

A Light Shining in Darkness

SCOTT HOEZEE

It was a dark winter's night when the farmer's wife went into labor. The farmer sent for the doctor, who arrived in time to assist with the birth. The farmer stood in the room holding a lantern aloft so that the doctor could see what he was doing, and soon the child was born; but then the doctor said: Wait, hold up that lantern! Another one is coming; and sure enough the woman gave birth to a twin. Well, the farmer was a bit shaken by this, except then the doctor cried out: Hold on, here comes another one: it's triplets! At this, the farmer began to leave the room, causing the doctor to shout: Wait, come back here with that lantern. Oh, no, the farmer replied, it's the light that attracts them. Well, humor aside, we are all attracted by the light. Isaiah knew that the people of Israel had been enduring a very dark time in their history. So, in the same chapter where he promises a mighty Messiah to come, he speaks about light; and Isaiah is not alone. Talk of light is all over the place in the Bible; and we will walk into that light today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is the fifth and final program of an Advent and Christmas series that we have rooted in Isaiah Chapter 9; and so far in this series we have looked at those four well-known titles for the Messiah: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace; and now we are going to conclude with the larger frame of that chapter, which is all about light.

DAVE BAST

It is; light is one of the great themes of scripture, and of Isaiah in particular, and later of the Gospel as well; and we want to kind of explore all that beautiful imagery that has to do with the central image of light versus darkness, and the light coming into the world with the coming of the Messiah, as he was promised early on in Isaiah, and then ultimately came in the Person of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So here is the beginning of Isaiah 9: ²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. ³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

DAVE BAST

And again from Isaiah 60, the same idea: ¹Arise, shine, for your light has come; and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. ²See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ¹⁹The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. ²⁰Your sun will never set again and your moon will wane no more. The Lord will be your everlasting light and your days of sorrow will end.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is two parts of Isaiah; early Isaiah, and the later in Isaiah, near the end; and it is very interesting that all throughout the Bible, the advent of God's Messiah gets associated with light; and of course, you know, the main...the most significant text we have about the birth of Christ...in fact, it is almost the only one, but Luke 2...Luke Chapter 2...and there we have Jesus being born in Bethlehem, being born on a dark night; and yet, one of the first things that happens is the scene is filled with the light of a million angels as the shepherds are told the good news that there has been a savior born to you; and if we were to pop over to Matthew's account, the main thing Matthew writes about in connection to the birth of the Christ is the Magi—the Wise Men—and they follow a bright star, which leads them right to the place where Jesus is.

DAVE BAST

Right; so we have this idea first kind of coming here in connection with the promise of the Messiah, in Isaiah 9, where he begins by talking about the people walking in darkness; and actually, there is a verse just before that that sort of introduces this poem, that talks about the land of Zebulon and Naphtali—Galilee of the Nations—and it says in the *future* the light will start there; the gloom will be overcome there beyond the Jordan by the way of the sea; and actually, if you look at the Gospel of Matthew, it says that when Jesus appeared, he first appeared in Galilee; so, what is going on there is a little bit of a historical reference to the idea that the enemies who were coming down—the Assyrians—came through the north. They came first to the area in northern Israel, and then they threatened, and cast darkness by fear over all the people; but God would reverse that by bringing the light of the Messiah into the world. So again, this pervasive idea of light versus darkness; and actually it goes even further back than that in the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Darkness is and has from the beginning, been depicted as something evil, something that is to be feared. You know, nothing good happens after midnight, most parents tell their kids when they set that 11:30 curfew that they have to come home; and it is interesting that under the cover of darkness a lot of the incidents of drunk driving, of domestic abuse, and a significant majority of rape...

DAVE BAST

Oh, crimes...yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Happens after midnight, when it is dark.

DAVE BAST

Crimes happen at night; and darkness also, kind of psychologically, describes our reaction when we are down, when we are deep in gloom; when it looks like evil has won out somehow and we have lost, and we have lost hope, and we have lost faith. So, all of that is going on here in Isaiah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and it is still used that way. I mean, I have never ever heard of a child who said: Mommy, I am afraid of the light...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is always: I am afraid of the dark; which is probably why...and you can Google your way to anything these days, you know, so I Googled this...in the United States alone, 90 million night lights get sold every single year to light up that darkness that children, and sometimes adults, find rather fearful.

DAVE BAST

Darkness is where bad things happen; darkness threatens us; darkness is when we feel down and even in despair or when we are frightful and worried about the future, or when it looks like we have lost...lost hope, lost faith; and into this darkness God promises the light will burst, and it will burst with the coming one—the Messiah, the King, the prince of four names: the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. We want to pursue that idea and that image into the New Testament Gospels next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; so, let's start by looking at a few of the New Testament passages that associate the coming of the Messiah with the coming of light into a dark world, as well as times of glory. Now, we have already mentioned the bright lights of Christmas; the angels appearing in the sky singing glory to God; the light that led the Wise Men—the Magi—to the town of Bethlehem; but there are other wonderful, wonderful light passages in connection with the Christmas story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here is one, again a little lesser known, as many of us know, the first part of Luke's Gospel has a lot of songs...there is a lot of singing; and we have two gargantuan chapters; Luke 1 has like 80-some verses, and in that chapter, near the end, starting at Luke 1:76, we get the song of Zechariah. He is the father of John the Baptist, and you remember the story. He doubted the words of the angel that his old wife was going to have a baby, and so the angel made him mute. He could not speak for nine months while his wife was pregnant. As soon as the baby is born, Zechariah's mouth is unsealed, and he sings a song referring to his child, John the Baptist, as we know him, and he says—sings, really:

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him; ⁷⁷to give his people the knowledge of salvation to the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven, ⁷⁹to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

DAVE BAST

So there is a very clear echo of Isaiah; the very passages that we have been looking at; the ones who are living in darkness will have the light shine on them, and those in the shadow of death will be led into the path of peace—the Prince of Peace...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The rising sun will come to us from heaven...that is such a lovely image.

DAVE BAST

It is, again, about the Messiah, and John himself will be the one to prepare the way. Based on other passages...other familiar words from Isaiah...he will make straight in the wilderness a way for the Lord; he will lower the hills and raise the valleys, and make the way clear for the Lord to come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that was John the Baptist...his work, and his father predicting that a rising sun from heaven would come because of John the Baptist's work to prepare the way for the Messiah; but then the Apostle John has some very well-known words from John Chapter 1.

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that Light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸Now, he himself was not the Light; he came only as a witness to the Light; ⁹but the true Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

DAVE BAST

And the reason it still shines is because the darkness did not overcome it. I cannot read that verse without thinking of the resurrection, how in the darkness God worked the greatest miracle of all when it seemed as though the light had been extinguished finally and forever on the cross. No; in the darkness of the tomb, in the middle of the night, Jesus burst forth and dawn came on Easter day; and all of those you think of...I know we are in the Christmas season here and we are in a Christmas series, but you think of all those references in the Easter account of the light dawning; the women go out when it is first light—it is just getting light—it is just early in the morning—and the Light has come back.

It reminds me of that line from the now very well-known hymn: *In Christ Alone*—the light of the world by darkness slain, but then blazing forth in new life at the resurrection. Now, that is the good news. Not to introduce a sour note, but the bad news is that even to this day there are some who *do* prefer the darkness. Some people even in Jesus' own day, who essentially put on spiritual sunglasses to keep out the light of the world; and that reminds me of the story from John 9 of the man born blind. Jesus heals him; it happened on a Sabbath, so it caused an uproar and people were trying to deny the miracle, and so forth and so on; but finally at the end after they throw this man out of the Synagogue—the man Jesus healed—he and Jesus meet up again, and you get these words from Jesus, from John 9:39:

Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” ⁴⁰Some Pharisees heard him say this, and they said, “Are we blind, too?” ⁴¹Jesus said, “If you were blind you would not be guilty of sin, but now that you claim you see, your guilt remains.” So, there is this willful keeping out of the light.

Right; you know, one of the messages of that story...of that miracle in John 9, the healing of the man born blind, is that people who are blind, ironically, this guy is the one who actually sees the truth about Jesus; and people who *think* they see everything, they see so clearly because they are experts in the law and they are Pharisees, and all that, they are actually blind, and that irony, that kind of role reversal... Do you think you see, do you think you know so much? If you do not see Jesus, you are blind; but, there is also the idea in John...another light/dark theme...that sometimes people actually *prefer* the darkness to the light. It is not just that they are kind of ignorant or they are mistaken, but they love the darkness, as John says, because their deeds are evil. We talked about how so many crimes happen under the cover of night when no one can see. There are people... All of us have some parts of our lives that we seek to conceal, that we do not want the light to shine into, that we want to keep hidden because maybe they are shameful or... John talks about that, too, in a passage from John 3.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, John 3: This the conversation with Nicodemus, who came under the cover of darkness himself, so that people would not see him talking to this rebel rabbi named Jesus; but Jesus says directly... This is right after the famous ‘God so loved the world’ verse—that is John 3:16—but in John 3:19 Jesus says:

This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth, comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

So, as good as it sounds to have light coming into the darkness, as we have been saying, people are afraid of the dark. Children are afraid of the dark, but there are still some people who, spiritually speaking at least, prefer the dark, so that they cannot be seen for who they really are, which is, sinful people who do terrible things.

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, we tend to pack away the Christmas lights and take out the tree soon after Christmas Day, but I wonder how we can choose the light and keep choosing the light, turning away from the darkness ourselves, and shining more light into our lives, into the world even after Christmas, but all year round keep our light shining. That is what we really want to talk about and think about as we wrap this program up.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this fifth and final program in a series of programs that we have done in connection with Advent and Christmas, rooted in Isaiah 9 and the titles for the Messiah; but the good news that people who have been living in darkness have seen a great light.

You were just saying, Dave, a moment ago, that in lots of parts of the world...not all parts of the world...but in many parts of the world Christmas occurs at a relatively dark season of the year, December, tends to be the shortest days, the shortest day of the year comes just before Christmas, like around December 22nd, I think. So, it is a dark time of the year; so we light it up at Christmas. We light up our neighborhoods. There are some light displays that are famous and people drive for miles just to drive slowly through these neighborhoods. It is all pretty and twinkly and so forth, but then soon enough it is done; and as you said, it goes back up to the attic. Take down all the strings of lights. But what we want to think about as we close out this program is how is it that we... So, we said earlier that Jesus is the light who shinezzzz and is still shining in the darkness, we need to reflect that light ourselves.

DAVE BAST

Well, the way that he shines primarily is through us. Let's keep it simple, and think about that idea. Are we people of light? This is, again, another great Gospel theme. You think about Jesus saying, “I am the light of the world.” He says that also in the Gospel of John, Chapter 8:12; and then in the Sermon on the Mount he turns around and says, ^{Matt. 5:14}“*You* are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵neither do people put light on a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

So, pretty clear there, I think.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, so we love the “I am” sayings; we love it when Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” It is like, good, good, I'm glad you are; but he turns the tables and says, “You are also the light of the world.”

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is an image that, again, weaves all through the Bible. We get it also from the Apostle Paul. Here is a well-known passage from Ephesians 5, starting at verse 8:

For once you were in darkness, but now you are in the light of the Lord; live as children of the light. ⁹For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. ¹⁰Find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret, ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, and everything that is illuminated becomes the light. ¹⁴That is why it is said, "Wake up, O sleeper; rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.

DAVE BAST

Well, and if you need more convincing, speaking of Paul, here is another example. Isaiah...we have been in Isaiah through this whole series...there is a prophecy of the Messiah...of the Servant of the Lord...in Isaiah Chapter 49, it says:

⁶It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to redeem Jacob and Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

And in Acts 13, in one of his sermons, Paul says:

⁴⁷God said to us, "I will make you a light to the nations." You plural, meaning us apostles and all followers of Jesus. We are a light to the nations, that God's salvation may reach to the end of the world.

So, it is not just that we have to let our light shine, we have to do good so that people will glorify the Father. In our witness, in the light of our lives, we will actually bring salvation even to the ends of the earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting that that image, as Paul wields it, particularly that Ephesians 5 passage we just read, kind of cuts two ways. Generally we like to think, you know, let your light shine! Be a good example. Bring the light of Christ into peoples' personal despair. That is all very important, but it goes the other way, and we have sometimes heard that phrase: Sunshine is the best antiseptic; which is to say, sometimes the best thing we can do with the light of Christ in us is expose what is wrong. So, we light up what people wish they could keep hidden because that is the only way to name the darkness...to name the deeds of darkness. Paul says expose them. Take out your flashlight and shine it on your neighbor's bad deeds, not just to judge them or shame them or be a negative, puritanical Christian, but to expose them to their need for Christ. Invite them to the light, and sometimes...it seems paradoxical, but sometimes the best way to invite someone to the light of Christ is first to use that light to show them how badly they need it, because look what you are doing. You are ruining your life with sin.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it goes that way, too.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we could use a little more light in our world, in our culture, in our society. There seems to be a lot of darkness around, and it seems as though we are going through an especially dark time now. I don't know, chaotic, dark... Almost every day there are reports of mass murders and terrorist attacks, and all this wrangling going on among, not just political leaders...I guess they have always argued, but ordinary people now seem to be taking it out on each other. What a wonderful thing to live lives that are light and not darkness, to let light shine into the dark places so that perhaps good may come of it. Paul talks, again in that Ephesians passage, about having nothing to do with fruitless deeds of darkness; and surely much that we see, much of the invective being thrown back and forth, the stuff that goes on on social media, that is just a fruitless deed of darkness. We can let our light shine in that way, too, and in that place; and so perhaps bring the light and love of Christ to the fore.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is what we want, right? We want to let our light shine, as Jesus said. We want to be attractive. It is pretty hard to argue anybody into becoming a Christian. You do not usually browbeat or argue people into conversion. What usually happens is people see something beautiful in you. They see grace and joy and hope in you. They see the light of Christ shining in you; and then they say: You know, I would like some of that in my life, too. They are drawn in by the beauty of it, in other words...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is sort of the goal of letting our light shine so that people can see us; and that is sort of the standing invitation of our lives that we want to extend to all people.

DAVE BAST

I think we have time for one more beautiful light passage from the New Testament. This from the very end, from Revelation 22, a vision of the new creation, of the heavenly Jerusalem:

¹The angel showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²Down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will be no more night (there it is, no more night). They will not need the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.

That is our future, really.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the bookend of the Bible. Let there be light is how we began in Genesis 1, and now we come to the very end at Revelation 22, and the light comes to us. The dwelling of God comes down from heaven, and he is now our light; he is now our very life; and so, we invite everybody to come to Christ's light, and we hope to bring as many people with us as we can.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork* today. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. So, connect with us online at groundworkonline.com to let us know scriptures or topics you would like to hear us discuss.

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