

# Foretold//“The Son”//Isaiah 9:1–7, pt 1

**Christmas offering...** Last week we took in well over 100K for our Christmas Mission Offering which is a great start. *But for those of you who are still working through what you are going to give, I really want to challenge you...*

- God has really blessed some of us and that’s a good thing... He wants you to enjoy it w/o guilt; but at the same time I want you to think about the fact that more than 2 billion people in the world live on less than \$2 a day and there are still close to that many who have never heard the Gospel... 26K children just like your children die each day of a preventable disease;
- ...that’s who all this money goes for. I want you to make some **radical** sacrifices at Christmas.
- I mean, **what if, just if...** you cut what you spent in Christmas by 1/2... would you not still be so much better off than so many people in the world?
- What if instead of being extravagant with ourselves this Christmas and got more and more stuff, we were radically generous, and we shared our wealth with others?
- I’m not talking about getting your kids nothing for Christmas (here kids, here’s a Bible verse, memorize it and be grateful), I’m just talking about giving generously to others out of the richness God has given to us!
- **If we have Jesus in our hearts, we can’t just look at an impoverished, lost world, and go on living our lives as if it were all about us.**
- Be generous; radically generous, this Christmas, live sufficiently and give extravagantly.

OK... we’re in week 2 of a series called “Foretold.” Last week I explained why I believe that the prophecies about Jesus Christ are one of the most convincing ways the Bible authenticates to us that Jesus is really from God; that He is God’s Prophet to us...

There are right at 322 direct prophecies that describe for us the character and nature of the coming Messiah, as well as giving us specific details about his birth, His life and His death.

- These predictions were not like those of people like Nostradamus. You ever read those? There’s like 1000 of them, I’ve read a few... Nostradamus was a 16<sup>th</sup> century French mystic who got his prophecies by peering into a pot of boiling water... his predictions are vague (at best) and even his most ardent followers will tell you he was often just plain wrong.
- By contrast, the sheer specificity, amount and detail of the Bible’s prophecies is truly amazing! I’d encourage you to investigate them yourself... once you really look at them, it’s pretty hard to say that the birth of Jesus was coincidental or a

chance happening... that event, the birth of Jesus, bears God's stamp all over it.

- I found this interesting example from a CIA report:
- Whenever a double-agent wants to reveal information to the CIA, the CIA usually gives them several layers by which to identify themselves, so that there is no chance that they could get the wrong person. For example: One particular Soviet double-agent was given 6 prearranged signs to accomplish: (1) He was to go to Mexico City, and (2) contact a certain guy in the city to let him know he was there and identify himself by the name of "I. Jackson." (3) After 3 days he was to go to a specific place in the city and (4) stand in front of the statue of Columbus, (5) with his middle finger placed in a guidebook. When he was approached by somebody asking for directions (6) he was to say that the statue of Columbus was a magnificent statue and that he was from Oklahoma. At that point they knew they had their guy.
- Jesus had not 6 signs to identify him, but 322. So, yes, fulfilled prophecy was a major way that God authenticated the message of Jesus.
- Scholars tell us that nearly 25% of our Old Testament is prophecy... It's the dominant theme of the whole thing: *Jesus is coming, and the world should be watching for the birth of this baby who would be God.*
- (Which brings me, btw, to remind *you* of the impending birth of *my* baby—who will not be God—but I haven't mentioned it in a while... and very shortly we are expecting the *advent* of the 4<sup>th</sup> (and please dear God let it be our final) child (no, kidding, we love big fams). My espoused wife, if you haven't seen her lately, is great with child.
- The official due date is Jan 3, but we are all praying that God would squeak the little fellow in before midnight, Dec 31... I have told Jesus I will give him a large part of that tax write-off if he'd just get the boy here before the end of 09. Also, Veronica and I can't really decide on a name so any suggestions, just put them in the offering.)

**For the next 2 weeks**, we are going to look in-depth at the prophecy recorded in **Isaiah 9 (Bibles...)**.

- Now, I'll go ahead and tell you... this prophecy is not one of the most amazing in terms of the details it prophesies about the birth of Jesus, but it is one of the most amazing in its description about what Jesus would be like and what His purpose would be.

**Isaiah 9:1–7. First, let me set the context:**

- We've got to rewind the clock about 700 years before the birth of Jesus. There was a rising power in the Middle East called Assyria, and all the other nations in the Middle East started to get nervous about how strong Assyria had become... so, they formed an alliance to defend themselves.
- Well, they wanted Jerusalem's king, king Ahaz, to join their alliance, but Ahaz didn't want to do it, b/c he didn't like

either of those guys, so they threatened to invade Jerusalem and replace him with a king who would. So, their armies start making plans to invade Jerusalem, and this of course throws King Ahaz into a panic.

- Well... then, the King of Assyria comes to Ahaz and says, *"Join me, and I will protect you from them."* (both sides want him to join for protection)
- So, Ahaz doesn't know what to do. So God sends the prophet Isaiah to him and tells him, "Don't join either side. I will protect you."
- Well, Ahaz is nervous about this and Isaiah can see that on his face and so Isaiah says, "Don't worry, I'll give you a sign from God."
- Now, you'd think Ahaz would be excited about that but instead he's like, "No, don't do that." Because evidently he thinks, "If God gives me a sign, then I have to obey him."
- But Isaiah says, "You don't want a sign? I'll give you one anyway." And so in Isaiah 7 he says, "The sign is this: a virgin will give birth to a child..." (Now, this part is confusing so hang with me. Scholars believe there was a fulfillment of this prophecy at the time... a child that was born then... you see it referred to in chapter 8... but it becomes pretty obvious that the real fulfillment of this promise would come later... because you see this child starts being described in the most incredible terms.)

*9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. 3 You have multiplied our nation; you have increased its joy... 4 For the yoke of his burden... the rod of his oppressor, you have broken... 6 For unto us a child is born, unto 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, the Prince of Peace. 7 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."*

- Now, here's your Debbie Downer moment... Ahaz ends up rejecting **all** this advice and making an alliance with the King of Assyria... which not only did not help them, but it eventually backfired. Assyria came against them to try and capture them.
- Then, Ahaz completely loses it and starts to sacrifice to the gods of other nations around him, to see if any of them would help... "I'll burn an offering to this god... let's see if this one works..." (I get the sad image of like the guy in Vegas who has lost almost all his money and so now I is throwing his last bit of money at whatever game he can to see if somehow he can somehow strike it rich and make it all back up).

- At the end of his life the legacy he leaves is to have led Israel into all kinds of idolatry that led ultimately to their exile. So... be depressed.

But, this passage is very instructive for us. So, let's ask a few questions of it: First, **how does this prophecy of the birth of Jesus answer the problem Ahaz has in Isaiah 9, namely that there's an army outside of Jerusalem that wants to destroy it?** Into a very real, dire, felt-need situation (impending attack), God gives a promise about a Messiah who wouldn't be born for 700 years! How does this prophecy speak to the situation?

### 1. Ultimate answers to our problems will be given in Jesus

- First, let me let you know that I know I am speaking to a group of people with problems. I know that. (Sometimes people think, "You're a preacher; man of God, you don't know what it's like to have real problems: I have my own problems, and people come to me a lot... I am daily confronted by some of yours). Some of you have health problems; you've got relationship problems; some of you have problems with your kids; some of you deal with depression, or a family member with depression; maybe you just found out you can't have kids; your spouse has left you; you've got problems at your job. Some of you feel like you can't breathe. Just like King Ahaz, you have an enemy that is larger than you and you really need God's help with it.
  - And I want to make this clear: God will help us in the present, just as he offered to in this story. (He offered to help Ahaz!) God answers prayer, Scripture makes that very clear.
  - At this church we believe He heals the sick and he restores marriage and He provides for the needy and we believe that because many of us have experienced it firsthand...
    - One of the greatest excitements of my life is seeing God answer prayer in my life: prayers for guidance (2 this week); prayers for help; prayers for healing. Blows my mind.
- But the big point God is making here is that the ultimate answer to this prayer, **and all prayers**, will be given in the reign of Jesus...
  - You see, ultimately, all our needs require an eternal solution. You ever think that a lot of our prayers are for temporary answers?
    - For example, you have bad health: You pray, "God, heal!" And If He does, great, but at some point you still die. Death is like Varsity level sickness. So any healing now you ask for is just temporary.
    - You say, "God make my spouse get better so they don't die and leave me alone." Again, eventually one of you will die and leave the other one.
  - The Prince of Peace that was promised here was not coming simply to help out temporarily... to win this battle or heal

one person's sickness; He was coming to end all battles and rid the world of death entirely. When He reigns, He will restore families, abolish wars, take away sickness and pain and loneliness and depression... that's ultimate healing.

- Until then, we, like them in Isaiah 9, are waiting... and while God answers prayer in the present, we still live a world of trouble and pain and disappointment and we wait for God to bring final healing in Jesus' reign.
- (Now, you say, 'Well, but wait... when Ahaz heard this, Jesus hadn't been born yet. But now, Jesus has been born. And the world is *still* a mess!
  - I've had many Jewish people tell me this is why they don't believe Jesus was the Messiah. They say, "You know, He came... and what's the difference? The holocaust was post-prince of peace, not pre. You call that "peace?"
  - OK... let me explain a mystery: the Bible says that the first time Jesus came (the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent), He came to defeat sin and death by dying on the cross and then demonstrating that by resurrecting from the dead.
    - That's because our primary problem was not bad health or bad relationships or armies that want to destroy us; our primary problem is that we are sinners who have separated from God and spiritually corrupted ourselves. So, Jesus on the cross defeated our sin and death and has offered that victory to all who will receive it...
    - When He comes *again*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> advent, He will rid the world of all pain and suffering.
  - Here's your Christmas theology lesson: *The 1<sup>st</sup> Advent brought relief from our sins. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent will bring relief from our suffering.*)
- For now, we, like Ahaz, are given a promise and we *wait for* its fulfillment. Now, you say, "Why the wait? Why didn't He just fix it all at once?"
  - ***I mean, I hate waiting.*** Don't we all (?), but me especially. I think it's b/c I have an especially low threshold for boredom... or I'm way too ADD. Don't know.
  - One of the things I most hated about Christmas as a kid was *the waiting*. It's like it we could never get through December... drug on and on... and have you noticed we actually do things to accentuate the fact to kids that we are waiting?
    - For one, the mall starts putting up Christmas decorations on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July now.
    - Then there's the whole Advent seasons thing. At every point you're reminded, "It's not here yet!"
    - We have the little... barn thing... with the doors with the 25 days leading up to Christmas and you open each one... then we have a little chalkboard that has "\_\_\_\_" days to Christmas and each day we write in the new #... just in case you forgot, not here yet. Drives my poor kids crazy.
    - Southern phrase: "Slow as Christmas..."

- That's actually a very important part of Christmas tradition... the *waiting*. Because it reminds us that ***life for the believer is in a posture of waiting for ultimate redemption.***
- Two other times I remember hating waiting...
  - The birth of our first baby. Slow. Will it **ever** get here? *But you don't want it to deliver early.* It may be hard to wait, but there are important things developing in there you don't want to stop or rush.
  - What if that was God's purpose in what He's doing, or seemingly not doing, in your life right now? What if the purpose of God, in waiting, is to form some very important things in us during this time?
- Guys... I know we want God to just appear and fix everything, but sometimes God has a purpose in the wait: things we learn; attitudes formed in us... and if we refuse to wait we will abort the work that God is doing.
- Does that make sense?
  - **One more example: The other time I remember hating waiting was marriage...** relatively short engagement... 6 mos. Why? That's how long it takes to prepare the ceremony. **Now, I didn't care about the ceremony.** Veronica did, so she was willing to wait. *God cares* about what He is doing in you.
- Guys, God is never late. He's got it all under complete control. I know you think He's late. Ahaz thought He was late. But He's not. He's never been. Never. He always arrives exactly when He intends to.
- The Apostle Paul describes Jesus' birth only 1 time in all his writings, and he says simply this: "*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son...*" (**Gal 4:4**) "*fullness of time*" is a Greek phrase that means, "At just the right moment..."
- If you find yourself in a place where you are having to wait on God... know that God has things fully under control. God will do His work in your life "in the fullness of time." ***Don't abort what God is doing in you by refusing to wait!***

**2. For now, what you get is Jesus.** God gives them a promise of ultimate fulfillment in the future; what we get in the present is the presence of Jesus.

- These next 2 verses give you 4 incredible names for Jesus. They're all relational names, not just descriptions of His attributes. We'll look at 2 of them this week and 2 the next. ***Here's the first one, vs. 6:***
  - **"Wonderful Counselor" (v. 6)**
  - ***Wonderful:*** a word that means *awesome*. Wondrous, awe-inspiring, glorious God. Jesus was the incarnation of God's awesome glory.
  - ***Counselor:*** a guide and help with our problems.
  - And I think it's very interesting that these 2 words are put together: *Wonderful Counselor*. Here's the significance of

that: ***The way that God helps us most in our problems*** (the way He is our counselor) ***is by allowing us to see how awesome and wondrous He is.***

- You get that? Counselor is “the help.” Seeing He is wonderful is “how he helps us.” The greatest help to us in the midst of life’s problems is for us to see the awesomeness of the God who says He’ll never leave us and watches **over us**; to have the assurance of His presence **with us** and to know how valuable that is **to us**!
- You see, a lot of times we come to church asking if God can make our lives better. (You’ve been out of church for a while, and you’ve had the birth of a child and you’ve started to think, “I think my kids needs a spiritual foundation.” So, you come to church... and you wonder, “Can God help my family. Can he make my life better? Will he help my marriage?”)
- I’ve told you that that’s kind of like a little kid saying “if a **nuclear bomb** goes off next to me, will I get hot?” “Yes... you’ll get hot.” But that’s kind of missing the point. If a nuclear bomb goes off next to you, your personal temperature becomes a tad irrelevant.
- **Athlete who competes for the Olympics:** trains and trains and wins the gold medal. He stands up on that platform and they begin to play the anthem, and the athlete breaks down and begins to weep. A little kid comes up and asks “is this fun?” In one sense you say “well yes, it is fun...” but see, it’s about so much more.
- **That’s the same as you coming up to God and saying, “God, will you make my life better?** Will you fix my problems?” Nuclear bomb, will you make me hot? You’re missing the point. Life’s greatest joy and treasure is to know Him, and to know that He knows you and loves you and is present in your life.
- That doesn’t take away your problems; but it completely changes how you go through them. Illus. **Dad’s surgery with my mom...** just for her to be there. Her presence changed everything. ***What’s it like for God to be there with you through it all?***
- The awesomeness of Jesus **to you** redefines (doesn’t always take away) but redefines the problems in your life.
- For all of you overwhelmed by a problem, or a temptation... think about this for a while: **In Christ you have the presence and the promise of the God who holds the whole universe in His hands and the absolute approval of the only One whose opinion really matters.**

*Next description...*

#### **“Mighty God” (v. 6)**

- The story that came to mind here is where Jesus calms the storm, which, I maintain, has to be one of the most underrated miracles of Jesus’ ministry.
- It was right at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry... Mark 4... Jesus and his disciples are on one of their first boat trips

together and there is a terrible storm... they're all fighting for their lives and Jesus is in the back of the boat... asleep. Got a pillow over his head so they won't wake Him up... They are all fighting and spinning and reeling... Peter yells out, "Jesus, don't you care?" (If I were making a movie about Jesus, I'd have Will Ferrell play Peter.)

- Jesus stands up... yawns... He's all groggy... looks out at the storm and the text says, literally, "He rebuked the wind and the waves." He looks at wind and waves and says, "Knock it off."
- Rebuked. Rebuke is what you do to someone underneath you.
  - You rebuke your kids. "You will not pee in the sink."
  - You rebuke an employee. "You will not show up an hour late to work."
- This guy rebukes the weather channel. He owns the weather.
  - He just stands up and turns it off. You know how like somebody's car alarm starts going off in the parking lot and some guy comes out real embarrassed and is like, "Oh, excuse me... that's my car." Jesus stands up and says, "Sorry, sorry, that's my storm." Click click.
- They said, "What kind of man is this, that even *the weather* obeys Him." The point was that He is a God of unlimited power.
- Then you see, at the end of His life, this pathetic scene, where Jesus literally crawls through the Garden of Gethsemane.
- This is at the end of the Gospel of Mark... Mark tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus sees something that makes him shrink back in horror and be deathly afraid and *beg* God to let Him out of what is coming.
- He's so afraid that it's almost like He starts to swoon; Mark says He "was afraid unto death" and that He sweat great drops of blood.
- 3x he goes to his friends just to say, "Can you stay up with Me?" Which is kind of tender, seeing the mighty God, just need companionship; just needs someone to sit up with Him for a while.
- What was it that He was seeing that caused the Mighty God to stagger and be deathly afraid and just need a friend? The price of our sin. The Mighty glorious, wonderful God submitted Himself to the weakness and humiliation of death so that He could purchase our forgiveness and give us an eternal home in heaven with Him forever.
- And this shines a new light on His mightiness; His mightiness is not just power over the wind and waves, but the mightiness of a love that would do anything to rescue us. Early church: **strength of a flame... not to burn up, but burn down. God's glory was not most shown by the majesty of His creation, but by becoming a man and dying to save us.**
- You want to know who Jesus is? He's not just the God who controls the waves; He's the God who was powerful enough to wrestle death and hell on your behalf and emerge victorious.
- Wonderful Counselor; Mighty God. This is what you get in the present.

- **Question: Isn't that enough?** Maybe your health has failed. Maybe your dreams have been shattered. Maybe your relationships have fallen apart. **But you have Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God. He is enough. And people for 2000 years who have suffered have testified that He is enough, and if you are hurting today I hope you'll let one of us show you how He really can be enough for you.**

### 3. The greatest danger for you in the present is that you will replace God with something else

- Ahaz wasn't content to trust in and wait on God... so he made an alliance with Assyria. He thought, "If God doesn't come through... well, at least I have this alliance with Assyria." Ultimately this alliance, this compromise, led to disaster. Assyria turns on them; then Jerusalem turns to idolatry; ultimately they would all be carried off into exile. All that came not from rejecting God, but from supplementing God with Assyria.
- **The greatest spiritual threat to your life is not rejecting God, but supplementing God.**
- You see it here in this story... You see it in the life of Abraham. Abraham wouldn't trust God to give him a son, since he and Sarah were both old as dirt, and so Abraham sleeps with a young servant girl. This was a compromise of faith and ultimately caused Abraham and the rest of his descendants all kinds of problems.
- Spiritually, we usually wreck ourselves not by rejecting God, but by supplementing Him with something. Here's what that looks like for you:
  - Because you are lonely and not content to wait in your singleness, you compromise who you date
  - Because you are unhappy in your marriage, rather than trusting God and waiting on Him, you cheat on your spouse
  - Because you are not happy with your income and how much God has given you, you go into debt
  - Because you are angry about your past, rather than trust God and forgive, you harbor bitterness
  - Maybe you just have a general dissatisfaction with where you are in life... so you are always trying to get to the next stage. (For example, I know lots of seminary and college students who are like, "I'm tired of being in school... I want to be out making real money or doing real ministry..." so you refuse to focus on your schoolwork. You're refusing to "wait," and you miss out on what God wants to do in your life during this time period. (I know so many students in this position.)
- Get this one: ***Some of you have stopped waiting on God and just become cynical...*** something in life has disappointed you or not turned out like you wanted it to. So, you are just bitter at the world. You're down on marriage, happiness... everything.
  - Tim Keller said we have 4 ways of responding to life's disappointments
  - We get disappointed with something... so we turn to another thing. Love; career; hobby; travel; sex.
  - We blame ourselves... something's wrong with *me*. You're full of self-loathing; live with a guilt complex.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> option is you get cynical... you think, “the world is just disappointing” and you live with bitterness.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> option is to realize you weren’t created for this world but for another one. You won’t ultimately be fulfilled by anything in this world, but by God and the next one.

Confidence in God; and patience to wait on Him; satisfaction with His presence... this is what makes your life stable. Here’s what God says to Ahaz in Isaiah 7: *“If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.” (Isaiah 7:9) If you’re not firm in your confidence in what God is doing, your life really will fall apart.*

- You won’t be firm enough to say no to temptation
- You won’t be able to say no to bitterness
- You’ll live with dissatisfaction and despair and restlessness
- You’ll go into debt

***Believe in what God is doing in you...*** be firm in it... and your whole will begin to take shape. You’ll quit being so unstable.

*“Thus says the Lord... ‘Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread.’ (Isaiah 8:11)*

- They fear death... you don’t need to, I’ve overcome it.
- They fear relational breakdown: you don’t depend on those any more.
- They fear financial ruin: I’ll take care of you.

If you’re overwhelmed with a problem... hear the word of God:

- God is sovereign, tender, loving control over you.... *in the fullness of time He will come!*
- And, in the present, you get the Presence of the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God.

So, where are you? I want you just to spend a little time with Jesus.

***Let’s pray:***

# Bullpen:

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Next week:

- Everlasting Father
- Prince of Peace
- Counselor

but as of yet has not instituted His full reign on the earth, and so we still see a world where peace does not yet reign: there is still sickness and death and problems and disappointment.