

Sermon Series: “Bethlehem’s Light Still Shines”–Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—12/2/07

Title: “In Despair’s Darkness Hope’s Light Shines”

Text: Isaiah 9: 2-7

Intro.: Ills.: The Company of the Discouraged

Theme: Even when the plastic joy of secularized Christmas heightens the pain of the real despair that may be present in the lives of many this Christmas season, God still comes to us with his healing and light through Jesus.

Many, walking in the darkness of despair, need a Light (Print Isaiah 9: 2-5)

- Despair and depression in our lives comes in many forms
 1. Purposelessness — lost in the “deep darkness” (skotia) of a broken, nonsensical life (**vs. 2a**)
 - a. **Ills.: Paralyzed by the fog**
 - b. Israel/Judah within a 150 years besieged, destroyed, deported – reeling from lost Messianic plan & purpose
 - c. Fracture marriage, broken health, dead-ended career, sin-shattered future, hope dashed on disappointment’s rocks
 - d. Sometimes, the darkness and fog in our life is of our own making
 - e. *But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! Matthew 6:23*
 2. Fear — dreading daily reminders of our mortality (health ailing, parents aging, kids growing, projects failing) (**2b**)
 - a. Long shadow of death creeps across our day like the December sun’s late afternoon reminder of endless night
 3. Oppression – bully in classroom, the oppressive boss, or nuclear-toting tyrant oversees, strips your will to live(**4-5**)
 - a. “Yoke” – carrying burden and cross of relationship thrown at you at home or with parents/siblings intentionally
 - b. “One who demands”(stick used) – living under the verbal rain of a careless person who beats you up with words
 - c. “marching boot/garment rolled in blood” – maybe you find yourself grinding under the aggression of another
 - d. **Ills.: Please stop the ride**
 - e. *We were harassed at every turn--conflicts on the outside, fears within. 2 Cor 7:5*
- On all of you, Bethlehem’s salvation light comes to shine its light of hope
 1. For those stripped of purpose by the tearings of life—in Christ God’s promise is you *will see the light*
 - a. God speaks as if already has happened (Hebrew verb) because in eternity victory already accomplished in Jesus
 - b. *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11*
 2. For those living under death’s shadow of fear, Bethlehem’s **light has fallen on your path**
 - a. For Israel and for us the solution to our despair and answer for our hope is **God with us**
 - b. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4*
 3. For those living under tyranny’s despair, God says that he **will break and consume and deliver**
 - a. **Ills.: Gen. MacArther of WWI Philippines battle of Batton — “I shall return”**
 - b. *We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us. 2 Cor 1: 8-10*

Reacquiring hope’s light is not about what you know but who you know. (Print Isaiah 9: 6-7)

- It is all about Advent name-dropping — of 350+ names given to Jesus, none adequate in itself to tell whole story
 1. **Ills.: Live under a different name**
 2. *And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12*
- So what is about His names that gives back hope to the despairing
 1. Wonderful Counselor – {Heb verb (action)} – “*One who has a deliberately, purposes a determined plan*” for you
 - a. “*Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'.*”
Isaiah 46: 9-10
 2. Strong-man God – not just might but brings might to bear in the flesh to conquer our fear and despair
 - a. *Since all of these sons and daughters have flesh and blood, Jesus took on flesh and blood to be like them. He did this so that by dying he would destroy the one who had power over death (that is, the devil). In this way he would free those who were slaves all their lives because they were afraid of dying. Heb. 2: 14-15*
 3. (My) Eternal Father — direct connection between God and man — my God comes to live with me in this moment
 4. Prince of peace – [Heb. – **shalom** – *state of being in a constant state of comfort*] – *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matt 5:4*

The Company of the Discouraged

The company of the discouraged is a very noble company. Not too long ago, the Hayden Planetarium in New York City issued an invitation to all those who were interested in applying to be a part of the crew on the first journey to another planet. Eighteen thousand people applied. They gave the applications to a panel of psychologists, who examined them thoroughly and came to the conclusion that in the vast majority of incidents, those who applied did so because they were discouraged with their lives here and hoped they could find a new life somewhere else. Bruce Thielemann, "Dealing with Discouragement," Preaching Today, Tape No. 48.

Please Stop the ride

Some years ago, while our family was vacationing in northern Minnesota, we decided to visit a small county fair near the town of Babbitt. There weren't many people there that morning. In fact, we were about the only ones visiting the carnival rides. So when I climbed into the Tilt-O-Wheel with my three kids, we hoped the operator would give us a decent ride—even though we were the only ones on it. Little did we know what we were getting involved in. The first few minutes were rather fun. We laughed and enjoyed the funny feeling inside our stomachs. But after a while, it got to be not so much fun. And after some more time—way past the length of an ordinary ride—I began to feel queasy. I wanted to get out, but I couldn't. First, we were going to fast to escape. Second, the centrifugal force had me pressed firmly against the back of the car. I was immobilized. Every time we spun past the operator, I looked pleadingly at him. "Please! Read my eyes! I need to get off!" But the operator kept the ride going. I guess he thought he'd let it run until more customers showed up. After another few minutes, the ride became miserable. The funny feeling inside my stomach had turned into a churning concoction that had a faint resemblance of my morning's breakfast. I had no control over my life. I was caught, going around in circles, held down by a merciless carnival ride operator. Only after what seemed like three or four hours did he finally relent and stop the ride. I'm sure I looked completely green by this time. I staggered off the platform and made it about 20 feet, where I bent over and lost my breakfast. Of course, my kids gathered around, cheering me on. They thought this was the best part of the ride. If you're caught in the grip of a diabolical ride that started out fun but has turned into an addiction—if you're going around in circles, powerless to get off—you know the helpless feeling of losing control of your life. You know what it means to

need God's supernatural help to stop the ride so you can escape. **Rich Doebler, Cloquet, Minnesota**

Live under a different name

There was a little boy whose name was Leslie Hope. At school, the teacher called the roll by last name first. So, it was always–Hope, Leslie. The other children used to tease him about his name and started to call him, “*Hopeless*.” He did not like that, because he was not hopeless. He was a happy person. Later he changed his name to Bob.

Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people who walk in darkness will see a bright light. The light will shine on those who live in the land of death's shadow.³You will expand the nation and increase its joy. It will be joyful in your presence like those who celebrate the harvest or rejoice when dividing loot. ⁴You will break the yoke that burdens them, the bar that is across their shoulders, and the stick used by their oppressor, as you did in the battle against Midian. ⁵Every warrior's boot marching to the sound of battle and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel in the fire.

⁶A child will be born for us. A son will be given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His government and peace will have unlimited growth. He will establish David's throne and kingdom. He will uphold it with justice and righteousness now and forever. The Lord of Armies is determined to do this!