

Sermon For unto us a child is born

Isaiah 9.2-7

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The verses we read from the prophet Isaiah are one of the best known Messianic prophecies in the old testament.

That is, I think, because of its great poetic and emotional value of the words. And also because there are so many clear links to Jesus Christ and the language of the New Testament.

And maybe also because George Friedrich Handel in 1742 made it so well known with his masterpiece The Messiah. I can't read these words from Isaiah without in my mind hearing the music.

1 Circumstances and Reversal

The historical background to this prophetic outcry by Isaiah was the dramatic defeat of Israel's armies at the hands of the Assyrian conquer Tiglath Pileser, in 738 and 733 BC.

Tiglath Pileser's armies moved from the north, through Syria, into the area of Israel. So the northern areas of Zebulun and Naphtali and the area now called Galilee were invaded and raided by the enemies.

The people in those areas were suffering much. In poetic language, Isaiah says that they were walking in darkness; they lived in a land of great darkness. But the people in that darkness, have seen a great light.

The priest Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, prayed to God about the coming of the savior and his prayer echoes these words from Isaiah, when he says that the savior was coming 'to give light to those who sit in darkness.'

And in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 4:12-16 the same words of Isaiah were applied directly to Jesus:

12 Now when he 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.”

So the very early church saw in the words of Isaiah a clear prediction of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The bible is the book of the church, and if we want to understand the Bible well, we must read it as the church has always done it.

And surely we can try to see how what Isaiah said fitted in his own time, in one way or another, and that is not wrong. But for us, the value of what he says, is in how he points to Jesus Christ.

What would the expected savior come to do? He will change darkness into light. Something you may also want.

He will increase the joy of the people. That is something we can all use, can we not? More joy.

And he will break the yoke that burdens the people, and the instruments that are used by the oppressors to make the life of the people of God hard.

I love that because we all have areas in our life where we are burdened, whether that is because of internal turmoil or because of external problems. But we want to lay down those burdens.

And we read in Isaiah of the promise that there will be an end to war; the boot of the tramping warrior and his blood-soaked uniform will go into the fire.

All these promises, even the actual language used, we heard in the past 4 weeks in the Gospel readings from Luke 1-2. Darkness , light, joy, peace, fire.

The Bible is a harmonious book - it is Gods composition. What was promised in the Old Testament, was fulfilled in the New Testament.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Isaiah wrote words that he may not have fully understood but that we, with hindsight, understand as a clear pointer to Jesus Christ.

2 The child

The child, the son, that is born and that Isaiah describes, is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Those are not names you would give to just any little baby son. My grandkids are fantastic, surely, all three of them, but I do not think my daughter and her husband ever considered to call them Mighty God or Eternal Father. Instead, they chose Hugo, Louise and Suzanne. Jesus is described here by Isaiah, no-one else. When Mary and Joseph looked into the cradle, they saw the one who is our Counselor, our God, our Father, our Peace.

And that is really what we need. In the midst of our darkness -darkness of sin, and problems, even the boredom of life, loneliness, we need this. We need a Counselor. We need God. We need a Father, We need peace.

God himself became a human being. In an incredible twist of history, the creator of all things made himself part of all things. The one who created humankind, accepted the limitations of humankind.

Why did He do this?

Isaiah says that God will take the yoke, the burden of the shoulder of his people by taking the government on his own shoulder. God lifts the burden of our back, by taking that burden on himself.

He became a lowly human to lift us up to divine heights.

He carried our sinful existence to liberate us from sin.

He adopted our flesh to give us his Spirit.

He accepted our temporality, to give us eternity.

God became a child, to save us from our darkness of sin, guilt, fear, death.

He became a child so that He could be for us and give to us all that we need.

Do you not need what to do? What choices to make? He is your counselor.

Are you in real trouble and you need help? God is on your side.

Are you lost in life, alone? The eternal Father puts his arm around you and calls you his child.

Your life is in turmoil? He can give you peace as no other can.

If only we stay close to him, and live with him, and ask him. And ask him.

Again and again we hear people say, where is God, look at the misery in the world! And yes, there is much misery indeed. But if people do not want to take look at where God shines his light, they will probably never see him.

He can be found in the Christmas child, who of course grew up and through his life and death and resurrection, brought us back to God.

By why then still so much misery? Could God not have made this whole world into a paradise with one stroke of his divine pen?

He could have done that, I assume. But if he had done that 2000 years ago, would we today exist?

If we need light, freedom, help, advise, that arm around our shoulder, we must not moan in our own private corner, but go to the child, the son. He is the one who promises to lift the weight from our shoulder. In Matthew 11:28-29 we read of Jesus that he invites us:

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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.

Our souls can rest - if we know that we are secure in the hands of the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

3 Eternally on the throne

We are secure because the government is upon his shoulder. And he will rule with peace on the throne of David and over his Kingdom.

What is this throne of David?

In the Old Testament, God had made very clear promises to King David and his family, that if they would rule the People of God with justice and in line with the will of God, that there would always be a family member of David on the throne.

But when Jessu was born, for many hundreds of years, there had not been a Davidic king.

When Jesus came - who happened to be from that family of King David - he would rule the people of God; there was a legitimate king again.

The child, the son, that was born has the government on his shoulder, "from this time forth and forevermore", says the prophet. Actually, as the Son of Man he had always been in the throne of the universe - and when he finished his ministry on earth, he returned to that throne.

And today he rules over us as our Prince of Peace, our King of all kings. When Jesus went back to his heavenly throne, he told his followers that he has "all authority in heaven and on earth". The sweet baby boy became the ruler of all.

Isaiah does actually speak of the *increase* of his government, a government of peace. The image is that the son sits on the throne, and his rule slowly extends into all directions.

Where do we see his rule today? In the church of Jesus Christ. He is the head of the church - he is in charge of us. Is the increase we read of, maybe the fact that the church of our Lord has throughout the ages increased in size? 33% of all people worldwide call themselves after this king on the throne.

But we also wait eagerly for him to increase his rule, until he fills the earth as the waters cover the sea. Nothing can stop him - his rule is increasing and it is forevermore.

This is a solid promise of God to us. 'The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this', Isaiah announces. His kingdom will have no end. His zeal is the jealous part of God's love for us. He is passionately committed to making your problems his own. He wants us to enjoy justice and righteousness and peace.

And instead of us wondering why there is so much misery still around, we better join the bandwagon - God wants to fill his earth with peace and justice and righteousness, so let us join the throng of the child who came to our world to make us new.

With him on our side, the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the prince of peace, with him on the throne forever, let us bring his good news and his peace to every corner of our world.

Conclusion

Christmas is the feast of the child, the son that has been given to us. God is on our side, He is with you now.

But this can only mean that we are now part of his program in this world. His program to bring justice and righteousness and peace. May he encourage us all afresh to bring peace to place where there is strife, to bring light into darkness.

Merry Christmas to you all

Amen

Conclusion 100 words