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Sermon 527 - Isaiah 9:2-7

Hope for Light to Break Darkness

And so Merry Christmas and thank you for joining us here at Amazing Love. What a great night to consider the angels announcement, “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news that will be for great joy, a Savior, the Savior is born.” And as we get going there are so many great things about Christmas - there are Christmas cookies, Christmas decorations, Christmas presents, and Christmas music.

I invite you to consider with me Christmas music. Christmas is a celebration so grand it has it’s own genre of music. Spotify has Rock, Pop, and Christmas. You don’t have that for other celebrations no Thanksgiving or New Years or 4th of July genre. Maybe a song or two. And do you have a Christmas favorite? All I want for Christmas is you, I want a Hippopotamus, or White Christmas. But a while back some superstars got together and they sang a song called, “We are the World.” Remember this? Written by Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson, but performed by a bunch that included Billy Joel, Ray Charles, Cyndi Lauper, Tina Turner, and Stevie Wonder. It’s a song of hope. That people can help people, especially helping the needy in Africa. One of the lyrics reads, “We’re saving our own lives. It’s true we’ll make a better day, just you and me.” Famously Bob Dylan looked quite awkward during his set recording this song. (i.e. wanted present) And in an interview it was discovered why perhaps he looked this way. For Bob Dylan believed and said, “Songs can’t save the world and man cannot save himself.” In essence he was saying that if our hope for the world is this song or ourselves - we have no hope. Because hope in songs or in people isn’t going to work for Africa or anyone else.

I share with you the story of We are the World to ask you, “*Where does hope come from?*” Are we the answer? Maybe by experience you put your hope in someone who let you down. I moved the area and I thought Derrick Rose was the reincarnate Michael Jordan going to bring the glory days back to Chicago. Didn’t turn out. Is our hope in giving and money enough? There is an interesting book entitled, “When helping hurts.” Saying that just throwing money at problems doesn’t just make it better. Hoping in these things may leave us feeling and looking like Bob Dylan. Disappointed and without hope. And without hope this life is hard!

Yet tonight because of Christmas hope is restored. In fact *On Christmas Eve we are thrilled by hope*. And though the the world is dark. Though darkness touches us all through depression, debt, sickness and sadness. Though some of us have come in with heavy hearts, hanging by a thread. I tell you this; there is light that breaks the darkness. It’s a baby born of Mary and placed in a manger. It’s a baby whose birth was foretold by prophets and then fulfilled through a miraculous conception. It’s a baby whose name is too big for anyone else’s broad shoulders - Immanuel - which means God with us. **And this baby** who grew to be a man and reveals to us this phenomenal truth, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) In other words those who have Jesus, Immanuel have the right for hope. He is the Light that breaks the darkness! Merry Christmas Church family. This is a message we can rally behind, Christ the hope of glory.

We turn now to the Word of God, the Bible. We do believe the Bible to be the reliable revelation of the heart of God. And today we consider the words of prophet Isaiah. He was living at time when God's people needed hope. They had experienced the darkness of other nations oppressing them and things were only going to get worse. Soon their lands would be conquered and the nation taken into captivity. They wondered were to get hope from? It's interesting that before this chapter it says they were turning to other sources. Not men like Bob Dylan or Michael Jackson or money. They were seeking mediums and spiritists. Like many Americans today they were very spiritual. But this was the result, "They will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness." (Is 8:22). Talked to a young adult who sought guidance in the occult and was disturbed. I wonder how many today this would be true - they are in utter darkness. Much of theology today is rooted in pop culture, personal opinion and a critical approach to the Bible, but still utter darkness. And into this Isaiah then reveals these words. There is a light that breaks darkness in this baby. We can be thrilled by hope this Christmas Eve. Turn to your neighbor and say, "Christ was born for you!"

One of the very best parts about Christmas is the gift giving. And maybe tonight there are some kids excited for what they might be getting. And I think of wrapping and unwrapping gifts. It's appropriate as we consider John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." But I want to consider with you what it's like when everything is unwrapped, and you have a glorious mess. The kids have ripped that beautiful paper to shreds, and they have stock piled their goods. Pajamas, socks, and toys all in their corner. And it's a wonderful moment, a moment unlike anytime of year when the whole family has their pile of goods and enjoying gifts. People stand above their piles as conquerors of Christmas.

That moment mirrors what Christmas is all about, and why we can be thrilled by hope. In fact this Christmas *We are thrilled by hope because of the bounty of God.* Now Isaiah didn't talk about wrapping paper and a stack of socks and pjs no look at what he references, "You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder." (9:3). There were Christmas-like moments for God's people back in the day. When the harvest came in and they could just bask in having enough, a bumper crop - look at all God gave. Or when the war was over and they had conquered and an enemy nation, enjoying their goods of silver and gold, an immediate increase. God says to you tonight, "This is you! All because of what I gave not pjs, socks, or technology. But because here's what I give. Unto you a son is given." It's appropriate that we give gifts because Jesus, the song of God is the greatest gift ever given.

But a question might be? ***What kind of bounty does a baby bring?*** Let's talk about it.

This past year at Amazing Love we got connected with the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. And we learned about their history. We met Bishop Slavik who told us how his family had been oppressed by the Russians. He grew up in Western Ukraine with much farm land, and the Russians simply took it from him. Their country is at war, protecting themselves against the Russians who want still want to take and oppress. And he dreams of what it would be like to be free from the oppression of that nation, to no longer live in fear of what they might do or steal. And I can't imagine how liberating that might feel, or to see him take back the farm land that

they once stole. Perhaps in a rocking chair overlooking the family farm. Would he have the type of joy the Scripture here talks about.

You don't have to grow up Ukrainian to experience oppression. We all know what injustice and unfairness feels like in this world to one degree or another. But some of the greatest oppression we face is that of guilt, shame, and fear. A great oppressor in our life is our own thoughts, we have been given a conscience that reminds us when we have done wrong, and what we deserve because of it. We have a spiritual oppressor in the devil also known as the accusers who is constantly trying to convince us we are beyond the love of God and could never be forgiven. But there is good news tonight, and hope tonight. Look what Isaiah says, "For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor." (Is 9:4). The reference there is a when God took a man named Gideon and 300 Israelites and they won the battle against 120,000 with torches and trumpets simply because God was with them. You should read that story in Judges 7.

And so God reminds us why we can be thrilled by hope. Because a battle has been won. A battle won not through torches and trumpets, but a tree. You consider the wood of a tree. A baby who would trade a wooden crib for a wooden cross. The wooden crib points to his life for us, and his wooden cross his death for us. A baby who lived in the light never sinning, and absorbing the darkness by bearing sins curse. This baby born to die so that we who were dead in sin might truly live. And because of this baby we have the thrill of hope. *We are thrilled by hope because the oppression of guilt is over.* And Jesus says the yoke of slavery to sin is broken. The oppression of the accuser is over. In fact this Jesus says let's make a gift exchange I take your yoke of sin and you get my yoke. It's an easy yoke and a light burden. This yoke is freedom, this yoke means adoption to sonship and daughtership, this yoke is the certain hope of eternal life. If you're new to Christianity. This is the message that salvation, forgiveness, life and peace are gifts coming to you from the Christ of Christmas. And by believing in this message, it's like a hand reaching out to receive the gifts God is offering. You want this to be your reality, light breaking darkness - then simply believe.

So what is this bounty? What is the joy of the harvest and plunder? It is not a stack of pjs and toys. It's not technology that will be obsolete in 2 years. The true bounty of our God is not earthly but eternal, spiritual. It's a bounty of peace, joy, and forgiveness. *Presents too big to wrap, and too priceless to purchase.* Praise God for these spiritual riches that are ours because the Light of the world broke the darkness of sin.

And it's good we remember that the riches of Christ are spiritual. The redemption of Christ is not for earthly nations and the prosperity of this world. For you consider the shepherds. They had just received in their hearts the bounty of Christ - yet, it didn't make the sheep less dumb or the nights less cold. You consider those Isaiah writes to, they have enough in these promises to have an undying hope and yet their years of oppression by nations are coming and coming soon. And you consider Christians though we have hope and are thrilled by it tonight, it doesn't mean you know get to go back to perfect family gatherings, where no one is going to get sick, and no problems to deal with. And though this hope still means a brighter future when these seasons pass, there is still hope for us now. *The thrill of hope culminates in eternity, but this hope still helps us now.*

Why? Because our hope isn't in a person who fails us. And it isn't in money that flees. It's in Jesus and look what Scripture says about him, "And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Let's walk through these names as it provides hope for us right now. Would you walk with me through some Christmas movies.

Wonderful counselor - reminds me of It's a Wonderful Life. George Bailey who tries to be a good son and good brother and husband and father. But life gets so hard for him that he doesn't want to go on. Until the angel Clarence and what does God do through Clarence? He gives wonderful counsel, namely how he is being used for a purpose. He sees life without him in it, and the shop owner who didn't have a turn around because he wasn't there. He sees his wife Mary turn into an old maid and hears the town is renamed Pottersville. And he realizes his life did have meaning and purpose. Immortalized is the need for George to get wise counsel.

When we experience our dark moments how great to know we too have a Counselor, not Clarence. But God. He uses his Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. That Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. At Amazing Love we promote Bible reading as a pretty big deal. We give them away and just encourage you to read. Some of you have walked with me long enough to know that if you are in your own dark spot I may just ask you - what passage are you going to or thinking about. You've walked with me long enough for me to ask you, "How is your personal devotions?" Because our God has wonderful counsel revealed to us in his Word!

Another description is that God is a Mighty God. He is the God where nothing is impossible. He is called the Waymaker. You can never be so stuck that he can't get you unstuck. When you don't see a way he can make a way. That reminds me of the Movie the Santa Clause. Tim Allen approaches Chimney's and says how am I with my new found 40 extra pounds going to fit through that? But the magic of Christmas is that it happens - along with him being able to cruise all around the world to every chimney and every family in one night - that's incredible.

You want proof of a mighty God? There is nothing more incredible than the God who says I'm going to die, and yet in three days rise again. Getting a portly man through a chimney is nothing compared to bringing a dead man back to life. And the God who did that still knows how to work the impossible for us. I wonder how many of you came into tonight with more questions than answers in the midst of your darkness. I wonder how many of you simply need to hear - he will make a way. When there is no way. He can do it!

He is Everlasting Father. I don't know about you but Christmas reminds me of the people who are no longer with us. It could be a Grandma or Grandpa, mom or dad, who has gone to heaven. It could be kids that have moved away. Picking up on the importance of the family dynamic is the movie Home Alone. Kevin thinks life will be better without his family, especially Buzz. But he finds he needs them. If you are Home Alone this Christmas or feeling away from family the Everlasting Father assures us we are never alone. He will never leave or forsake us and has always been our dwelling place. Yes people will continue to come in and out of your life. That's a reality you might have to face. But he never will and he is always here.

He is the Prince of Peace. We were having a discussion of the favorite names of God at the Blumer household and Bella picked up on this one. Can you imagine a kingdom ruled by peace, by harmony and love? Such a kingdom does not exist on earth. But on a night like this when we consider the significance of the Savior and his love for us - we are a part of such a kingdom. When we realize the rod of the oppressor is broken we have true peace. To draw your

attention to this I bring up the Charlie Brown Christmas. And the character Linus. Now to know Linus is to know his blanket, it's his security wherever he goes. Maybe there are some here who grew up with such a blanket. But when Charlie asks the meaning of Christmas and Linus gives the answer, something changes. The blanket drops. The Words of Christmas bring so much hope, security, and peace that he doesn't need that blanket. Is this not the peace of Christmas. God I know like Linus I've picked up and clung to so many other things as I wrestle with darkness. I've coped with people, possessions, medications, I coped with pleasure and reckless pursuits of me. But they are blankets with no security compared to what you provide - as you are here.

We have the thrill of hope because of who this baby is. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. And if this Christmas your hope is in Him. If you stop fighting and simply believe. His light can break your darkness however dark it might be. May the message of Christmas thrill you tonight and every day. May you not forget what Christmas means. Amen.