

Isaiah 9 Sermon

Church on the Corner 2016

1 But there will be no gloom for those who were 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 will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

2 The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

4 For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

6 For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Introduction

They say that Christmas starts earlier and earlier but this is ridiculous... It is a lovely familiar reading. "A child is born..." But the danger is we read it through the lens of Christmas and we miss what else is going on here. It is of course an amazing prophesy of the birth of Jesus - 650 years before hand. But it is much more than that too.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light"

When I find myself walking in the darkness it is usually because of a navigational error. No it's definitely this way... I know a shortcut.

But the darkness that Isaiah is talking about is more than just getting a bit lost on the way. It is people not knowing which way to turn, afraid and not knowing where to look for help. *Ch 8:21 They will turn their faces upwards, or they will look to the earth, but will see only distress and darkness...*

Darkness breeds fear, and that fear is easily exploited. When we are afraid we stop thinking about others, the wider concerns disappear. I don't think I've every known a time when that picture of walking in darkness is so appropriate. Where are we going in our Economics, politics, a divided society, dehumanising people. We are like those stumbling in the darkness.

Who were the people walking in darkness?

The lands of Zebulun & Naphtali were the first of the tribes to be overrun by the Assyrians (Ch8v4). The original readers of Isaiah would know this region as a lost place - a no-mans land. Once part of Israel but now overrun and desolate. A people occupied by an invading army, detached from their religious and cultural heritage, ruled by a brutal and compassionless regime.

What does the light look like for them?

v4 An end to oppression.

Read v4 The Yoke that burdens them, the rod of the oppressor. The picture is oxen - yoked to pull a plough, spurred on with a rod. But applied to humans - working for a system which doesn't care about them, for the benefit of a faceless master.

Can you relate to this? I We have bought into a system that demands we work every hour under the sun. But we are the lucky ones. What about the rest of this world? What about the refugee and the economic migrant, the tenant farmer in drought hit land. Work without hope of reward or freedom.

v5 An end to terror and violence.

The boots of the tramping warriors is a start emotive picture of invading armies. Is there a more terrifying picture than your town occupied by alien soldiers? Waking up to the sound of tanks rolling through your town. A picture of powerlessness.

So how will this happen?

Let Jesus explain. Matthew's gospel quotes this passage directly. Matthew 4:16

the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who dwelled in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.'
From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

The Light of the world is the Kingdom of God.

This is the point about the big picture within which the Christmas story sits.

v6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;

The Child is not just a baby - he is a son. And the son is an heir. The heir to a kingdom.

v7 makes this very clear.

The throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness

The point is that what Isaiah foresees not just a baby in a manger but a the Kingdom of God. A kingdom unlike any the world has seen. it doesn't work by the ways we are used to - Not upheld by military power, or by economic might, manipulation and deceit, threats, bribery, and punishment (As much as the church from time to time has tried to make it work like that).

But it is a very different kind of kingdom. Upheld it with justice and with righteousness - It is a kingdom of personal loyalty, a kingdom of faith. A kingdom of Love and service. A kingdom of the poor and the forgotten.

And it starts at the margins. Zebulun and Naphtali were the area around lake Galilee. A social and political backwater. *“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”*

We live in 21st Century London and here it is easy to fall into the mistake of thinking that Christianity is in decline. Nonsense. It is flourishing all over the world outside the centres of power. China, South America, Africa. Even Iran.

Those who are walking in darkness, they have seen a great light. But it is those who recognise that they need help who find it.

Perhaps you need to experience the darkness in order to see the morning star.

When you have all the lights turned on you don't see the dawn coming. Don't be afraid of the darkness. Don't give in to fear. 8:12 *“do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.*

You are not those walking in darkness - you are those who are following the star - who have seen that the dawn is breaking and respond with joy.

God says trust in me and I will be your sanctuary.

It is a kingdom of peace.

Never take this for granted. Christianity has at its heart the greatest act of non-violence.

When Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away and allows himself to be led to the cross he makes a choice that changes the course of History. The Cross of Christ is God disarming the powers, overcoming the mighty and bringing down the mighty from their thrones not with power but with weakness.

Conclusion

And there is one final twist to this. The clue is in Ch8:18 Here am I and the children the LORD has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the LORD Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion.

The kingdom of God is made up of ordinary people. And those ordinary people are signs and symbols of the kingdom. Or in other words - they are the light of the world.

So this is a kingdom that invites you to join in. To participate. To cast off our allegiance to this old world (which is what Jesus means by repentance) and to accept the invitation to participate in a new world (Which is faith).

And to get involved.

To pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done”

To chose a different way.

And to work together for that day, when your kingdom comes and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

So one of the questions we will be asking over coming weeks is what about you?

What is your contribution to the kingdom of God? How are you playing your small, but by the grace of God essential part in this Kingdom which is coming on earth as in heaven.