

The light shines in our darkness

Welcome

Opening Scripture John 1:9

Hymn: MP 538 Once in Royal David's City

Bible Reading: Matthew 4:12-17 (page 968)

Prayer of adoration and praise.

Children's talk

Notices No Wednesday Bible Study and prayer,

Choruses MP 503 O little town of Bethlehem

Main reading: Isaiah 9:1-6 (p 693)

Hymn: MP 342 Infant Holy Infant Lowly

Sermon The light shines in our darkness

Hymn MP 493 O come O come Emmanuel

Close

Sermon title: The light shines in our darkness

Exordium

- When the Pagabete New Testament was presented at Gemena in the Congo, Wycliffe Bible translators said: decades of work went into producing this vital and life-changing book! Hence the massive community-wide celebrations – as seen on 25th April as four language groups celebrated the launch of their NT. For those communities it was a day full of joy, singing, dancing, food and happiness. Such is the effect of God's word entering the lives of people who have never had it before.
- God's word is always at work transforming lives - remember the Ethiopian in his chariot reading Is 53? He received living words, life changing words, the light of Christ came, as he met the one behind the words he went on rejoicing.
- God's word is powerful - Jesus in synagogue at Capernaum chose to start his ministry by reading the word of God – from the scroll of Isaiah.

Every word in your Bible from Genesis 1:1 – Rev 22:21 is God's word. The entrance of God's word brings light. God speaks through his word - so expect him to speak – so pick up your scroll and open at Isaiah 9 – and expect him to speak to you.

Our passage starts with "Nevertheless" in other words we must see what when before.

Firstly it is easy to misunderstand because we don't look at the context.

- As with this man grabbing a woman – only to save her from the lorry

At King Solomon's death Israel split with 10 tribes in the North and 2 in the South. The South had at times some good, while in the North all was bad.

Isaiah is writing to the southern kingdom of Judah as the dark clouds of judgment hang over the northern kingdom, soon to fall to the Assyrians. The bad kings of the north had promoted idolatry and false worship, finally God had had enough. This is known as the sin of Jeroboam who drew his people away from Jerusalem as the spiritual centre, and set up alternative places of worship at Dan and Bethel. *"Don't go to Jerusalem, - come and worship here"*. He also set up an alternative priesthood made up of anyone and everyone. It was a blatant departure from what God has clearly revealed in his word. They claimed to worship the true God - but were doing it in their own way = which is the wrong way.

- ✚ It was abhorrent to God then – it is just as abhorrent to God today.

Beware of worship done my way, irreverent and fleshly, the Bible shows the standard and already contains a hymn book to show us right worship.

Beware of worship which elevates me, and all about what God has done for me. Worship is giving Him His worth as he has revealed his character and his works. It must be Christ centered – and **in Spirit and in truth**, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well who lived in the midst of false worship.

To attempt to worship the true God in the wrong way- is to not worship God

Isaiah is warning Judah in the south not to go the same way as the North.

As you know the first chapters of Isaiah catalogue Judah failings, their lack of love, their immorality, their idolatry, and that Jerusalem - where God had his Presence - had become a place of violence and of oppressing the poor.

It was so bad that when they came to the temple to worship - God said I am sickened by it, my soul hates it - I'm not listening.

2Ki 10 says in God's anger **the LORD began to reduce the size of Israel. Hazael overpowered the Israelites throughout their territory** 2Ki 10:32 (Jehu)

God's judgment meant that as in the days of the judges they were overrun by their more powerful neighbours who attacked and suppressed them.

Moses had warned Israel this would happen back in Deuteronomy.

✚ **Paul says the same in Romans 1- God's judgment is to hand me over to the power of sin - that it gets the better of me - and hold me captive....**

In Israel certain parts of the country fared worse, **In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, up in the region of Galilee.**

How did he humble them? All the northern tribes struggled to drive out the inhabitants of the land but the **land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali** in the far north lay remote and most exposed, the first to be overrun by invading armies who descended from the north. These pagan nations repopulated the area around Galilee. Remember it was across the lake near the Decapolis (10 cities) where Jesus drove out the demoniac - hence the presence of pigs.

It was aptly known as **Galilee of the gentiles** 9:1.

The Jews saw this area as a bit of a dark and dim backwater. Didn't Nathanael say 'Nazareth' **can anything good come from there?**

At the time Isaiah writes the nation had become lazy and self-indulgent – **us Today?** “**Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands. .. so..**

Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; their men of rank will die of hunger and their masses will be parched with thirst.” Isa 5:11-13

Is 5 goes on to list the **woes to those who call evil good and good evil - today!**

God calls Isaiah the prophet to bring the warning – but who is listening?

It gets worse in that those in the South had made deals with the ungodly North – how foolish to trust the world and not the lord. The result was that the North joined forces with Aram a foreign oppressor and together they threatened Jerusalem. Their hearts shook with fear.

God's answer is “If you think Aram is bad, waiting in the wings are the Assyrians!, the most powerful and cruel hordes the world had ever known. They impale their captors or pull them along by the nose with hooks. God says: The Assyrians will destroy them – but then they will come for you!!

God's people, like those in the world around, didn't trust in God, but in their own political manoeuvrings. They looked everywhere - but not to the Lord.

Who today do you trust when you are up against it? -it's telling - is it your family first?, or is it the NHS, or the scientists with their godless worldview?

✚ **Christians we must look to - and trust in - our Sovereign Lord.**

Yet here Israel quickly turned to the occult.. “8:19 **When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?**

✚ **This is to bring in darkness x2, a shroud covered the land.**

In my local visiting there are more and more who say 'I'm not religious' yet when you probe, they have often looked to their star signs or mediums.

There's a darkness, they have never heard God's word, for there's a dearth of the word of God, a famine of the word of God.

The harder the heart, the more people choose their own way - the more God removes his word - and the more darkness x2 Only God's word brings light.

■ **At a recent British City Missions conference a speaker from the Bible Society underlined their aim which was to bring God's word back into the life of the nation - but then went on to say their other aim was to bring God's word back into the life of the church!**

So Isaiah goes on to say to God's people **To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.** 8:20

In other words, get back to the Bible! This is where God speaks!

We see this in Isaiah 40:1-12 – the passage predicting John the Baptist, again and again it is all about ‘the Voice’ **the voice of one calling in the desert**. When Herod killed John for speaking out against his sins he silenced the Voice of God. When Jesus was later before Herod - he remained silent.

✚ A heart or home, that rejects God, will no longer have the opportunity to hear God speak. That heart and home will remain in darkness.

As if there is permanent night with no dawn, like that nightmare when you lie in bed and long for dawn, but it doesn't come x2

The more God's word is rejected - the darker it becomes, the more chaotic, the more uncertain people are, the more fearful, the more miserable, worse and worse – it's as if we press the self-destruct button and seal our fate.

8:21 **Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.**

They look up and curse God - and then

They look down – looking towards the things of this world.

22 **Then they will look towards the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.**” Isa 8:19-22

Fearful gloom and utter darkness

Surely we live in dark days, wasn't this a phrase Winston Churchill used as the nation was overshadowed by a powerful and evil tyranny. Today it's the devil, the god of this world who is bringing a powerful and evil tyranny – and many are captive. The result is **Fearful gloom** and **utter darkness**.

It's not just we are surrounded by darkness, in darkness – but Jesus says we are darkness. - This darkness continues on for hundreds of years

✚ I have spent a little time on pointing out this dark backdrop - the scripture lays it out much more than I have, that the light be brighter still.

Hope

1 **Nevertheless**, x2 This first word contrasts strongly with the foregoing chapter where everything is troubled and hopeless, dim and dark, a place of despair. - But then the wonderful word ‘**nevertheless**’ that is God's word - if you see your life as being one of darkness, hopelessness and despair - with God there is always a ‘**nevertheless**’. **Nevertheless there will be no more gloom** x2 **for those who were in distress**.

The great light is coming

2 **The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.**

3a

Matthew quotes this passage in Ch 4 saying that is why Jesus left Nazareth and came to live in Capernaum the major city on lake Galilee. Thus Jesus starts by bringing his **great light** to shine in the darkness of Galilee.

The people walking in darkness – walking - anyone living in the darkness of sin and death can now come into the light.

have seen a great light He describes this future event in the past tense P.P.T. Even *in darkness*, in *death* itself, there is hope with Jesus, He has the power. The OT ends with the word ‘**curse**’ but the Lord God sent His Son to lift the curse, open the curtain and bring in light.

✚ **When the gospel comes to any soul, light comes, a great light, a shining light, which will shine more and more. It is a light to us who sit in darkness, and we should not hide from it - but readily receive it.**

Jesus came to bring God's favour **3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy**; The gospel brings Joy, Christ can change gloom to Joy, - sadness to gladness

When Philip brought the Gospel to Samaria there was Joy in that city.

The Lord here wants to get us to see just what this means - and he uses some illustrations: **they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest**,

We hardly notice the harvest these days but for a farmer it's a great uncertainty, what will the weather do? Will the crops be ruined? Only the moment the harvest is safely in the barns can everyone relax. Then the party, the food is there to there to keep us going through the long year ahead. There is joy when spoils are won as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. There is Joy when the oppressor will oppress no more. **4 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.**

The CROSS is the place of victory over sin and death. In the CROSS Christ broke the power of Satan, through the cross he removes the burden of guilt. Christ through the cross can free anyone from the prison of self and sin, and to now live in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

Before we come to the wonderful v6 - the last word of v5 is fire,

■ **When there is a gas fire on a rig the way to put it out is to bring another fire, an explosion – yes fire to snuff out the fire.**

3b

This is not fire as in judgment - and God's justice demands it – no this is the judgment on judgment, the fire to end fire, the final end of all hostilities.

Just as when the battles are over and the war is one, all that army equipment is no more required, it is redundant. Chuck it out it won't ever be needed again!

How wonderful it will be in heaven, no army for nothing evil will ever enter, no locks, no bars, no security systems, no emergency services, no hospitals for **“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”** (Re 21:4)

The rescuer

It is for this reason the son of man came into this world **6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,**

The eternal son is given, the One from everlasting to everlasting who was with the father, comes into this world, born as a child, born of a woman, one of us in Adam – to save Adam's helpless race as the hymn goes – John said: we have seen his Glory the Glory of the One and Only.

Here is a new power - a new controlling authority One who **will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, & denoting eternity Everlasting Father.**

✚ **He humbled and emptied himself, - to exalt and fill us.**

He is the **Prince of Peace**. As a King he commands peace, As a King he preserves the peace, He is my peace, He is the author and giver of peace.

Do not fear, this world with all of its vanity will pass away - there is another kingdom, Christ's eternal kingdom. **7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. For ever!**

It will grow and grow and grow and become the only Kingdom – all else will be destroyed, all the powers, all influences, all movements will go.

Make sure you are in it. x2

- Tired and weary soldiers returning from the misery of the trenches at the close of WWI were keen to be going home. They boarded two ships the Sheila and the Lolaire bound for the Isle of Lewis. Within sight of Stornaway and home in the early hours of 1st Jan 1919, the Lolaire hit rocks and sank. Everyone lost their lives, the most tragic of shipwrecks.

Now is the time to cross over, to make sure you have moved from one to the other, from darkness and despair to the Kingdom of light and life, the kingdom of love, Joy, peace, and Hope. Have you moved across?

Those ships travelled alongside each other all the way, one man traversed across from the Lolaire to the Sheila. One ship safe, the other sunk. Vis_94.cdr

Yes now is the time to cross over, change vessel, be under a new captain heading to a new destiny. The way to do that is to obey the words of Jesus:

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Mt 4:17 The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of repentance. That is the way in – and many don't make it – or won't make it for it means to stop living for self - but to turn and live for Jesus and in obedience to His will.

Is there is someone here who knows that the life you are living is contrary to God? – I don't just mean that you don't like the consequences of some of the things you have done. No, you know you are living contrary to God.

Respond to that voice to turn from it and turn to Christ – he will receive you It is good to be in Church on Sunday morning, to bring worship and to hear God's word - to hear Him speak, *for when God speaks light comes the light of truth, don't hide from the light let it exposes sin in your heart -and bring change.*

God's word has changed me, is changing me, my thinking, my tongue, my attitude, my actions, through reading the Bible and hearing sermons.

- We at BCM have seen God speak and transform lives – and more recently Steve the Resource Centre manager, Alec last year's Intern, Ray from the Open Air work, recently a Bangladeshi meet on the street, all would declare that the light of Christ has shone in their hearts.

Many here can say “Yes, Amen, - I know that too”.

Make Christ your captain he will see you to the right destiny.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. It's God's work, he brings his light to overcome my darkness. Christ is that **great light** x2 with Christ **even in darkness light** shines, and no darkness can overcome it.

Anyone who has Jesus has an inner settlement of heart. It's a new confidence from a God I no longer need to fear - but One who accepts me as a loving father accepts a son or daughter.

The Spirit of Christ who says to me that *'all is now well with my soul'*.

May that be your experience now. Amen.

END