

Terrorizing Darkness, Dawning Light

In the 8th century B.C., the prophet Isaiah looked outward at the world in which he lived and inward at his own heart and saw an incredibly menacing and perilous darkness. In Chapter 9, he parses out the nature of this terrifying darkness while also setting forth God's rescue plan. He foretells how God's light would break in and conquer the darkness.

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

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.

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.

Our text this morning answers two important questions: From what are we rescued and how are we rescued?

1. From what are we rescued? We are rescued from a most terrifying darkness (v.2).

A. Darkness is a striking biblical metaphor for our fallen condition and all of sin's attendant consequences. There are at least four aspects to this darkness (three are referenced in Isaiah 8 and 9).

B. **The Internal Darkness of sin.** "Those who have walked in darkness" (v.2). The first aspect of this terrifying darkness is the darkness of our own sinful hearts. Isaiah sees this darkness in his own heart and in those of God's people (Isaiah 6:5). This internal darkness causes us to tolerate structures and practices in our society that are contrary to God's life-giving purpose.

C. **The External Darkness of exile.** (Isaiah 8:17). The darkness that truly terrorizes is the darkness that comes when God hides his face. According to Isaiah, this is due to God's discipline and judgment. God's people are being exiled due to their persistent rebellion, unbelief, and idolatry. Our sin has exiled us also from our heavenly Father.

D. **The Darkness of death.** We dwell in the land of deep darkness as a consequence of our sin. The phrase "deep darkness" is also translated as "the shadow of death." (Cf. Psalm 23:4).

E. **The Outer Darkness.** This completes the biblical picture of the terrifying darkness from which we are rescued. Jesus reminds us that those who die in their sins will experience the second death and will go into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever. (Matthew 22:13; 25:30).

F. Experiencing the rescue of Jesus Christ from all of this darkness moves us to humility, gratitude, and joy for our own rescue and emboldens us to gladly commend our Savior to our friends who need His rescue.

2. How are we rescued? God's light dawns and shines in our hearts (9:2, 6-7). Light is a biblical image of salvation. It is a symbol of God's favor and salvation. Beyond the darkness is the shining light of a divine child. (Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6)

A. The light dawns as we marvel at how He comes (v.6). Isaiah prophesies the birth of a royal child. The interesting part is that it comes roughly 750 years before His actual birth. The mighty God comes as a child. He is fully man. The Father and originator of eternity is given as a son in time and space. He is fully God.

B. The light dawns as we marvel at who He is (v.6b).

This royal child is given four names. He is called...a wonder of a counselor, a God of might, a Father of eternity, and a prince of peace.

1. He is a **wonder of a counselor**. This ruler doesn't need a bunch of counselors and advisors to rule His kingdom. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).
2. He is the **God of might** (cf. Isaiah 10:21) Literally, the hero God. He is the champion warrior who fights our battles and conquers His enemies. On the cross He delivers us from the domain of darkness and transfers us into His kingdom of light (Colossians 2:13).
3. He is the **Everlasting Father**. He's the Forever Father. He cares and loves His family forever. Jesus Christ leads us out of the citadel of death and the grave and brings life and immortality to light through His gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).
4. He is the **Prince of Peace**. He comes to make those of us who were God's enemies His friends. He comes to bring about a universal flourishing of life as it was meant to be lived — in relationship with God.

C. The light dawns as we marvel at what He came to do (v.7). Jesus is born for the purpose of establishing His progressive (always expanding), peaceable, and perpetual (eternal, there is no end) kingdom.

D. The chief source of our happiness and joy this Advent season is knowing that we have been rescued from the darkness to reign with Christ in His kingdom (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) and to do everything in our power to see it expand.

Discussion Questions

1. How do we know for certain that (Isaiah 9:1-2) refers specifically to our Savior Jesus Christ? How and when did light come to Galilee of the Gentiles (Matthew 4:12-17)? Ask the Lord to give us in fuller measure His gift of repentance that leads to light and life (Acts 11:18).
2. What does it look like to hope expectantly and trust unwaveringly in the Lord when you go through a time of darkness and difficulty (Isaiah 8:17)? Psalm 27 serves as King David's own affirmation of faith in the Lord as his light and salvation amidst the spiritual darkness. Praying through this Psalm will help to counter our own tendency to despair.

3. Can you think of times in the past when God seemed like He was hiding His face from you? How do people naturally respond when they have a sense of being deserted and abandoned by God (Isaiah 8:21)? How should we respond?

4. Can you think of anyone in your web of relationships who needs to be transferred from the domain of darkness into light? Why not begin a concerted effort to pray for them regularly that the Lord might shine His light into their hearts?

5. How would you encourage someone struggling with the fear of the dark shadows of death? I would encourage you to start with Psalm 23:4-6 and Hebrews 2:9-14. Why not take a few moments and thank the Lord for these assuring promises?

6. Which of these four royal titles most resonates with you (9:6)? Are you presently listening to the Wonderful Counselor? Are you hiding in the King who is Mighty God and asking Him to fight your battles for you? Are you delighting in your Forever Father who comes to grant you eternal life (cf. John 5:24, 10:10, 17:3)? Are you welcoming or resisting His rule of peace in your life and relationships right now?

Going Deeper

1. What do we learn about darkness and light from John 1:1-14 and John 3:19? Confess specifically the ways in which you have loved darkness more than the light of God's favor and approval.

2. How can we be so sure that God does not hide His face from us now? Matthew 27:45-50. Why not take some time to meditate on Revelation 21:3-4 and ask our Lord to hasten the time when this becomes a glorious reality for us?