

The Hope of Christmas Isaiah 9:1-5

< Introduction >

I was praying that Fukuda San would be able to stand here today. I was also praying that he would receive the recovery that he needs. My feelings were complicated. However, God sees the end just as clearly as the beginning. He already knew a long time ago that I would be standing here today, even though I didn't know it till a week ago. He knew that Fukuda San needed to take a break from ministry. And it is by his grace that Fukuda San is receiving the care, counseling and comfort he needs at this time.

My brothers and sisters, if our lives depended on us we wouldn't make it. If we didn't have God, we would not have his words, his Spirit, even the breath he puts within us. We would be lonely and without hope.

Today, in the words of Isaiah 9:1-5, we see that God knew hundreds of years before Jesus came what he was going to do to bring Israel out of darkness and to offer hope to the whole world.

Let's take courage and hope from Isaiah's words.

Isaiah 9:1-5

^{9:1} 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.

"Nevertheless, there will be no more 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. 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. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before 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."

Oh, Lord of hosts, would you come and speak to us now and give us hope. Amen.

Today I would like to talk about three expressions of hope in these verses. 1) The first one is: Our gloom (darkness) will end. 2) Secondly, the light will come. 3) Thirdly, all of our enemies will be defeated.

The first word of hope comes in verse one, the very first sentence: "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish."

Our first word of hope is that the gloom will end. What is this gloom?

The last verse of the previous chapter says this: "And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness." (Isaiah 8:22)

This is talking about Israel's judgment. They had forsaken God who had brought them out of Egypt. They had forgotten him. They were depending on their own strength. God's power departed from them. The light of God went out. Look at 2 Kings 15:29.

"In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured . . . Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria." It was the beginning of Israel's 70 years of captivity.

Zebulun and Naphtali came from the family of Jacob, and became northern territories of Israel. They were located around the Sea of Galilee. So, in the second part of Isaiah 9:1, it says, "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."

These two northern territories bordered Gentile nations and so when Jesus came, he would bring salvation not only for Jews but for Gentiles as well, to the nations that bordered Israel.

This brings us to our second word of hope in these verses. The first one was that the gloom will end. The second one is: Glory will come. Light will shine, as verse two indicates. "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."

That's what I love about Christmas: the illuminations, the colorful lights that pierce the darkness. I heard from Elaine's uncle who has since died about their Christmas tradition. On Christmas Eve, after they ate as a family, they would gather in another room where the Christmas Tree was, but they wouldn't turn the lights on. They would just sit in the darkness for awhile. It was hard for the kids because they were excited about opening presents. But even for the kids it was good discipline to wait in the dark. They experienced the darkness together.

Then the Christmas tree lights and candles were lit, we sang and read the Christmas story from the Bible, opened presents and ate and drank till late at night. There was so much joy! We exchange gifts because Jesus was born and the darkness is gone. Our joy in Jesus is so great that we want to share with each other. It was such a happy time. Let's do it this year too.

The darkness will end. The light will come. The result is in these next three verse. Look at what the next verses say. Isaiah 9:3-5

"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 Genesis 17:5, God told Abraham, "'No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations."

Jesus came and fulfilled this promise. He multiplied the nation of Israel, the people of God. Now, we too are included in this promise.

We rejoice before the Lord, just like we did on Christmas Eve. The harvest has provided enough to eat. Our needs are provided. We share with each other in gifts. The enemy has been defeated and so we divide the spoil.

Let's read on about the enemy. "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."

God has defeated all of our enemies, just like he did on the day Midian. Do you remember that?

Judges 7:12, 20-22

"And the Midianites . . . lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. . . . And they (Gideon's 300) cried out, 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!' . . . When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled."

This is a stunning victory that only the Lord could have performed.

Verse five shows the completeness of the victory.

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

Even the garments and the boots of the soldiers will become useful. They will be burned as fuel for the fire. They aren't just defeated, they become useful even in their death.

What does this mean for us today?

Well, first of all, here is our third word of hope. The first word of hope was: The darkness will end. The second word of hope was: We will see the light. And the third word of hope is: All of our enemies will be defeated.

My brothers and sisters, what is our enemy today?

I play tennis with some men on Wednesdays, afterwards we always go out for lunch. Its a great time. But recently, one of the men said, "I'm not going to lunch today." When I probed further about the reason, I came to find out that he did not appreciate one of the other men's strong opinions. There is conflict there. I was sad about that.

But what is even more saddening is that this happens in the church too. It happens to us as leaders. It happens inside of me. I said at the beginning that I was praying for Fukuda San to be able to give the message today, but I yet I was praying for adequate recovery. It's so complicated! It causes quarrels and conflict. Yet within that, today's message was given. "For to us a child is born. to us a son is given." The darkness will

end. The light will come. Every enemy will be defeated. The enemy won't just be defeated, but their boots and clothes will be used. The enemy, the trial, the complicated feelings were used to bring me back to the hope of Christmas. "For to us a child is born." When we begin to quarrel, let's repent and go to Jesus. Let's face each other and ask forgiveness.

Are you overwhelmed at your job right now? Is that your enemy? You are working hard, but it would be easy to be anxious. There are so many things to do. You are trying to do them all by yourself. You're tired. Confess that to God. Jesus became anxious about going to the cross. He asked others to pray with him. Are you doing that?

Is your life not going the way you had hoped? Perhaps you are angry at God. This feeling is also an enemy. What should we do? Go to Jesus and express your feelings to him. Write it down. Lament about your losses. Invite Jesus into those losses. He knows what it is to lose everything. He knows what it is to be overwhelmed. He came into a complicated world. On the cross he was likely angry at his father. "Why have you forsaken me? But yet, he gave it all into his Father's hands. The enemy was used to accomplish the will of his Father.

Prayer

Thank you Lord for Isaiah, and for how even in a complicated and broken world, you used him to give a message of hope to the world. Thank that the darkness we feel right now will end. Light will come. Our enemies will be defeated. We need you Jesus. We love you Jesus. Shine your light into every heart. Help us not to give in to the enemy or our feelings or our impatience, but instead to use the enemy to take us to you, repent, encourage each other and experience revival. In Jesus name, Amen.

Final Blessing

"May you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
may you anoint my head with oil;
may my cup overflow.
May goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Amen.

Let's go with Jesus this week as well. We have the hope of this child, our Savior. In spite of the enemies, the trials, may they cause us to hope in Jesus and to share with each other and pray!