

STRANGE Predictions

A sermon on Isaiah 9

Today we're going to look at an Old Testament prophecy that is filled with some STRANGE predictions for Christmas 2020. Before we do, a prayer: **O Lord, strengthen us by the truth. Your Word is the truth. Open our eyes to see what you want us to see; open our ears to hear what you want us to hear; and open our hearts to believe what you would have us believe. Amen.**

I. STRANGE Predictions

The lesson we are looking at is from Isaiah chapter 9. It is a prophecy written to the people of a country called Judah around 750 B.C.

Now, not long before this prophecy, Judah had been a very positive place to live. It had been experiencing economic growth. There was individual financial stability. It was a cozy, healthy nation in which you could raise your family in a *cushy, plush life*.

You could take your family downtown for the big festival.

You could take your wife on a date to a crowded restaurant.

You could brave the local mall (they called them marketplaces) and buy up all kinds of gadgets without having to worry about who touched them last.

You could even – get this - sit down 5 feet away from a stranger.

Wow.

Things were good in Israel.

Recently, that had changed.

Neighboring countries had attacked and slaughtered 120,000 of their countrymen...

In one day.

And we think COVID numbers are bad...

Now there wasn't time for festivals and recreation.

People were at home.

People were scared.

People were just concerned about whether they would survive!

Sound familiar?

It is to this sobering reality that Isaiah brought comforting predictions from God.

Predictions that were recorded.

Predictions that pointed to a time well beyond 750 B.C.

Predictions that find fulfillment in Christmas 2020.

Look for yourself.

Prediction 1: God's Light will Drive out Darkness

Maybe you're thinking:

That's not all that impressive of a prediction.

Cause there are Christmas lights every Christmas.

Light on the tree in your living room.

Lights on the inflatable reindeer on your lawn.

Lights – lots of lights – blindingly obnoxious lights – on that one house on the block.

In Hebrew, the word for darkness has another meaning.

Gloom.

Sadness.

Deep depression.

Here's what God says will happen to those in gloom.

“The people walking in darkness/gloom have seen a great light.

For those living in the land of the shadow/gloom of death, the light has dawned. (v.2)

Do you follow that prediction?

God's light will drive out gloom this Christmas.

Which is strange.

Because not a lot of things can seem to be able to drive out COVID depression.

Even the most grandiose light display flashing in sync to the music of Manheim Steamroller only helps for a moment.

Then, when the display is over you think:

COVID is still going on.

I still lost my job.

I still haven't had real personal interaction in months.

I'm still in deep depression.

But this prediction from God's Word says the light **has dawned**.

As in...

It's started shining.

And it continues to shine.

Consistently.

Persistently.

Repeatedly.

God's Light will brighten the gloom this Christmas.

Prediction 2: God will Multiply our Joy

Again, that seems strange.

We live in a world that's filled with news mostly void of joy.

Bad COVID reports.

Bad news on Aunt Matilda.

Bad news from that you'll have to quarantine even longer.

Maybe you might expect Christmas to add a bit of joy.

But not enough to make a difference.

God doesn't promise to add to your joy.

But to multiply it.

Verse 3 says, “**God, you have multiplied the nation and increased its joy.**”

Has this ever happened to you?

You head to the store.

You're only planning on making only one batch of cookies.

You decided on gingerbread men, because they have ginger in them – which decreases your risk for heart attack – or something.

But then, you see a display for macaroons. They are premade so you aren't technically breaking your “only bake one vow.”

You see a kid in the aisle and are reminded of the cutouts mom made... You pick up the ingredients necessary for those too.

You head to the checkout and notice a low price on sprinkled sugar cookies. You get two boxes because “if you get the green ones, you'd need to get the red to balance out the color scheme.”

Then, you get home find a big package from Grandma filled with about 50 of her famous Snickerdoodles, 25 chocolate bonbons and a tin of those cookies with the Hershey's kiss smushed onto the middle of it.

Your Christmas cookies have multiplied.

That's what God promises to do with joy.

Even if your “joy” is at a level one.

Multiplied by ten.

That's a lot more joy.

God will multiply joy this Christmas.

Prediction 3: God will Defeat Oppressors

Oppression has been a key phrase in 2020.

And some of the worst kinds of oppressions happen within our own thoughts.

Oppressed by the racism you've felt on your Facebook feed.

Oppressed by the hatred of that one coworker whose anger is not lost even though it's on a ZOOM call.

Oppressed by the late notice after late notice of payments overdue.

Oppressed by guilt of not giving your kids a better education.

Oppressed by shame of not having enough money for your idea of a perfect Christmas.

Oppressed by a nagging little voice that keeps saying, “You didn't do good enough.”

None of these things seem to be going away anytime soon.

It's not like putting up a few decorative snowmen will stop their rule.

But look at what Scripture says:

God has **broken the rod of the oppressors as...in the day of Midian.**” (v.4)

That's a reference to a Sunday school story involving a guy named Gideon. Do you know that one? It's a story that happened long before the Jewish situation from 750 B.C. Israel was under the oppression of the Midianites. There wasn't much Israel could do because the Midianites had an army “like a swarm of locusts.” (Judges 7:12) That means it was tens of thousands strong.

God tells Gideon to lead an army to fight them.

But Gideon says, “You only gave me 30,000 guys. That's not big enough to fight back.”

And God says, “Hmmm...I did miscalculate the number. Let’s send 29,700 of them. I’ll give you the victory with a measly 300.”

And God does.

*Like Gideon, you might be facing so many oppressors it seems like a swarm of locusts.
Like Gideon, you also have one powerful God on your side.*

God will defeat oppressors this Christmas.

Prediction 4: Victory will be Yours

We have really lowered the definition of victory during COVID.

For example...

The other day I counted it a victory ‘cause I ordered pizza online.
Drove to the delivery place
Turned on my hazards.
Watched as they put the pizza on top of my car.
Rolled down my window.
Grabbed the pizza box.
And brought the pizza home.

VICTORY!
And during COVID!

There aren’t a lot of victories right now.
It’s easy to not expect any this Christmas either.

But check out verse 5:

**Every boot that marched in battle
and the garments rolled in blood will be burned.
They will be fuel for the fire. (v.5)**

Did you hear that?
God says:

*Burn your soldier uniforms.
Stop striving.
Stop struggling for a victory.
You already have one.
Because the battle is done.
And the battle is won.*

Victory will be yours this Christmas.

Because of God.

II. STRANGE Fulfillment.

This is starting to sound good isn’t it?
I’m getting excited for Christmas again.

What do I need to do to make this happen?

Do I need to buy the right Christmas gift?

Do I need to fork over enough money?

Do I need to call up Rudolph or Frosty?

Do I need to do everything in my mommy power to create some type of Winter Wonderland paradise within my own apartment walls with decorations, goodies, Pinterest projects, and acoustic Christmas music in order to give my kids joy, light, and victory?

Nope.

It has nothing to do with you.

And everything to do with a baby.

For to us a child is born.

To us a son is given. (v.6a)

A baby?

Really?

Like a little tiny human?

Nine pounds?

Little tiny booties the size of my thumb?

Yep.

Cause that child is no ordinary child.

That child will grow up.

That child will live perfectly.

That child will die innocently.

That child will rise triumphantly.

That child will save you.

That child is Jesus.

Look again at what makes him extraordinary.

He will be named: Wonderful Counselor. (v.6c)

Remember the depression we mentioned above?

One of the ways God drives out the darkness of gloom is with counseling.

Which makes sense.

There's been a significant increase in needs for counseling throughout the pandemic.

Most of it via Zoom.

But Jesus is really good at counseling.

Really good.

He offers counsel that no other counselor can.

Note that Jesus is called the "Wonderful" counselor.

That word "wonderful" is related to the word "miraculous."

Jesus is the miraculous Counselor that offers miraculous Counsel.

He can say things that no other counselor can

*I died for your sins. So, you're totally forgiven for that.
You are loved by your Heavenly Father. I just talked to him about this last week.
That thing you are afraid of? I've seen what happen. It all turns out good.*

He will be named: Mighty God, (v.6d)

And this explains the miracle!
It isn't some elf bringing you these Christmas predictions.
It isn't some magical reindeer bringing you good tidings.
It isn't even the Amazon guy.

It's God.

God who came in Jesus.
God who comes in Jesus.
God who is Jesus.

God who is your light.
God who is your joy.
God who has no problem defeating any of your oppressors.
God who has already given you eternal victory in Jesus!

He will be named: Everlasting Father (v.6d)

Because there have been quite a few deaths this year.
1.44 million worldwide.

Even of people we thought would last forever.

Like Alex Trebeck.

I was born in 1984.
Alex was hosting jeopardy since 1984.
He has literally been the host all my life.

But now he's gone.

But Jesus isn't.
And Jesus won't ever be.
Jesus is everlasting.

He will be with you now and throughout the 2020 holiday season.

He will be named: Prince of Peace.

This is a big one.
Peace has been hard to come by in 2020.

Besides all the COVID.
All the isolation.
All the alone.

There has been

Police brutality.
Violent protests.

Horrific racism.
Domestic abuse.
Political unrest.
And just plain nastiness on Social Media.

Some posit we are on the brink of Civil War.

A made-for-TV Hallmark Christmas special won't solve the world's problems.
It won't even give you lasting peace.

But do you know who will?

The prince of Peace.
Jesus brought us peace with God.
Jesus speaks peace to our hearts.
Jesus empowers us to be at peace with others because we are at peace with God.

III. One More STRANGE Prediction

This leads to one more prediction for 2020 Christmas.

(5) God's Kingdom will Flourish

This seems the most farfetched to this pastor.

Over the past months, I have *seen* church attendance drop.
Over these past months, I have *seen* a once full church look so empty.
Over these past months, I have *seen* more and more of our own family go from worshipers, to online worshipers, to occasional worshipers, to I think you should just leave me alone, pastor.

We're unveiling our Christmas Eve plan – we're doing four services to try and encourage people to join us, but even then, it won't be the same.
The church family won't be together.
We won't be able to blast joy to the world at full strength.

But...

In spite of what we've seen.
In spite of what we might see.

God promises this:

Jesus will rule on David's throne and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from now on, into eternity. (v.9)

You see it?

God's kingdom will flourish this Christmas.
Whether we see it or not.

Because he will be on the throne.
Because he will be working through his people.
And, since you are one of his people, because he will work through you

God help us to see the good in this Christmas.
And help us to be the good in this Christmas.

Amen.