



# ***A GREAT LIGHT***

## **Reading: Isaiah 9: 1-5 & Matthew 4: 12-17**

*'The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them' (Isaiah 9:2)*

In this passage the Prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of the Messiah. He speaks of a child that is both a child of hope and a child of light, foretelling that this child would be the light of the world who would lead people out of darkness and into the light. In order to understand these verses it is necessary for us to place them into their larger context, and to do that we need to consider the previous two chapters.

In these chapters we learn how God is going to judge king Ahaz for not trusting the Lord. Just as happens today, many of the people chose to follow the king rather than trust in the Lord, and the result when that situation arises is discipline and destruction. In the world today, notably the Western world, people have turned away from God in their droves, preferring to trust in their own judgment. Usury, immorality, self-centredness and greed have caused nations that once were Christian to turn their backs on God, and even, as is the case with both the UK and USA, to promote anti-Christian policies. How long can we expect that God will accept such a situation?

Certainly, there are many signs that God is saying that 'Enough is enough.' The downturn in the economy has plunged our nations into crisis to the point that, having failed to stave off Recession, the Government are now speaking of attempting to stave off a Depression. Daily, we are hearing about increasing numbers of people losing their jobs, about increasing financial burdens on families and of the spectre of home repossessions. Having barely got over the shock of major banking institutions collapsing both here and in the USA, only this week we have heard that Woolworths and MFI have both been put into Receivership. It must seem to some people that the world as they know it is collapsing around their ears, whilst those in power are powerless to stop the collapse.

It has long been said that the wealthier people become then the more they come to rely on themselves rather than on God. Relying on oneself means putting oneself in the centre, whereas we should always put God in the centre, letting our world revolve around Him. The result when a nation becomes full of self-centred people is that God is cast to one side as though He is an irrelevance. History has proven that when such a thing happens then God takes action, and I believe that the current problems that we are experiencing as a nation are a reflection of God's anger.

Constantly Christians, and therefore Christianity, are coming under increasing attack



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with blasphemy such as that recently broadcast by Rowan Atkinson as part of the Prince of Wales' 60th birthday celebration being largely ignored. Anyone who dares to complain is regarded as an oddity, but then again, whenever Christians are portrayed in a 'faith' role in the media, particularly on television which is largely responsible for the mindset of the general public, they are usually portrayed as weirdo's. In Cardiff, 'Borders' bookshop have invited a man to give a public reading of his blasphemous poetry on 11th December, and earlier the same day he will do the same at the Assembly Ty Howel building at the request of militant atheists. Fortunately a protest is being mounted by a prominent Christian group, but guess who will be portrayed as the 'baddies' in any resultant media coverage.

Every year the PC brigade manage to come out with an increasing amount of propaganda aimed at removing all traces of Christianity from Christmas. For example, if when the post office ask you if you want Christmas stamps this year they will supply you with the 'Pantomime' range of stamps. If you want religious stamps then you must ask for them specifically. Many people are unaware of this, and so I wonder how long it will be before the Post office refuse to create any new religious stamps on the grounds that nobody wants them.

People could be forgiven in the face of all that is happening if they felt that they had no hope. Yet the real answer is that God has given us all the hope that is in Jesus Christ. He is both the Hope of the World and the Light of the World.

For the people who followed king Ahaz and trusted in the Assyrians rather than in God, the result was that God's judgement fell on them, but fortunately, in the middle of this judgment hope is found for those who chose to turn to God and trust in Him. In Isaiah 7:14 we read, ***Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*** The ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy is the birth of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who is our hope.

Just as God set aside a believing remnant who turned their backs on the Assyrians and trusted God, so today there is a remnant of believing Christians who refuse to be swayed by popular conceptions. This remnant is set apart by the presence of God, the fear of God, and the truth of God.

By the close of Isaiah chapter 8, the Israelites have been brought to their knees, and we are told in verse 21 that they are so famished that ***they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward.*** Verse 22 continues the picture of despair, ***Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and dark-***



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**ness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be driven away into darkness.**

Despite all of this, Isaiah prophesies that God will provide hope for them, turning the devastated areas of Zebulun and Naphtali, situated in Galilee in Northern Israel, glorious: ***‘The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.’*** The light would come to that land because God chose Galilee as the land where Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, would live.

The darkness of which Isaiah spoke is both external and internal, the former because of the destruction wrought by the Assyrian army, and the latter as a result of that destruction's impact upon the people which caused the inner darkness of despair.

In chapter 9, Isaiah elaborates upon the coming light that God will give to dispel the darkness, and in 9:6 we are told that this great light will come through a child, ***For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us, and the government will rest upon His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, mighty God, Eternal Father, prince of Peace.*** The hope that we have is underlined by the prophecy in verse 7, ***There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace.***

In Matthew chapter 4 we find the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy when Jesus, hearing that his cousin John had been taken into custody, withdrew into Galilee and ***leaving Nazareth, settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali*** (4:13). Verse 17 tells us that ***From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”***

Just as Isaiah had prophesied around 700 years previously, Jesus began His ministry in Galilee. The Light had come!

Today that same Light is with us, calling people to repentance and salvation. Looking at the spiritual state of our nations it is easy to understand how people believe that only a miracle can turn things around, and of course they are right. It does need a miracle. But then, God is in the business of miracles!

People are world-weary; tired of the uphill struggle to make sense of all that is going on in the world, whether it be the economic downturn and the devastating effects on their lives or the world-terrorism threat posed by Islamic extremists. Yet in amongst all of this world-weariness God has provided a solution – a safe haven in the midst of all the storms.

Jesus is calling out today, just as He has done for two thousand years, ***“Come to Me,***

*all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

He is God's miracle.

Amen

*(Sermon preached by Rev'd Colin Gordon-Farleigh, at St John's Presbyterian Church, Runcorn,  
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