

JESUS THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Isaiah 9:1-9:7

Intr:

In our first Advent reading by the children this morning, they lit a candle that represents forgiveness in our spiritual relationship with others.

If you'll remember what they read, it went like this:

- Too often forgiveness makes us feel like we're alone in a dark place.
- We've been wronged.
- People have done mean things and said words that cut us like a sharp stone.
- Too often we wear our anger and our hurt like a suit of armor so that no light, no help, no healing, can get through.

Christmas is not always a time of light even for those who profess to be Christian believers because of this thing called unforgiveness.

Jesus commanded us:

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Mark 11:24-26

Paul taught us in this passage:

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Col. 3:12-14

For many it is a time of darkness because of disobedience to the commands of Jesus.

You see – it's important that we understand that the darkness is anything opposite of the way Jesus lived and commanded us to live as Christian believers.

You see before Jesus came there was definite darkness.

Isaiah chapter 8 and 9 describes this prophetically.

The darkness here is a result of sin and of Exile caused by sin and even unforgiveness, not being willing to forgive another becomes a sin.

Illus.

I recall preaching in my last church a sermon on forgiveness.

A man came to me after the service was over and he said, "Pastor, I guess I am going to go to hell."

And I said to him, "Why do you say that?"

And he said, "Because of your sermon this morning. I hold an unforgiving spirit against someone and I can't forgive them. And according

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to your sermon this morning, and I can't forgive this person, then I'm destined to hell."

And I told the man, "Surely, surely you understand first, it's not my sermon, it's the Word of God. And secondly, surely you can ask God to help you forgive that person."

And the man said, "No! I can't and I won't!"

Folks, I can't imagine this. Jesus tells us to forgive others for their wrongs they do to us and say against us.

You see today is no different in our situations and circumstances.

The Word of God still teaches us that sin separates us from God, Recorded in Matthew 6:15, Jesus said,

"But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Sin leads to Exile and Exile is separation from God and from the place where He would have us to be.

Understand this now, our problem is self. Self is stubborn and does not want to forgive.

Darkness abounds and is always a result of losing the Light.

Remember the Lady who asked the question about Christmas when she said: **"Who started this thing anyway..."** is a caricature of this world

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in which we live, a very dark world, because we have lost the Light.

We'd rather hold on to the grudge.

We'd rather keep those hurt feelings.

We'd rather blame some one else.

We'd rather be mad than glad.

We'd rather cuss at someone than give them a blessing.

We'd rather keep a broken heart than have a mended heart.

People, that's all darkness!

How could it have happened?

How did we loose our way?

This is not the real question of our text.

Our text only speaks in the positive and the GREAT NEWS IS: ***THOSE WALKING IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT!***

You and I read in Charles Dickens classic work, **A Tale of Two Cities.**

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we

had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. . . .”

The French revolution had brought the worst of times and the best of times to both France and England.

Dickens words were truly descriptive of the mood of the world.

But these words could also have been spoken about our time.

In many ways we, in America, are experiencing the best times the world has ever known, and at the same time, and in other ways, these are the worst of times.

The same was true of the time just prior to the birth of Christ.

There was both despair and hope residing in the hearts of the people of Israel, sometimes the Jews experienced emotional extremes at the same time.

It was the worst of times.

“**Contrast**” is the best word of the prophet Isaiah used here.

1. The people understood words of gloom, distress, darkness and death.

These were the words of their day.

These are the words of Exile. These Jews were not free people

These are the words associated with the penalty of sin.

2. For Israel, Idolatry had brought about this great day of despair.

What do we mean by idolatry?

We mean other gods, (small “g” than Big God) took their place in people’s hearts and lives.

What can a little god be?

Anything you put before God.

3. As in any age for anyone, to turn away from the living God to serve anything or anyone, including ourselves will bring us to the place of exile, and this puts us in peril of punishment for our sin.

Yes, as the kids read this morning - forgiveness is sometimes hard!

You and I feel crushed by what has happened in our life.

You’re crushed and hurt by whatever it is that devastates your life.

You wonder is God there, how can I worship God?

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You wonder how could God allow this terrible thing to happen.
You carry this awful burden around your neck and it continues to drag you into darkness.

My friend, do you realize that is exactly what the Devil wants you to do when you carry this and don't give it to God.

It puts you into exile, into the darkness of the soul.

And you experience this thing called the awful of unforgiveness.

Maybe you even blame God for it.

4. Darkness is always the atmosphere when we are out of the presence of God.

The demons of your life can occupy your life.

Satan's angels/demons are cruel against you, and your mind, causing you to experience spiritual poverty.

In those days when this scripture was written the mood of despair had settled among many of the people, for not many years before they had experienced victory over their enemy, the Syrians, which they celebrate to this day in the holiday called Hanukkah.

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Listen, friend, there was a time in your life when there was victory and you remember it.

I want to remind you dear believer this morning that the Messiah is real.

Just as the people of Israel longed for the coming of the Messiah, so today we must long and find Him for our lives.

They yearned for the Coming of the Messiah.

They clung to the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah: ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase 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. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this”*** (Isaiah 9:6-7).

They longed for His Coming!

The people of God were living with this hope and holding on to the dream of the prophets for their Messiah to come.

They saw a united Israel which would freely and fully worship God. They saw deliverance from oppression.

And into this good-times-bad-times-world, Jesus came.

The world at that time had grown hard and cynical, and darkness abounded, but there was a breath of hope in the hearts of some of the people as well.

There was a sense, there was an expectation that God was about to do something wonderful.

At the birth of Christ, darkness pervaded the world, and God's Good News was coming into a bad-news world.

The first thing that I would like to bring out is:

I. God's Good News is greater than the world's bad news.

John described The Messiah's coming as **The Light coming into the darkness**, and he said that ***"the darkness could not extinguish it."***

The Greek literally means: ***"The darkness could not take it down."*** It could not conquer it, neither could it overpower it.

Darkness is negative.
It is simply the absence of light.

It has no power of its own.

If you would go back and read verses 20-22 in Chapter 8 you would find the description of the times –

"Desperate, distressed, hungry, Fearful, Gloom and Darkness, Utter Darkness" are the words describing the age of that time.

That's what the world was facing at that time.

Believer friends, I don't want that to go over our heads and we just piously nod.

Sin abounded in every way. Do you understand? Let me read a reading that will explain what I am trying to get across:

SOME ATHEIST ENJOY CHRISTMAS

Christmas isn't just for Christians anymore.

Nearly half of adult Americans report they personally know someone who doesn't believe in God but still will celebrate the yuletide this year, according to a survey of 1,001 people conducted by Scripps Howard News Service and Ohio University.

Significantly more people will set up a Christmas tree than will attend a worship service on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. And Americans

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overwhelmingly believe the holiday has become less focused on the birth of Jesus than it used to be.

"Historically, it has been a struggle for America to find meaningful holidays that include a sufficiently broad number of people. But Christmas seems to have many modes of interpretation upon which we can set our own personal needs," said University of Texas historian Penne Restad, author of the scholarly book "Christmas in America: A History."

"Christmas has become as much a celebration of community as it has a celebration of religion," she said.

The survey asked if "you, personally, know anyone who does not believe in God but still celebrates Christmas?" Forty-five percent answered yes, 51 percent said no and 4 percent were undecided.

"Sure I know people like that. I'm one of them," said New Yorker Ron Barrier, a leader of American Atheists, a 2,500-member national organization defending the rights and interests of atheists. "As a free thinker, I believe the holidays are a great tradition regardless of the underlying basis for them."

Read with me in chapter 9 and verse 1

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

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Now I want you to notice there is no darkness in the world that can extinguish a single candle.

Light is a very positive force.
Darkness cannot resist it.

Illustration:

There have been times when I have come into the Worship Dome at night when it is totally dark.

The lights are off and it is dark outside.

I cannot see a single very far in front of me.

There are no colors visible.
As far as I can tell, the Worship Dome has nothing in it since I cannot see anything.
Or, as far as I know, there may be people hiding everywhere.
I sort of get the feeling what it means to be blind when darkness engulfs you, Pastor Joe.

Do you ever get that feeling of fear?

I recall when I was younger and it wasn't all that far back when I was outside in the dark and I had this terrible feeling that someone or some thing was after me and it was pitch dark.

It made the hair on the back of neck stick right straight up.

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I had that terrible sensation of fear that that something was ready to pounce on me.

People, now listen, **darkness creates illusions.**

But if I could just turn on one light, or even light a small candle, I can see everything. (light a candle)

And the more light I turn on the clearer I can see.

I can see the carpeting and white drapes, the chairs.

You see - I know where to go and where not to go.

I can see clearly.

When the lights are on there is no way to let enough darkness in to overcome the light.

You see – that’s how Jesus works in our lives through His Holy Spirit to give Light in such areas that would be dark in our lives.

It is The Light that overcomes darkness, not the other way around.

The same is true with God’s Kingdom of Light.

My friend, do you realize this morning that the prince of darkness, the devil wants you to remain in your darkness?

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He doesn’t want you to be forgiven and neither does he want you to forgive the wrong others have done to you.

He doesn’t want the Light of Jesus to shine on you.

But when the Light of Christ comes the darkness can not resist and neither can it put it out.

God’s light has come into the world to overcome the darkness, and the darkness is helpless against it.

It can only create illusions. And my friend, you might be living in dark illusions this morning.

Light helps us to see what is real. God is real!
Jesus, our Messiah is real!

We all know the light of the sun that comes up at the dawn gradually overcomes the darkness of this universe until there is a complete dispelling of the darkness.

I’ve sat in the woods and watched it a hundred times.

You see this sunlight goes from planet to planet giving light and warmth. It’s the marvel of the creation of God’s universe.

Light is greater than darkness and God’s Good News is always greater than bad news.

There is not even any comparison.

I suppose that if you only listened to the evening and morning news, you would think there was only darkness in the world — only bad news.

But if you would start your day reading the Good News of God, your mind would be filled with the Good News, and the 6:00 evening bad news could not overcome it.

Friend, whatever you're going through right now that seems to be the dark time of your life; God is trying to send you **The Light** to dispel darkness.

Here is one of the promises we have from God:
“Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

I'm preaching to someone this morning that needs just a little more faith to actually believe that God is there for them.

God's Good News is Greater than the world's Bad News.

The second thing I would like to point out is:

II. God's Good News transforms the world's bad news.

I want you to think about when Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem of Judea when she was heavy with child.

The bad news was the way Joseph and Mary were treated.

All through the young life of Jesus there were those who tried to kill Him.

People even accused Jesus of being a Devil!

The Word says that ***“They said all manner of evil things about Him.”***

You see human nature isn't that much different today.

If we as believers are not sanctified thru and thru and filled with God's Holy Spirit, we'll do the same thing.

But because God's Good News is greater than the bad news, it is able not only to overcome it, **it can even transform it.**

The Bible says, ***“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”*** (Romans 8:28).

God works in the good things and even the bad things, because He can transform all things.

The only power that darkness has is to convince some that there is no light.

Darkness takes hope away.
The Light brings hope.

The Word of God says, ***“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. . . . For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. . . .”*** (Isaiah 9:2,6).

When I read the news or watch the news of the senseless deaths done by the terrorists of the world, or some senseless shootings in Columbus, I think of those who are living in the shadow of death and utter darkness, those who need the Light to dawn on them.

It seems like every night the television shows images of hate, destruction and senseless loss of life.

But a couple weeks ago I walked into the Children’s hospital room and saw Pastor Derek and Amy with their new little baby girl, Emy, it was like two different worlds, and to hear Pastor Derek cheering on little Emy when she was in a crisis in her life, Derek was saying “You go little girl, you go!”

I can tell you that the Good News is greater than the bad news.

I can tell you this morning that the Light is greater than the Darkness!

I was up at 5:00 on Saturday morning trying to complete this sermon and I watched the sun rise in the east and watched the sun dispel the darkness.

But there are those times in every person’s life when despair and darkness sets in like a shroud.

There are only shadows and very little bit of light.

It looks like nothing is going to work out.

It looks like the future promises no change.

Hopes are dashed and dreams die.

It’s in those times that the hard questions come.

No less a person than John the Baptist had a time like that in his life.

He thought he was doing God’s will, and in spite of his faithfulness, God allowed Herod to throw him into a dungeon to await execution.

Dark thoughts began to roll around in his mind.

Heaviness lay on his heart.

He sent a couple of his students to Jesus so that he might answer some of his questions.

He said, ***“Are you the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”***

You see - Doubts were overshadowing his faith and friend I’m telling you this morning if it did it to John the Baptist, don’t be surprised if it will try to do the same thing to you.

He was confused and he was uncertain.

Remember now that this is the man, who as an unborn infant, leaped in his mother’s womb at the very presence of Jesus in Mary’s womb.

He had seen the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus and heard the voice from heaven saying, ***“This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased”*** (Matthew 3:17).

Before he was imprisoned he witnessed the miracles that Jesus was doing, and after he was imprisoned he had heard even more about Jesus’ work.

But in prison, John could only feel the darkness.

Jesus told the ones John had sent: ***“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead***

are raised, and the Good News is preached to the poor” (Matthew 11:3-6).

Some of you are in a dungeon this morning. You feel the darkness of your soul.

Do you want to get out of your darkness and the prison that is holding you?

You see – now understand this, the Kingdom of God did not depend on the circumstances of John the Baptist’s life.

It did not matter what Herod, in his darkness, was doing.

The Light had come, and the darkness could not stop it.

**The blind were seeing,
The lame were walking,
The sick were cured,
The deaf were hearing,
The sick were healed,
The dead were being raised and
The poor were given hope.**

It did not matter what Herod was doing. He could never overcome what God was doing.

It does not matter what this world is doing today. They cannot overcome what God is doing!

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Now folks, think of this, **from the Cradle to the Cross** - even the Roman soldiers execution of Jesus on the Old Rugged Cross could not extinguish the Light, because of the good that God would do through the cross would **transform the worst into the Best because of The Light.**

Summary:

God's Good News would turn evil into good, and curses into blessing.

Messiah had come to earth; He would love the world and bring His Light to it.

Believer friends, The day is coming when bad news will no longer exist. Jesus is Coming Again!

The Bad News will not even exist in our memories.

The Bible also has a tale of two cities.

The book of Revelation tells about the eternal struggle between the city of evil called **Babylon**, and the city of God — **the New Jerusalem.**

These are kingdoms growing side by side, like wheat and weeds, until the End of Time.

Side by side, evil and good exist together in this world.

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The best of times and the worst of times going on at the same time — parallel kingdoms operating in the same world we live in.

Babylon represents the worst of times.

It has spread its bad news throughout the world.

It is an empire of evil, but God will destroy it.

But it will be just as incredible to see how quickly God brings the New City, The New Jerusalem.

John, who wrote the book of Revelation, describes it in his vision: ***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’”*** (Revelation 21:1-4).

The old order of bad news has passed away.

The Good News has overcome the bad news.

The Light has dispelled the darkness.

But you have to be looking for Good News if you are going to find Good News.

You have to believe that God brings the best of times in the middle of the worst of times.

Spiritual Application:

How do we let God's Light/His Son shine in us?

Isaiah chapter 58 tells some of the ways we can put aside darkness and let God's light shine (Isaiah 58:9-10)

The old Prophet Isaiah said, **9b "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."**

As you and I look at these verses, think of the way Jesus fulfilled this description during His earthly ministry.

If you want GOD'S light to shine in you, you must do away with:

- **The yoke of oppression,**

and that means both your oppression of others and the oppression of things, habits, and addictions on you.

How are you presently being an oppression to other people? Do you realize that it is a sin?

What habits and addiction do you have in your life that is causing darkness to overcome your spiritual life? You are living with guilt because of those habits.

- **The pointing finger**

Oh, how we love to justify ourselves and point our fingers of judgment on others.

Do you realize this morning that Jesus said **"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."** Luke 6:36-38

That was the way of the Pharisees that Jesus condemned.

- **And malicious talk**

Those in darkness try to comfort themselves by talking negative and being critical of others around them, but in the end it does them no good.

Those in the light cease from that kind of talk, and instead say things that edify and

build others up. This is a true example of the Light in a believers life.

The ministry of encouragement is a refreshing change from the talk of those in darkness.

And you must, instead

- spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry
- And satisfy the needs of the oppressed,

Isaiah 58 tells us, “***then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.***”

This is a picture of the way Jesus lived His life.

And if we live like Jesus --- if His light shines within us --- we, too, will shine.

That’s what Jesus was talking about in the Sermon on the Mount when He said: “***In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.***” Matthew 5:1

We can live with anger, negativism, criticism and unforgiveness in our lives.

We can give in to pessimism and despair.

We can look for the worst, and fail to believe the best.

It is so easy to believe in the power of darkness.

It seems so strong at times in our world we live in.

It appears to be all around us, closing in on us.

Everyone seems to be giving into it, and we feel overwhelmed and alone.

Invitation:

Friends, what is the darkness you are facing in your life?

You have to receive the Good News into your heart and make it a part of your life.

Medical science tells us that if you would be shut up in a completely dark room for just a few months you would completely lose your sight.

It is as if the eyes forget how to see.

Muscles and nerves atrophy, and eventually sight is no longer possible even if you are brought back to the light.

Live in spiritual darkness long enough and you lose your spiritual eyes.

But the Good News is that Jesus is still in the business of healing the blind.

You can come to Him for a healing and find it.

It is so easy to live in the darkness, to make the choice to stay in the darkness.

We can live as though there is no Good News — only the bad news.

You see – you and I have a choice!

Are you going to insist on staying in the dark?

Do you know that Jesus came just for you to dispel the darkness of your heart?

Jesus is here this morning wanting to turn on His light in your life so the darkness won't engulf you.

It doesn't mean you won't recall what put you in the dark, but it does mean that you can have His peace and joy again.

The devil wants us to stay in his darkness.

Jesus, the Light that overcomes the dark, is reaching out to you right now.

Will you respond by allowing Him to shine again in your heart?

If you will allow Him to do that, your whole life will change.

Your family will see the difference.

They will know Jesus has come and changed you.

It was the worst of times, but the best of times had come in the person of Jesus.

THE TRUTH IS VICTORY IS REALITY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE!

LIGHT IS THE NEW REIGN FOR THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVER!

This language, *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,”* is the language of an Heir!

No longer would the throne be vacant!
Hope is now restored! A child has been born and the nation is no longer without an heir to the throne!

“OF THE INCREASE 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. THE ZEAL OF THE LORD ALMIGHTY WILL ACCOMPLISH THIS.”

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what has done has been done through God” (John 3: 19-21).

J. Vernon McGee wrote, **“Some time ago a man said to me, ‘McGee, I heard you on the radio, and I disagree with you about salvation. Let me tell you what I think about it.’ Well, he was ready to build a fire, and he wanted both of us to sit there and warm ourselves by his fire. It knew it was a phony fire, which would give off no heat or light. So frankly I told him, ‘I don’t mean to be ugly or rude, but I don’t want to hear what you think, because what you think and what I think are meaningless. It is what God says that we need to know and we need to walk in his light. If we reject him, then we generally walk in the light of our own little fire down here. But the Holy Spirit warns that you will lie down by that little fire of yours in sorrow, which means that you will be eternally lost.”**

Isaiah lets us know what we need to do if we want to let GOD’s light shine in us.

Then you can Rise and Shine:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” Isaiah 60:1-3