

A LIGHT HAS DAWNED: A CHILD IS BORN

Isaiah 8:19-9:7

Key Verse 2,6a

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.”

Isaiah was a prophet in the times of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, with the exception of Ahaz, the Chronicles of the kings of Judah says these kings were good (2 Chr 26-32). The country worshipped God in the temple, offered sacrifices and held all the festivals according to the Law of Moses. So, why does the book of Isaiah have such harsh rebukes for the nation of Judah? When Israel took over Canaan everywhere there were local altars or shrines called high places and they were commanded to destroy all of these, so that they would not be a snare for them (Dt 12:2-5). Yet, the constant theme of 1&2 Kings is the failure of the kings to destroy these high places which led the common people to live compromised lives, worshiping God among many other gods (2 Ki 15:3-4; 34-35; Chr 27:2; Isa 1:11-15; 57:4-5). The LORD said, **“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught”** (Isa 29:13). As a result, justice was perverted and the weak and marginalized were oppressed, people were full of superstition and pagan practices, and what was good was called evil and evil was called good (1:21-23; 2:6,8; 3:5,16; 5:7,20). It sounds a lot like our times, and we may expect God to have only a message of impending doom and destruction like we so often hear. However, Isaiah 7:14 says, **“the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”** which means God with us (Mt 1:18). God does not want to reject the adulterous world that runs away from him to chase after other lovers, he wants to be with us, he pursues us (Hos 3:1)—that is the incredible message of Christmas. As we begin today the first day of the season of Advent, let us consider the long foretold Jesus whom God zealously wants to dawn in the hearts of all people who are in darkness.

First, The world is in deep darkness without God (18:19-22,9:2).

Look at verse 19. In those days, the people of Judah were trembling because of an alliance between Northern Israel and Syria, and impending war (7:2). In such times, the people were desperate for comfort, answers and direction yet they refused to come to God (7:10-13). You know it's obvious really, since the Bible says you must not give your love, devotion, time, or money to anything more than

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to God, if you are doing these things, you have two choices: either you must rend your heart, cry out to God and cut off the compromises or you will harden your heart to that word. The people chose to harden their hearts (6:9-10). But their problems didn't go away, their anxiety didn't diminish. So, they turned to charlatans who "chirp" (ESV) "whisper and mutter" to trick people into thinking spirits were talking to them. Rather than listen to the living God, they wanted to listen to the dead. The old English for "spiritists" is "necromancer." "Yeah I need comfort and answers, let's go visit the Necromancer"—that's just bad news. It's shocking that in our modern enlightened times, business for mediums, palm-readers, astrologers, psychics, self-help gurus, and the like is booming! What does that tell you? People are desperate for answers. Do you know that people ask Google, "What is the meaning of life?" 1.3 million times a year on average?¹

"Should not a people inquire of their God?" (19) When you are in distress where do you turn? Immediately you fall on your knees in humble submission and cry out to God right? When the kids are sick or I can't fix something, even when I don't understand something about a passage, I immediately turn to Google, "Google knows everything..." right? In the Bible there is the beautiful example of Rebekah. When she experienced great pain in childbirth, she didn't get on WebMD, she got on her k-n-e-e's, and God revealed the entire life direction of her children to her, information that shaped the rest of their lives and helped her to correctly navigate through very difficult, life decisions at the critical moment—all from one prayer! Can Google give you that?!

Not only prayer, but Isaiah exhorted them, **"Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning"** (20a). The literal translation is, "To the law and to the testimony!" (ESV, BSB, NASB, KJV). The law, (Hebrew "torah") refers to the whole Bible as it existed in that time. "The testimony of warning," refers to God's specific command and warning in chapter 8 (8:16). I like the literal translation better, when you're in a time of distress "To the Bible! And to God's command!" In the time of distress king Ahaz decided to trust in Assyria but Isaiah held onto God's word saying, **"I will wait for the LORD...I will put my trust in him"** (8:16-17). Verse 20b says, **"If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn."** People need the word of God. They can try to find a kind of light from many different sources but none really illuminates. Without the word of God, the light can never dawn in their heart. God's word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (Ps 119:105). People who reject God's word, are left in utter darkness. They wander through life distressed and hungry for truth until they

¹ <https://www.mondovo.com/keywords/list-of-1000-most-asked-what-questions-on-google>

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become totally famished for meaning of life, then they become enraged and turn their eyes to heaven and blame God and blame the government (21). What's worse for all their talk of being enlightened and free, when they look at the world through their distorted lens, they see only distress and darkness and beyond that, fearful gloom of death, because through they don't want to admit it, they know that judgment and hell awaits them (22).

What a terribly tragic life. 9:2 says they are **“The people walking in darkness”** and **“those living in the land of deep darkness”** or **“in the land of the shadow of death”** (KJV). In the city, we don't have a proper appreciation for the terror of all-consuming darkness. Once in college, I tried to bike to the local state park to camp but didn't make it in time and was literally trapped in utter darkness, unable to see my hand in front of my face, in the middle of nowhere—it was quite terrifying. It says, **“The people are walking in darkness.”** But people can't walk in darkness, because you can't see where you are going. But people *are* walking in darkness. They have no idea where they are going, but all they can do is keep walking having no idea if they are going the right way or if their next step will be off a cliff, or what dangers are lurking on either side, they are full of fear, and insecurity, and feel isolated.

While things may look very bright on the outside the people of our country are living in a land of deep darkness. According to the US State Department, 244,000 American children and youth that are at risk for sex trafficking each year.² According to UNICEF, 2 million children are subjected to prostitution in the global commercial sex trade. The average victim age is between 11-14 and the average lifespan is 7 years.³ We talk about slavery like it's an ancient thing that we completely eradicated in America but there are more slaves today than in the history of the world, let that horrifying fact sink in for a second. Victims are being targeted on major campuses and foreign students are being lured to the US with the promise of education or through student exchanges.^{4 5 6 7}

² <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-human-trafficking>

³ <https://arkofhopeforchildren.org/child-trafficking/child-trafficking-statistics>

⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/local/arizona-breaking/2018/04/12/asu-police-issue-warning-sex-traffickers-luring-students/513205002/>

⁵ <https://fox6now.com/2018/09/16/does-occur-on-college-campus-human-trafficking-continues-to-be-growing-problem/>

⁶ <https://www.indystar.com/story/opinion/columnists/tim-swarens/2018/05/03/human-trafficking-victim-shares-story-forced-labor-indiana-university/569823002/>

⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/12/these-foreign-exchange-students-were-told-theyd-be-working-at-a-florida-yoga-studio-for-the-summer-instead-they-were-sold-for-sex/?utm_term=.6b7b1ff0ec09

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This week we heard about one Northwestern Student Daniel Jessell who was found dead in his dorm room having hung himself at the very moment that we were having our prayer meeting praying that students in deep darkness and depression this Christmas season may find hope and life in Jesus through this Christmas service.⁸ Suicide is the second most common cause of death among college students and has tripled since the 1950's.⁹

This year roughly 24,000 orphans—those whom God told Christians to care for (Ja 1:27)—will age out of foster care and 40% will become homeless. Only half will ever get a proper job and only 3% will ever hold a college degree. Not because they're lazy but because they are missing the basic love that should be intrinsic to every human being made in the image of God.¹⁰

Christians have become increasingly concerned about issues of gay marriage and public acceptance of transgender people. But you know, LGBTQ youth are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness. They are 4 times more likely to commit suicide than straight youth, in fact suicide is the leading cause of death for LGBTQ youth between 10-24 years old.¹¹ ¹² Our staff is currently studying Christian Ethics and sexual ethics and gender identity was the topic several weeks ago. While I wanted to go on about what the Bible says is correct, one of our pastors whose ministry is near Boystown said when he looked at the alarming number of assaults, murders, suicides and depression in this community, his heart was broken for them and he knew they needed Jesus. Not they need to repent, but they need Jesus. I was cut to the heart. In worrying about right and wrong, I never stopped to think about these people who are suffering in darkness. They need Jesus. **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”** (Jn 3:17). Can the same be said of us? Do we want to condemn the world or save the world through Jesus?

Is your heart broken yet? Or should I go on? Because I cried reading all these many stories about the darkness of our country that is right beneath the surface. It's so easy to look around and tell ourselves, everyone is happy, everyone will be fine, look they're working, they're going to school, the world is progressing toward a glorious utopia. But they are not fine, and they will not be ok. They are in

⁸ <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-met-northwestern-university-student-found-dead-20181129-story.html>

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/02/well/preventing-suicide-among-college-students.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/>

¹¹ <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/lgbtq-young-adults-experience-homelessness-more-twice-rate-their-peers>

¹² <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/LGBTQ>

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darkness. So, what shall we do? Acts 26:18 says, **“I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”** Struggling with human beings cannot solve the problem of darkness in our world because our real enemy is Satan. The REAL enemy is the sin that is within us that will always lead to these atrocities, no matter how sophisticated and prosperous our world becomes. The only solution, the ONLY solution is that people need Jesus. We may ask why are we having a Christmas Worship Service? Why am I dragging myself away from my children 3 nights a week, for 3 weeks and losing a lot of sleep for one worship service? Are we only going out of tradition, to have a fun time and enjoy ourselves? Then much prayer may not seem necessary. Traditionally, we have—as the Bible commands—spurred one another on to reach out to the lost around us and this practice was heavily criticized. But why did we do it? It is because the world around us is perishing in the darkness! Our hearts should be broken for them. They will not be ok, they will not find their own way, they need Jesus! They need the light of dawn! This Christmas service is the opportunity to reach out to the lost world with the **“good news of great joy.”** In preparing this message my heart was broken that I had become so habitual about Christmas, only thinking about chorus and excusing myself from inviting anyone because I am in CBF. Lord, forgive me for not seeing the pain and darkness of the world around me, forgive me that I didn’t care for the lost. Help me to see them and to bring them to meet the baby Jesus this Christmas!

Second, God wants to give the light of his son to all those in darkness (9:1-7).

Ok. All the dark part of the message is done. Verse 9:1 says, **“NEVERTHELESS, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.”** God would soon judge the nation but what he really wanted was to honor them through sending the Messiah (1, Mt 4:12-16).

Let’s read verse 2 together, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”** We’ve thought extensively about the darkness, but what is darkness? It has no substance, it is only the absence of light. Therefore, once the light shines, darkness immediately is forced to flee because the light is what is true, it is infinitely more powerful. In the same way, we must have faith that when the light of Jesus dawns, Satan must flee and the darkness of sin and death will be driven out of all who believe in him.

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The light of Jesus also overcomes the shadow of death. Luke 1:77-79 says, “[you will] give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.” John 8:12 says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Darkness holds the power of death, and because of the fear of death, people go crazy to survive in this world and live it up in this world before they die. They suffer from fatalism and hopelessness. Yet, death holds no power or fear for those who are in Christ Jesus, because he gives the light of eternal life. This is not just extending our life beyond death. But while we live in this world we cross over from death to true life (Jn 5:24). We experience the never ending supply of life that God gives that wells up to eternal life (Jn 4:13-14).

The light of Jesus also gives us purpose and direction. John 1:4 says, “**In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.**” It is probably my favorite Bible verse, I even named my Daughter Zoe (life) after it. Because you see, when Jesus showed us the way to eternal life through faith in him, it was like after millennia of people wandering, seeking, yearning and groping in the darkness, a beacon was lit, a lighthouse shone on the dark and stormy sea. And suddenly, everyone could know exactly where to go. They could see the path clearly. They had hope and they no longer needed to live in fear. In Jesus we don’t need to seek the darkness of this world to satisfy our soul’s hunger but we have a clear life direction and purpose in Jesus.

Jesus said that he came to give us life and give it to the full (Jn 10:10)! When this light dawns in a person’s life, what was once despair becomes hope, what was lost is found, what was sorrow becomes joy. Verse 3 says, “**You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.**” The joy of harvest after many months of intense labor is so much fun. For a warrior after an intense battle with death on every side, to suddenly look up and see that they’ve won, is a flood of indescribable joy. In the same way, when Jesus comes into a person’s life, he shatters the oppressive yoke of sin. He breaks their slavery to destructive habits and desires. When we are truly freed from Satan it never feels like painfully cutting off something we love but a huge relief, like a captive set free.

How does God accomplish all this? Let’s read verse 6a together, “**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his**

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shoulders.” Notice that it says “to us” not “to Mary”. **“To us a child is born, to us a son is given.”** God gave his one and only son *to us*. Jesus, who is Almighty God, exalted to the highest, surrounded by millions upon millions of angels, incarnated into the world so quietly as a baby, even as a single cell—he became nothing. There is nothing like that feeling when you are given your baby for the first time. The flood of love, the immediate bond that you would lay down your life for this child, deep sense of responsibility and the overwhelming feeling that you are completely unworthy—who am I that God should give his one and only son for me? Jesus came in the most humble way as a vulnerable, fragile child so that everyone from the lowest blue-collar workers watching their flocks by night, to kings traveling from afar could receive him and take him as their own.

Yet, this tiny baby was God’s king, **“the government will be on his shoulders.”** This is not a worldly government, a theocracy as Israel was, or a church state. Jesus is the king of God’s kingdom which is not of this world. When Jesus put on flesh, he brought the kingdom of God down to earth. Mk 1:15 says, **“The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”** Where God’s kingdom comes, there is no more sadness leading to death, no inequality or hunger for he is Wonderful Counselor full of all wisdom. Where God’s kingdom comes, there is no more slavery or trafficking, there is justice and freedom for the oppressed for he is Mighty God. In God’s kingdom, there are no more orphans for all have an Everlasting Father. In God’s kingdom there is no more strife over sin and identity because he is the Prince of Peace. He is the perfect king that we long for who has absolute power, authority and dominion. **“Of the greatness 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” (7).**

Sinful mankind lost God’s kingdom because of our sinful rebellion. Yet God does not grudgingly invite us back, he doesn’t want to keep it from us, or keep it only for an elite 1%. He does not give us His Son and His Kingdom as a concession. Verse 7b says, “The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.” With great zeal God brought salvation to the whole world. The entire point of the history of God from the moment of our sin to the death of Jesus has been to rescue us from the dominion of darkness and bring us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col 1:3).

Let’s be reminded today that when we look at this dark world, God’s desire is not to condemn the world but to save it through Jesus. Do you have God’s heart this season. May Jesus dawn in our hearts, so that we may take this **“good news of**

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great joy for all people” (Luke 2:10) to the dark world. Let me close with the lyrics of this song, “Give me your eyes for just one second, Give me your eyes so I can see, Everything that I keep missing, Give me your love for humanity. Give me your arms for the broken-hearted, The ones that are far beyond my reach. Give me Your heart for the ones forgotten. Give me Your eyes so I can see.”¹³ Amen.

¹³ Brandon Heath. “Give me your eyes.” What if we. July 23, 2008. Brandon Heath and Jason Ingram. Dan Muckala. SME