

Isaiah 9:6-7 - God's Zeal

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[0 : 00] Well, in both our services today we've been focusing on the words of Isaiah chapter 9 verses 6 and 7. We can read these again.

For 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. 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 forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Now as we were saying this morning, Isaiah chapter 9 comes in a wider section of the prophecy of Isaiah from chapter 6 through to chapter 12 which is describing a crucial, crucial moment in the history of God's people in the Old Testament. And as we were saying when we were reading it, Isaiah is coming to the people with a message of judgment because the people have been rejecting God but also a message of hope, a message of salvation. And in order to study these words we've been asking three questions. This morning we asked first of all what is going on and at this time it was a period of intense political turmoil. You had Judah which was just a really a tiny little nation and north of them there was the northern kingdom of Israel and north of them was the kingdom of Syria and these two nations were clubbing together threatening Judah and we're going to attack them and in the panic of this situation the king of Judah Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria which was even further north and much bigger to come and help them.

As we were saying if you imagine Wales were feeling threatened, Scotland and England pulled together to attack Wales so the king of Wales goes on phones in America to come and to help. That kind of thing. A lot of political turmoil, a lot of uncertainty people were panicking and the big mistake that the king of Judah made as we were saying this morning was that he went to the wrong place for help. Instead of listening to God instead of trusting God he went to Tiglath Palaeus and the king of Assyria in order to get help and the results were not good. So that's what's going on. Political turmoil are real mess in many ways in terms of the stability and peace in the Middle Eastern region. Our second question was what is God doing about it?

[2 : 59] And the point we tried to emphasise was that in the midst of all this unrest and all this disturbance among the kingdoms of the world, God was promising to establish his kingdom.

These words are pointing forward to the true king, the king who will reign forevermore to Jesus Christ who comes and as Jesus came he said the kingdom of God has come. Jesus is God's true king.

Throughout the Old Testament as we said you've got kingdoms that come and go and come and go and rise and fall. In the midst of all that turmoil God is saying I will establish my kingdom. I am in control.

You can trust me. So that was this morning we had these two questions but tonight we come to our third question and really it's the most important question of all in terms of studying this passage and it's one of the most important questions we can ever discuss in life.

Our third question is why is God doing this? In all this turmoil God has promised to establish his kingdom. He is going to send his king but why? Why? Well the answer to that is given to us in the very last sentence of verse 7 and it's on these words that we are going to focus.

[4 : 45] The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. God is going to establish his kingdom.

God himself is going to come as king and he's going to do it because of his zeal. Now what does that mean? What is that telling us? Well that's where I want us to focus what are we going to do in a while together tonight. What does it mean when it says the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this? Well the word for zeal is a really really interesting word in the Old Testament.

The word expresses very very strong emotion. This is not a kind of casual word. This is not a half hearted word. This is an intense word. It expresses the strongest of emotions and it gets translated in various ways. Often it's translated jealousy and in particular the word is used to describe a husband's jealousy for his wife, his protective passionate love for his wife and his dismay if she is ever unfaithful to her or if she is abused by somebody else. We find that in Numbers chapter 5 verse 29. This is the law and cases of jealousy. Same word. When a wife though her husband's under her husband's authority goes astray and defiles herself but when the spirit of jealousy comes over a woman and he is jealous of his wife then he shall set the woman before the Lord and the priest shall carry out for her all this law. The wider chapter there is discussing the laws of how to respond to adultery but at the heart of it is this notion of jealousy that a husband is fiercely protective of his wife. It's a very very strong emotion. It's also related to the word for envy that we find in Genesis chapter 30. When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children she envied her sister. She said to Jacob give me children or I shall die. Now the one thing that that verse is saying is that Rachel really felt strongly about her situation. She envied her sister. Same word more or less the same word the same family of words that she had this intense intense feeling in regard to her situation. Or it can be translated zeal like we have in Isaiah 9 and we have in Psalm 69 verse 9 zeal for your house has consumed me. The key point that I want to emphasize is that this word is expressing the sentiments of somebody who really really cares.

When you see that phrase the zeal of the Lord of hosts we are not talking about something small. We are not talking about something casual. It is telling us that the Lord of hosts will do this because he really really cares. And as we explore that I want us to just categorize things under three general headings. The first thing that we see in regard to this phrase is that God cares about the world. God cares about our world. And that's a vital reminder because so many people can have a conception of God whereby they think that he's a distant being. People think of God as perhaps a force or as something. So many people say that they say that they don't believe the Bible but I believe in God. Not sure if I believe in God but I believe in some higher force or somehow higher power. So many people think that God if he exists is detached from the world, separated, not that interested. Well the Bible tells us that that is not true. And we are being reminded in Isaiah 9 that God is deeply deeply concerned about the world and he is absolutely passionate in his care and in his commitment. When the world is in turmoil like it was in around 730, 720 BC when these events were taking place when the world was in turmoil God cared. And it's still the same today. In fact that's really the great message of the Bible that God cares about the world.

[9 : 39] Sin came into the world, sin spoiled the world and sin gave God every reason to abandon his creation. But God did not do that. If you go to the beginning of the Bible and you read the first 11 chapters of Genesis you see things just they start off perfectly and they just get worse and worse and worse and worse. It's a picture of devastation. The effects of sin are horrific. Even in these short chapters you get a very clear impression that society, that civilization is absolutely falling apart and it all culminates in Genesis 11. You've got the Tower of Babel where the world is in rebellion against God and everything falls apart. And so you're at this low ebb in Genesis 11.

But God does not leave the world there. And if you like Genesis 12 it's like a marker where by God initiates his plan and starting with Abraham God implements his great plan to put everything right. And that's the great message of the Bible. God is putting it right. And that's a reminder that God cares about right and wrong. And that's immensely, immensely important.

God cares about right and wrong. And we saw that in the passage that we read Isaiah chapter 10. Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees and the writers who keep writing oppression to turn aside the needy from justice to rob the poor of my people of their right that widows may be their spoil and that they make the fatherless they pray. God is basically saying there woe to you who are picking on the poor who are exploiting the needy and who are harming the most vulnerable. God cares about right and wrong. God cares when people suffer. God cares when his instructions are being ignored. God cares when people do awful, awful things in the world. We can look at the recent events that have taken place and the last couple of months seems to have been unbelievable in terms of what's been taking place. Do you look at all the different events from the poorest countries like Afghanistan to the most well off nations like Germany, France, even America, turmoil, and chaos everywhere. And very often people react to these things by saying, where's God?

How can God allow these things? I spoke to somebody a few months ago and his, if you like, reason for not coming to church and his reason for rejecting the Bible was, why isn't God destroying ISIS? Why isn't he just obliterating them? That was his objection to God, that bad things are happening and God's not doing anything.

That was his reason to reject faith in God. But this is where we have to remember that God cares. He cares zealously about right and wrong. And this is also where we have to stand back and have a broader perspective. Because we must never ever forget that God will hold all of us to account. That's emphasized in many places in the Bible, Romans 14 is an example. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. [13:57] People often criticize God when his judgment is not instant. That was the objection of the man I spoke to. Why isn't God getting rid of ISIS? No. But we have to remember that just because judgment has not come, does not mean that it isn't coming. And that applies to the whole of humanity.

And it's quite interesting if you look at history. And if you try to think of some of the most most brutal regimes of history, you've got the Assyrians who were the powerful empire at this time. They were the strong ones. And they were followed then by the Babylonians. And if you read Lamentations, you will read some of the awful things that the Babylonians did to people.

You've got the Romans with crucifixion and the arena and all the brutality that they showed. And you've got other empires throughout history, Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire. You've got Communist Russia, you've got Nazi Germany, all these brutal regimes. But if you look at them, they have all got one thing in common.

They're gone. None of them are standing today. They're gone. God cares about right and wrong. The Bible tells us that history proves that.

The words of Sam won her through the wicked will not stand in the judgment. And that is because of the zeal of the Lord of hosts. God cares about the world.

[15:58] But secondly, God cares about his purposes. He cares about the world in a general sense.

But he cares in particular about his purposes. As we said, the whole of the Bible is an account of how God is putting things right. He is putting right what has gone wrong.

And the Bible gives us this amazing and thrilling account of how God has implemented that plan, how he is working out his restoration and his salvation. And in that we see that God cares about his purposes. And this is where we have to stand back and remember that Isaiah is part of the Old Testament prophecies. And the Old Testament prophecies served many purposes, but one purpose that they fulfilled was that they teach us and they taught the people of the Old Testament that God has a plan. And the prophecies are intimating what the next stage of that plan will be. They tell the people what is going to take place. And they're a reminder that the people of the Old Testament, whether you come in at Isaiah's time or whatever else it may be, they are at a stage and at a moment which is part of a bigger, wider plan. And in many ways it's amazing. At this point in Isaiah, Judah was tiny, absolutely tiny on the global stage.

And the cause of God and the people of God at this stage in history looked like they had no chance. But they were just at a stage and at a part of God's bigger plan. And as you read through the Old Testament prophecies, you see this plan being laid out and we have the incredible seeing all of these things being fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the New Testament. God has a plan and he zealously cares that his purposes will be fulfilled. God will implement his plan.

And this is emphasised by the title that is used of God in Isaiah chapter 9. It says, of the unities of his government and of peace there will be no end and on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. You look at the Old Testament, you see lots of different titles for God and each one of these will emphasise a different aspect of God's attributes and his character. And the one that we have in this chapter and the one that we have in this word is one that I'm sure you have heard many times. We sang it in a number of Ersams, the Lord of hosts. This zeal is the zeal of the Lord of hosts. But what does Lord of hosts mean? It's one of these phrases that you hear often but what exactly does it mean?

[19 : 41] Well the word hosts is basically the word for armies. It's the word for armies and the some Bible translations like the New Living Translation translates the Lord of hosts, the Lord of heavens armies. So when you see that phrase Lord of hosts think army. Now what is that teaching us?

Well it's telling us two amazing things about God. First of all it is telling us that God is sovereign over all forces, all armies, all powers, all beings, all bodies, whether in heaven or on earth. God is the one who is in control. God is the one who is sovereign over every force, every power. No matter how powerful an army may seem, no matter how strong a nation may look, it is subject to the unique and absolute supremacy and authority of God. Now in Isaiah's time the big force was Assyria. They were the superpower of that day but the wonderful thing that Isaiah emphasizes that Assyria was simply a tool in God's hand. If you read on in chapter 10 we see this being described and you can read chapter 10 when you when you go home if you want but it's talking about how God uses this mighty nation of Assyria to implement his plans. Ah Assyria the rod of my anger the staff in their hands is my fury. In other words Assyria is in God's hands he is the means by which God is executing judgment but Assyria itself would also be judged. Assyria was arrogant. Assyria thought they were the strong nation and they thought they were the ones who'd achieved it all but they were also going to be judged and we have this remarkable image in verse 15. Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it as if a rod should wield him who lifts it or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood. Now that's an image there of somebody picking up an axe and swinging it against a tree and it is saying that

Assyria is the axe and the iron is God's. Assyria is a tool in God's hands the axe cannot boast over the hand that wields it. God is the one who uses it and this is really really really important for us today because this is what our world view must be. When we look at all the nations of the world when we look at all the forces in the world and all the powers that are around us we have to remember that they are all simply tools in God's hands and remember what I said Judah at this time was tiny and Assyria was huge and so it was exactly the same as it is today where at sometimes especially in the west the church can seem tiny and the forces of our nations can seem so strong and yet they are simply tools in God's hands. Whoever steps into the White House at the end of this year is a tool in God's hand. Whatever happens across Europe it's all in God's hands.

Now as Christians we can often feel very sad about the state of the world and we can see things that are going on and we can really feel so sorrowful at the way things are and that's correct we should always mourn the effects of sin but when we see the world in turmoil and when we see the world turning away from God yes we should mourn that but we should never feel threatened because God is the Lord of hosts. God is the one who is sovereign over every power when we see the world in the way it is we should never feel discouraged. Yes we should feel sad and sorrowful but we should not feel discouraged because God is the Lord of hosts. God is the one who reigns and even in our local situation here we must remember that God has said that he will build his church and the gates of hell will never prevail against it and the fact that God is the Lord of hosts the Lord of all forces the Lord of the armies reminds us that he has both the power and the resources that he needs to change the world and if you think about an army an army is a combination of power and resources in an army you've got a huge group of men and women all organised into different departments you've got a huge resource and along with that lies power whereby if the army implements a strategy it takes place if somebody in command tells them to go somewhere they go and so you have this combination of power and resources and thereby things are achieved and God has the same thing the power and the resources he has power power to accomplish his purposes power to open people's eyes power to soften hard hearts power to give people understanding power to save people no matter how lost they may seem God has the power to save people from a lost eternity God has amazing power but that power is administered through resources and the amazing thing is that God's army of resources is you you as God's people are the means by which God can fulfill his purposes as Jesus said when he was ascending you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth we are God's resource for reaching the world we are God's resource for proclaiming this message of salvation we are the means whereby the nations of the world and the people of carloy and everybody around about us who does not yet know Jesus Christ we are the means by which God can reach these lives and together as a church as God's people we are an army serving our sovereign God and we can bring this message to those who need to hear it and as we do that and as we go for it together we do it knowing that

[27 : 30] God is sovereign over everything we have God on our side we are the resources through which his plans and purposes are accomplished so that's the first thing that this teaches us that God is is is over all forces all powers but this phrase Lord of hosts teaches us something else that is really important it's teaching us that God is willing to fight the word hosts is the word for armies it's a fighting word it's all to do with fighting and that's telling you and me that God's zeal for his purposes is so great that he is willing to fight for them God is willing to fight to put things right and in order for God to accomplish his plan of salvation he has had to engage in a spiritual war it is not a small thing for God to get involved in the world it's not a small thing for God to start correcting the problem of sin it is a fight it is a war and God is willing to fight and that's why at the very beginning in Genesis 3 it speaks in terms of conflict God says to the serpent I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel and throughout the whole Bible and throughout the whole of history you see the outworking of this battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil God is willing to fight and that doesn't say that that's not telling us that God is as violent or unstable we know that he's not it's telling us how strong God's zeal is when it comes to putting right the problem of sin when it comes to offering people like you and like me salvation God is willing to fight for it and it is a cosmic battle that's what Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers against authorities against cosmic power over this present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places God is engaged in battle but there is only one winner as Colossians 2 says you who are dead in your trespasses and in the uncertain decision of your flesh God made alive with him having forgiven us all our sins by cancelling the record of death that stood against us with its legal demands this he set aside nailing it to the cross he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him in Jesus Christ God won a victory God won a war and there's three vital things here to mention briefly the first is that God is willing to fight for his purposes no matter what the cost this conflict cost God his own son but he did not spare he gave him up for us all God is willing to fight no matter what the cost secondly God is willing to fight in order to

bring peace that is God's great aim in engaging this conflict he is putting things right in order to bring peace we sang about that in Psalm 46 and it's mentioned again in Isaiah in chapter 9 and in various other places that God wants to bring an end to conflict the yoke of his burden the staffer is shoulder the rod of his oppressor you've broken us in 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 fire and in other places in Isaiah and throughout the Old Testament and as we said in Psalm 46 you see God putting an end to conflict God establishing eternal peace God is willing to fight no matter what the cost God is willing to fight in order to bring peace but thirdly God is willing to fight for you and this is perhaps the most amazing thing of all we see that God cares about the world God cares about his purposes but God also cares about you and all of this is leading us to the amazing conclusion that the zeal of the Lord of hosts that passionate commitment and care is for you God passionately cares about you God jealously cares about you God really really cares about you that is what that phrase the zeal of the Lord of hosts is telling us and it's so so important that we get asked this because I don't know what you might think of yourself I don't know what your view of yourself is but for most of us our view of ourselves is never the most positive and we look at ourselves and we see so many failings and we think how can God have any interest in me how can God even remotely care about me and maybe you feel like that it is so easy to feel that way but Isaiah chapter nine is telling you that God really really cares about you God wants to lead you he wants to guide you through your life and to show you where you should go where you shouldn't go what you should do what you shouldn't do he wants to lead you in the best path God wants to protect you and hold you so that no one can snatch you out of his hands so that you are safe for all eternity so that you are utterly secure God wants to comfort you whatever you have been through whatever life has thrown at you whatever has happened that you never thought would happen whatever you've been through that you never imagined would be your experience God wants to comfort you God wants to help you and no matter what your circumstances are God wants to love you and look after you forever and ever God really really cares about you God's zeal is for you and this highlights two really important points just to finish with first of all this is why as Christians our behavior matters some people think that you you you put your faith in Jesus Christ and then it doesn't matter how you live your sins are

forgiven so you do what you like some people think like that but that's in complete contradiction to everything that the Bible is telling us because God cares about how we live our lives and yes we are not saved by what we do we are not saved by obeying the law but as those people who are saved through faith in Jesus Christ God wants us to be faithful to him and to live in his way he doesn't want us to go astray just like like like an unfaithful spouse God does not want that to happen God cares about how we live as his people that's why he's given us his law as a rule to live our lives by a path to keep us where we want us to be God wants the best for us and that's why our behavior matters God wants us to stick with him to follow him to go into the coming week tomorrow and the next day and to think I am going to follow the word of God in every way

I can so this is why our behavior matters but secondly this is why you can trust God you can trust God with your life and with your eternity because he really cares it's very very hard to trust somebody if if you are uncertain about whether they are concerned for your welfare or not somebody seems uninterested then it's hard to trust them but God is not like that God is the perfect king who loves his people and is loyal to them God is the perfect father whose children mean everything to him God is the perfect savior who will not lose any of those who come to him in faith God's zeal is for you his passionate commitment is for you and you might be saying how can I know that how can I be sure you're well this is where we see something really amazing

[38 : 43] Isaiah prophesied and he said the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do it and he was looking forward to something that was going to come in the future but the amazing thing for you and me is that we look back and we say the zeal of the Lord of hosts has done it and if you want proof that God cares about you then you look at the cross where the zeal of the Lord of hosts reached the ultimate point of sacrifice where the precious son of God was killed for you and for me and that's why we can see in the words that we started our service with that in this in the cross the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins God has done it because of his zeal for you the whole Bible is telling us that God's plan has been fulfilled because he really really really cares the tragic thing about Isaiah's day was that most people didn't listen and most people didn't trust what God was saying many of the people rejected God most of them didn't listen and we see the same thing happening today the same thing is still taking place and that leaves us with the vital question do you trust God to care for you?

he really really cares about you and the proof of that is on the cross but do you trust him? will you give him your life and will you lean on him for your death?

God is saying I really care but he is also saying do you trust me and I hope that we are all saying yes Amen