

## A WEARY WORLD REJOICES // The Throne of David

When I was little, I was terrified of the dark. I would sprint past my sister's bedroom in a total panic because I thought arms were going to reach out of the darkness and grab me. Once I survived, I would dive into my bed, pull the covers over my head, and not move a muscle for 10 minutes, because I was afraid someone had followed me into my room, and if I didn't see them, they couldn't see me. It's a bit embarrassing now, but my fear of the dark was real. As little kids, we don't know how to deal with the dark. And as adults, maybe we're not afraid of dark rooms, but we have times where we don't know how to cope with darkness—relational tensions, unresolved conflict, division in our families.

**Romans 8:22-24**, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Many of us struggle to just cope with the darkness that we find in a world that is groaning for its redemption. But what we find in the Christmas story, is not just a casual addressing of the darkness, but a God who confronts the darkness. A God who steps into the darkness we've been running from our whole lives.

Isaiah 9 tells us this story, 800 years before the birth of Christ.

**Isaiah 9:1-7**, "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.

<sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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.”

The context of Isaiah 9 is incredibly bleak. The year is 732 B.C., 10 years before the northern kingdom of Israel is pulverized and plundered by the Assyrian army. The Assyrians carried out a scorched earth policy in military conflict, and they were coming for Israel and Judah next. These people were dwelling in darkness, and they were terrified.

But internally, the conditions within Israel and Judah were just as dark and dire as those on the outside. The final verses of Isaiah 8 reveal that in addition to the military threat on the outside, the people were so disconnected from God they began turning to sin and darkness for comfort. For them, there was no light at the end of the tunnel. There was no hope. It was a time of total despair for all of Israel but especially Galilee (the northern part of Israel) because they would be the first to feel the boot of the enemy.

If I'm Israel I'm going, *“Okay God, time to bring the chariots of fire, the angel armies, some reinforcements. Cast all this darkness away from your people.”* And God says, *“I've got a better idea. Instead of all that, how about I give you a baby?”*

God's solution to all that pain, fear, sorrow, and darkness is a baby.

*“God's answer to everything that has ever terrorized us is a child.”*

- Ray Ortlund

But this wasn't just any child. I want to show you some unexpected and easily missed details out of this passage that show us how this baby, this child gives all of humanity a victory, a courage, a power over darkness that we cannot gain any other way.

## **WHAT HE DOES**

One of the things I love about God, and other times get me in trouble with God, is that He's constantly doing the opposite thing I expect Him to.

This passage points directly to one of those things.

**Isaiah 9:2**, "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**."

Now for context, Galilee of the nations was like a trash heap, or the junk drawer of Israel. People hearing this or reading this would have been appalled and thought, *"If God is going to do something glorious, he would have started at the divine HQ in Jerusalem, the Holy City!"*

**1 Corinthians 1:27**, "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong..."

Isaiah says God is going to do something glorious in Galilee. Even when all 12 tribes were there in Israel, Zebulun and Naphtali were the northern part, sort of the outskirts of Israel. They had long been deported and taken away, and now, Galilee was a place that still have Jews in it, but it also had people from a lot of other countries. It was a very multi-ethnic region. That's the reason for the phrase, "Galilee of the nations." It literally means Galilee of the Gentiles.

And God says, 800 years before the birth of Christ, that the salvation is going to come out of Galilee. No one would have expected it. Many people likely wrote Isaiah off, thinking he'd lost his mind.

There's another place in John 1 when Nathanael (one of the 12 disciples) is eventually introduced to Jesus. Phillip is trying to get Nathanael to meet Jesus, and he says, *"There's this rabbi. We think He might be the Messiah, the one we've been waiting for! He's from Nazareth."* Nathanael laughs in his face and makes fun of Jesus' hometown.

**John 1:46**, "'Can anything good come from Nazareth?'"

See, there has always been a pecking order. If you're from Rome, you look down on Jerusalem. If you're in Jerusalem, you look down on Galilee; If you're in Galilee, you look down on Nazareth. And if you're in Nazareth, you have no one else to look down on...you just own it. And God looks at Nazareth in Galilee, the lowest rung on the totem pole, and says, that's where I'm going to do something that's going to change the course of human history. That's where redemption will be born. The least likely, least expected place anyone would think.

This is what God does.

- Jesus was not born into a comfortable home. He was born into a feed trough, a manger.
- He was not born into a wealthy family with political influence or military power. He was born into a poor family with little social standing and no social power.
- He was not born surrounded by heads of state. He was surrounded by shepherds who were at the bottom of the social ladder and were considered unclean outcasts.
- He was born to a pregnant, unwed teenage peasant girl who would have been stigmatized the rest of her life (and she was) because of pregnancy prior to her marriage to Joseph...and her son would have received that same judgment and scorn.

In other words, Jesus had none of the markers that the world looks for in order to predict or determine someone's "success in life." No one looked at this family and thought, *"Their son is really going to be somebody."* He had none of the marks of greatness.

As far as the world's standard, Jesus was a person of no consequence. And yet, born into obscurity, and remaining there for 30 years, this baby became the most influential person in human history. In that feed trough, in that little manger, laid the King of Glory. In that humble, obscure, most vulnerable state, was the most holy, glorious, powerful human being to ever walk this earth.

God loves to bring greatness, bring power, bring salvation into your life through ways we would never expect. This is exactly what's happening in the Christmas story.

## **WHO HE IS**

Something that's always fascinated me is that when you read Genesis 1, you read the creation account. Have you ever noticed that before God created the sun, there was already light? When God created the world perfectly in Genesis 1, when God said, "Let there be light," there was light. The sun wasn't there yet. The sun wasn't created until later.

There was light, but there was no sun. How did that happen? I'll tell you how. In the book of Revelation, it tells us that when God has created a perfect world, where the city of God has come down out of heaven and the new heavens and new earth are

here, and the world is perfect, and all death is gone, and all suffering is gone, all injustice and disease and aging and decay are gone ... Why?

It says there will not be any sun. Why? You won't need a sun. The sun is just a symbol of ... what? It says God and the Lamb will be the light of the world. See, there's an ultimate light, and in that ultimate light, nothing dies. Nothing decays. We need that light, and we're being told that God is going to give it to us.

How do we get that light?

**Isaiah 9:6, "For to us a child is born..."**

- In other words, this child is the reason why we have all this hope, the reason why we know all this is going to happen. It's all going to happen because...

**Isaiah 9:6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."**

- No other religion on the planet makes a claim like this. This not just a child. These titles are only titles that could be given to someone who is not just from God but IS God.

Mighty God and Everlasting Father are both explicitly stating that this child is God in human flesh. We celebrate many things at Christmas– gathering of family, exchanging of gifts, sharing meals around the table, but ultimately, the source of all the nostalgia, celebration, and wonder at the center of Christmas, we celebrate the fact that God came down and was born!

And often we think, *"Oh that's so nice and beautiful that. God came down for us."*

John Stott, in his book *Basic Christianity* writes about the fact that when you read through scripture, no one ever had a mild reaction to Jesus. People either hated Him and tried to kill Him for claiming to be God, or they were scared to death of this lunatic and got as far away from Him as possible. Or they fell down and worshiped Him and gave Him their highest allegiance.

You embraced Him. You gave Him your life, your ultimately loyalty. You said, *"You're the reason I'm going to get up every day, to live for you."*

People hated Him, feared Him, or worshiped Him. Stott goes onto say that no one reacted mildly to Jesus. Nobody "liked" Him. Nobody just thought, *"He's a nice guy."*

*Kind of inspiring. I like Him. I get things out of his teachings. I try to learn some principles from Him from time to time."*

No one ever responded to Jesus that way because He doesn't give us that option.

**Isaiah 9:2**, "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."

In the gospels, Jesus Himself says that he is that light! In Matthew 4, Matthew writes this...

**Matthew 4:13-14**, "And leaving Nazareth He went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled..."

He is the eternal light that entered into the darkness of a world weary with sin, longing for the day of redemption.

### WHY HE CAME

Notice it doesn't just say, "For to us a child is born," it also says, "to us a son is given." He is a gift that we can choose to receive.

It's interesting the previous verse it talks about this war, the battle...

**<sup>5</sup> For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.**

Isaiah is saying a great battle is going to be fought, and all darkness and evil will be overturned. But you are not going to have to fight that battle. You won't need the warrior's boot. You won't need armor. You won't need a sword. Melt it down, burn it up. They're useless to you because your victory is going to be a gift, and someone else will do the fighting, not just to bring you out of darkness, but to give you the light to dispel the darkness. The victory is a gift.

The truth is, as beautiful as the birth of Jesus is, it forces us face a reality about ourselves that most people would rather ignore.

In order to truly receive the gift of the light of Jesus into your life, we have to recognize that we are a people who dwell in a land of deep darkness. A people who

are stained, saturated with the disease of sin, in desperate need of a savior, a messiah, a God who will come down, live a perfect life, die a sinner's death, and overcome the darkness so that we can enter into His glorious light and become agents of light in the world around us.

So today, we're going to celebrate not only the coming of the Messiah, light entering into the darkness, but we're going to remember the crucifixion of the Messiah. This child came to lay down His life for us.

**Isaiah 53:3-7**, "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. <sup>4</sup> Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth."

Today, as we've received the light and life of Jesus, may we be people who bring His light into the darkness we find around us, and to our friends, family, neighbors, and even strangers we may run into during the Christmas season. Because as those who've walked in great darkness, we have seen a great light; as those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on us light has shone. His name is Jesus. He is the light of the world. He's worth celebrating.