

Sunrise is Coming!

Isaiah 9:1-7

December 8, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to Isaiah 9. Imagine yourself in a prison cell all alone deep under a medieval castle sometime in the 1500s. There is no light in your cell and it is cold and damp 24-7. You get one meal a day of crusty bread and dirty water. No TV, no cell phone, no internet, no books, no shower, no clean clothes, no nothing. Languishing in a dark and dank prison. No hope of release as you have been sentenced to death for crimes against God and against the humanity He created. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Not sure when your name will be called and when death will usher you out of a temporary earthly prison into an eternal hellish one.

And then one day...one day, the warden who delivers your gruel tells you that a new king has seized control of the empire. The next day, he tells you this new king has spoken of freeing all prisoners of the former regime. Imagine the hope that suddenly wells up within your soul. Though still in prison, though still cold and sick and dirty and hungry, your outlook has now changed as you begin to dream, to risk anticipating, to allow yourself to consider a life outside the darkness, outside the four mildewy walls. Could it be? Or is this just another warden's trick? Is this another mindgame to engender hope only to crush it again.

And then one day...one day, after hoping and dreaming of freedom for weeks, you hear footsteps in the distance accompanied by the rattle of keys. The footsteps stop momentarily as you hear a key in a lock and then the shout of a prisoner suddenly set free! The footsteps continue coming toward your door stopping every so often to repeat what you've just heard. The excited cries of those who are freed supercharges your soul with joy, with hope, and with anticipation! Freedom is finally coming your way!

This is one way to think of Advent. The coming of a new King with keys to all our prison cells. Dietrich Bonhoeffer who has recently been celebrated with a movie of his life has said, "A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes...and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent." Praise God for the promise of freedom. If you are able, please stand as we read such a promise today from Isa 9:1 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 honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan — 2 The people walking in darkness have seen **a great light**; on those living in the land of the shadow of death **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 men 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 unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on **his shoulders**. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase 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.

We often read this passage during the Christmas season and focus on the names and titles of Jesus and rightfully so. We have them on several of our banners to remind us What Child This is. But somehow, although we read it, we often overlook the beginning of this passage. Say no gloom! Vs 1 Nevertheless, there will be **no more gloom** for those who were in distress. But the word nevertheless indicates this follows something that is nearly the opposite. At the end of Isaiah 8, the prophet describes God's people who are oppressed, distressed, depressed, and hopeless. Vs 22 Then they will look toward the earth and see only **distress** and **darkness** and **fearful gloom**, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

Sounds like our friend in prison that we described in our opening does it not? Out of purpose. Out of hope. And some of you may be feeling that way today for any number of reasons. Some of you have lost loved ones and you feel imprisoned by the grief and loneliness that brings. Some have had relationships go sour leaving you feeling abandoned and rejected. Some are struggling with physical challenges like you've never faced before that seem to imprison you within your limited abilities. Some may just feel overwhelmed by life. Locked into a deadend job, an empty bank account, and full credit cards. Exhausted. Out of energy, out of encouragement, out of hope. And whenever we look toward the earth, as vs 22 says, we see only distress, darkness and fearful gloom.

Don't look toward the earth. Don't look at the inside of your own prison cell. With eyes of faith, look up! Look into the hallway and down the corridor of time and see the one approaching with His ring of keys! For that's what Isaiah 9 is all about! **In the past**, those who lived in northern Israel, in Zebulun and Naphtali had felt neglected by God, perhaps even forgotten by Him, like some of you today. But in the **future**, Isaiah writes, God will honor this area known as Galilee. Also the areas by the sea and by the Jordan, those who have been in darkness will see a **great light**. Say Great Light. Not just any light, a great one! Like a bright meteor bursting through our atmosphere on the darkness of nights! Like going from midnight to noon with nothing in between. Like going from the dark prison cell to a hallway illuminated with blinding halogen floodlights! That's what's coming, Isaiah says!

Vs 2 On those living in the shadow of death a light has dawned. There is no darker darkness than death! And ever since Eden's fall, death has cast its long dark

shadow over all of humanity. Every person, every animal, every plant, every living cell. Living in the dark prison of the shadow of certain death. And suddenly a light has dawned! Say dawn! The sun's coming up! But notice you're not looking at the earth as Isaiah 8:22 says, for the sun's dawn comes not from below, but from above!

And in bringing that glorious dawn, God enlarges the nation. He builds them up! He increases their joy! Say joy! How many of you can use an increase in your joy? With more rejoicing than with a full harvest or a decisive military victory. Think about this. How could anyone dispel the shadow of death? The only way to get rid of a shadow is by shining light on it! And when the dawn comes, the glorious sunlight of His presence obliterates any trace of a shadow left by death! That's true because death no longer has the keys to keep us in his prison! Jesus wrestled those keys out of the Devil's hands when He died, descended into Hell and then rose again! When John encounters the Risen Christ in Revelation 1, Jesus says to him, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And **I** hold the keys of death and Hades."

This is what Advent is all about! The new King is on the throne is coming with his keys to set us all free! The insurgents that just took over Syria have promised to set all previous prisoners free. Imagine being one. Advent is like the early morning when light begins to appear over top the Massanutten Mountain. It's not here yet, but you know sunrise is coming! You anticipate its arrival. Imagine getting lost in the woods all night without a clock, not knowing if it was 2:30 or 5:30 until you saw a faint low on the horizon. Isaiah is prophesying this sunrise 700 years before Jesus was born. He's telling folks at midnight that the sun is coming up in the morning! Hold on till sunrise!

Vs 4. As in the days of Midian's defeat, God will **shatter** the yoke that burdens them. Say shatter. He will **break** the bar across their shoulder and shatter the rod of their oppressors, their slave masters. What is Midian's defeat? It's the story of Gideon rescuing his people from the Midianites, not Mennonites, who were stealing their crops and livestock, and living in their homes forcing them to camp out in the mountains. They were under a cruel yoke of enslavement, of bondage. And with God's help, Gideon and his 300 men defeated that whole entire Midianite hoard and drove them out and shattered their power. That's the imagery Isaiah uses to help us understand how God will give the **victory** to His people through the One He will send at sunrise! This is a promise of the Messiah!

Not only does Jesus have the key to whatever prison you're in today, when it comes to the prison of death and hell, when it comes to the utter hopelessness our sin has left us with, Jesus' death and resurrection **shattered** those doors and bars that have kept us enslaved. He **obliterated** the rod of guilt and shame the devil had been using to beat us down and keep us intimidated and scared. The yoke of oppression brought on by sin, that has kept us bound in service to the enemy draining us of our energy, our time, our

resources and our very life; that yoke He has now blown into a thousand splinters! As the song, O Holy Night proclaims, "Chains shall He break!" And He has, and He does, Amen?

Anybody got any chains they need broken today? Any yokes or rods you need shattered? I know a guy! Enslaved to your own fears? Enslaved to worries? Enslaved by other people's expectations and judgments? Enslaved to fear of death. Enslaved to.... you fill in your blank. Chains shall He break, Yokes shall He shatter, rods shall He destroy.

And it keeps getting better. Vs 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. What does that mean? An end to all war! And everyone said? I've been emailing a lady named Sharona in Israel who has been so desperate for the war there to end. For peace to return. They have been living in constant fear of bombs and attacks. And one day that war and all others will end! **Every** army boot, **every** bloody uniform will be burned up. Consumed. Destroyed. The promise of a world without war! This Messiah will usher in God's holy Shalom peace that is all encompassing. Peace between people as well as in our own souls. Physical peace, mental peace, financial peace, relational peace, emotional peace, and most importantly, spiritual peace. This is not peace through strength or peace through treaties or peace through anything else. It is peace through Jesus Christ! Even so come Prince of Peace!

Notice how Isaiah writes this. In verse 1, He says, "in the future," but then the prophecy that follows is written in past tense. All this is a done deal! Prophecy is history written ahead of time. And Zechariah, John the Baptist's father whom we met last week, quoted Isaiah in his own song of prophecy in Luke 1:78 where he says, "because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." The sun from heaven was about to rise when Zechariah sang that, to dispel death's darkness and to enlighten our path that we might travel in Shalom peace.

And so it's with these incredible prophecies that Isaiah introduces the Messiah who arrive some 700 years later. In verse 6, he simply says, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. Who is us? In Isaiah's context it was the Jewish people. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali and by the sea and by the Jordan. But today us includes every one of us. Isaiah is foretelling what will happen when, in Mary's womb, the first hint of dawn will begin to appear over the mountains into our darkness. And in Bethlehem's manger, the first rays shone brightly onto all the earth past, present, and future. The Advent of the Holy One!

And, he says, the government will be on His shoulders. Say government. The governing of mankind is too heavy for the shoulders of any one person. Kings, Emperors,

Caesars, and Chiefs have all tried it and failed miserably. Sin's shadow has darkened all governments. Those in power have committed some of the worst atrocities of all time. The challenges of maintaining justice while ensuring mercy, of providing food and housing and medical care for all while mediating disputes are too much of a burden for any one man's shoulders. But not for those of a God-man. Jesus and Jesus alone can handle the responsibilities of ruling over the world He created and all who live in it. He and He alone can administrate and provide, rule and dictate, with forgiveness and grace for all. With love and mercy for all. With justice for all. The people living in darkness **have seen** a great light!

Vs 6. And He shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, (the Prince of Shalom!) 7 Of the increase 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." That means it's a done deal. It's a settled fact. You don't have to wish and wonder if it's going to happen. This Counselor who is Wonderful, this God who is Mighty, this Father who is Everlasting, and this Peaceful Prince who brought the Light into our darkness when He was born in Bethlehem's manger. And His government, His peace and His Kingdom have been increasing ever since and shall forevermore.

In Ps 102:18 we are told, "18 Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord: (that would be us. What was to be written?) Vs 19 "The Lord looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth, 20 to hear **the groans of the prisoners** and **release those condemned to death.**" 21 So the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem 22 when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Lord." We do assemble to worship and praise Him today. As we shall do forevermore. He has heard our groans, He hears your groans today and He brings release to those condemned to death.

Mankind had been sitting in our dark prison cell without a single ray of light, without a single spark of hope since Eden. But as Isaiah and the other prophets begin to tell of a future Messiah, it was as though the wardens were speaking of a new king approaching the throne giving hope to hold on. Yes, we do deserve to die for what we've done. For rebelling against God and for hurting and abusing others. But at Advent we hear the sound of approaching footsteps and jingling keys. The sweet carols of pardon and deliverance. The anthems of eternal everlasting freedom!

This new King has the keys to your prison cell and He wants to set you free. This good news includes all of us, but we each have to individually and personally accept it. I can't imagine any prisoner whose cell had been unlocked and opened refusing to come out. And yet many do just that. Jesus, the Great Light, has shattered our deadbolts, He

has blasted our hinges, He has demolished our doors. And yet, many want to keep wallowing in the darkness of sin eating its poisonous bread and drinking its deadly water. Friend you don't have to do that anymore! Come to the Great Light! Run out of your cell into the arms of your King who has the keys! Do that as we pray and if you have, celebrate it by worshipping Him in the Great Light of His deliverance and peace.