

**Promised by God** - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Isaiah 9:1-7** (#484)

**Introduction:** Whose promises do you trust? In our “post-truth” world, where it seems like more people than not have a very squishy view of what is absolute and what isn’t – which voices do you actually listen to? Trust in? Hold to?

What we really need is a voice that speaks words that aren’t politically loaded, that don’t have any hidden agenda or easy-to-miss undertones. And we need those words to not just bring more bad news, but actual hope: hope for us, in our daily lives, where joys and successes are often overshadowed by our failures.

So, let me ask the question again: when it comes to the most important things in life, who do you listen to? Which voice do you zero in on? Which do you tune out?

During the days of **Isaiah** – as we read last week in **chapter 8** – there were lots of clamoring voices. Not too different from today, actually. There were calls to find wisdom and understanding from all directions: turn to a medium; how about a necromancer? And this, too, is no different than what we find in our own world. “Listen to the experts,” “don’t listen to the corrupt experts.” “Find meaning in yourself.” “Listen to the wisdom found on the internet.” Yet the true answer we need isn’t more opinions, but an authoritative source of truth. A person who can never be wrong and who will never lead us astray. As we enter into **Isaiah 9**, I want you to hear the one voice that is worth listening to, what that voice promises, and how those promises would be – and are now – being fulfilled...

**9:1** The voice is that of the Lord, whose words are faithfully recorded here by Isaiah. If you weren’t with us last week – or if you have a memory that seems a little less quick these days, as mine often is – let me remind you that we read about a lot of gloom and anguish last week. So this verse serves as the transition, the point of change. Gloom and anguish is what will be the lasting reality for those who seek wisdom and help from anybody but God. Yet what of the remanent – what of those who repent of their sins and turn to the Lord during this judgment? Isaiah answers: there will be no lasting gloom for them.

Let's be careful to understand just what Isaiah means: he isn't saying that these faithful ones will somehow be magically transported out of the dire and drastic situation that Israel finds itself in during this era. Largely, they will suffer just like everyone else. Yet their suffering will be of a different quality, because they can have actual, real, hope. So yes, there is judgment, there will be defeat and exile. Yet that won't always be the lot of God's people. Just as these two northern tribes were hit hard by Israel's enemies, they will – alongside the rest of God's people – end up experiencing His blessings upon the faithful in the future.

Stop for a moment and consider: the way that our whole modern world is setup, we are taught to believe that if you act the right way, achieve the right things, work hard enough, and be nice enough – then you'll have success in life. It's a very legalistic way of thinking, isn't it? Because if life isn't going well, then the solution that is always offered by our world is to do more, work harder, try something different. But the reality of our lives is rarely part of the conversation: we are sinners who deserve the bad things that happen to us. This is true both as individuals and also as peoples and nations. Yet the good news is that God loves sinful people – so much, in fact, that He will rescue them from themselves. The solution for whatever burdens you carry today, isn't to find the right strategy, the right lifehack – helpful as those sometimes may be – but rather, from the start, to look to the Lord for help. To cry out to Him. To trust Him. Do you? Have you? Will you? Listen to the Lord and what you'll hear for repentant people is not more words of condemnation, but instead words of hope, words of life. What are those words? Let's read them...

**9:2-5** The ESV translation of the Bible sets these verses in poetic form and I think that makes a lot of sense. Notice, first of all, the contrasts from where things have been to where they will be: the people walked in darkness, but have seen a great light. They dwelt in darkness, but light has shone on them.

In both cases, notice the problem: darkness. Sin, evil, rebellion, wickedness, loss of hope. Note the solution: they themselves don't somehow create a really bright lightbulb; instead, the words are in the "perfect" tense. Now, for those of you

who – like me – didn't pay nearly enough attention in school to grammar, the perfect tense can express – among other things – the idea of something that is more than just an event in the past, but rather something that has happened previously yet continues to have effects into the future. What does that mean?

Ultimately, it means that Isaiah is writing in faith, which is to say, he is writing as if God has already accomplished all that He was then promising. Certainly Isaiah is being inspired by the Lord to write in the way that he does, but I think we need to understand that the form in which Isaiah is writing these inspired words shows us something about his faith in the Lord: it's as if Isaiah is writing from a point in the future when God had already accomplished all of these promises – that's how sure he was in what the Lord had said.

So, what does all this amount to? From darkness to light to – as **verse 3** states – joy and rejoicing. God will rescue and care for His people. The oppression that they will soon undergo – the yoke of burden, the staff, the rod of oppression – these will be broken, shattered, by the Lord. The fate of God's people isn't simply to be slaves and exiles forever! Neither, as we read in **verse 5**, is it to always live in fear of war and battle. Instead: God will do something to rescue His people, to change their situation, to move them from the darkness of sin and death – of war and exile – to life and gladness.

Let's camp here for a moment. God promises that His people will not always be in their present circumstances. But remember how they got themselves into this mess in the first place: it wasn't just happenstance, as if they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Instead, the people of God are receiving this judgment because of their sin. They deserve all this darkness and destruction. The fact that God would preserve them through this punishment is absolutely amazing! If you're looking for a definition of grace, this is it. If you want to know what real love is – not the flimsy stuff of Hallmark and social media and warm fuzzies, but a love that is costly and sacrificial yet lasting – then this is it. With a truth so important, let's dare not miss what it means for us...

First, it means that God is for His people. Yes, He punishes them – and us – because we deserve it, but also because we need it. There is no true love without correction. Parents: letting your children do anything they want without consequences isn't love, it's hatred. The modern idea of having no limits, nothing out of bounds isn't loving at all. Discipline, limitations, not only are these the things of reality, but even more they are the path of the Christian life, of faithfulness. Which brings us to the next point...

Second: God's love for us is not based on our performance. This is the other side of the coin: God doesn't promise rescue and deliverance for His people because they got their act together and became really good at keeping His law. Isn't that the temptation of our world? We rebound from sin and wickedness and start thinking that if we can just try hard enough, set the right habits, resist that chocolate bar, then it'll all be ok. We zip around like a fly, moving from being Sadducees who doubt large parts of God's Word to being Pharisees who think that if we just get really strict about it, then we'll be ok. Nothing could be farther from the truth. What is required is not our own performance, but trust in the Lord: we look to Him rather than seeking truth and wisdom elsewhere.

Which brings us to our application: we live on the other side of these promises – at least in part. The arrival of Christ – which we'll speak of in a moment – has already begun to fulfill these prophecies and, for those who trust Him, has already begun to change our lives. But I wonder: where do you look, who do you listen to, when it doesn't seem like life has changed at all? When the oh-so-wonderful miraculous conversion story isn't your own? When the answered prayers seem to all be in other people's lives? If that describes you, then remember Isaiah's own situation: he was preaching these words during a time when Israel *was not* experiencing blessing. Therefore, you and I live in the present, but we trust that the Lord's word will hold true in the future. Your task in life is simply to look to the Lord, trusting what He has said, even as you endure the present. One great way to do that? Just as Isaiah has shown us: think and speak and act as if all that the Lord has said is exactly what will happen – because it will. Indeed, for us living

on this side of the cross, it has already begun to happen. Let's close with that third and final picture: how have these promises already begun to be fulfilled?

**9:6-7** If you don't recognize any other part of Isaiah's book, you'll probably recognize this one: darkness to light? That's **Luke 1:79**. Unto us a child is born? **Luke 2:11**. In short: Luke records for us the fulfillment of this very passage, and it is fulfilled by Jesus Himself – God's own Son, who took on human flesh. It was He who gave those first disciples hope. It was He who perfectly fulfilled God's law. It was He who died on the cross instead of the disciples. And it is His death that applies to all who trust Him. This Jesus is the fulfillment of God's prophecy!

Just what does this all look like? Jesus is born, He grows, He is faithful. He is the One who will someday return to rule over everything. He is the One whom we don't deserve, yet can't live without. And this is why Christ is the Wonderful Counselor – filled with wisdom and mercy and grace. It is because He is fully God in the flesh that He can rightly be called Mighty God. He, being fully God even as He is fully man, is the Everlasting Father to His people – there is no other God. Jesus and the Father are distinct, yet both are God alongside the Holy Spirit. And this Savior ultimately will usher in peace – not only between nations and peoples, but peace between God and us. Our rebellion will end and He will give us joy!

If you are tracking along with our Bible reading plan, it wasn't too many weeks ago that you came to **2 Samuel 7**. There we read of David's desire to build a house for God, but the Lord had other plans. In **verse 13**, we found that a descendant of David would build the house, but the promise didn't end when Solomon finished construction. Instead, the verse continues: "and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." The Davidic throne, the kingdom that he inaugurated, will not end. This is important – so much so that it is repeated in **verse 16**: "Your throne shall be established forever." How can God say that? What does it mean? Flip back to **Isaiah 9** and we read of that very throne of David being established and upheld. And now look again to **Luke 2**: this Jesus is that King.

You and I might be tempted to say “really? Are we sure about this? How can Jesus who comes so many centuries later really fulfill this prophecy?” And the answer comes from a blind man in Luke **chapter 18**: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” That’s irony: the blind man truly sees where we so often don’t. This Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises.

Let me conclude with two truths we need to hold to during these uncertain days:

First: look at how Christ’s kingdom will be ruled – with justice and righteousness forever. Do you long for that? For a land that isn’t ruled by who has the most money or has the dirt on everybody or has the most connections? Do you yearn for actual justice not because you yourself would fare well in such a place, but because the God of all justice has granted you mercy? If so, then the call for you is to look with hope towards this kingdom, and to care more about this kingdom than any other.

Second: keep track of how all this will be accomplished. By your and my effort? By electing the right people? Passing the right laws? Holding to the correct standards of morality? Whatever bit of good any of those things might produce, they aren’t what is cited here. Instead, God’s promises are upheld and fulfilled not by our works or wisdom or effort but – oh this is truly good news for broken people like us, prone to failure – they are upheld by God Himself! He does the work. We get the reward. This week: rest in Him. You don’t have to perform. You don’t have to somehow make all things new. Those are God’s accomplishments. Instead, you and I simply need to trust Him. To doggedly cling to what He has said. To believe that our God truly is this good and glorious and gracious even as we await His return, even as we await the fulfillment of the remaining promises. Let’s pray...