

# God to the rescue

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 26 November 2014

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[ 0 : 00 ] Today we are going to be looking at Isaiah 9. We've already looked at how God's kingdom will come when God's people gather in Zion, how the city of God is secure, and last week we looked at God himself coming to visit Emmanuel, God with us.

Our reading today is in Isaiah 9, which is on page 573 in the Bible. It's page 573, and we'll read verses 1 to 7. These verses will often be read in the run-up to Christmas.

Isaiah 9. I'll read the last verse of the previous chapter, Isaiah 8, verse 22. They will look to the earth, but behold the stress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and they will be thrust into thick darkness.

That's the unbelievers in Isaiah's time. I've got the impression this is working now. Sorry? Could be better. Well, as I said last week, I'm not the kind of preacher who bellows.

Anyway, for better or for worse, as they say in other contexts, let's read Isaiah 9. But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

[ 1 : 30 ] But in the latter time, he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 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. You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you, as with joy at the harvest.

As they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult, and every garment rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born.

To us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulders. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[ 2 : 35 ] 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 righteousness.

For this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Let's have a moment or two of prayer.

Lord God, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you for this wonderful story which began before the creation of the world.

That you would come one day in the person of your Son to be God with us. To rescue us from sin. To liberate us from slavery.

To shine light into our darkness. As we think on these things today, we thank you it's not just for a particular time of year. This is the truth. This is pointing to the new creation, to the new kingdom that will come.

[ 3 : 39 ] We pray as we study your word together for these moments. That your spirit will indeed shed light on the pages. And shed light into our hearts. As we look forward to the coming of the king.

The government of the world will be on his shoulder. To the coming of the Prince of Peace. And we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. It's said that when the Titanic went down, the Aberdeen Press and Journal reported the event under the headline, Aberdeen Woman Lost at Sea.

And that's characteristic, isn't it, of inward-looking local papers and local attitudes. But very often we treat the coming of the Saviour in that way. It's something we can find into nativity plays, into decorations, into Christmas trees and so on.

But Isaiah is telling us the coming of the Saviour, both the first time he came and the second time he comes, is not just an event in Bethlehem.

Not even just an event in this world. It's a cosmic event. It's an event to which the whole history of the world has been moving towards. And an event which casts its light ahead and which will one day be fulfilled.

[ 5 : 04 ] Now I read the last verse of chapter 8 because Isaiah is presenting us with two alternative kingdoms, really. One is the kingdom of darkness.

And that kingdom of darkness is described in the verses before it. Verse 19, when they say, inquire of the mediums and the necromancers. World of spiritism.

The world of the occult. The world where people try to discover by occult means what the future is going to be. And that world ends in a world of deep darkness.

And that's the point of, but, verse 1, There will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. This is new hope for the faithful remnant. For those in Zion, Jerusalem, who are looking for the coming of the king.

And the ones who obey the words of the prophets. Because Isaiah has talked in chapter 8 about the words that he's speaking. He's asked his disciples to write them down.

[ 6 : 06 ] Because they're not just for that generation, they're for every generation. And it's interesting, in chapter 9, verses 1 and 2, He talks as if the events had already happened.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined. In other words, it's so certain that God will do this, that Isaiah is able to talk about it as if it had already happened.

So, two big themes here in these verses. First of all, verses 1 to 5. God has come to rescue his people. Everything looks bleak.

As I say, Zion is in a mess. The earthly Jerusalem, full of oppression, injustice within its walls. And the terror of coming invasion by Assyria.

So, both inside and outside, there is gloom, there is bleakness. And only the eye of faith can see what's going to happen. So, how then do we know that God will come to rescue his people?

[ 7 : 14 ] Is this just whistling in the wind? Is the atheist writer Richard Dawkins right when he says that Christianity, indeed any religion, is just wishful fulfillment, splitting in the wind, hoping things will get better?

Now, Isaiah says, we know that God will bring in his kingdom because of two things that we know about him that have already happened and are already happening.

Two things which show that nothing in heaven and earth can prevent God bringing in his kingdom. And first of all, in verses 1 and 2, he says, this God who will bring in his kingdom is the creator.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. These are the first words of creation. Let there be light. The whole dark universe, cosmos, is flooded with light.

And the light of the new creation will dawn. And it will dawn in these very places. Zebulun, Naphtali, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

[ 8 : 18 ] These were the far north of the country. And these were the places which would fall to Assyria first. When the Assyrian armies coming from Iraq, coming from the Tigris, descended on these kingdoms, these regions in the north would be the first to fall, the first on whom the darkness would descend.

And when Matthew picks this up in chapter 4 of his gospel, Matthew quotes these words and he says about them, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the kingdom.

Jesus the king has come to the rescue. The light is dawning in these regions in Galilee. And Galilee is specifically called Galilee of the nations. It's not just hope for Israel, not just hope for Zion.

It's hope for the world. In earlier generations, people would sing hymns like, The whole wide world for Jesus. This shall our anthem be. In other hymns such as, Jesus will reign, Where'er the sun does his successive journeys run.

These words are echoed in Luke's gospel. When John the Baptist's father, Zechariah says, The sunrise from on high has visited us. The light is dawning.

[ 9 : 31 ] The sun rises and the world is flooded with light. And that still happens. Whenever the gospel shines into a dark heart, into a dead heart, And Christ comes to live there, that is the light dawning.

So the New Testament describes, one of the ways which the New Testament describes, Becoming a Christian, moving from darkness to light, moving from death to life.

So he is the creator. How do you know he can do it? Because he created heaven and earth. He is still creating. The fact that we are here at this moment, alive and breathing, Shows that his spirit is still at work in the world.

But secondly, he is the savior. Verses 3 to 5. Picture of harvest and feasting. One of the great pictures in the Bible of the new creation.

We'll hear more of that next week. But here he's talking about the Exodus story. The conquest of the land. The day of Midian.

[ 10 : 33 ] That is the story of that rather unimpressive figure, Gideon. Not a particularly inspirational individual. And who won a victory so astonishing that it could only have been God's victory.

You read the story of Gideon and Judges. You'll find the Midianites, one of the kingdoms surrounding the people of God, had attacked in great force and in great numbers.

And Gideon summoned a large army. And that dwindled away to 300. You know, God is supposed to teach Gideon and teaching us that it's not numbers, but the fact that God is with you.

If Emmanuel is with us, then numbers don't matter. And also, what they were going to do was crazy. They had clay jars, put a torch inside them, and then blew a trumpet.

And when the trumpet was blown, they smashed the clay jars and the light shone out. Once again, of course, the light shining out. And the Midianites were simply routed.

[ 11 : 38 ] Because, first of all, they turned on each other. They had masses of camels. The camels in their terror, trampled down tents and people. And the victory is won for the Lord.

So, by this great Exodus event, not just the leaving of Egypt, but the whole business of settling in the land. As I've said before, the Exodus is a picture of salvation.

Moses leads the people out of Egypt, out of slavery. And Joshua leads them into the land. Jesus leads us from the slavery of sin and death into the promised land.

And you notice verse 5, but of the tramping warrior. The destruction of military hardware echoes the first passage we looked at. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

This is God, the Savior. You can do it. He is the Creator. He is the Savior. The Lord of creation and history. Nothing in heaven and earth can prevent it.

- [ 12 : 39 ] The gospel cannot be stopped. That's the first thing. So, God, we are told, has come to rescue his people. In verses 6 to 7, the well-known verses, thus a child is born, God has come to visit his people.

Now, this word visit used in the Bible is not just a casual stopping by. Not that I happened to be passing, so I thought I would look in. That's not the idea at all. This is the idea of coming for a definite purpose, to save his people.

And all through Luke's account of his coming, this word visit is used. He has come to visit us. In other words, he's come to change everything, change our circumstances.

The word has become flesh. Now, last week we looked at Emmanuel, and this is spelling out in more detail who Emmanuel is. Who is this God who has come to visit his people?

After all, pagan stories are full of gods coming into the world and doing all kinds of things. You'll notice, first of all, a child is born. He is truly human.

- [ 13 : 47 ] He's not like the pagan stories of God, parachuted in from somewhere else and then suddenly disappearing. And of course, the emphasis is not, a child is born to us.

That would be a better way to put it. It's not to us a child is born, but a child is born to us. He's the one who's coming to visit us. Notice he is also a son given.

That means he is in the royal line of David. The prophecies to David are going to be fulfilled because a son is given. He's born truly human, but he also comes from outside.

He is given, and that promise will be fulfilled. And then come these great names which spell out who he is. He is, first of all, a wonderful counselor, literally a wonder of a counselor, with wisdom far above humans.

In Isaiah's times, a great deal of a great lack of wisdom, the way people are thinking and behaving. Even Solomon's wisdom failed, and failed badly when it came to the test.

- [ 14 : 54 ] And as for King Ahaz, the king we read about last week, he has chosen the way of darkness. He's chosen the way of folly. Thirty years later, his son Hezekiah is going to follow the light.

And choose the way of wisdom. He gets it wrong as well. And so does his great-grandson, Josiah. Once again, a very good king, a good son of David.

In other words, there's going to have to be a son of David who changes everything. One who is truly human, but who is truly God. That's what the gospel is, isn't it?

I need a Savior who's not me, obviously, because I can't save myself. I also need a Savior who is me. I don't, of course, mean me personally.

I mean a Savior who is human. Only Jesus Christ, great David's greater son, fulfills that. He can stretch out and bring God and humanity together.

- [ 15 : 55 ] This wonderful counselor. The mighty God. Literally, God the warrior. Echoes of Exodus 15. The Exodus story again.

Moses says, I'll sing to the Lord. The Lord is a warrior. He's destroyed the enemies. He's led us across the Jordan. I know some people want to water this down and translate it something like God like hero.

But the phrase also occurs in the next chapter, in chapter 10, verse 21. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

And the mighty God there is very clearly the Lord Yahweh himself. So, mighty God must be, must have the meaning of this is one who is God.

Very interesting way John puts it at the beginning of his gospel. The word was with God and the word was God. Notice with God. In other words, there is more to God than the word because the Father and the Son are also God.

[ 17 : 05 ] But the word is truly God. This is not God going to send a representative. After all, all through history he's sent prophets, including the prophet we are studying, the prophet Isaiah.

And right on until John the Baptist comes. But this is God himself who will defeat all his enemies and rule over the whole of the creation.

Now notice, although he is a child and a son, he's also the everlasting father. However, the Bible often brings these paradoxes, these mixed metaphors together. Like in Revelation, the lion who is also the lamb, the bride who is also the city.

So, he is the one who has been from all eternity. But he comes into time and space at a particular time. People, and he is the father.

Incidentally, father isn't often used in the Old Testament as a title for God. It was Jesus who told us when we pray to say our father. But it is used some places.

[ 18 : 11 ] And for example, in Psalm 103, as a father has compassion for his children. So, the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. He shows his tenderness and his care.

This is the king for whom the people long. Long ago, in Samuel, 1 Samuel chapter 8, people had longed for a king who would protect them from their enemies.

Here is the true king. At that time, they wanted rescue from the temporary rule of the judges. Here now is a permanent fulfillment of that. The king who will reign.

And he is the prince of peace. Now, this Hebrew word, peace, shalom, doesn't just mean absence of war. Although, obviously, it does mean that. Beating swords and spears and so on.

But it means wholeness and harmony. When he reigns, there will be great rejoicing. Nations will live in peace together. As I've said, I think there will be nations in the new creation.

[ 19 : 13 ] There won't be any racism or snobbery or hatred or looking down on different peoples and different groups. There will be harmony. There will be wholeness.

Humanity, redeemed humanity, will be what God wanted them to be. And notice the word, verse 7, of the increase of his government. One of the reasons why we find heaven unattractive is because we think it's the end.

We talk about it as the end. It's not the end. It's the beginning. It is the end, of course, of this world. But it is also, as Churchill said, a famous time during the Second World War.

It is the end of the beginning. And increase suggests there are more wonderful things to come. And on the throne of David and over his kingdom.

Now, the throne of David means that he will reign over the whole of creation. Not just in Jerusalem.

[ 20 : 14 ] He will reign over the whole of creation. And with justice and righteousness. These are the two things that are not happening in Jerusalem, as Isaiah preaches.

No justice. People, there's exploitation. There's hatred. There's anger. There's bitterness. And there is no righteousness. People are no longer following the words of the Lord.

And while there's zeal, the commitment, if you like, of the Lord of hosts will do. In other words, God is totally committed to this.

This isn't an idea God has and then will discard. You know how often we get bright ideas. And then we find we can't carry them out. At least I often get brilliant ideas.

Particularly in the middle of the night. And by the time I've got up in the morning, I've forgotten them. Or else realize how unrealistic they are. With God, there is no such thing as circumstances beyond his control.

[ 21 : 14 ] This kingdom will come. And it will come because of God's total commitment. Now, all this happened partially when Jesus came the first time.

When he came preaching the kingdom. And Matthew, as I say, takes up the words of this chapter. The land of Zebulun, Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people did see a great light. People were converted. Demons were cast out. The dead were raised. The lame. As I say, the lame saw.

It's that verse, you know. The lame walk and the dumb speak. I usually quote that all wrongly. The lame speak and the deaf walk. But you know the verse I mean.

All these wonderful things happened. As disease retreated before the king himself. And even death retreated before him. But you know, these were temporary.

[ 22 : 13 ] The cemeteries didn't empty. And the three people whom Jesus raised would all have to die again. However, they were showing that when the kingdom comes, there will be no disease.

There will be no slavery. There will be no hatred or injustice or unrighteousness. Above all, there will be no death. Death. Because death will be defeated and conquered.

What happened the first time he came? He met the serpent dragon and gave him a death blow. But the devil is still active. But when he comes again, when the kingdom finally comes, then all these things will disappear and disappear forever.

Isaiah says we can trust God to do that. Because he is the creator. And because he is the savior. Amen. And let's pray. And Father, in the midst of preparations for Christmas, help us to see the real reason for the coming of the Savior.

Coming to rescue us. Coming to free us. Coming to establish outposts of his kingdom in the fallen world. And pointing to the day when he will come again.

[ 23 : 28 ] And we pray, Lord, that we will experience the joy of Emmanuel, God with us at this time. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Amen. Amen. Amen.