

Hurst Green
1st Dec 19
The Light Shines in the Darkness
Isaiah 9:2

We have looked at:

- Faith as a mustard seed
- Let your light shine

Now think about light. As I said it has marvellous properties.

Anyone who had those PIR nightlights that plug into sockets know that when the bright lights are on they seem feeble but when you get up in the middle of the night one little light gives you all you need.

Light is the enemy of darkness and darkness never overcomes light.

John 1:5 (ANIV)

⁵ *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

The Light shines in the darkness

Now the aim of the next few weeks is to encourage you and excite you about the real reason for Christmas.

I know you all know it and know the priority of Christmas being seen to be about Christ. That is why we get together on Christmas day regardless of how much hassle it is to drag everyone away from all their news presents and, at the same time, ensuring all is in place for that great traditional Christmas lunch.

But in that excitement and preparation remember we have two events that are great to invite your friends, relatives and neighbours to.

On the 22nd we have Morrison's in the morning at 11pm. Singing carols to the shoppers who really appreciate it as they stagger out with their trolleys loaded with more food than they can possibly eat!!

Then in the evening we have the traditional 9 lessons and carols. A great service with the message of Christmas and, because it is so traditional, people do not feel threatened by being invited

Then once they have come along once who knows – they may come the next time you invite them because you do still invite people to come along – don't you?

So today to excite us we are focussing in on one verse. The same one I used at the start of the service:

Isaiah 9:2 (ANIV)

² *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.*

Remember to Israel as it went through all its misfortunes, albeit caused by their disobedience and ignoring God, they sought hope from the scriptures. Just as many do today when they face life's crisis.

And they knew their scriptures – even down to the lowliest person.

When Jesus clears the temple in John 2 the disciples remembered Psalm 69.

I am not going to give you the verses in the hope that you will go and find them this service!!

For the people of Isaiah's time the fulfilment of these words would take some 800 years but they clung to words of encouragement even as they ignored the commands and warnings the prophets brought them.

So many times Israel had to cling to the hope of what God had said as they waited for the deliverance from oppression. They clung to hope.

But for us these are not words of hope; for the last 200 years these words of Isaiah have been a simple statement of fact. We know of that great light that has dawned for all of mankind.

Actually it is much more than a statement – it is a proclamation. The existence of this light needs to be proclaimed to the world that is still in darkness and doesn't understand the light.

In our excitement we go beyond:

- The excitement of the modern wealthy Christmas
- The gift buying and wrapping
- The cleaning and decorating
- The shopping and cooking
- The gathering of families

As familiar and fun those things are they are all the results of the dawning of the great light and not the other way around.

So we have that very familiar verse:

Isaiah 9:2 (ANIV)

² *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.*

That verse has inspired many Christmas cards and the first part of it has appeared on many of them but it doesn't tell the whole story.

Look at Chapter nine of Isaiah and see what else this passage has for us.

Isaiah 9:3 (ANIV)

³ *You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.*

Just the next verse and it has a message of Joy; increasing joy and don't we all need that!!

Doesn't the world need it?

It also demolishes one of the arguments people use against talking about Christ. The "I'm doing all right" idea.

You might be but you are missing out on increasing Joy,

And that verse brings a message of a rejoicing people; three times it uses the word.

Our verse also acknowledges the state of people – the state of our nation. They walk in darkness or in the shadow of death

Does that remind you of something? Yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death yet I will fear no evil.

Another message of freedom!

And the second half of verse 6

Isaiah 9:6 (ANIV)

⁶ *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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Some of the names of God we include when we sing that rather breathless hymn with all the names of God!

But verse 6 holds a very important message in the first half. It says "to us" and actually says it twice.

This whole season is not about God's glory although it inspires us to give him the Praise and Glory.

This season is God reaching out to us; trying to reclaim us from the darkness we were hiding in.

This is about Jesus and the amazing miracle he wrought coming down to earth and sharing our humanity.

This is God giving "to us"

Our society has taken that message too far and turned Christmas into a narcissistic festival that they claim is all about family but in so many ways is all part of the “me” society.

They are trying to escape the darkness another way and ignoring the one way that actually achieves the escape. And what is the darkness of the world?

Divorce and family breakdown is a huge part of it. Humans love stability but our society has decided that one’s happiness is more important and if things get difficult it is better to bail rather than put some work into it. I accept that divorce is sometimes necessary and of course to work this needs both sides to put the work into it!

Our fear of them of illnesses. As we have cured the common complaints and made our lives more comfortable we live longer and other ailments come along. Some horrible ones; dementia and some forms of cancer; some annoying ones as the body ages and things start to fall apart.

Our fear of that of death. No one wants to lose someone but in the words of the Hank Williams song “I’ll never get out of this world alive”. We take the view that each death is a tragedy but that we should all die in age order but life isn’t like that and any of us can die at any time and Heb 2:15 tells us that Jesus came to free us from the fear of death – one of the messages of release.

Both of those are linked to fear and yet time and again the bible tells us not to be afraid and 1 John brings us encouragement that love drives out fear.

And of course the really big one – **Sin**. Going against God’s rules for our lives. The world wallows in this and the trouble with sin is so much of it is enjoyable.

But of course where sin leads is far less comfortable. Drug addicts walking around our streets like Zombies. The dealers behind this taking advantage of the weak. The violence on our streets as people battle for the wealth that this creates. Corporate greed. Burglary and many others.

Against that doesn’t our world need a message of joy, rejoicing and release?

Our faith has the answer

Psalm 34:17 (ANIV)

¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

But the issue people have is with that is the word righteous. One of those nice Church words we throw around but we need to understand it.

One who is right with God. It really is that simple!

The difficulty is that we know we cannot make ourselves righteous we have to rely on God for that.

And it is always a heart change not behaviour change and so we cannot tell from the outside who is righteous with God.

But we have to help people who are walking in darkness and living in the shadow of death get there and this is one season when they may well listen

2 Corinthians 5:11 (ANIV)

¹¹ *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. ~~What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.~~*

We can only persuade we cannot make them.

And the last line of the great commission

Matthew 28:20 (ANIV)

²⁰ *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Huge words. To obey everything – it still sounds very difficult even with the encouragement of that last sentence.

Matthew 28:20 (ANIV)

²⁰ *~~and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.~~ And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

What really helps is another well-known verse from Psalm 23.

Psalm 23:3 (ANIV)

³ *~~he restores my soul.~~ He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

And even when that sounds too difficult turn to another well-known verse

Isaiah 43:19 (ANIV)

¹⁹ *See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.*

God is doing this, God has done this and God will do this because he is a consistent God. See that he says he **is** making rather than he has made. It is an ongoing work as I am sure that we can all witness to.

But the final verse I want you to turn to is back in our reading and is the very last sentence:

Isaiah 9:7 (ANIV)

⁷ *~~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 for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.~~*

God has a zeal for helping us become righteous and zeal is a very energetic word.

“great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or objective”

That is how much God wants people to choose to turn to him.

And our message is simply one of joy, rejoicing and release. There can be no offence in that

Isaiah 9:2 (ANIV)

² *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.*

That light has shone out over 2000 years and will never get put out and so that light still shines today.

