

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
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Isaiah 9:1-7**

[Video shown: <https://vimeo.com/147354741>]

Good morning. I love that song! *To tell of my story is to tell of Him*. May it be so for all of us. Let's pray before we dive in this morning:

Jesus, we do pray that when we tell of our stories, it would reflect You in a mighty and powerful way. Father, we enter this time and ask that You would make your presence known here. Father, that You would be the loudest voice in the room. That through the voices of the Old Testament we would learn something new and fresh. We pray that You would transform us this morning and speak truth into our lives. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Well, I have a fairly extensive and long travel bucket list. There are a lot of places in the world that I would like to go. I think this is passed down to me from my grandmother. She was a woman who traveled many places. When she died at 80, she was planning her second trip to Australia. Nothing slowed this woman down and I'm so grateful that she passed this down to me. There are many places in the world that I still want to see, but a few years ago, a mentor of mine called and asked if I, along with a couple of my co-workers, wanted to go and do some youth ministry missionary training in France. And I said as fast as I possibly can, "Yes" without asking my boss, without checking my passport (which expired the day that I returned), without doing anything, I immediately said, "Yes, I want to go!" I started taking French when I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and so the opportunity to go and see everything that I had learned about, the language that I had learned, the food I had learned about, the culture that I had learned about, was to me the trip of a lifetime. And so I went to France three weeks after he called, and I remember flying into Charles de Gaulle airport and getting in the car—we were going to spend two days in Normandy doing a WWI history tour, and then go down to our training, which was on the German/French border, in a town called Munster, and then finally we would make our way up to Paris and spend three days in Paris. And that's what I was waiting for because that's what I wanted to see. And I loved the rest of France, I loved seeing the countryside, I loved being in the training, I loved being in the small towns, but when I got to Paris, I was nonstop. The friend I was traveling with was at one point like, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could just go to a café in Paris and sit and enjoy the scenery?" And I was already half-way to Notre Dame Cathedral and said, "Nope. We have too much to do, and too many places to go, and too many places to see." And I remember that when we got to go to the Eiffel Tower, the morning that we visited the Eiffel Tower we came up out of the subway and I just bolted. I had no idea where I was running to, but I knew that it had to be somewhere. I turned the corner on

the street and saw it standing in front of me. And again, this is what I had been looking at and studying and wanting to see since I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. And it was standing there in front of me! And how magnificent the sight was.

I think a lot about the expectation I had for this trip. The expectation that I have for any trip I take is pretty high because I'm so excited to go. And on this trip, my expectations were completely and totally met. The trip exceeded my expectations. And I think about what expectations we have and how expectations play a really big role in so many of our circumstances. We expect things to happen. We expect people to say things. Sometimes we have really high expectations and sometimes they're met. Sometimes we have low expectations and what happens exceeds them. For me, I feel like most of the time when I have expectations, they're not met. And I wonder if that's the same for you on occasion? This time of Advent, this time leading up to Christmas, is a lot about expectation and anticipation of the coming Messiah. But so often what these four weeks are spent doing is shopping, running to Target for the eighteenth time this week because we forgot something, going to parties, decorating. We don't take advantage of the opportunity to rest, to pause, to expect the coming Messiah. And I wonder if this year, along with all of that, we take time to really think through the expectation of the Messiah? That's what we're going to be talking about this morning and throughout Advent. What do we expect from the Messiah? And who was He?

We're going to listen to the words of the prophets throughout Advent this year and hear from the Old Testament about what they were expecting from the Messiah.

So, if you want to get a Bible from the pew racks in front of you, we're going to go to Isaiah 9. It will be on the screen as well. It will be a different version on the screen. We pick up the story of the Israelites when the Assyrian Empire had conquered much of their land. The kingdom of Israel was divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom at this time. The Israelites had participated in anti-Assyrian activities, and because of that, the Assyrians were pushing in, moving into their land and killing the people. The lives that were lost and the faith that was shattered had the Israelites down and out and completely beat up. The Assyrians were brutal. They killed without any care or acknowledgement of human life. They wanted the land and they wanted to punish the people who had gone against them. And though the Israelites were not blameless in this fight, they were very much living in darkness and wanted and demanded justice. They wanted retribution. They wanted someone to step up and fight for them and so they kept looking to leaders and governors to do that. And the prophet Isaiah starts speaking about the future. He says in verse one:

Isaiah 9:1-2 "But there will be no more gloom for those who knew such hardship. In times past, God humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali; later, He will restore the honor and glory to the way of the seas, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee, home of the nations. The people who had been living in darkness have seen a great light."

The Israelites had been living in darkness. Continuously, constantly living in darkness, and light is going to break through. Light and darkness is an extremely common theme that runs throughout the Scriptures. We just heard during the lighting of the Advent candle Jesus saying,

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever walks with Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Israelites were living in darkness and needed light to break through and they were expecting it because of what the prophet Isaiah said.

A couple of weeks ago I drove to the airport to pick up a friend and I got there a little early so I had to do a loop around. On the exit ramp that you loop in order to go back to baggage claim, at the very top of it, I noticed that you can see both downtowns. You can see downtown St. Paul *and* downtown Minneapolis. And that day when I was driving there the sun was SO bright. It was around 3:00PM and there wasn't a cloud in the sky and both of our cities were completely illuminated. And it made me think as I drove back down toward baggage claim how much light our city needs right now. How much light our country needs right now, and our world needs right now, because the darkness is extensive; violence, abuse, poverty, oppression, abandonment, addiction, fear, terror. The list goes on and on, running and racing for perfection and performance. There is darkness and it's extensive and we, like the Israelites, have been living in darkness, but have seen a great light. Isaiah continues in saying:

Isaiah 9:2-3 "The light of life has shined on those who dwelt in the shadowy darkness of death. And You, God, will make it happen. You bolstered the nation, making it great again. You have saturated it with joy. Everyone in it is full of delight in Your presence, like the joy they experience at the harvest, like the thrill of dividing up the spoils of war. For as You did back in the day when Midian oppressed us, You will shatter the yoke that burdens them, You will lift the load that weighs them down, You will break the rod of their oppressor."

This is a reference to the book of Judges, 500 years earlier when the Midian army was making offenses toward Israel and capturing them, and God raised up an army and delivered the people. It's a story that is still told at the dinner table of the Israelites because of God's power and His deliverance.

Isaiah 9:5 "It's true. All the fabric of war will go up in flames. The troop's heavy boots that stamped us down and their blood-soaked garb will be burned beyond recognition or use. There will be a new time, a fresh start."

Can you hear what they wanted? Can you see in those verses their desperation? They wanted a fresh start. They wanted justice. Someone to come to their aid and fight for them and take back their land.

According to Webster's Dictionary, justice is just behavior. "A concern for justice, peace, genuine respect for others." A judge or a magistrate . . . the Supreme Court; that is what they wanted. They wanted someone to step up and I wonder what images would have popped into their heads? That it would have been a mighty king, a diligent ruler, a fearless sovereign. But Isaiah turns the corner and he adds a detail into the story.

Isaiah 9:6 "Hope of all hopes, he says, dream of our dreams, a child is born, a son is given to us; a living gift. A child. Not an army leader. Not a righteous king ready to fight, but a baby in the most humble, independent way possible. It will be a child who saves you."

Not only does he say it's going to be a child, but he says a son is given, a son is given. Not born, but given to you, which means that he was already there.

In the beginning of Genesis, in the creation story, God says, "Let us make man in our image." Jesus the Messiah was already present. He was already there. He's been part of the Godhead, the Trinity, since the beginning of time, and He will be given to you. Isaiah tells them that justice will come through a child. He continues and says,

Isaiah 9:6 "And even now, with tiny features and dewy hair, He is great. The power of leadership and the weight of authority, will rest of His shoulders. He will have power in leadership, authority, and influence."

The NIV text says that the government will rest on His shoulders. This would have been language that they wanted; language that they expected. Yes, we want a king. We want him to rule the government, but was it exactly how they thought? They needed someone to free them. That's what they wanted. They kept running toward and demanding a person fully and only human to step up and to save them. And I wonder if we do the same thing? Not necessarily always turning to our government, although I think that is a viable option, but turning to other people in our lives; turning to ourselves to save us, to change us, to free us. I rely on myself probably more than I rely on anybody else. So, what does it look like for the government to rest of His shoulders? Well, Gayle Erwin explains it like this:

"Obviously, Jesus is not in charge of the halls of Washington, London, Moscow, Baghdad, or Paris. So, how can we ever believe that the 'government will rest of His shoulders'? Actually, His government shows it's working in wonderful ways. Whenever I see someone who miraculously leaves a life of drugs or alcohol and is restored to his or her family, I can see that he is now governed by God. Whenever I see loving Christians gently caring for orphans and those rejected by their family, I am watching people governed by God. Whenever I see people eagerly learning the Bible and joyously praising, I know who their governor is. Whenever I see people give up lucrative careers simply to go and share the Good News, I know they are governed by God. So, indeed, the government is alive and working. Often silently, mostly unseen. We can be and are, by choice, governed by God. Hope, joy, peace, and rest cover its subjects. Justice, mercy,

and grace, amazingly coexist. I like this Kingdom. The borders are open. So come on in.”

It’s not what we would expect necessarily as we’re reading through this, would we? It’s not what the Israelites would expect. Isaiah continues . . .

Isaiah 9:6 “His name? Well, we’ll know Him in many ways.”

He wants to expand on this. He wants to tell us now what this Messiah is going to be like. He gives us descriptions. He gives us His name.

Isaiah 9:6 “He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Dear Father everlasting, ever-present never-failing, Master of Wholeness, Prince of Peace.”

The NIV text says, “Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” And if you are reading from an NIV Bible, you will see maybe a small letter at the top after “Wonderful Counselor” which will take you to a footnote that says, “Or, Wonderful, Counselor.” Scholars are divided on whether or not there’s a comma after “Wonderful.” The New King James has a comma, but the NIV does not.

But I think when you’re reading this and listening to the names, to the descriptions of who this Messiah is, I want the Messiah to be wonderful because I need wonderful in my life. I need a sense of wonder. I don’t want to just go through the motions—go through the motions of church, go through the motions of life, of business, of school, of being with my friends—I don’t want to go through the motions. I want a sense of wonder in all of that. A sense of purpose. The Messiah gives purpose. He gives life meaning. Do you expect Him to be wonderful? His name shall be Counselor.

How many people do you listen to on a daily basis? How many people try to influence you or turn you this way or that way and give you counsel? The Messiah will be our Guide and our Counselor. Mighty God. He is mighty. He is full of might and He can handle whatever situations we face. His name is Mighty God, Everlasting Father. The word for father here is the source; the originator, the author of eternity, so like we talked about earlier, He was always present. Time does not hold Him. It does not constrict Him. We want to stop time, we want to go back in time, we want to slow time, we don’t want time to move forward, or sometimes we DO want time to move fast. God is not bound by time. He is everlasting and He is the Prince of Peace. In Him is peace, not necessarily absence of conflict, but peace in the midst of it. Our Messiah is peace.

John tells us that “Greater is He who is in me than the evil in this world.” That’s who Israel should look for. That’s who we should expect. Isaiah continues:

Isaiah 9:7 “His leadership will bring such prosperity as you’ve never seen before—sustainable peace for all time. His reign is characterized by reform and stability.”

Isaiah 9:7-8 “This child: God’s promise to David—a throne forever, among us, to restore sound leadership that cannot be perverted or shaken. He will ensure justice without fail and absolute equity. Always. The intense passion of the Eternal, Commander of heavenly armies, will carry this out to completion.”

Quite a picture of hope. Quite a picture of the days to come and the expected Messiah that resonated with them, I would imagine, but then when He came, he showed them a different way of life. Again, Israel got this glimpse into the future because they were being oppressed, but because they were not blameless in all of this, either. They continued to walk away from God. They continued to run to other sources for justice, and mercy, and peace, and grace. And Isaiah was reminding them that their Messiah would come and that God was the one they needed to put their trust in.

Is that what we do to? Do we run to so many other sources, so many other areas of peace? Do we believe that this baby, this child, will carry the weight of the world on His shoulders? Do we really believe that He is Mighty God and our Counselor, or do we just think of it as a metaphor? I believe that it leads us to ask this question of ourselves: What kind of Messiah am I expecting? What kind of Messiah are you expecting, because far too often religion can always be about self-interest? The Israelites were caught up in that, too. They wanted a Messiah to save them, lead them, rescue them, but they wanted it their way. And how many times do I expect the Messiah to save me, rescue me, come to me, speak to me, but I want it done my way? How I think is best. What I think I need. How I want it done. What kind of Messiah are you expecting? Because to follow Him in His ways are not the ways of the world.

No matter where you are—a boardroom, or with a woman who said something bad about you behind your back, or at school with a teacher you think doesn’t like you, or in Minneapolis, or as you pass a homeless person, or as you travel abroad, His ways are not like the world’s ways. His government is different. This Messiah invites us to love instead of hate. To forgive instead of hold grudges. To extend a hand to our enemy instead of fight back. To give the benefit of the doubt instead of judgment. To pause instead of making another knee-jerk reaction. To ask questions instead of assume. And to be peace in the midst of chaos. And if I were completely honest with you, I would say to you that I fail at this so often. This is hard stuff because I don’t want to naturally respond like that. I don’t want to naturally pursue justice especially if I’ve been wronged. I want my way.

I read a story recently about the life of Corrie ten Boom. Corrie was a woman who lived during Nazi occupied Holland and she and her family were convinced and convicted that their role at this time was to save their Jewish friends, neighbors, and strangers. So, they built a secret room in their house and hid many Jewish people. They were caught. The Gestapos showed up at their door and arrested most of her family. They were taken to prison and then sent to different concentration camps. Corrie never forgot who her God was. She never stopped talking about her God. She never stopped

praising her God. She never stopped following her Messiah throughout her entire ordeal.

She ended up at Ravensbrück, one of the most brutal and torturous concentration camps. Her sister died there. Eventually Corrie was released, and as she went back to life outside of the concentration camp, she continued to proclaim God's name. She went around to churches to tell her story and to share of God's goodness, and she says that as she was finishing a talk in Munich in 1947, she was met with her biggest challenge. A man was pushing through the crowds, approaching her with his hand out to shake hers. This is how the story goes:

“A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all of our sins are at the bottom of the sea!’ And Corrie thinks to herself, ‘And I, who had spoken about forgiveness, just fumbled in my pocketbook rather than to take his hand. He would not remember me, he was a guard at Ravensbrück.’ He was a guard who punished her and beat her, and tortured her. ‘How could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.’ ‘You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,’ he said, ‘I was a guard there, but since that time, I’ve become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear from your lips as well. Fräulein,’ again the hand came out, ‘Will you forgive me?’ ‘And I stood there—I whose sin had again and again needed to be forgiven—and could not forgive. How could I erase everything that happened there?’

The narrator of the story goes on to say that the soldier stood there expectantly waiting for Corrie to shake his hand. She says she wrestled with the most difficult thing she would ever have to do, but she knew she had to do it. ‘The message that God forgives is real and comes with a prior condition: we forgive those who have injured us as well.’ Standing there before the SS man, Corrie remembered that forgiveness is an act of will, not emotion. ‘Jesus help me,’ she prayed. ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.’ And so, Corrie thrusts out her hand and she says in her words, ‘As I did, an incredible thing took place, the current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.’ ‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart!’ For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely, as I did then, but even so I realized it was not my love. I tried. I didn’t have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Corrie ten Boom would have had every reason to not do that. Justice in the eyes of the world would say to her, “Spit in his face. Run away. Do not extend your hand.” But the Messiah that lived inside of her said, “I am the Prince of Peace. I am your Counselor. I am your Mighty God. And I give you the ability to forgive this man.” That’s what justice looks like in the eyes of the Messiah. It’s not always how we expect. His light shines into

the darkness in ways that we don't always understand. And so I wonder if you'll walk on a journey with me this Advent to ask the Messiah where He needs to shine light into the darkness in our lives and have the courage then to respond not out of our own will, but out of our own surrendered hearts to Him? Let's pray:

God, the Messiah is here and His ways are different than the world's ways, and it is difficult. But we know Father, that You are strong and You are mighty and You came as a Mighty God and a King who would rule as a baby because You came to serve and show us the way. And I pray that we would let You into our hearts and lives in ways that we haven't before so that we can experience who You truly are. In Your name we pray, Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*