



**Part 1: Isaiah 9.1-7 | Formerly Present Darkness
12.03.2017**

Christmas Missions Offering

We love Christmas here at Mercy Church! We are developing a bit of a tradition of setting aside the entire month of December to focus on Advent. For those of you newer to church advent is just a word the OG church used to describe the season of remembrance & celebration of the birth of Jesus. Advent has two parts for Mercy:

- 1. A Series of worship services pointing us to the birth of Jesus.** That culminates of course in a Christmas eve worship service here at Mercy that you will want to invite everyone you know. BTW Christmas eve services will be the same times as our regular services. 9 & 11am. Talk more about that this month.
- 2. Christmas Missions Offering.** If you are around Mercy for any length of time you will find central to who we are is the belief that we exist to share the love of Christ with the whole world. So in this season of gift giving, Mercy Church is going to give what we call our Christmas Missions Offering. 100% of that offering goes outside the ministries of Mercy Church to missions work around the world. We divide that up where

some of it goes to local outreach efforts here in Charlotte, some goes to supporting church planters in North America, and some goes to planting churches across the world. Last year we helped Image Church in Atlanta GA get off the ground. We helped our partner in South Asia fund training materials that helped train church planters in remote areas of the country. Jay & Julie Ellis...we helped them get to Germany. CMO also funded our ServeWeek Initiative.

So here's what we are doing: In two weeks, December 17th, we are going to give our Christmas Missions Offering. I want to challenge you to go and pray about what you might give to this offering. Here's the way Courtney and I are talking about it with our kids: We give gifts to one another at Christmas. We want our family's best gift to be one that helps others know Jesus. So as a family we are going to give to the Christmas Missions Offering. **Our goal: \$50,000.**

If you go on our website you can see our partner ministries this \$ will go to. Local ministries caring for the needs of Charlotte, National & international partners who are planting gospel preaching churches. I want to challenge you to join my family in giving your best gift this Christmas to God's mission. helping others hear about Jesus. You pray about it over these next two weeks and come ready on December 17th.

Ok, Let's get into our message for today.

Isaiah 9:1-7
The Hope of Christmas: Formerly Present Darkness



This December we will be remembering and celebrating the birth of Jesus by looking at the book of Isaiah. Many theologians throughout church history have referred to Isaiah, even though it is in the Old Testament, as the 5th Gospel. The reason is because no scripture seems to so clearly point towards the coming of Jesus as this book. So if you have your bible, Isaiah 9. Psalms – Go Right. Prov, Ecc, SofS then Isaiah. Pretty Big Book. If you hit Jeremiah go back.

While you turn there let me set up what is happening. If you've never read Isaiah before it's going to be a little different than other areas of scripture you've read. It's around 730 B.C. and The main character, Isaiah, is called in chapter 6 to be a prophet which means he is called to speak on God's behalf to the people of Israel . Most of the book records Isaiah's message.

Here's the thing: **The Reason God raised up a messenger was because Israel had turned to worshipping false idols.**

Basically disobeying God and rejecting him as their authority. So God's messenger, Isaiah, was to bring a warning that if they don't repent, God is going to bring judgment on them. And that judgment was a very real judgment. God was raising up the nation of Assyria, and then Babylon, to conquer Israel.

So when you open your bible and see 66 chapters largely filled with prophecy, what you are reading is God's warning to his own people about the road they are traveling down.

Now here's what makes Isaiah's message so good. Lest you were thinking we'd spend Christmas talking about judgment.

Isaiah's message is one of impending Judgment mingled with a very clear promise of hope. And this is why we need Isaiah so much. It's what makes this old book not just relevant, but the answer many of us need this Christmas.

We'll see today Isaiah talk about the sin of Israel in terms of darkness. **And this darkness is like a shroud hanging over his world.** He sees it around him in how people treat one another and in how they reject God. He sees it in himself too.

And I don't think it is a stretch to say there is darkness in our world today. In fact it feels like darkness seems to be hanging over our particular culture like a thick blanket right now.

And just a little bit of soul searching will reveal there is darkness in each one of us too. Desires and thoughts we would NEVER put on social media because people would think we are monsters. The thoughts some of you moms think about your young kids in the heat of stressful moments....If you posted that instead of your cute new family Christmas pic...Imagine how many calls social services would be getting. There's this darkness of insecurity in relationships. Maybe it's the darkness of pain caused by somebody a long time ago or recently, maybe it's the darkness you've created by some things you've done. How do we escape the darkness? We can PRETEND like its not there. We are awesome about that in the south. Pretend like all is good. But you and I know its there. So what do we do? How do we escape the darkness AROUND us and INSIDE of us? That's what Isaiah is here for. He's talking to a people who need hope. Who hear the Christmas message often and think its just a hallmark sentiment. Light in



Darkness. What they NEED is to experience HOW the LIGHT of Christ's coming actually overcomes the very real darkness they are dealing with in their lives. And Isaiah is here in the bible To show you and I that very thing. The very real HOPE of CHRISTMAS.

Let's get in there:

[22] And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness...

Israel is going to try and stand their ground but God is telling Isaiah that aint gonna work. The enemy is too strong and it is going to crush Israel. The darkness is going to be too great for their strength. And they will be exiled and made to be prisoners and slaves to foreign kingdoms. And Isaiah is put here to say WHEN THE ENEMY conquers you...when your sin has finally come back on you...when you are as verse 22 says....thrust into thick darkness...THERE IS HOPE! Where is Isaiah's hope? It's that God is faithful to his promises.

And that promise is that one day a RULER will come who will rescue them and will sit on King David's throne forever. That's God's promise from 2nd Samuel 7 and even when all seems lost Isaiah says verse 7 that promise will not be broken. Somehow a rescuer is going to come

Ok verses 22 sets up the problem so that the next few verses can talk about this rescuer and what he does for Israel. Because they are poetic in nature I'm going to read them all to you and then show you the hope for us in here.

- [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.
- [3] 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.
- [4] 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.
- [5] For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
- [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.



Now if you've been around church before, maybe if only at Christmas or Easter, some of those phrases are familiar to you. Especially verse 6 right?

So you church people gotta guard yourself against thinking "predictable Christmas sermon...nice abstract sentiment with no application to my life" **HALLMARK MOVIE**

No, this is written to people with a real problem & the messiah is a real answer. And that real answer is made clear in how the NT picks up on Isaiah's prophecy and says Jesus is the one he was talking about.

So when you and I read Isaiah we have to read it through the filter of the new testament to fully understand it. And I want to show you how the promises of God explode off the page when you do. So I want to walk back through these verses and show six promises about Jesus in Isaiah that don't give abstract sentiment but instead give real, tangible hope for us this Christmas.

1. Jesus is the light that defeats darkness (v.2)

Look at verse 2 again

[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.

The people are in a bad way. The darkness is surrounding them. And remember darkness is a metaphor for the state of

things. Depravity & despair. And Isaiah is saying one day these people that are living in deep darkness will receive a light. Notice that? They don't eventually find their way to a light. No a light is shone down upon them from somewhere above. The gospel of John picks up on this and says

[4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5]The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1.4-5

The one to come...he would pull people out of this darkness and John says that one is Jesus. John 9 Jesus says he is the light of the world! God himself! And as the light he exposes the darkness of sin and not only does he expose sin for its ugliness, after exposing it he defeats it all together!

John 12:46 I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Now right here I want to show you the power of Isaiah's message. It's in the way it speaks to different times. Follow me here cause it is the hope some of you need today.

FORGIVE ME but my best way to illustrate this idea is the Delorian from Back to the Future. It's like God allows Isaiah to hop in the Delorian with Marty McFly, transport him a few years into the future...and things look rough....then they hop back in the delorian and go a long way further into the future and it looks AWESOME. And Isaiah then comes back from the future to the present and that vision stays with him.



Isaiah – Warning current Israel about **present darkness** (Assyria) & even **future darkness** (Babylon) and THEN he transports himself BEYOND all that and looks back on it and calls it **FORMER** darkness. Notice the tense change. Those who walk-**ed** (past tense) & **dwelt** (past tense) in darkness **are now** in the light & **WILL be** in an even greater future light. Embedded in there is the beautiful perspective of the Christian life.

The hope of the gospel is that present darkness, & even future darkness, will all one day be former darkness.

You understand that? Isaiah is helping you see life from God's perspective. It applies so many ways. Maybe like Israel that darkness is of your own making. Some of you are headed for darkness because you refuse to turn from your sin. And you haven't been in the depths of your destruction yet but it is coming. And what you need to hear today is that you can step out of that darkness and into the light named Jesus. Jesus says confess your sin. Expose it. Put it into his light...and he is faithful and just to forgive you. And guess what...Even as messed up as you are....it will move from "present" darkness to "former" darkness. Every Christian in this room is one with former darkness. Maybe you are a Christian and you hear me talking about darkness and your heart is pounding a little bit faster right now because that darkness has a name for you. I'm telling you today you can be free from it and the promise of John 12.46 will be true for you. Present Darkness can become former darkness.

Maybe you are in darkness...but it is because you are a victim of someone else's sin against you. This last week we saw ~~sexual~~ harassment and abuse move to the forefront of the news as men like Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose and Louis C.K. and Al Franken were exposed for their vile acts of ~~sexual~~ harassment. And that's just one industry the reality is there are SO many people who've been ~~sexually~~ harassed or abused. The statistics are alarming enough to make me confident there are people like that in this room. Maybe that's you.

The hope of the gospel is that this present darkness will one day be former darkness. The gospel says you are not defined by what someone else said about you or what someone did to you. Christ washes away those labels that you've been wearing. He says to give him your burden because he can carry it. The gospel says you are a new creation. Which means former darkness doesn't come with you. Doesn't define you. Listen the scars will linger and in a few minutes I'm going to talk about some things you can do to battle those scars. But that's where you need to see Isaiah's perspective. One day...no more darkness AT ALL.

[4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:4

So yes you can find healing now, but the hope every Christian carries around is that one day. ONE DAY no more pain. That late night crying that nobody else sees because you don't want to tell anyone about that deep pain you are carrying? CHRIST CAN HEAL YOU FROM IT NOW **and**...lift up your eyes



SAINTS.....HE SAYS ONE DAY YOU WON'T CRY ANYMORE! NO MORE PAIN! Because in him present darkness becomes former darkness and look at this one day THE FORMER WILL PASS AWAY! YOU WON'T EVEN HAVE THE SCARS ANYMORE! AND THAT HOPE, the hope of HEAVEN...IT IS HERE FOR YOU TO THROW YOURSELF ON. Oh what greater Christmas present than finally being free of that darkness. You need to take a step into the healing light today.

2. Jesus is the warrior who brings freedom from bondage (vv.3-5)

Verse 3 says that this redeemer multiplies the nation. That means it isn't just Israel anymore who is redeemed through this person...it is now a freedom for all nations. If you were here last week you heard about how God is a missionary God who is about redeeming all peoples and Isaiah is tracking with that and then focus on verse 4.

[4] 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.

Notice the language. Yoke, Staff, Rod. These are the tools of a slave master oppressing his slaves. And Isaiah says God breaks it! Like when the people of Midian were oppressing Israel in Judges 6 and God used Gideon and 300 men to break their stronghold over Israel. And Isaiah is saying God is going to BREAK whatever stronghold that sin has over you! HOW?

Romans 6 says The light of the gospel breaks the power of sin over us. We are no longer slaves to it. So what burden are you carrying? Yes this sounds similar to the darkness metaphor. It should. Because the darkness of sin has a way of not just surrounding us but it runs deep into our soul to where we WANT to be free from it but we are also afraid of the pain we will go through to get there. That addiction you haven't told anyone about. You can be free from it! It doesn't have to own you anymore. Our local outreach coordinator was telling us this week about a guy she met at a partner ministry who lost everything in 6 months because of an addiction to prescription pain meds. It became his master and he was losing the battle. And listen Jesus doesn't give you the strength to beat the slave master....HE FIGHTS THE BATTLE AND HE WINS THE VICTORY!

That's why verse 5 says

[5] For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle
tumult

and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

He's saying the clothing worn for battle...you can throw it into a victory fire. You don't need it. The only victory fires I've really been around happened in college on Franklin Street when we beat duke in basketball. But man...they were awesome. You are running around hugging all kinds of strangers you've never met. Crying tears of Joy because Brendan Haywood finally hit a free-throw when it mattered. And then fires start appearing. That means the celebration is GOING! Now how do you keep the fires going? You would think sticks & stuff. NOPE. Clothing. People readily sacrificed



shoes & other garments in the spirit of celebration. And they did burn. Isaiah is saying you can't win the battle. You aren't strong enough. The enemy is too great. BUT, great news: the battle has been won for you. So toss your battle gear into the fire and hug your fellow neighbor who has also been set free.

Isaiah is again looking beyond the present battle. And he's trying to get you and I to look beyond this battle you are in right now and he says in Christ...HE HAS WON THE VICTORY! That's why we sing HALELUJIAH...HE HAS WON THE VICTORY! It's the victory over sin. It's not my master anymore. I'm free! The Gospel Perspective is:

The hope of the gospel is that present battles, & even future battles, will all one day be former battles.

Now, how is the battle won? Well that's verse 6. Verse 6 is HINGE in the book of Isaiah. It's what sets up the 4 gospels in the new testament. If we can't win our battle...If we can't escape darkness....What is the answer?

[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.

Isaiah says we are not to fight our battles instead we are to receive the victory and the victory is to come from a baby

born here on earth. Not just any baby. Isaiah 7 says its one specific baby:

[14] Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

A virgin shall give birth to a baby and that baby shall be called Immanuel which means God With Us. When you read 'called' think as "described as" because the way to describe this virgin born miracle child is that God himself has come down to us. He has taken our form. The strong has become weak. The eternal has taken on the temporal. The infinite has come into the finite. And in the names of this child in verse 6 are the other 4 promises about Jesus in Isaiah 9.

3. Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor who can help you

Can I sit down in this one for a second? Because out of the 4 of these this is the one that doesn't show up as much in other places. BUT I think this may give some of you the breakthrough you need with God. First he's the **wonderful** counselor which means all words fall short of describing just how wonderful he is. I can't say awesome because that doesn't do him justice. He's indescribable. And he's a counselor. Not an advice giver but one who can help you.

I've got a few counselor friends and I've walked enough people through counseling to know that if you are going to go to a counselor you need to be prepared to do a couple of



things.

1) **You must tell the counselor everything.** See counseling is only effective when you actually put everything out there. Any counselor will tell you that Until you are ready to be honest you are wasting their time and yours. They can't help you unless you are tell them everything.

Now here's the thing: That is scary. Because putting all your darkness out there...who would still love you if they knew all that? Not only that, how can God really understand you or help you? Now we are getting down to where Jesus meets your real life. There is a description of Jesus from the book of Hebrews I find really helpful for how we understand God as a counselor.

[15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, **that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** Hebrews 4:15–16

He knows the human struggle to its fullest. And here's the thing: When you come to him and confess all that darkness... he doesn't just issue judgment on you. That's the fear. That you are too messed up to be loved. No, the opposite happens...

The power of the gospel is that Jesus doesn't judge you...instead he takes your judgment onto himself. He died for

your sins so that no matter what kind of a wreck your life is you can bring the whole thing to him. And ONLY when you are ready to give it all to him can he actually help you. I met a guy the other day who said...I just don't know about giving my whole life to God. And right here is why...the wonderful counselor can help you but only when you are fully transparent with him. That leads to the second thing you have to be ready to do in counseling:

2) **If you really want to change, you must do what the counselor says.**

This right here is the big moment. Are you ready to do what the wonderful counselor tells you to do? Because more than likely there is a good chance that what he says to do will not make sense to you. Maybe it will seem radical, maybe it will seem downright nonsensical. Like the rich young ruler who wanted to follow Jesus and Jesus said "Go sell everything you have & follow me." And the guy said...that's too much. He was still trusting himself and not the wonderful counselor. He was waiting on Jesus to make sense according to his perspective.

That's not how counseling works. The counselor says the darkness has so clouded your judgment that its best you just don't trust YOU and instead trust ME. You say: What a leap of faith! ABSOLUTELY! Jesus says that if you come to him you will have abundant life...but it will be because you choose his ways instead of your ways. Some of you want to know how Jesus can help you this Christmas...its right here in this idea. ARE YOU WILLING TO DO WHAT HE SAYS? IF NOT...OF COURSE NOTHING WILL CHANGE! And this isn't a category...like you



obey him in religious space. That's like telling a counselor you want help with a drug addiction but not with an alcohol addiction. Dealing with one without the other is pointless. You gotta let Jesus into all of your life. Let the counselor heal you completely...or its useless. The darkness you have hiding in that one area you don't want him to touch...it will spread. TRUST HIM & GIVE IT ALL TO HIM.

And you can trust him because of the next description. He isn't just a counselor, he is...

4. Jesus is Mighty God who can save you – This is John 1 – Core to the Christian faith. He is God. It means he's all powerful. He CAN WIN THE BATTLE! He can make present darkness former darkness, present battle a former battle. He actually has the power to heal. The power to break addictions. And he offers it to you. You have to give him everything but listen even death could not hold Jesus. And the power to defeat death is the power he says every one of his followers now has. He is mighty. And he is God. There is only one God. Nothing else will save you.

5. Jesus is the Everlasting Father who loves you – He's not just royalty, he's family. He's the one that can give you the security you need. That's a dad's job. To make you feel like no matter what you have a people who love you and care for you. And your earthly father, even if you have or had a really good one, can only give you a taste of what Jesus can give you. He's the father whose approval you've been longing for.

6. Jesus is the Prince of Peace who reigns over you – He's the one who reigns forever on David's throne. Anxiety becomes former anxiety. Fear becomes former fear. Anger becomes former anger. The rest your soul finds in the abundance of his provision for you...will give you the present and future peace your soul craves.

Do you know this God? The one who has the wisdom and power to help you? The one who doesn't just help your present problems, but the one who goes underneath them, to their root, and offers you deliverance from your greatest problem. He gives you peace more satisfying, and more permanent, than any victory in this life will ever offer you.

In him there is hope that all present darkness will be former darkness. And he says you can actually begin to LIVE in that hope now.

