

Isaiah 9:1-4

Epiphany 3; January 22 & 23, 2017

We like to live in the light. We walk into a dark room, and we reach for the light switch. We put nightlights in the rooms of our children or in the hallway so that don't get scared. Ask any child which room in the house is the scariest, and most will say the basement. It's scary down there isn't it? There are dark corners in the basement. There are all kinds of strange sounds in the basement. The pipes creak and groan. You can see a blue/orange glow coming from that machine in the basement called a furnace. You know, there might be spiders in the corners as well. We like the light more than the dark.

We like it when it is light outside. I think the one thing I don't like about Wisconsin in the winter is that we get these long stretches of cloudy and gloomy days. It's hard to imagine what it must be like to live in Fairbanks, Alaska, and have 3 hours and 42 minutes of daylight on December 21st. I think that would get depressing after a while.

Darkness has a way of doing that. As much as we like to live in light, we default to living in darkness. We find ourselves often living in the darkness of sin. As we do, sin brings fear to our hearts, because we know that the God we have a God who does not tolerate sin. Fear corrodes our confidence in God's goodness. We begin to wonder if Love (God) lives in heaven. Fear unleashes a whole swarm of doubts. Fear turns us into a bunch of control freaks. If God isn't going to fix this, then I will have to take matters into my own hands.

When life begins to spin out of control we try to bring it back into control by our OWN doing. We begin to do things our way, and not always the way that God desires. Our hearts become filled with fear. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus gives a number of commands to his children. The number one command is: Don't be afraid. Over 20 times in the Gospels, Jesus tells us "not to be afraid," "not fear," "take heart," or "be of good cheer." Why so often? Jesus knows how easy it is to be afraid. He knows what fear does to us. Fear may fill our world, but it doesn't need to fill our hearts. The children of Israel needed to hear those commands from their God. They needed to hear that they were still God's children. So, he sent them a prophet whose name was Isaiah.

What a mess the Israelites had made of the Promised Land they inherited from God. They had turned their hearts away from God. They created idols to worship. They now were doing all kinds of really ugly things. They were no longer living in the light. They were living in the darkness. As punishment, God gave possession of the land to foreign, idol-worshipping kings, and many of the Israelites were deported into foreign captivity. **"He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali."** Those tribes were the northern most tribes of Israel. When the Assyrians came in from the north into Israel, they didn't stand a chance without God. From the east would come another enemy – the Midianites.

But that is what sin does – it messes things up. When sin reigns in a heart, it captures the heart's lust, pride and all kinds of other desires of selfishness. Sin consumes a person's character and integrity until all that's left is desire. The land of darkness is not a good place. It is a place in every person's heart that is here today. What happens if we begin to live in the darkness of sin? We make excuses as to why we keep doing that sin in our life. After we have made excuses long enough, we begin to rationalize sin. It's always someone else's fault. We point fingers any direction than ourselves. Then we defend sin. We choose to live in sin. We choose to live in the darkness. What are the dark places of your life? What are the parts in your heart that you don't want to be seen in the light? That makes us uncomfortable, doesn't it? But that is what repentance does. It points the finger not at everyone else, but at me. It sees sin for what it is. It is darkness.

However, God doesn't want his children to live in the darkness. He wanted the people who were beaten down and worn out to know that God had not left them. He was their God who was going to rescue them. He was going to shine in their dark hearts. **"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."** Light was going to shine in place that they never expected to see it again. The land that was humbled by the Assyrians, would be the land that the Savior would walk. God would keep his promise.

But more importantly, God was going to shine light into their dark hearts. A light was coming that was going to shine into the dark hearts of mankind. Into the darkness of this world, God sent Light – his Son, Jesus. **"You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing**

the plunder. 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." Their hearts would be filled with joy.

That's what Light does. It changes everything, doesn't it? I could stand up here and tell you all kinds of steps that you need to do if you want the Light of Jesus to shine in your hearts. If you do this, this and this, then God will do this. Follow these words and your life will be different. Guess what? It isn't going to work. It doesn't work. The only one that can bring light into your heart is Jesus. It is only Jesus that can shine the light of the Gospel into all those dark corners of your heart. That's what Jesus wants to do in your heart.

What happens when he shines there? It changes everything, doesn't it? Jesus drives out fears, doubt and guilt. The enemies of Jesus don't stand a chance against the Light of Jesus. You ever have one of those really long nights? You can't get to sleep. Every little thing in your mind becomes bigger than it is. Then the sun dawns. It changes everything. Things aren't as bad as they once seemed. That's what Jesus brings to you. Live in the Light of Jesus! Amen.

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