

Isaiah 9:6-7 - God's Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Well, today I want us to focus on two of the well-known verses that we find in Isaiah chapter 9, reading again verses 6 and verse 7.

For to us that child is born, to us that son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful councillor, 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 when we read that section we were in many ways diving into the middle of a wider section in the book of Isaiah.

If you are reading through Isaiah you will notice that chapters 6 through to chapter 12 are one big section, and they are very important section in the prophecy of Isaiah.

[1 : 14] And these chapters are describing what really is a crucial moment in the history of God's people in the Old Testament. These were days of big events and of very, very important developments in the history of God's people.

And as we said when we read it, Isaiah like all the other prophecies is bringing us a message of judgment and of salvation.

And so whilst we are going to focus on the two verses we have here, we are going to be thinking about the wider picture of what is going on at this time. And so in order to study these two verses we are going to just ask three very simple questions.

First we will ask what is going on. Secondly we will ask what is God doing about it. And then finally we are going to ask why is God doing that.

Now the third question we are going to ask tonight because it would take us a bit too long to do all of these this morning. So we are splitting things across the two services today and this morning we are going to focus on our first two questions.

[2 : 23] So what is going on? Well these chapters in Isaiah chapter 6 to 12 are talking about a time where there was immense immense uncertainty and turmoil in the ancient Near East.

There was a real political instability among the nations surrounding Israel and it was a time of great turmoil. With about 700 years before Jesus was born, 730 to 700 BC and by this time the nations, the nations of Israel had split into two.

You will remember that after Solomon died his son Rehoboam became king and at that time the one nation of Israel split in two.

Most of the nation became the northern kingdom which was known as Israel and then two of the tribes became the southern kingdom called Judah.

So country split in two, northern kingdom Israel, southern kingdom Judah and tension is building between these two nations and between the wider nations.

[3 : 38] And second things chapter 16 describes for us what is going on. So we can read through it together a few verses from here. In the 17th year of Pika the son of Rimalia he was king of the northern kingdom, 17th year of Pika Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign.

So Pika king in the north Ahaz king in the south and he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God as his father David had done but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.

He even burned his son as an offering according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. He sacrificed and made offerings in the high places and on the hills under every green tree.

So southern kingdom Judah's got a new king and he is rebelling against God. Then resin king of Syria and Pika son of Rimalia king of Israel came up to wage war on Jerusalem and they besieged

Ahaz but could not conquer him.

At that time resin king of Syria recovered Elath for Syria and drove the men of Judah from Elath and the Edomites came to Elath where they dwell to this day. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria saying I am your servant and your son come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel who are attacking me.

[5 : 04] Ahaz also took the silver and the gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasure of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria and the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and took it carrying its people captive to Kir and he killed resin.

Now a lot is happening there so in order just to get our heads around what's going on we can just look at a wee map to see what's happening. This is the ancient Near East at the time around 730 BC.

You've got Israel and Judah have split in two. You can see the green nation is Judah, small southern kingdom Ahaz was their king and the capital was Jerusalem.

The northern kingdom was Israel and their king was Pika and he reigned in Samaria that was their capital. When you had Syria which some of your bibles might call Aram, I think the older versions often call it Aram, Syria, same place.

Their king was resin and it can be a bit confusing because you have Syria and you have Assyria, two different places. Assyria is the big one up at the top. Their king at this time was Teclath Palaeza and Assyria was the big superpower of the world at that time.

[6 : 24] So you've got these nations and tension is building. As we read in 2 Kings, the king of Israel, Pika and the king of Syria resin joined forces to attack Judah.

The two of them pulled together and said we are going to attack Judah. But like Scotland and England joining together to attack Wales, something like that. So that's the plan.

They are going to join together and launch an attack on Judah. So the king of Judah, Ahaz, panics because he sees this threat coming from the north.

So in order to try and fight off the attack from Syria and Israel, he goes and he asks Assyria for help.

He contacts Teclath Palaeza, in other words he gets the big man, the big country, the strong ones. He gives him all sorts of gold, all sorts of wealth and says come and help me.

[7 : 24] And Teclath Palaeza, who wants to expand his kingdom, says no problem. And he comes and he overthrows Syria, he overthrows Israel.

So it's a hugely kind of traumatic and uncertain, unstable period. I hope all that makes sense. I hope you can see a picture of what all the different nations are doing at this time.

And so the northern kingdom fell, Assyria came and conquered them. And Isaiah was speaking about that in Isaiah chapter 8. The Lord said to me, take a large tablet and write upon it common characters belonging to Mahashalal Hashbash.

And I will get reliable witnesses, Yura'i the priest and Zachariah the son of Jebecha, Jebecha'iah, to attest for me. And I went to the prophetess and she's conceived and bore a son.

Then the Lord said to me, call his name Mahashalal Hashbash. For before the boy knows how to cry, my father or my mother, the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.

[8 : 30] Isaiah there in the underlying section is prophesying Syria, capital Damascus, Israel, capital Samaria are both going to be overrun by the Assyrians.

And in all of this turmoil, Judah is like a sitting duck. This tiny little country is there with all this chaos going on around it.

The king, Ahaz, was threatened and he was very, very nervous. But the key point in all of this and the key point that Isaiah chapter 6 to chapter 12 takes is that Ahaz went looking for help in the wrong place.

If you read through these chapters, God sends a very clear message to Ahaz and he says to him, you will be safe. Chapter 7 tells us this.

I can just read it through, I'll just skim through it. God comes to Ahaz with a message, there's all this threat, there's all this difficulty, Syria and Israel have joined together but God says in verse 7, thus says the Lord, it shall not stand and it shall not come to pass.

[9 : 55] And God even said to Ahaz, you can look for a sign to prove it. But Ahaz refused. He refused a sign. And as we saw, he went to Assyria for help.

So in other words, instead of going to God, instead of listening to God, instead of leaning on God, he went to Assyria in order to get help.

And that's why the message is a message of judgment as well as a message of salvation because Ahaz did not rely on God.

And here we see a really, really important lesson for us all. It's reminding us that when we feel threatened, when we feel scared, when we feel in difficulty, we can so easily look for help in the wrong place.

It's so easy, so easy when we are feeling vulnerable to look for help in the wrong place. And we can look around us and we can see that that is true.

[10 : 59] You see it in so many people's lives. You see people whose lives are devastated because they look for help in the wrong place. You see people who are lacking self-esteem.

And so in order to get confidence, they take a drink. You see people who are lonely. And in order to have company, they enter into the wrong relationship with the wrong kind of person.

You see people who are struggling for money and they go to a payday loan company and borrow from someone who's only going to put them further and further into debt. You see people who want to be noticed.

They want to be important and so they align themselves with all sorts of extreme groups or extreme behaviour. We can so easily look in the wrong place.

And even those of us whose lives maybe seem on track, we can still be looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place. We can look for satisfaction in the wrong place. So often we think that if we just get a promotion or if we just get a new possession or if we just get a certain element of success, that is going to make us happy.

[12 : 09] So easy to think that. It's so easy to think that. And all around us you have people at the bottom of society where they have made terrible choices and they are miserable.

But you also have people who are at the top, people with the best jobs, people with the highest status and they are miserable because they are in a job they hate, their stress levels are unbearable and they are caught in a trap.

All around us people are looking for help in the wrong place. And the message that Isaiah 9 is reminding us is that the only place we should go is to Jesus.

Jesus said, whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never have thirst. And the amazing message of the Bible for all of us is that whatever is troubling you, whatever it is, the answer is to run to Jesus.

Now that's not just a sort of vaguely optimistic sentiment, that is an absolute fact. Jesus is the one to whom we must turn.

[13 : 27] Jesus is the one who actually can help you. When you are in need, you go to somebody who can really help. When we face a problem, whatever it might be, you go to the person who can actually help.

You don't go to the garage if you've got chest pain. You go to the doctor. You don't go to the doctor if your TV is broken. You go to the person who can actually help. I remember when I was working at Gordon Deasles in Stornoway in the engineering workshop, a lot of people would come in with the diesel pumps of their cars or their tractors.

Now I didn't work on the diesel pumps. I didn't know how to fix them. I didn't know what to do with them. It was Robbie, my brother-in-law who did all of them. And so when somebody came in with a diesel pump, I would say, go to him.

Go to Robbie because he was the one who could help. When we are in trouble, when we need help, we need to go to the one who can actually help.

And when it comes to the biggest problems of life, when it comes to the problems of life and of death and of stress and of worry and of fear, there is only one place to go, to Jesus.

[14 : 40] And he can help. He can help you. Whatever you are going through, Jesus can help.

And those of us who are Christians, this is their message. This is what we need to say. This is what we need to tell people. When we're speaking to people who are struggling, when we are faced with those whose lives are falling apart, when people we know are going through really hard times, this is what we need to say.

Jesus can help you. If you're a Christian, it's what you need to say. If you're not yet a Christian, this is what you need to hear.

This is what you need to hear. Jesus is the one to whom you must go. And please, please, please don't go to the wrong place.

Don't go to the wrong place to get the answers about life and death and sin. Don't go to the wrong place to find peace.

[15 : 50] Don't go to the wrong place to find joy. Please make sure you go to the one who really can help. That's what Ahaz didn't do.

He went to the wrong place. And so if we ask the question, what is going on, you've got all this turmoil and Ahaz is looking in the wrong place.

But our second question is what is God doing about it? If that's what's going on, what is God's response? Well, if you read through these chapters, the key theme that's being emphasised again and again and again is that God is in control.

Isaiah chapter six, which is the start of this section, begins with Isaiah's amazing vision of God on his throne. God reigns over heaven and earth. And that's the theme that's running through the whole of this section and indeed through the whole of the Bible.

God is in control. And it's amazing because in all this political turmoil among the kingdoms of the world, in all this fighting between Syria, Israel, Assyria, Judah and everyone else, God is giving us this wonderful promise that he is going to establish his kingdom.

[17 : 14] And that's what our verses are describing for us today. Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end and 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. If you look at those verses, you can see that they are full of kingdom language. Look at all the words that appear in it, government, throne, kingdom, prince, it's all about God establishing his kingdom.

Now if you read through the whole of the Old Testament, you will see that again and again and again you can read about the rise and fall of kingdoms.

Right at the beginning, the dominant kingdom was Egypt, they rose up, they fell. Then the dominant kingdom was Assyria, which is at this time, they rose up, they fell.

[18 : 30] After them came Babylon, Babylon rose up and fell. Then came Persia, Persia rose up and fell. In between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the kingdom of Greece rose up and fell.

In the New Testament, the Romans rose up, they fell. Even the kingdom of Israel rose up and fell. And whilst all of this is happening, God is revealing through the Scriptures of the Old Testament that he is going to send his king and his king will never fall and his king will reign forever.

So whilst all these kingdoms are coming and going and coming and going, God is saying, my king is going to come. And all of that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

That's why the first thing that Jesus said when he began preaching was, the kingdom of God has come.

[19 : 34] Everything that the Old Testament was building up to is now being fulfilled. Jesus has come to reign. The kingdom of God came and it still stands.

That's what Isaiah is prophesying in verse 9. Of his government, of his peace, there will be no end on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it with justice, with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

Isaiah is telling the nation of Judah and he's telling us that no matter what is going on, God is the one who reigns.

But not only are these verses telling us that God's king is coming, it also tells us the qualities that the king is going to have. And three or four things that are identified in this verse by the wonderful titles that we have at the end of verse 6.

The king is going to be the wonderful counselor. He's going to be wise. He's going to be the one who knows what's best.

[20 : 38] He's going to know right from wrong. He is going to know everything about how we should live and what instructions we should follow.

He's going to be wise. He's going to be strong. He's mighty God. He's going to be strong. No one can threaten him. No one can near him and his kingdom is a safe place.

No one can threaten him. He is tender. He is the everlasting father. That's describing a father forever.

A father forever. That's a beautiful picture. Somebody who is just always a loving father. And he is the prince of peace.

And it's really interesting to notice that because we talk about all these kingdoms. You had Egypt, you had Assyria, you had Babylon, you had Persia, Greece, Rome. All of these kingdoms were established and maintained by force.

[21 : 41] That was how they became to power. The Assyrians came to power by conquering. The Babylonians came to power by conquering. These kingdoms were established by force, by violence, by war, by brutality.

The kingdom of God is not established by force. It's not a kingdom of violence. It is where the prince of peace reigns forever.

And so we have all these qualities described for us in the Old Testament. And when we come to the New Testament, we see that Jesus is the perfect embodiment of them all.

Jesus is the wonderful counselor. He's the one who gives the wisest, wisest teaching. You read through his words and we see such wonderful teaching.

And we forget that so much of our society is built on the truths that Jesus laid down. In particular, you can look at the Sermon on the Mount, where you see such amazing teaching. If you think about it, remember what we said.

[22 : 41] The kings of the Old Testament, their priorities were force. Alexander the Great, for example, an incredible military ruler. All of these things were established by force, by rage, by violence.

Jesus says, don't be angry. Jesus says, don't take revenge. Don't lust after others. Don't do things for your own glory. Don't judge others.

Don't be anxious. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy due to others, what you would like them to do. What Jesus is teaching is in complete contrast to what the world was doing then.

Jesus gives us the wisest teaching. Jesus is telling us everything that we need to hear. And so often the world is characterised by revenge.

I'm going to show a picture. I want the children to tell me if they know who this is. Okay, here's a picture. Who's that? Eva. No Mio and Juliet. Yes, now, grown-ups.

[23 : 42] Make sure you listen carefully. No Mio and Juliet. So this is a really good film based on the story of Romeo and Juliet, but it's all about garden gnomes.

So it's No Mio and Juliet. And there's two groups of gnomes. There's the blues and there's the reds. And of course, No Mio is a blue. Juliet is a red and they fall in love.

But the reds and the blues hate each other. And so all the conflict arises because of that. And when you look through that film, my children were watching it while we were away and I was watching it a bit too.

Throughout the film, basically the blues and the reds hate each other. And the reds do something to the blues. And then the blues try to get them back. And then the reds try to get them back. And the thing gets escalated higher and higher and higher and higher, each one doing something worse to what has been done to them.

They are totally motivated by revenge. And the end result is that it all falls apart and they nearly destroy each other. But in the end, it's their safe.

[24 : 50] It's a happy ending. But basically, these two groups are taking revenge all the time. Now that's a children's film. And it's, of course, based on Shakespeare.

But No Mio and Juliet is more my level than Shakespeare. But the thing that was very interesting, as you watch that film. You couldn't help but think the nations of the world are still doing exactly the same thing.

When something happens in the world, when something terrible happens, the leaders of that nation respond by saying, we will wipe them out.

You attack us, we'll obliterate you. We do something to us, we'll do worse to you. And we think that we've moved on from the days of the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Persians. But I'm not so sure we have. People take revenge. And it's Jesus who says, don't do that.

[26 : 00] Because Jesus knows that that simply doesn't work. Only who takes revenge against one another ever gives up. They just keep on doing it, keep on doing it, keep on doing it.

Jesus is the wonderful counselor who gives us the teaching that the whole world needs to hear. Jesus is mighty God.

He is mighty God. You see that demonstrated by his miracles. He demonstrates his power over nature, his power over disease, his power over evil, his power over death.

He shows that he is strong. He shows that he is king. Jesus also is the everlasting Father.

Now you might say, hold on a minute. We talk about God the Father and Jesus as the Son. And that of course is absolutely true. But I think that these verses are very much focusing on Jesus.

[27 : 00] And the reason that it uses the phrase everlasting Father is because in the Old Testament, a king was supposed to be like a father to the people.

The king's role was to look after the people. It wasn't that the people were to look after the king. It was that the king was to look after the people. They were to have a fatherhood role, a caring role, a shepherding role.

And that's exactly what Jesus is. How many times did Jesus go to those whose lives were in a mess? How many times did Jesus help those who nobody wanted to go near?

Jesus showed such a tender love, the love of an everlasting Father. And Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

And we know that it is only in him that we will find true peace. And so all these things have been prophesied by Isaiah.

[28 : 01] If we step back into Isaiah's day, if we go back to 720 BC, we're looking forward. But we today right now are able to look back.

And it's quite amazing that we can look back and see that every word that Isaiah prophesied came through. He said that Israel and Syria would be destroyed. They were. He said that as Syria itself would collapse, it did.

He said that a child who would be born of the Virgin, he was. He says that Galilee was going to become great and see glorious things and it did. And Isaiah said that the perfect king would come. And in Jesus Christ he came. Now, just as an aside, it's when you see these things, you realize that it's not hard to believe that the Bible is through.

The Bible's prophecy throughout history and the events that subsequently happened fit together perfectly. What the Old Testament said would happen has happened.

[29 : 06] But the key point that I want to highlight from all of this is that Isaiah 9 is telling us that in the midst of all the turmoil that people faced, God is saying, trust me.

That is what God was saying to Ahas. Back in chapter seven, he said, be careful, be quiet, do not fear, do not let your hearts be faint because of these two smoldering stumps, that's Israel and Syria. Do not be afraid of them. God was saying, trust me. He was in control throughout it all and his plans were never going to fail.

That was God's message to the people of Judah in 700 BC and that is God's message to you today. We live in days of uncertainty.

We live in days of political uncertainty. I don't think any of us saw what's happened in the last two months. I don't think any of us predicted that happening with Brexit and maybe another referendum and everything else that's going on.

[30 : 15] We are in days of political uncertainty and we are in days of personal turmoil as well. Sometimes we might have worries, maybe you have worries about what, what about your home, what about your family, what about your health, about your finances, any of these things.

When these things are weighing down on us, it can be overwhelming. I think all of us have been a bit unsettled by the political events of the last few weeks and I'm sure that personally we are experiencing things that can leave us feeling overwhelmed.

But all the time God is saying to you, trust me, God is saying I will look after you.

And that's what Christianity is all about. It's about trusting God and it's about being looked after by God. God is saying to you, I am the wonderful counselor, I will guide you, I will teach you, I will lead you.

He's saying I am mighty God, I will protect you, I will uphold you, I will use every bit of my strength to keep you safe. God is saying I am the everlasting Father, I will care for you, I will protect you, I will love you and I will keep you safe forever and ever.

[31 : 39] And God is saying I am the Prince of Peace, come to me and have peace. And when you look across the whole Bible you see that God has implemented this perfect plan of salvation.

Isaiah is giving us a prophecy, the rest of the Bible gives us the fulfilment. And God simply wants you to trust Him.

And that's what faith is. All the time we say you must put your faith in Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Does it mean that you get some sort of indescribable feeling inside you?

Does it mean that you all of a sudden become a better person? Does it mean that all of a sudden every doubt and every thought and every bad thing in your mind goes away?

No. It just means that you trust in God. You are leaning on Him. And that's all God wants of you.

[32 : 43] He wants you to trust Him. And so whatever your circumstances are today, God is saying to you, trust me.

If the thought of tomorrow whatever it might bring is making your heart sink, God is saying, trust me. If you are looking at the political situation of Europe and the world and you're worrying, God is saying, trust me.

If you are scared about becoming a Christian or scared about going to the prayer meeting or scared about telling people that you want to be a Christian, God is saying to you, trust me.

And if you are scared of death, God is saying, trust me.

And this is why being a Christian makes a real difference in your life. It makes a real, real difference because it transforms everything.

[33 : 52] And this is why putting your faith in Jesus Christ is the most important, important thing for every single one of us. It's not just a sentimental aside to have as part of your life.

It is the answer, the real answer and the only answer to all the problems of life.

Jesus is king. Jesus is in total control. Jesus will never, ever, ever let you down.

You can trust Him. He wants you to trust Him.

God is saying to you today, trust me. Amen. Let us pray.