

12/24/23 - Isaiah 9:2-7 - "Three Certainties of Christmas"

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[0 : 00] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who have dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

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.

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.

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

For us, 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 Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[1 : 07] Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over the 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.

Praise God for his word. There are many uncertainties in life that we may face, especially the uncertainties of performance-based issues in life.

Those are within our control, similar to the how we perform, the uncertainty of how we'll perform in a job interview, or maybe if we got the job, how we perform within that job.

There's uncertainty in that, which is within our realm of control. Or, for many of us like myself, if your Christmas presents are going to arrive at your doorstep on time, or if we have forgotten that Christmas present, that we'll be out at Boardman fishing through traffic for.

[2 : 21] Luckily, that's not my story this year, and that's not an uncertainty in my life. But maybe yours. So, we'll get this service going a little bit for you so you can have the afternoon. But there are some uncertainties that rely on a realm of factors that are outside of our control.

Uncertainties that relate to your health. Uncertainties that relate to the weather forecast in northeast Ohio. We don't know if it's going to rain or snow, or maybe a mixture of both and a tornado in the same day.

But it leaves us with uncertainty, either with our control or outside of our control. The one thing about uncertainty is that it has the power to immediately vanquish our pride, knowing that we are actually not in control of a lot of things.

It humbles us at the reality that we don't have control over many things. Uncertainty can often leave somebody who struggles with depression completely paralyzed within their home.

People who struggle with anxiety can be paralyzed with an inaction to move or do something that they ought to do. It can leave you hopeless.

[3 : 42] It can leave you depressed. It can leave you paralyzed. It can leave you anxious. Or for trauma responses, it can leave you in hypervigilance. Our passage today gives us a great guide to overcome uncertainty.

And it calls us to focus upon what is certain. Looking back upon Isaiah's day and this time period, the northern kingdom of Israel was at war and has turned against the southern kingdom, Judah. This nation Judah, led by Judah's king Ahaz, I mean, they're diminishing. They're a fish in water. It doesn't look very good.

The probability of survival is very low. And if uncertainty had a time put to it, this time in the nation of Israel's history, this was it.

This was an uncertain time. It's like the longer God seemed absent, the more audacious the idea of any restoration would become.

[5 : 01] It was dark. The darkness in this passage brings to mind times of camping deep within the wilderness of Canada. Three hours above the border and then a two-hour ride on water to get to a campsite.

This is a deep wilderness in Canada. And while city lights illuminates our night skies and our surroundings here in wonderful Youngstown area, in Canada it really depends upon the forecast. There's no moon. There's no light. You've got clouds in the sky. It's deep darkness. But it's within the thickness of darkness that light shines its greatest illumination.

The darker it is, the greater light, even the most insignificant amount of light can become. In Canada you can shine a flashlight into the trees in a dark overcast night where it's deep darkness, like freaky darkness.

And you can illuminate an entire landscape. And even to think, if there's people camping even miles and miles and miles away off, even if they lit a flashlight, you could see it.

[6 : 25] The power of light within darkness. In my mind reading this passage, a powerful light shines at a distance in this darkness in Isaiah's day.

Just as it does in overcast nights in Canada. But what does the passage show us today? It shows us that the light of God illuminates uncertainty and turns us into certain faith.

The light of God illuminates certainty for our faith. If our faith is concerned about it, it's the light of God that will illuminate it.

It's the light of God that will carry it. We will see that in three sections in our passage today. And we have a sermon titled, Three Certainties of Christmas. And with that, like a good Baptist preacher, I will break this up into three sections today.

Getting back to our roots here. And so let's look at the first certainty, but before we do, let's pray as we dive into this passage.

[7 : 43] Father, we come to you today knowing that this book, if we look at it as just black and white text, we're missing it.

As we open your holy book, we plead with you today to speak to us. To use my frail health, my frail words, to illuminate a glorious truth that's found within your word that you have spoken.

Do this work in our church this morning. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The first certainty that we're going to see is that God is committed to His people.

This is a certainty, church, that God is committed to His people. Look at God's people in verse 2 that was just read.

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.

[9 : 03] What has God done in the past? Verse 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. In verse 2, God's people experienced quite a rescue since chapter 7 under the failed leadership of the king of Judah by the name of Ahaz.

When the northern kingdom joined forces with Syria to fight and wage war against them and to replace Ahaz with their own guy.

God's people are told here to be looking back, seeing a great light in deep darkness.

Where are they looking, church? Back. This is the theme from verse 2 to verse 6 I want us to see. What are they also looking back on?

[10 : 06] God's multiplication upon the earth. This looks back to remind people of the promise that was confirmed with Abraham. To multiply physical descendants as the sands of the seashore in Genesis 22.

God is committed to His people. God is the source of their joy. God did it all in verse 3.

This new joy in uncertainty finds its expression through metaphors of harvest, of victory in battle, naming the spoil and things of that nature.

This is great joy. And you see, we don't need life to be in order to be certain in our faith.

We don't need life to be in order to be certain in our faith. This brings us into the heart of David in Psalm 4-7 where he says, you have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and

their wine abound.

[11:23] There's nothing that compares to the joy in knowing that God is committed to His people. Church, sometimes in uncertainty we simply just need to look back.

Are you awake this morning? Sometimes in uncertainty we just simply have to look back. If you're in Christ, what do you have to look into?

Maybe Ephesians 5-11 could be a good guide where the light of Christ first shined in your darkness of unfruitful works and exposed them, awakening you, O sleeper, from the darkness and captivity of your sin.

Church, when we look, we don't look in the direction that the world looks. The world's always looking forward, writing a new story, a new year, a new me.

It's all nonsense, humanism. The church looks back to give a significant source of what we can then look forward to, which rests in God's commitment to His people.

[12:40] You see, in uncertainty today, we are able to find hope in our profoundly unique relationship with God of all creation.

every one of you here in this room is an image bearer of the God of this earth. Every one of you bears that image, image bearers.

You see, He shines, He multiplies. What kind of God is that? What kind of God shines, multiplies, guides His people, makes promises?

That is a God who loves. There are several uncertainties in life, but God's love for you should never be considered one of them at all.

This light should illuminate certainty for our faith in Him. But not only that, not only do God's people find certainty in looking back at our profound, unique relationship with God, but also when we look back upon the unfolding promises of God being revealed to us.

[13:57] And with that, we get the second aspect of certainty, that God keeps His promise to redeem. God keeps His promise to redeem.

In verse 4, in Isaiah's day, God would redeem the north and the south from bondage of every foreign oppressing power, whether it being the Assyrians, as massive and mighty as they were, or the Babylonians.

This victory would recall the past victory against the Midianites. It's an interesting connection that Isaiah makes through the Word because what he's saying is that while there is a remnant of hope that remains for Judah, this looks back to the remnant of hope for Gideon and his little army against the Midianites in Judges 6 through 7, that his power and his accomplishment through God's people occurred regardless of the weakness of his people, regardless of the frailty of his people, regardless of the failings of his people, Ahaz included.

In verse 5, it holds a concurrent reminder throughout the book of Isaiah that God's people have to look back. The language here in verse 5 where it says, for every boot of the trampling warrior in battle to molt and every garment rolled blood with will be burned as fuel for a fire.

Speaking of yokes of burdens and the staff of his shoulder and the rod of the oppressor you have broken as the day of Midian, he's recalling them to look back. He uses similar language in chapter 10, verse 24, where he continues to have them look back and I want you to see this.

[16:08] It says in chapter 10, 24, Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, O my people who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians when they strike with the rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did.

Circle that. Verse 25, For in a very little while my fury will come to an end and my anger will be directed to their destruction.

Verse 26, And the Lord of hosts will wield against them a whip as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb. Circle that.

And his staff, it continues, will be over the sea and he will lift it as he did in Egypt. Circle that. And verse 27 concludes, And in that day his burden will depart from your shoulder and his yoke from your neck and the yoke will be broken because of the fat.

And then he continues to talk about this accomplishment and this battle against all the foreign enemies in chapter 14, verse 5. You don't have to turn it to it, just read it later today.

[17:24] Against the Babylonians, it says, The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers. And then continuing to chapter 14, verse 24, The victory against the Assyrians.

The Lord of hosts has sworn, As I have planned, so shall it be. And as I have proposed, so shall it stand. Verse 25, That I will break the Assyrian in my land and on my mountain trample him under foot and his yoke shall depart from them and his burden from their shoulders.

What words of certainty than what God speaks to his people, so shall it be, so shall it stand.

God keeps his promise to redeem. And most of all, in verse 6, the famous verse 6, Isaiah points back to the promise of a child who serves as a sign to his people that God was with them.

We read this in chapter 7, verse 14. In Isaiah's day, we would imagine them naturally looking around for a child that was born and it was born as a sign that God was with them, that God would redeem them in that time through a physical birth.

[19 : 02] They saw remnants of this through the reign of King Hezekiah to come as being their ruler. But what God had in store to bring hope to captive Israel would supersede anything they could have ever imagined.

it wasn't just a symbolic sign, it was a person. What served to Isaiah's day as a sign would then unfold as a person to us.

God Himself would enter human history, Emmanuel, God with us. and through the person of Jesus Christ and four names that would distinguish Him as the God-man both in His royal nature and His divine nature.

Do you see that here? Wonderful counselor relating to His royal nature, His royal humanly nature. He's a master of wisdom and teaching of miraculous proportions.

This is like no other person on this earth. It's accompanied by affirming wonders. Jesus Christ is literally the positive contrast of the failing leadership that Ahaz was in Isaiah's day.

[20 : 24] He's mighty God, relating to His divinity. This identifies Jesus with the sovereign God whom His authority is derived from.

He will be a contrast to Israel's first king, Saul. who was very little in His own eyes, 1 Samuel 5, 17. An insecurity that led an entire nation to follow Him, not God. This mighty God, this divine mighty God would be the antonym of King Saul.

Look, everlasting father relating to His royal human nature. This king would be the father of the nation relating to relational intimacy and reverence between God and His people.

And there will be no need for any other successor after Jesus Christ. He's the prince of peace, relating to divine nature.

[21 : 26] This refers to the abundance and the wholeness of the restoration kingdom to come. Hope on the horizon. Looking through the telescope of time to see the promise laying ahead.

And not only will the coming son of David be king, he will be a ruler who ushers in a period of shalom, peace, of welfare and wholeness for His kingdom.

You see, as God's people look back at the certainty of God's promise to restore, looking at that symbol, that sign in Isaiah's day, we can then look back at the announcement of the person in Jesus Christ that we see in Luke 2 verse 11 to the shepherds, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord, and this will be a sign for you.

You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger, and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom He is pleased.

God is to restore on this earth is uniquely and solely bound to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 06] That is certain, and this light should illuminate certainty for our faith in Him.

God is sovereign over His plans, and this will be assured of this next week.

Well, we reflect upon God's sovereign zeal over His plans, and we have with that the third certainty.

God is sovereignly over, God is sovereignly over His plans.

I think I might have to make an edit to that certainty. I meant to say, God is sovereignly zealous over His plans. And in verse 7, we see this unfold.

Verse 7, I'm just going to read it to you. 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 forever more.

[24 : 27] What will do it? The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Verse 7 describes the covenant promise through the prophet Nathan to David.

This turns us back to 2 Samuel 7 where Nathan says, When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will

establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men. But my steadfast love will not depart from him as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. God is sovereignly zealous over his plans.

[25 : 42] To think David's great, great, great, great grandson would be the earthly father of Jesus is absolutely profound.

Who could ever plan something like that? only God. What a plan for this nation who is on the brink of destruction.

What a God this is. And while this verse in verse 7 looks back, it focuses back once again to the unfolding work and the reign of this royal divine king to come, the last line ought to radiate within all of our anxious hearts during uncertain days, even today.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Just as we read in chapter 14, so shall it be, so shall it stand.

In other words, God guarantees that he himself will fulfill this promise. It is a guarantee that he will fulfill his promise.

[27 : 06] It will not depend on human responsibility. It will not depend on human power, human decisions. Yes, all of those things are factored into the sovereign plan of God, but they will never thwart his plan.

What a reality for us as we look around the world today. You see, these were certainly dark times in Israel.

They were going to get darker still. I hear it so many times in our day today. Oh, the world, the end time is near. We're in the end times.

Well, congratulations, scholar. We've been in the end times since the death of Christ. And we don't know when it's going to end. But what we do know is that it's been much darker on this earth than what we're experiencing today.

These times in the nation of Israel were dark, and they were going to become darker still. But the Lord in His zeal would not allow the darkness to last forever.

[28 : 20] Zeal is greater than darkness. It's the light that shines in deep darkness. And so, church, it should not catch us off guard when we may walk through the darkness of uncertainty.

But what should catch us off guard is when we lose sight of the light that God shines for us. As if we're wandering around this darkness, as if we have nowhere to look.

All the while, our Bibles are closed. And the news is on. That's a problem. Do you lose sleep at night over the news?

Do you lose sleep over rumors of wars and terrible things that could face us today? Over international unrest in our world today?

Well, you see, at times it may be difficult to see what is ahead and what God is doing. But God has given us something certain to look back upon in history through the nation of Israel and through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 35] In other words, the church ought to rest well in World War III. The church, you and me, should be able to rest well in World War III.

faith because we have a certain faith that is rested in a God who loves us, who is in control over all things, and who is sovereignly zealous over His plans.

So maybe you're here today facing what seems to be the absence of God and maybe a claim of God's love and promises and all this sovereignly zealous stuff seems all too lofty.

Sounds almost too good to be true. Well, the truth is there is nothing God can say or do that is greater than what He has already revealed to us through His Word.

And here within His Word, we find a historical historically, theologically rich, deep-rooted truth of hope for us in our uncertainty and whatever the day holds.

[30 : 56] And so if you are looking for constant reassurances of signs, well, God, just give me a shooting star, give me something. You ever drive down the road and you're just like, Lord, if this light is green, then I'm going to take that as a sign that you want me to do that.

You ever do that? Maybe it's just me. But how stupid we are, right? If you're looking for this constant reassurance and signs in this life, all the while that God has given the greatest assurance and sign in the Bible, in history, maybe the best question is not to have God give you a sign, but to God give you faith to believe.

because at the point of you asking for a sign of reassurance is a point where your faith is very, very small.

Faith that believes that God has broken the yoke of sinful oppression from our lives is true whether we feel it or not. It's not bound to emotions, not bound to what you think.

It's bound to what you know, what you know in Scripture, what you know through the revelation of Jesus Christ to us in our day today, of which God has broken the yoke of slavery and given us the yoke of Jesus Christ where, guess what, Matthew 11 writes Jesus' words, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

[32 : 37] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

so shall it be, so shall it stand. Your life might not be put into perfect order, but God will order your life perfectly.

no matter if the diagnosis isn't weighed in your favor, whether the healing that you've been praying for and longing for comes, whether God intervenes miraculously in your life or in your family, you know this for certain, that your life might not be in perfect order, but God will order your life perfectly.

This Christmas, don't reduce our king and savior down to just any counselor, any mighty figure, any father or any prince. The savior and king of which Christmas centers upon is the shining of a great light in deep darkness in Isaiah's day, in Bethlehem's day, and in our day today.

And guess what? It's going to continue to shine long in whatever end time scenario it is for tomorrow. It will continue to shine. This is the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

[34 : 21] May the light of God illuminate certainty for our faith. Let's pray. Thank you.