

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 26th November 2023 am

TITLE: "The glory of Christmas" TEXT: Isaiah 9 verses 1-7

Series: Christmas 2023 Part 1 Scripture references from the ESV

Isaiah 9: 1-7 But there will be no gloom for her who was 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 has made 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 dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

³ You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the
spoil.

⁴ For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth
and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The best Christmas adverts play into the fact that we love stories about a hero who risks his life to rescue someone who is in danger. We are moved by narratives that show sacrificial love resulting in rescue for those who are completely undeserving, and life being brought into places where people are experiencing certain death. At the heart of the Christmas story is the ultimate human rescuer who came to rescue humans. We have a rescuer who is:

- Both God and man in one being
- the real-life rescuer who really did live, not an animation in a Christmas advert

- The rescuer who filled a dark place with the glory of his presence, his grace and his life.

He is the rescuer who did not just risk his life but who gave his life.

**The glory of Christmas is the glory of Christ
who comes into the dark places and shines with the blazing glory of God,
rescuing humanity and giving us eternal life.**

God gave a promise (vv1-2 above) that the lands to the west of the Sea of Galilee would be transformed from places of darkness and contempt to places of light and glory. Matthew's gospel shows us that Isaiah was predicting the birth of Christ and his relocation to that area. **Now when he (Jesus) heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.** ¹³ **And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,** ¹⁴ **so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:**

¹⁵ **"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—**

¹⁶ **the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,**

on them a light has dawned." (Matthew 4:12-16)

Both Isaiah and Matthew are showing us what happens when Jesus steps into the dark places of our lives. You might be currently in a very dark joyless place, full of anguish, despair and shame.

The glory of Christmas shows us that when Christ steps into the darkness of our lives, we can expect to experience

God's presence, God's grace and God's life.

1. **The Glory of God's presence (v6).** Put three phrases from this verse together and consider it this way:

- **For to us a child is born... and his name shall be called.... Mighty God**

When Jesus stepped into that region of Galilee, the eternal God had come in human flesh. The creator God had

- formed the sea of Galilee and knew exactly how many litres of water were in it

- created the dust under his feet and numbered every grain of sand
- given life to the people around him and knew every hair on their heads

and now this same creator God had come to live among the people he gave life to, sail in boats on the sea he had formed, and walk on the dust he had created.

When the angels announced his birth, he was given the name Immanuel – God with us.

When God comes to a place, it becomes glorious, purely because God has come. That region of Galilee was transformed by his presence which brought glory that it did not have before. We can see the same thing happening at the dedication of the temple. It was a wonderful building but it was only a building until God came. **As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. (2 Chron 7:1).**

- Today, the glory of the church is that God is with his people.

Every believer in Christ has Christ dwelling in him by his Spirit. That is why we need to be so careful how we speak to each other and about each other. There is no room for grumbling in the place where God is present. When we gather together, the glory of the church is not in the building or anything external. It lies in the fact that God is dwelling amongst his people. With that indwelling comes the glory of God. Our lives are transformed from lives of shame to lives of glory because Christ comes in.

When Christ steps into the darkness of our lives, we can expect to experience God's presence.

- Is that your experience on a day to day basis?

2. The Glory of God's grace (vv1-2). The lands were a place of gloom and shame, where people were in anguish. It was a place of sin because people living there had turned away from worshipping God and were worshipping idols – gods of human invention. This led to drunken orgies, human sacrifices and self-harm, reflecting the sin of humanity. The people had ignored the warnings that God sent by his prophets, and eventually God sent the Assyrian army to take his people into exile. Zebulun and Naphtali were the first lands to fall under the Assyrian occupation.

These lands were a place of shame because of their sin and God's just judgement, but also because those living there were Gentiles, who were much despised by Israel. In Jesus' day, none of this had changed. It was not a place where Jews would choose to live. The people living there were the least deserving people to experience the blessing of God, yet Isaiah prophesies glory for them (v1).

Jesus Christ goes to the least deserving place – that is grace on display

We need to know that we are all like the people of Naphtali and Zebulun.

- Every one of us has failed to worship God as he rightly deserves
- Every one of us is a Gentile who does not deserve the presence of Christ.

If you experience his presence, and if he steps into the darkness of your life then it is only because of grace.

The glory of Christmas is the glory of God's grace

When God sent his Son into the world, he sent him to the least deserving place in the land, because of his grace to sinners. Sin is a terrible affront to the holiness of God. When we say that we don't want God but would rather try to fix everything ourselves, God is rightly and justly offended. He has every right to say to all of us: 'Go from my presence – I never want to see you again. You are exiled to Hell'. He does not do that.

- Instead, God comes to us.

He is able to do that because Jesus, who came to live in this dark place, would be exiled in our place to satisfy the need for justice

- He suffered the exile of hell that he did not deserve so that we could have what we do not deserve –

the presence of the living God in our lives.

When Christ steps into the darkness of our lives, we can expect to experience God's presence and God's grace

- Do you experience the presence of God in your life, so that your life has the glory of Christ's life shining from you? If you do, it is only because of the glory of God's grace.

3. The Glory of God's life (v2). The land of deep darkness has a metaphorical meaning. The darkness is so great that it casts a death shadow. This makes sense when we think of the role our sun plays in sustaining life on earth. Without the sun, there would be no life on earth. Yet John tells us that at the end of time, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, with human life flourishing, but there will be no sun! How can this be? Rev 21:23

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb

In the presence of Jesus, there is life – not just spiritual life but physical life. We all owe our existence to Jesus Christ.

When he comes into our lives and into the darkness that the shadow of death casts over us, then we experience life.

As we know Christ, and enjoy fellowship with him, so he lifts the death shadow from us. Our circumstances may not have changed, and we still have to face physical death but we have real life.

We will, one day, be able to live without the sun but we cannot live now without Christ.

- Ask yourself if you know that. Do you have this light of Christ's life in your life today? Is it a present reality to you?

When Christ steps into the darkness of our lives, we can expect to experience God's presence, God's grace and God's life

What does this mean for us?

1) We do not need to be afraid to ask Jesus into our dark places

Christ willingly chose to go to lands that were considered to be places of contempt. He was not put off by the dark, not even the darkness of people's sin and contempt.

Your dark places might be:

- Not knowing Jesus
- Habitual sin – sin that you cannot stop committing, no matter how hard you try
- Guilt and shame – although you know that God forgives you, you have not been able to take that into your heart, and you live with a continual sense that God is not pleased with you

- Hostility towards someone – you have been hurt by someone and have never been able to let go of that
- Fear – you are afraid of what might happen to you or is happening, and cannot make decisions

In those dark places, we feel anguish that things are not well with us.

The glory of Christmas teaches us that Christ meets us in those dark places.

Though you do not deserve it, he shines the light of his glory into the dark places

- The light of his grace assures you that you are forgiven and there is no guilt and shame
- The light of his word directs you so that you know the right decision to make
- The light of his presence takes away the fear that you feel, burns up the sin in your life and fills you with himself so that his glory is seen in you.

Take time to talk to the Lord about any darkness that is overshadowing you at the moment and ask him to shine the light of his glory into them.

What if you have tried this and nothing has changed? Then consider this.

2) You need to fear the one who comes into your dark places (v7). You need to reverence him and stand in awe of him so that you are willing to obey him.

When the light shines in the darkness, it reveals Jesus as King

Jesus does not come as the therapist to fix us. He comes as the King who is to be obeyed.

He is the King who has every right to rule over every area of our lives. If you do not experience Christ changing your dark places into ones filled with light and glory, it will be because you do not want to receive him as King. You may be willing to receive him as the one who takes away your shame, for example, but not as the one who must be humbly obeyed.

Those who have had their lives transformed into lives are glory are those who gave up their right to govern themselves and submitted to the disruption that Jesus brought. Joseph is a good example of this. When Jesus came into his life, he had to trust God's message from the angel, although it seemed impossible,

and then had to risk the shame of his community and marry his pregnant fiancé. When Jesus shines in our dark places, we encounter the living God and he turns our lives upside down but not in the ways that we expect. He wants so much more than just to fix us.

The living God wants a relationship with us

He wants to come in as King, to fellowship with us and bring us under his glorious rule

He will do it and then we will be in the best place we can be

This Christmas, let us look beyond all that the world tries to sell us about Christmas and instead let us see the real glory of Christmas:

**The glory of Christ the light shining in the dark places
so that we may enjoy his presence, his grace and his life.**