

For Unto Us a Child is Born

~Isaiah 8:11-22-9:1-7

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It is almost here. Christmas Eve arrives on Tuesday and Christmas Day on Wednesday. Then we have a little less than a week before we go into the New Year – 2020. For old people like me, that seems hard to believe. Remember the turn of the century and millennium 20 years ago on the last night of 1999? Some greatly feared a collapse of world systems because of widespread computer failure. Yet the clock struck midnight, we entered the new millennium and now we're 2 decades into it. So since Christmas and 2020 are just a few days away, I wonder how you're thinking and feeling about the future? What word might best describe your outlook for Christmas, New Year's and beyond? Excited; Ho Hum; Fearful; Anxious; Ordinary? What about hopeful? What place does hope have in your life? Hope is the feeling that what we want will happen or that events will turn out for the best. We feel hope when we look forward to something with reasonable confidence.

Yet the likelihood of fulfilling our hopes depends on who/what we put our hope in. Say you book a trip that includes a four hour flight from Edmonton. Most of us hope we have a good flight. But we might have different expectations of good. Some might define "good" as "not crashing." So as long as the plane doesn't crash with you on it, you had a good flight. But others might define good to include taking off on time, prompt in-flight service, a smooth landing and quick access to baggage. Most people hope for such a flight. But fulfillment of that hopes depends on the airline staff and other factors beyond their control. Most people understand if something happens beyond the airline's control like a massive storm. But if the airline itself failed, we can experience disappointment and unfulfilled hopes. Some of us might even book a flight based on an airline's reputation for reliability. The more trustworthy the object of hope, the more likely a fulfilled hope.

Sometimes, we have low hope levels because someone burned us. Or several have disappointed us. Unfulfilled hopes cause deflation and despair. So after several disappointments we might start protecting ourselves by choosing not to hope in anyone except maybe ourselves. That can seem like a safer place to live. It might even show wisdom with someone who regularly disappoints.

But might we take a low hope approach with God? Have we concluded it's safer to not hope in Him because of something that happened or something disappointing? Have we projected our hopelessness in humanity onto God?

Living with hope can fuel fortifying power in our lives. It can raise us up when we have every reason to be down. It can keep us going when others give up if we hope in someone trustworthy.

A group of people living during a tough time for their nation needed hope. They felt the threat from powerful nations surrounding them. But worse than that, they knew their nation had turned away from the Lord. So the Lord would turn over the nation to an invading superpower. So these people faced the likelihood of living through an invasion. But they also faced threats from their own people for continuing to trust in the Lord. Would the Lord prove trustworthy with their hopes?

His words through the prophet Isaiah spoke to them and contain a famous prophecy of Christmas. We will follow their story today in the next section of the prophecy from Isaiah. Last week we saw Isaiah the prophet deliver God's message to King Ahaz. God called the king to trust Him for safety during a turbulent time. The Lord even invited Ahaz to ask for a sign for assurance. But Ahaz refused. So the Lord Himself would give him a sign: A virgin would conceive and bear a son and would call his name Immanuel. But the Lord would also give King Ahaz and his people over to the one they trusted – Assyria's king. Isaiah 7 ended with a detailed description of the coming desolation to the land and its people.

We pick up the story today from Isaiah's perspective in the aftermath of Ahaz's disastrous choice. Just as the Lord would give Ahaz a sign through a baby boy named Immanuel the Lord would bring hope to His people through a child born and a son given. Our text will answer two questions for us today. Who is part of God's people or remnant? What hope will the child bring? I pray that in walking through this story, you will find reason to hope into 2020 and beyond. We pick up the story in Isaiah 8.

Isaiah 8:1-9:7 English Standard Version (ESV) (Page 492-493).

8 Then the LORD said to me, "Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, 'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz.' ² And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me."

³ And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz; ⁴ 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."

⁵ The LORD spoke to me again: ⁶ "Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, ⁷ therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, ⁸ and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel."

⁹ Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered;
 give ear, all you far countries;
 strap on your armor and be shattered;
 strap on your armor and be shattered.
¹⁰ Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;
 speak a word, but it will not stand,
 for God is with us.

¹¹ For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: ¹² “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹³ But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. ¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

¹⁶ Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. ¹⁷ I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. ¹⁹ And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. ²¹ They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. ²² And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

9 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.

⁶For 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.

⁷Of 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.

I believe the main point of this text today can be stated like this. **The child born unto us brings hope to God's faithful remnant.** Who is God's faithful remnant? What hope does He bring? But to understand the power of this statement, we have to attempt to understand the situation for the people in that time. We discover this through Isaiah's eyes in chapter 8. In verses 1-4 The Lord instructs Isaiah to write on a tablet of some sort a name – Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. It means "the spoil speeds, the prey hastens." The Lord commands Isaiah to give this name to his second son. So remember last week we met Shear-Jashub which means "a remnant will return?" Now we see this next name which likely refers to the coming destruction on the nations threatening Judah. So if you're looking for new baby names you've got two right here in Isaiah: Shear Jashub and the catchy "Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz." Isaiah's wife conceives and bears a son. Isaiah names him accordingly. Through him the Lord again predicts that those nations threatening the kingdom will fall.

But then in verses 5-10, the Lord reveals the tragic consequences of the king's choice. Isaiah talks, in verse 6, about the people refusing the waters of Shiloah that flow gently. This is an image of the Lord. He would have provided them with all they needed for life in a way that cared for them gently. But they have chosen the King of Assyria over the Lord. So in verse 7 we see him portrayed as a mighty river. He will not come as a gently flowing stream. At the end of verse 7 this river will rise up and overflow its banks like a flash flood. It will overwhelm the nation like a flood of water that comes up to their necks. So King Ahaz, his court and the people face a very tough and tense time.

But some still trust in the Lord. Yet they experience great pressure to conform to the king and his court's decision.

The Lord counsels Isaiah. So starting here in verse 11, Isaiah portrays the Lord as putting His hand onto him to emphasize the importance of the message. If someone really wants to get your attention, they may put their hands on both of your shoulders and look you directly in the eye. The Lord does something like this in warning Isaiah to not walk in the way of this people.

He warns Isaiah specifically to not agree with the conclusions of the king and his court. Verse 12 – “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread.” Perhaps King Ahaz and his supports labelled anyone who disagreed with them a traitor. They may even have accused Isaiah of a conspiracy to bring down the king. The Lord warns him not to buy that nor fear what they fear.

Instead, Isaiah must fear the Lord of hosts. That tremendous title portrays the Lord like a warrior king with a massive army of angels. His power makes Assyria look like an ant. So a more productive investment of one's fear and reverence is to direct it towards the Lord Himself. He can save and deliver. Yet those who reject Him cannot just push the Lord aside. He becomes an obstacle to them – a stone of offense; a rock of stumbling; a trap and a snare to the residents of Jerusalem. Many people think they can just delete God from their worldview and just go on living. Or they think they can just ignore God and never have to deal with Him. Yet a persistent sense of guilt remains even in a society that denies most morals. Questions of significance pop into people's minds when they reach the middle of their lives. They wonder if there is more than climbing the ladder and accumulating possessions. The Lord is either the rock upon whom we build our lives or the rock we keep stumbling over. Isaiah prophesies that many in Jerusalem will stumble over Him and fall in Isaiah 8:15. Just as they would over Jesus when He came.

So in 8:16, it sounds like Isaiah concludes his prophetic ministry. “Bind up the testimony and seal the teaching among my disciples.” This portrays the rolling up of scrolls and sealing them to protect against tampering. Isaiah has delivered the word of the Lord and now seals it for a future generation to discover and evaluate. He sees that the Lord will bring a judgment upon through Assyria. He does not know if he will even survive it. But in 17 he declares his posture amidst a frightening reality. “I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.” (I propose this posture or approach is what you and I need today.)

The phrase “hiding the face” portrays someone who refuses to pay attention or listen to the ones they hide their face from. The Lord will hide His face from a people that chose to trust an earthly king. Isaiah will live among this people and bear the consequences they all face. Yet he will wait for the Lord and continue to hope in Him. So even though a nation may be under God’s judgment, the remnant that remains faithful to God continues to wait and hope in Him. In fact, Isaiah recognizes that he and his children will be signs to the people. Whenever they call his two sons by name, people will hear “the remnant will return” but “the spoil speeds and the prey hastens quickly for the plunder.”

Then in Isaiah 8:19, he calls out the apparently common practice of inquiring of the mediums and others who contact the dead. These mediums claimed to contact and seek counsel from the dead. People still do that today. Instead of inquiring of the Lord, they go to a medium to see what the dead have to say about life. Isaiah points out the irony. “Should living people inquire of the dead about living today?” How could the dead know about living since they’re dead? Instead, the so-called people of God should inquire of their God. So Isaiah rebukes the people and declares in verse 20 “to the teaching and testimony!” You don’t need to go to mediums to find wisdom for life today. Go to the Lord’s living teaching and testimony found in His Word.

But many will refuse. So they walk in darkness. The last verses of Isaiah 8 set the stage for the hope of Isaiah 9. So look at the end of Isaiah 8:20. “If they will not speak according to this word, (the Lord’s word), it is because they have no dawn.” A life without dawn is a life lived in continual darkness. Verse 21 and 22 describe such people. I think this is more of a spiritual description than a physical one. “They will pass through the land greatly distressed and hungry.” You probably know people like that who live in distress and continual hunger for something more. “And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously at their king and their god.” So they will angrily accuse their government of wrongdoing. They will also speak against God. They will look for hope in heaven and earth yet not find it. Instead they find only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. We will need to keep this in mind as we plunge into the next verses.

But you need an answer to the first question. Who is part of God’s faithful remnant? I could find multiple descriptions in these verses. You can maybe write down one or two that speak to you.

Who is part of God’s faithful remnant? Isaiah describes them in at least seven ways.

They are **People who:**

- **Do not walk in the way of those who reject the Lord. (8:11)**
- **Do not buy the conclusions made by those who reject Lord. (8:12)**
- **Honor the Lord of hosts as holy. (8:13)**
- **Wait for and hope in the Lord even when He hides His face from a people. (8:17)**
- **Inquire of God instead of inquiring of mediums. (8:19)**
- **Trust the teaching and testimony of God. (8:20)**

So remember our main idea today. “The child born unto us brings hope to God’s faithful remnant.” Now we have an idea of who makes up the remnant and what they faced during Isaiah’s time. But what hope will the child bring? Well remember the end of Isaiah 8? People will live in distress, darkness and the gloom of anguish.

Now listen to Isaiah 9:1. “But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he (the Lord) brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.” They were two tribes of Israel located in the north. If any invader came down to invade Israel, these tribes got hit first. This happened when Assyria came. Zebulun and Naphtali fell first. But look at the second half of verse 1. “But in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.” You might have heard of Galilee before and the Sea of Galilee. Jesus spent most of his ministry life here. The territory of Zebulun and Naphtali became part of the region of Galilee during by Jesus’ time. They heard the good news of the kingdom first from Jesus.

So starting in verse 2, Isaiah proclaims this famous prophecy in a poem. He reveals the hope this child will bring.

What hope will the child bring?

1]- Light for those in darkness – 9:2. The people who walked in great darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwell in the land of darkness, upon them has light shone.

2]- Joy for those in despair – 9:3 – You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at harvest as they are glad when they divide the spoil. There’s three references to joy and one to gladness.

3]- Relief from the burden of oppression - 9:4. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder and rod of his oppressor you have broken as on the day of Midian. So Isaiah portrays a person who carries a heavy load and maybe has the staff of their master on their shoulder. Imagine some oxen who wear a yoke or harness around their necks while

they pull a cart. The staff of their owner also rests on their shoulders. Remember the word shoulder which we will see again. Yet the Lord will break all this oppression.

4]-Peace instead of war – 9:5. So all the invading soldiers boots and garments will be burned because they are either gone or defeated by God.

Then comes the cascade of hope in the famous verses 6 and 7. The child will bring hope because of **His own excellence – 9:6.** For to us a child is born to us a son is given. He will be born as a human. “And the government will be upon his shoulder.” Remember the staff on the shoulder in verse 4? Here the government is on the child’s shoulder.

And his name shall be called “Wonderful Counselor.” Wonder refers to the supernatural – a wonder. So this child’s counsel is supernatural. His wisdom goes far beyond any human capabilities. He is the Mighty God a title reserved for the Lord Himself. He is the Everlasting Father. That’s strange considering “unto us a Son is given.” But this is not talking about God the Son becoming God the Father. Everlasting Father portrays a caring father who looks after His children forever. He is prince of peace; an administrator of peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. So He will command an empire just like Assyria. But He will not conquer through violent assault. His kingdom spreads when God changes hearts in one person at a time. Now Christ has people all over world. Justice and righteousness will characterize His reign forever. To address perhaps any remaining doubt in the mind of one listening, the prophecy concludes with God’s certain intention to fulfill it. “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” The child born unto us brings hope to God’s faithful remnant.

Now those are great words on a page. But how would this child actually fulfill these hopes? Jesus brought light to those in darkness. He literally opened the eyes of the blind. But he also opened the spiritual eyes of many more with the light of the Gospel. Today, sometimes God heals the physically blind. But He is constantly at work bringing light to the spiritually blind.

Jesus coming brought joy to many who met him; to the shepherds and the Wiseman; to the woman at the well; to those healed and release from demons; to those who received their loved ones back from death. He continues to bring joy today through forgiveness, life, support. Jesus brings relief from the oppression of sin, Satan and even death. Jesus will one day rescue us from the presence of sin, death and the devil when He returns. So this fulfilled these prophecies and brought hope to the people during His ministry. He continues to bring hope today.

But can we actually experience and live with hope today? If so how do we do that?

1st Peter 1:3-5 shows us the way. Peter writes “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

So the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our hope. If God accomplished that then He can and will follow through on our deepest hopes. **Since the child born unto us brings hope, let us fix our eyes daily on the resurrected Jesus to live with hope.** This is the life of faith. It's not closing our eyes and hoping that someone like the tooth fairy is actually real. This hope has a certain and sure foundation because of the witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. If you don't believe in the resurrection, I would encourage you to look into it further for the evidence supporting the empty tomb of Christ. Then evaluate the explanations for it. But for those who are already part of God's faithful remnant, we started today by asking; “What place does hope has in your life?” We have seen how God gave hope to a remnant facing incredibly difficult times. We know that God came through because Jesus actually lived and ministered in Galilee. The kingdom of the Lord had come. He was crucified just outside of Jerusalem and resurrected the third day. His kingdom continues to grow today. It will one day be revealed for all to see. But until then, we must continue to hope in Him with whatever we face. No matter what you've gone through, are going through or will go through, there's always reason to hope because of Christ. So let us close by fixing our eyes on the resurrected Christ.