



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

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“Unto us”

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-7, Matthew 4:12-17, Colossians 1:9-14

Today’s passage took my mind to the U2 album ‘War’. Do you remember the boy on the cover? Instead of tanks and guns, Bono decided to show connection to people’s lives and the impact of war. It is a powerful and confronting picture of an intense, searching child’s face. To live through these times in Ireland was dark. This Irish band was finding it’s voice to speak out about the darkness and injustice!

In Isaiah 8:1-9:7 the same contrast and conflicts of war and peace; injustice and justice are captured through the oracles and reflections of the darkness and the light of life.

In a dark nation, it is Isaiah and his children who are the sign for the future generations of God’s people.

Chapter 8, although we haven’t read it today, deals with similar events to chapter 7, which Cameron preached from last week. The name ‘**Immanuel**’ is mentioned in 8:8 and is alluded to again in 8:10.

In today’s chapters of Isaiah, the outworking of Immanuel, God with us, is in terms of darkness and light. In the short term, it means gathering darkness, which is the judgement being forewarned by Isaiah, but in the long term, the light with the coming of the Messiah.

The passage has four oracles, given to Isaiah directly from the Lord, and two brief reflections on their significance by Isaiah himself.

“The Lord said to me.” We call these oracles as they are considered to be delivered as a divine utterance for his people and mostly likely as an answer to a request for God’s guidance.

Chapter 8:1-10 the people are being given a chance to abandon their faithless scheming and rely entirely on the Lord as their deliverer. King Ahaz and the Israelite people have rejected the Lord’s help, but Isaiah says that in the end, it’s what the Lord has purposed and planned that will ultimately be achieved.

9 Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered!

Listen, all you distant lands.

Prepare for battle, and be shattered!

Prepare for battle, and be shattered!

10 Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted;

propose your plan, but it will not stand,

for God is with us

The rest of chapter 8 reveals Isaiah’s inner turmoil. He sees the urgency of teaching his followers. They need to understand their God before the darkness closes in around them. They need to preserve Isaiah’s message of hope for the future generation, who may be more willing to hear.

There is a change of mood in chapter 9 from fearful gloom to Isaiah’s confidence in the Lord. With his gaze once more fixed on the future, he looks past the darkness of the Assyrians. For Isaiah, devastation gives way to glory.

Chapter 9:1 introduces a sharp contrast “Never the less”:

“Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.”

The promise of salvation is clearly the climax of the movement from darkness to light. At the same time, it represents the final reversal of the situation in chapter 7 where the Davidic house, represented by Ahaz, was rejected.

The oracle of chapter 9 points directly to the coming Messiah, the great son of David, the one true light.

Isaiah wrote this prophecy to lift the gaze of the people from their circumstances to the great hope they actually do have. This is the message we hold. We do have hope. We have rock solid certainty about the future. A future that starts in this life and goes beyond when Jesus calls us to eternity with him.

Our future is laid out for us in this prophecy. Today, I want us to lift our eyes to this hope.

From verse 6, what a child, what a son, is promised:

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he (this son, this king) will be called
Wonderful Counsellor (supernatural wisdom), Mighty God (unstoppable power),
Everlasting Father (eternal in nature, but also parental in nature), Prince of Peace.

This is the promise Isaiah lays out.

To Us

The Israelite nation had lost this hope. They were not secure as the people of God. A once proud people weren't yet reduced to rubble, but the writing was on the wall. Assyria was coming. Everyone knew it. They were surrounded by darkness.

Kings were desperately seeking a solution. Should they befriend Assyria, hoping that Assyria's king would see no reason to invade the land of a friend? Should they join forces and try to stand against Assyria? Can they find support in Egypt? They are, after all, the last buffer between Assyria and Egypt. Where is their help coming from?

For his part, Isaiah speaks as a prophet with the heart of a pastor. He told the people to pause and take a breath. **To us** a son is given. He spoke out against these human solutions to the region's problems. The one place the people weren't turning to for help was to God. They were running around madly devising schemes to survive as a people, but they refused to seek God in the matter.

Maybe it's because of everything happening around them they were thinking that God either wouldn't or couldn't help them. Where is God in all of this? We are his people. If Assyria overruns us, what does that say about our God compared to the gods of the Assyrians? Is our God really the one true God? Does God even exist? If God is real, and loves us, and we are his people, why are these things happening? Are the questions any different today?

But this son that Isaiah speaks of is the son given **to us**. We the people of God have not been left alone. God keeps his promises. He has promised us a son, a King, who would come and rescue us, and he has made this promise specifically **to us**.

Nearly 2 700 years later, are we sure of this son, who has been given **to us**? Could God have given anything else that could show so clearly, we are loved by him? **To us**, a son is given. Think on this. It is amazing. A son has been given. God truly loves me. I can walk in the light. I do have true hope. I can claim the promises of God and that is at the centre of this prophecy.

Verse 2 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.'

God is reassuring his people that this exile will not be forever. He is saying there will be a reversal. He will act to give hope to his people.

Verse 3 describes the huge joy that will be given to His people, when finally, their redeemer comes to liberate them from their oppressor. ‘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.’

This promise hangs on the birth of this great king, verse 6. He is the one who will do this. ‘For **to us** a child is born, **to us** a son is given’. This child, this human child born into the world, will be our divine King. Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

This child given **to us** grows up and starts to put God’s kingdom into operation, wherever he goes. This is what it looks like, he says, when God is running things. The world gets turned the right way up.

Read, in the gospels, as the Wonderful Counsellor (attributed to the Spirit of God) goes to work, dealing with individuals but also confronting the systems which had enslaved them, and upsetting the slave masters.

See, as the Mighty God (attributed to Jesus the Son of God) strides through Galilee, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, rescuing people and restoring creation itself.

Look on in awe as the Everlasting Father (God the Father) is seen mirrored in the incarnate Son, giving himself totally to his beloved world.

Jesus, from his earliest beginnings with a price on his head, through to his riding the donkey into Jerusalem, shows what it looks like when the Prince of Peace is on the move.

He comes to get God’s kingdom off the ground – or perhaps we should say, precisely *on to* the ground, the real life of real people. And that involves taking upon himself the full force of the world’s cruel systems, the political and economic enslavement from which we still suffer, so that the power of evil can be broken and something new may take its place.

That was true at Jesus’ birth, as it was true at his death.

Isaiah says Jesus will be without rival. When a King has this much power, purity and wisdom, can you imagine his kingdom? Isaiah says this kingdom will go on forever. Verse 7: ‘Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.’

This kingdom, this government, unlike earthly government, will be characterised by justice, and righteousness, and peace.

Have you noticed this prophesy is written in the present tense. It is a rock-solid promise now.

Peace and justice and profound hope for the world is possible, and the little Bethlehem baby is a sign of this truth. Today we are reminded that this son, Jesus, points us to the character of God and his plan for his people.

As followers of Christ, we need to live in the present of this promise. Our hope is sure. This son, given **to us**, has changed how we view our world. With the story of the Christ-child in our hearts, and the Spirit of Jesus giving us energy and direction, we are called to be kingdom-bringers in wherever we go. Isaiah spoke of the authority of the child growing continually, spreading justice and peace throughout the world, and it is through the work of Jesus’ followers that this is to come about.

When we learn his way and walk his path, when we submit ourselves to him and his good judgment, we know peace. Well-being, in the midst of the craziness of life in this world. Nehemiah 8:10 “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength”. Michael reminded us of this truth a couple of weeks ago.

In human terms, the people of God were still weak and vulnerable, facing darkness. But their future was in God’s hands. The God who is in control. Our future too is ultimately in God’s hands. He is still in control.

Psalm 46:10 directs us

“Be still and know that I am God.

Now, when Jesus in John 14:6 says;

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me”

he is saying to us, “I AM God’s way, I AM God’s path. If we want to learn God’s ways and walk God’s path through this life, we do it following Christ, the son who came **to us**. There is no other way.

We have heard God’s word. Now it is time to reflect.

Be still for a moment and pray.