

Text: Isaiah 9:2-7

Sunday 25th October 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Message

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be true and pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

In the last few weeks, we've watched or read much about local, national and international government. As our politicians seek to respond to Coronavirus, we saw tensions mount between representatives in Manchester and Westminster. And in less than 10 days, we will know whether the United States has a new President or not. Looking in upon both these scenarios, and even our own issues of government here in Scotland and Falkirk, we may well agree with Winston Churchill, who famously

said, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” In every era of history, humanity has tried various forms of government, but none are perfect, and none can be.

None can be, because they are made up, of human beings and we are not perfect. There is a darkness to all our souls, a selfishness, a brokenness, and so we find ourselves looking out upon a world and see this brokenness played out before us on an international scale, with such horror and brutality and evil that human trafficking and other injustices continue in our day.

We may ask: what is there to be done? Is there any hope? Does God care? **But God has not been silent, for the**

Scriptures never dodge the darkness in our world, even in our own lives, for through the Bible we're helped to see that the darkness of our world is not the only, nor the fundamental, reality of things. The darkness is not all of the story, it is not the end of the story – there is more to come, there can be hope, there is hope.

In our passage today, we are at the end of a portion in which God has been trying to persuade Israel to put their trust in Him. Yet, they have not listened, they have rejected God's ways, and so now find themselves surrounded, overtaken even, by the Assyrian army.

Darkness appears to be on all sides, and yet despite Israel's rejection, despite their lack of trust, God, in His grace, draws near once more and brings a message of hope, a message that the story is not finished, the story

**will not end in darkness, for there is hope of a future king
and His kingdom.**

We read today:

'The people

walking in darkness

have seen a great light;

on those living in the land of deep darkness

a light has dawned...

For to us a child is born,

to us a son is given,

and the government

will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called...

Wonderful Counsellor,

Mighty God,

Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace.'

(Isa. 9:2, 6)

In the midst of darkness comes light, and Isaiah is so sure of it coming about that his words speak of it as if it had already happened: '...for to us a child IS born.' Yet this child will be no ordinary king, for the first three names designate divinity 'Wonderful counsellor' speaks of one who can work wonders and whose wisdom is far above any human's, and so this individual is described in Hebrew terms which convey a 'supernatural' quality.

No wonder then, that this future king is described as 'Mighty God', a mighty warrior who leads the hosts of heaven, and yet He is also 'Everlasting Father' for He loves

with such perfect and parental love. This is no ordinary child, but it is a human child nonetheless, as confirmed for us by the title 'Prince of Peace', where 'prince' is always used in the Scriptures of human leaders.

Through Isaiah, God brings a message of hope, that the story is not ending here, the darkness will not prevail, for the odds will be overcome by this future King. Indeed, that is why we read here of the reference to Midian in verse 4, which points us back to the **book of Judges**. At that time, Israel was once more surrounded by a vast multitude of the enemy, swarming over the land, and yet the Lord defeats this foe with a mere 300 individuals led by the trembling Gideon. Israel felt powerless at that time, Israel thought the darkness would win out, but the Lord brought a **different ending**, 'for as in the day of

Midian's defeat...' the Lord broke the rod and broke the bar. Isaiah is saying the same thing will happen through this child, that the odds will be overcome, there is good news, there is hope, the story does not end here and the Lord will turn our darkness into light, our conflict into peace, our loss into abundance and our despair into joy.

And He will do this in the coming of a child, a child who was no mere human being, a child who would then grow up and one day begin to fulfil these words of prophecy, such that we read in the **book of Matthew:**

'[Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

**'Land of Zebulun
and land of Naphtali,**

**the Way of the Sea,
beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles –
the people
living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.'**

**From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the
kingdom of heaven has come near.'**

(Matt. 4:12-17)

**In the person of Jesus, this prophecy began to be fulfilled
– the King had come and so His Kingdom was breaking
into this world, it had come near. As we read through the
four gospels of the New Testament, we see signs of God's**

Kingdom breaking in, we see signs of the One who is Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He came with power to work wonders; He came with wisdom and teaching that has lasted the ages; He came revealing the love of God in His life and most powerfully in His death. Jesus was this promised King, the One who ensured that the story would not end in darkness but that light had dawned, and yet, this Jesus is not dead, He is not a myth or a child's story or a relic of history, but He is the Living One, Everlasting, for He was raised to life and He will return to bring the fullness of His Kingdom into reality.

I wonder friends, do you know this Jesus? Do you know this living King? Because without faith in Him, without relationship with Him, all we are left with are the worst

forms of government that we as a species have tried from time to time. But **Jesus came saying**, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12) Darkness does not need to be our only or fundamental reality, for in Jesus there is hope, He is our living King and one day His Kingdom will be all that there is.

Now Isaiah's prophecy also gives us some details of that kingdom, **for we read today:**

'Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign

on David's throne

and **over his kingdom,**

establishing

**and upholding it
with justice
and righteousness
from that time on
and for ever.’ (Isa. 9:7)**

There are some very key words in **this verse, for ‘peace’ is the Hebrew word ‘shalom’, referring to a well-being or wholeness, which impacts all of an individual’s life, and all life between individuals. In that future kingdom, where shalom exists, all things are whole, healthy and complete. The experience of shalom will be spiritual, physical, psychological and social.**

It should be no surprise then, that in the next sentence we read that this King will **uphold His kingdom with**

justice, 'mishpat', and righteousness, 'tzadeqah'. Tim Keller, in his book on Generous Justice, argues that when we see these two words close to one another, as in this verse, then the best English expression of our time, to convey its meaning, could be 'social justice'. **If that's accurate**, then the hope of this future King and the hope of His future Kingdom brings a message that darkness will not prevail, that the darkness of human trafficking will not prevail, there will be right relationship between God and humanity, and right relationship across humanity, from one to another, and rather than treat one another as commodities or as slaves, there will be social justice.

But is it all just future? Is all that we have to offer simply a message of hope? **Well, Jesus said:**

'This, then, is how you should pray:

**“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth
as it is in heaven...”**

(Matt. 6:9-10)

God’s Kingdom, this Kingdom which will have peace and social justice, we are to pray for this kingdom to come in greater measure in our day, that on earth we would see the kingdom of God. But is all we have to offer a prayer?

Well, I don’t think so, because as we said about prayer and the Lord’s Prayer, part of prayer is about changing us – that as we focus on God, as we understand more of His

Kingdom and pray and yearn for this, then we change, and more often than not, we are then the answer to this prayer, for we realise we are to embody His character and ways, and so must live differently. Yes, let's pray "Thy kingdom come", but we better get ready to be the answer to that prayer as well, for through you God might do a work of bringing justice upon the earth.

Friends, this Halloween, let us replace darkness with light, let us scrap the costume and take up justice, let us forget the stories of witches and mummies or superheroes, and instead be a people who say that darkness is not the end of the story, that there is hope, there is Good News of a King, His Kingdom is breaking into this world, and so we will stand alongside the

oppressed, for our God and His Kingdom is one of justice and of light. May it be so. Amen.

We close our time together with our final song,

HYMN MP-575 Rejoice the Lord is King