

Isaiah 9:1-7
Joy to the World (Christmas 2018)
December 23, 2018

The Christmas hymn *Joy to the World* has stood the test of time. Written sometime around 1719 by Isaac Watts, it is the most published Christmas hymn in North America according to the website hymnary.com.

The surprising thing is that Isaac Watts did not write it as a Christmas Carol. He did not have in his mind the angelic announcement of Christ's birth (Luke 2:10) "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Watts actually had in mind Genesis 3 and Psalm 98—how Christ reverses the effects of the curse and brings about God's kingdom. Yet the song fits so well as the theme of *joy* is so interwoven in the Christmas story. We are going to focus on Christmas joy this morning.

Main Idea:

The gospel is truly "good news of great *joy*" because in it God provides the *light* and *leader* that people need.

The intent of Isaiah 9 is to set forth hope to Israel which will be a foundation for their joy.

1. The light that gives great joy (1-5)

- In order to understand the picture of light in this text, we need to understand the contrasting darkness.
- It actually helps if we take a brief step back to look into the total context of Isaiah.
- The prophet Isaiah was called to speak God's Word in a time of *deep spiritual decline*.

Just to get a sample of some of the sin issues in the environment of 700BC.

5:8-23

⁸ "Woe to those who join house to house,
 who add field to field,
until there is no more room,
 and you are made to dwell alone
 in the midst of the land.

¹¹ Woe to those who rise early in the morning,
 that they may run after strong drink,
 who tarry late into the evening

as wine inflames them!”

- People were living in greed, self-indulgence, living for party and pleasure. The philosophical category is hedonism—pleasure becomes the highest good. Pleasure is god. It’s what gets you up out of bed again.

²⁰ “Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,”

- People were crossing moral lines. Moral relativism is not just a postmodern problem—it’s a heart disorder.

²¹ “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
and shrewd in their own sight!

²² Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine,
and valiant men in mixing strong drink,

²³ who acquit the guilty for a bribe,
and deprive the innocent of his right!”

Greed, self-indulgence, pleasure seeking, morally confused, oppressive, unjust....

Since this was the condition of the people, God was going to judge them with exile. They would be expelled from the land. Just like Adam, Israel will be vomited out of the land because they rejected God’s kingly-righteous rule over them.

(8:22) “And they will be thrust into thick darkness” (describing the invasion of northernmost tribes to Assyria in 733BC).

Spiritual darkness does not describe Israel alone. The human condition for every person born of Adam is darkness. Col 1:13 uses a phrase “the domain of darkness” to describe the spiritually lost condition.

- What does spiritual darkness look like? Well, it’s a life dominated by the things we just saw: greed, self-indulgence, pleasure-seeking, morally confused, making a ton of unjust decisions that hurt others and ultimately offends God.

- The term “walking” is used: Walk describes a way of life. What we call patterns or habits.

My wife offers me excellent accountability with my eating habits. I’m predisposed to eat a lot and gain weight. We don’t do diets in our house; they don’t work, at least for me. But there is such thing as a *lifestyle*. When I’m tempted to make bad eating choices, Emily will remind me: *It’s a lifestyle*.

In Biblical talk, your walk is your lifestyle. Not some short-lived improvement, but an overall pattern of life change. The Bible talks about the new man/new life.

The text says there will be a lifestyle change for many.

- Is. 9 is forward-pointing to a time beyond the exile. There is a shift from humility to hope.
- Matthew quotes this as being fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. (Mt 4:14-16)
- Throughout the Bible, light is symbolic of God’s presence.
- It’s no surprise that in the NT, Jesus is referred to as the light: (Jn 3:19)
¹⁹ “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world”.
 (Jn 8:12)
¹² “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

We invent all kinds of devices to try and expel darkness. My prediction is that at least a dozen of you all will get a flash light of some sort as a Christmas gift next week. Options are endless with LED/Smart lights.

Mankind may have mastered expelling physical darkness, *but only One has the capability to expel spiritual darkness...the Lord Jesus.*

- The text does not just say that people will see the light, but that they will *enjoy* the light. There is a difference. I can see a beautiful sunset, or I can *enjoy* it.

- The light is enjoyed since God's presence is something to enjoy. Just read the final chapter of the Bible (Rev 21-22).
- But note that the joy is something *God gives*.
- Is. 9:3 is really like a praise chorus—it is a joyful celebration to the God who gives.

“You have multiplied
 You have increased
 They rejoice before you”.

- The joy felt is likened to when a great war has been ended (v4).

Words like yoke, burden, rod, oppression (v4) remind us of the bondage of Israel in Egypt. Midian highlights the awesome ways God delivers (Judges 7).

Redemption, Reconciliation, Restoration—it's all here in seed form!

One pastor summarized this section as *the grace that never lets go* (Dale Ralph Davis). That seems appropriate. It is found earlier in Isaiah (1:18) “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow”.

When people sit in spiritual darkness and the gloom of judgment hangs over, and God breaks the dawn of his light over them, it is only because his grace never lets go.

2. The leader who brings great hope (6-7)

- This section actually answers the how question: how will God lift the darkness and bring joy? By sending the leader God's people long for.
- There is a saying that everything rises or falls on leadership.
- That is true biblically, nationally/politically, corporate world, sports, and in the church.
- If leaders have character, conviction, competency and a calling—there is a hopeful future.

Is 9:6-7 is clearly a prophecy about Jesus 700 years before his arrival to the earth.

- Let's look and see how Jesus is qualified to be the leader of God's people.

- First, we can't pass over the fact that deliverer is a *child*-deliverer.
- Stretching back to 7:14, this would be a virgin-born child that embodies God's presence as Immanuel.

This deliverer has the character, conviction, competency and calling to give hope.

1. Character: (v6) Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

—His very character is the character of God. These attributes all stress the deliverer has the divine nature.

—One thing is pretty clear: the way this leader is described is with both human and divine attributes.

- Eternal Father is not a Trinitarian confusion. This is poetry—a father offers sustained provision and protection, care and concern. The ruler of Is 9:6 provides eternal protection, and love for eternity.

2. Conviction: This flows out of character. Look specifically at his conviction of leading “with justice and righteousness” (v7).

- He does not favor the rich or oppress the poor. The Gospels show the opposite. Jesus often rebukes social elites for their arrogance and favors the poor, outcasts, and oppressed. His followers are “the least of these”

3. Competency: A final mark of a good leader is that they can do the job. Character and conviction are good, but if there is no skill at execution, leadership will fail.

Jesus is competent to shoulder the responsibility of leading God's people in peace. The way Christ governs God's people is *mightily* and *expansively*.

(v6) mightily: “and the government shall be upon his shoulders”

—think of the implications: Jesus governs multitudes of his followers from every tribe, tongue, and nation across history.

(v7) expansively: “Of the increase of his government and of his peace, there will be no end.”

There is no king in all of Judah or Israel who ever did this! Even if a King brought peace, it was short lived. His son usually did something to ruin it.

- The Hebrew concept of peace *shalom* has behind it the idea of victory—when all ungodly opposition/darkness is removed from the earth.

“Prince of peace does not mean that the prince is peaceful but that he has the power to bring and enforce peace even in a world where many don’t care to have it.” (Dale Ralph Davis)

- Jesus says the sobering truth (Jn 3:19): people love the darkness rather than the light.
- Finally, his calling. He will sit on David’s throne. This deliverer will be in the family line of David—fulfilling God’s covenant keeping promises. So the birth story of Matthew’s Gospel begins with a genealogy showing *Jesus Christ is this child born/son given*.

Conclusion:

Last week I was listening to the Ben Shapiro show. Shapiro is a young Jewish-American who comments on conservative politics.

Shapiro was interviewing a Christian for his show and he said the gut-honest truth to his Christian guest:

“If what you believe about Jesus is true...then it’s bad news for me.”

I appreciate that Shapiro believes in truth statements.

Eternity is at stake regarding what we believe about Jesus Christ.

Peace on earth comes through One who secures victory, fully deserves our trust, worship, and obedience.

It presses us to ask: Is the truth of Jesus good news or bad news for me? Do you have a personal interest in the child born, Son given deliverer Jesus Christ? Spurgeon said in a Christmas sermon: “If he is born to you, then you are born again.” Jesus is not just the cute baby of the nativity scene—he is also a blood-soaked Savior given to us.