it will cost you nothing to receive it but it will cost you your soul to reject it.

If you pass up this opportunity of receiving the free gift of God which is eternal life you only have yourself to blame.

[26 : 20] But you know Isaiah he doesn't even stop there because having described the gloom of darkness over the people and the gift of light in God's son Isaiah goes on to describe the government of Emmanuel that's what we see thirdly the government the gloom the gift and the government we read again in verse 6 it says 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 from this time forth and forever more the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this in order to describe the government of Emmanuel Isaiah ascribes four titles to him he calls him the wonderful counselor mighty

God everlasting father and prince of peace you know it's not enough Isaiah thinks that it's not enough for Emmanuel to have just one title he needs four titles he needs four titles in order to describe the government that was put upon his shoulder he's first of all given the title wonderful counselor and you know it's interesting that the term wonderful it's only ever used in the Bible to describe God Emmanuel is the wonderful counselor because he possesses the wisdom of God he is he has wonderful wisdom his wisdom his counsel and his knowledge is far above our wisdom our counsel and our knowledge and as our wonderful counselor he knows what's in our heart and he knows what's going on in our lives and our greatest comfort today should be that even though we don't know what's going on in our lives even though we might not even understand what's going on in our providence our wonderful counselor knows exactly what's going on he understands everything that's taking place you know that's why he bids us to come to him and he says to us in the gospel come to me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest because he's our wonderful counselor he knows the way that we take he is our Emmanuel God with us but you know Emmanuel is not only a wonderful counselor he's also been given the title mighty God mighty God he's a divine warrior he's all powerful he's omnipotent he has defeated our enemies he defends us against our enemies he protects us from our enemies my friend our Emmanuel Jesus Christ he has crushed Satan he has conquered sin he has defeated death he has destroyed the grave he stands over it all and says oh death where is your sting oh grave where is your victory and he can say it all because he is the mighty God I know how the psalmist describes him thou hast an arm that's full of power thine hand is great in might he is a mighty

God he's the wonderful counselor the mighty God he's even the everlasting father you know this has caused a bit of confusion because how can you call a son father but it doesn't mean that Jesus is God the father it means that he is the father of eternity he is the author of eternity he's the author of eternal life he's the only one who can provide to us the promise of eternal life he's the father of eternity he's the author of eternity and you know trusting in this Jesus it's the difference between an eternity in heaven and an eternity in hell that's the difference between trusting in this Jesus or not my friend our Emmanuel is the wonderful counselor he's the mighty God he's the everlasting father and he's also the prince of peace the last title given to describe the government of Emmanuel shows that he will bring peace but it's not just peace and reconciliation between fellow man it's peace and reconciliation with a holy God because by our sin we're separated from this holy God and you know when you think about it that's what the Christmas story is all about it's all about the birth of the prince of peace and the promise of the prince of peace that we can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ he's the mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus he's the advocate with the father Jesus he's the prince of peace because he alone is able to give to us that peace which passes all understanding and my friend you might not have this peace in your soul you might long for it you hear Christians talking about I have peace with God but you know [32 : 12] I've said it before and I'm sure I'll say it again you receive peace with God when there is commitment and confession when you commit your life to Jesus and when you confess that he is Lord that's when you have peace in your heart when you confess the shepherd as your savior that's when you have peace that's when you know the prince of peace for who he is and what he's able to do for you when there is commitment and confession my friend our Emmanuel our Jesus he is God with us and he has come to bring peace he came to bring us out of our gloom of sin and bring us from darkness to light he came to be a gift the gift of a savior to freely come to receive this gift and you know he has a perfect government upon his shoulders a government of salvation where he has this wonderful titles wonderful counselor mighty

God everlasting father prince of peace the gloom the gift and the government what is christmas all about the gloom the gift and the government but the point is it's all for us the promise here in isaiah was made for us the child was born for us the son was given for us the savior was crucified for us the his blood was shed for us he was raised again for us he ascended up on high for us he is interceding on our behalf today for us my friend it was all for us all for us for to us a child is born to

us a son is given may the lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh lord our gracious god we give thanks to thee for the wonderful gift of thy son and we bless thee oh lord that he came in the fullness of time to give us life as a ransom for many and we pray that we would see this gift as a wonderful gift that we would accept it as a free gift that we would love the gift of thy son that we would love him that we would listen to him that we would look to him that we walk us we pray we thank thee oh lord for thy goodness for thy love for thy gracious hand and giving all thine only begotten son that whosoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life bless us lord we pray go before us take away our iniquity receive us graciously for

Jesus sake amen we shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of psalm 18 psalm 18 it's on page 221 psalm 18 we're singing from verse 28 down to the verse mark 32 psalm 18 from verse 28 the lord will light my candle so that it shall shine full bright the lord my god will also make my darkness to be light by thee through troops of men I break and them discomfort all and by my god assisting me I over leap a wall we'll sing on down to the verse marked 32 of psalm 18 to God's praise the lord will light my candle soul that day shall shine full bright the lord my heart will also bring my darkness to be light by thee through troops of men

I break and them discomfort all and by my god assisting me I over leave a wall as for god perfect is his way the lord his word is tried he is a balm to all those who do in him confide who but the lord is gone but he who is our home and state tis god that cur doth me with strength and perfect makes my way the grace of the lord jesus christ the love of god the father and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all now and forever more amen