

**Text: Isaiah 9:1-7 (Pew Bible, pg.683)**

**Title: “Keeping Hope Alive” Pt.1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tonight we begin our special series of December Nights with our Choir and Orchestra joined by Christian music artists “The Katinas” for a fabulous Christmas concert at 6pm. And the climax of our Christmas celebration is the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 6pm. This year we will have a special Cowtown flavor to our beautiful Christmas Eve celebration. All of these events are great opportunities for you to invite friends who need to hear the message of Christmas and the gift of Christ. The last Sunday of the 2013 we’ll meet in one worship service and share together in the Lord’s Supper.

Open your Bibles to Isaiah 9. We’re going to camp here in this passage over the next two Sundays. These OT verses point us to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Let’s stand as I read Isaiah 9:1-7.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Last Spring Alex White, a law student at the University of Colorado, was doing some backcountry skiing in the Rockies with a friend. Suddenly an avalanche swept down on top of them. Alex’s friend was instantly killed and Alex was swept down the slope and when he finally came to rest he was buried under several feet of snow. Fortunately he had with him an emergency beacon so that the search and rescue personnel could begin to track him once they learned of the avalanche. But for the next three hours White lay encased in a dark tomb of snow. There was just a small air pocket in front of his face, but he was unable to even wiggle a finger. He felt his life slipping away with no hope of survival. But after three hours the search and rescue team found Alex and dug him out of the snow alive. The chances of someone surviving after being buried like that is less than one percent. A rescue helicopter whisked him off to a hospital in Denver and after a week he was back in classes.

When I read that I thought about the fact that, particularly this time of the year, people feel like they have been buried under an avalanche of overwhelming pressures and fears. There are time pressures ... how are we going to make it to all the events we’re supposed to be at? There are financial pressures ... how are we going to pay for Christmas presents this year? There are family pressures ... how is our dysfunctional family going to get along at Christmas dinner? There is sadness and sorrow because this Christmas there will be an empty place at the table because of the death of a family member. It’s no wonder that, in spite of all the festivities that try to prop our emotions, depression is more common this time of the year than any other season.

I’ve entitled this brief series “Keeping Hope Alive.” This morning I’m going to talk about the Promise of Hope (Isaiah 9:1-5) and next Sunday we’ll see the Person of Hope (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Let’s talk about hope for a moment: **Hope is the confidence that God has better and greater things ahead for us.**

Hope is confidence, not a wish or a longing. Hope flows from a strong faith in the promise of God. God had a word for His people through the prophet Isaiah. And that word sparked hope. If your confidence is in your own strength and wisdom, then you don’t have hope; you have a dream or a

wish. But if your confidence is based on the strength, wisdom and promises of God, then you have hope that God has better and greater things ahead for you. So when GOD'S PROMISE is met with our FAITH it produces in us HOPE.

You really don't know what a ray of bright light of hope this is unless you understand the darkness and hopelessness that surrounded those to whom the Lord speaks through Isaiah. Here's what's happening in this portion of God's Word:

Isaiah is a prophet from God to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The evil and oppressive Assyrians are poised to attack Israel. And Israel is already in a mess. Spiritually they are far from God. Militarily they have no strength. Isaiah knows, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that in about three years the Assyrians will overrun and humiliate Israel in a crushing defeat. People would be brutally killed. Families would be separated from one another. The land would be devastated economically. A proud nation would be brought to its knees. That's how dark were the circumstances in those days. From a human perspective there isn't much hope.

All of this produced a crisis of faith for Israel. Has God abandoned them forever? Does God care? Can He do anything about their situation? Is there any hope of restoration? But out of this darkness comes one of the great confessions of faith in the Bible. In fact, there is hope ... and it will come from a Person ... from a child born to them ... from a Son given to them.

Let me just tell you now that Isaiah may have had in mind an earthly king who would come and lead Israel through these dark days. Maybe it was a king like Hezekiah. But it's abundantly clear that Isaiah knew that no human could ever provide the ultimate hope that people need. That hope would have to come from beyond the earth ... it would have to come from heaven ... it would have to come from God. And I'll tell you now that Isaiah is seeing Jesus, the One who would ultimately fulfill this prophecy.

In the Gospel of John the apostle understood that many of the prophecies in Isaiah were fulfilled in Jesus.

**John 12:41 - Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him**

If ever there was a time when people needed help keeping hope alive it was then. And it is now! This Christmas many of us need help keeping hope alive. What is this hope? It is...

## **1. THE HOPE OF LIGHT COMING INTO OUR DARKNESS (Isaiah 9:1-2)**

**Isaiah 9:1b - In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—**

Because of the Assyrian attacks, an oppressive darkness shrouded the people who lived in these regions. But this dark land, and these dark lives, would be flooded with light.

**Isaiah 9:2 - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.**

When Isaiah speaks of the “land of the shadow of death” he uses the same word that David used in Psalm 23: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...” And we know about these dark nights of the soul. The valley of the shadow of death is a lonely place because it seems that God isn’t anywhere around. It’s literally the anguish of death.

But there’s the hope of light shining into the darkness. NOTE: All the main verbs used in these verses are in the perfect tense (like they happened in the past), in spite of the fact that Isaiah is talking about future events. Why? It was Isaiah’s way of saying that what he is talking about in the future is so certain that it was like it had already happened.

Now again, we’re seeing Jesus here. And how do we know that?

Back in v.1 when it speaks of Zebulun, Naphtali and Galilee it is referring to a particular region of Israel. And 700 years later, this region would be an area where much of Jesus’ earthly ministry would take place. You’ll recall that Jesus, before He began His earthly ministry, went into the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days. When that was finished Jesus immediately went out to preach. Matthew 4:12-16 tells us about this:

**Matthew 4:12 - When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.**

**Matthew 4:13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—**

**Matthew 4:14 - to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:**

**Matthew 4:15 - “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—**

**Matthew 4:16 - 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.”**

And Isaiah prophesied that this would happen.

**Isaiah 9:2 - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.**

Notice that a great light shined on them. They were helplessly staggering around in darkness, and into that darkness God shined His light. And when the Bible talks about light shining into the darkness it most often describes what we call “revelation.” God gave them light in the form of truth that would set them free. What amazing grace that God comes to us when He sees us staggering around not knowing which way to go, and He reveals Himself.

In Isaiah’s time this land was a land of darkness. In Jesus’ time it was a land of darkness. And into this world of darkness Jesus came as the light.

**John 1:4 - In him was life, and that life was the light of men.**

**John 8:12 - “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Recording artists Mercy Me produced a song a few years ago called “Revelation.” The lyrics describe the darkness that many people feel:

My life has led me down the road that’s so uncertain  
And now, I am left alone and I am broken  
Trying to find my way  
Trying to find the faith that’s gone

This time I know that You are holding all the answers  
And I’m tired of losing hope and taking chances  
On roads that never seem  
To be the ones that bring me home

Give me a revelation  
Show me what to do  
Cause I’ve been trying  
To find my way  
I haven’t got a clue

Tell me should I stay here  
Or do I need to move?  
Give me a revelation  
I’ve got nothing without You  
I’ve got nothing without You

But in Christ there is the hope of light coming into our darkness. But there’s more hope here in this prophecy. There is...

## **2. THE HOPE OF JOY COMING INTO OUR DESPAIR (Isaiah 9:1,3)**

**Isaiah 9:1a - Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.**

The land was filled with anguish, with loneliness, with an oppressive gloom. There was a feeling of sadness in the air. There wasn’t much to rejoice in. Their lives were in ruin; their nation was in ruin.

But notice that Isaiah saw a day when the despair, the gloom and the distress of Israel would turn to joy.

**Isaiah 9:3 - You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.**

Three times he refers to joy or rejoicing. Notice that God does this. God would intervene in such a way as to reverse the despair and produce joy in the hearts of His people. And again, it is so certain that Isaiah speaks of it in the past tense, as though it has already been accomplished. That's how reliable God is.

**ILLUSTRATION** – If you're a cancer patient or survivor you know the power of the words "cancer free." You've been taking treatments and praying, and then the doctor gives you the report ... the cancer is gone. What joy that news brings! Judy Stamey has been battling cancer, but in the midst of that she has kept hope alive. Here is part of an email she sent a couple of weeks ago:

"It's been a long year of battling the disease of aggressive breast cancer, but God has heard our prayers and blessed me with healing. To hear the words "Cancer Free" brought tears of gratitude to my eyes ... The last 12 months have been an amazing journey and as I look back it's been one of the most rewarding years of my life. In the midst of suffering and pain, God was opening my eyes to experience things that I had often taught about, but did not completely comprehend."

And God ultimately brings this hope to people through Jesus Christ. Jesus was born and He died to save people who knew the despair that sin caused. At the birth of Jesus the angels announced:

**Luke 2:10 - "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.**

So in Christ there is the hope of light coming into our darkness. And there is the hope of joy coming into our despair. But also there is...

### **3. THE HOPE OF VICTORY COMING INTO OUR DEFEAT (Isaiah 9:4-5)**

Or we might say this is freedom coming into our oppression.

Remember that Isaiah sees the day when Israel would experience an overwhelming defeat. And it would happen because they had been unfaithful to God. When the Assyrians swooped in on them they would be utterly destroyed. The ones who survived would live as slaves, with little hope of freedom again. But Isaiah saw a day of victory coming.

**Isaiah 9:4 - For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.**

He's talking here about the yoke ... a heavy piece of wood that is placed in the neck of a slave. Needless to say it is a heavy burden.

And that's what sin brings to us ... a heavy burden. As hard as we try we can't throw it off.

But when God brings the victory it will be like taking a heavy burden off of someone's back.

Isaiah reminds the people of the great victory that God won in the day of Gideon. The Midianites were poised to rout the army of Israel. Judges 6 tells us how God raised up Gideon to lead Israel to victory with just a small army of 300 soldiers. It was a great victory, and Isaiah said, “God will once again give a great victory.”

But how would God do it? How would God achieve such a comprehensive victory? It would be through a child.

**Isaiah 9:6a - For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.**

Now I said before the Isaiah may have been looking at an immediate fulfillment in an earthly king who would be a savior for the people. But no earthly king would be able to completely bring the light, the joy and the freedom that people need. No human being can solve all our problems. And that's why God, at just the right time, sent His Son Jesus. At His birth the angels announced to the shepherds:

**Luke 2:11 - Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**

The hope that we all need is found in Jesus Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

**ILLUSTRATION** – One of the most amazing stories from WWII involves a submarine that sank off the coast of New England. Rescue divers were sent to the scene. As the rescue divers reached the submarine on the ocean's floor they immediately heard a banging that was coming from inside the submarine. They realized that one of the crew members of that sunken submarine was hammering on the inside of the submarine's hull. As they listened closely they realized that the crew member was hammering out a message in the old Morse Code ... “Is there any hope?”

Hope is the confidence that God has greater and better things in ahead for us. Without Jesus there is no hope for light in our darkness, joy in our despair or victory in our defeat.