From Darkness to Light:

The Redemptive Glory of Jesus Christ

**Isaiah 9:1–5** 1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. 3 You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. 5 For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

Here we are seeing the great work of the Mediator promised and foretold at a crucial part of redemptive history. Isaiah’s prophecies tell of Jesus universal salvation, spiritual illumination, and final triumph.

*To Bring Universal Salvation (the scope of salvation)*

To add to the imagery being developed here and the universal scope of this text, it is important to bear in mind that this region West of the Sea of Galilee (or Kinnereth) was something of a “melting pot.” This was also a critical passage to various regions of trade and commerce. There were “Hebrews, Canaanites, Arameans, Hittites, and Mesopotamians” there (see, John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: 1-39*, 239). The beginning of the prophecy of Messianic deliverance is spoken into much more than just an ancient melting pot of the ancient world. The prophecy comes at a critical time, when in a few years, the nations represented in this region would undergo a upheaval of sorts. Many more of the foreigners would settle in the land Zebulun and Napthali. The Jews in these regions would see God’s judgment in the form of exile and to add insult to injury Tiglath-pileser would resettle the Jews in Assyria and allow Mesopotamians to fill the land of the tribes. So the prophecy of Christ’s redemption is not only spoken in the context of the Gentile nations being in darkness but being in Israel and the covenant people being dragged off into exile. Its almost as if, everything has to go wrong before everything is put right.

The thing to see here is the ethnic hostility that emerged from such times. At a time when the Jews despised the Gentiles more than ever; Isaiah issues an oracle that God intends to bring the nations near. He will make the land “glorious” (כבד) again. But what most people could have never comprehended was the manner in which this great work would be accomplished and the nature of the work itself. If you were a Jew, you would be tempted to think God would accomplish this strictly along geopolitical lines; bringing an end to Israel’s enemies (cf. Lk. 1.74; 24.21; Acts 1.6). But this is why so many of Jesus’ disciples and contemporaries could not understand the nature and character of the kingdom of God. There are two redemptive historical movements here. The messianic and the redemptive. From the messianic angel, this passage from Isaiah was foreshadowing Jesus’ own move from Nazareth to Galilee in Capernaum:

**Matthew 4:12–17** 12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a Light dawned.” 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

From the redemptive angel, the apostles explain the outworking and application of the redemption in view here:

**Ephesians 2:11–18** 11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Here then is the first inclination of what will be continually developed in Isaiah, namely that the work of the Messiah will be universal, that is, not limited to one nation or time, but it will be ‘a time for all people’ as it were. A redemption for all nations, tongues and peoples in fulfillment of the great Abrahamic promise (Gen. 12.1-3 cf. Rev. 5.9-10). A kingdom therefore, that no one could have imagined:

**Isaiah 11:10** 10 Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.

**Isaiah 42:1** 1 “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.

**Isaiah 42:6** 6 “I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,

**Isaiah 49:6** 6 He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

**Isaiah 60:1–3** 1 “Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2 “For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the Lord will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. 3 “Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.

In Zechariah, while envisioning the same messianic redemption foretold in Isaiah, Zechariah says, that there will come a day when God will make a remnant out of the most vile enemies of God so that they will stand in covenant solidarity with His people in full fellowship and covenant inclusion so that the Philistine, the mortal enemy of Israel, “will be a remnant for our God, and be like a clan (or chief) in Judah” (Zech. 9.6-7).

*To Bring Spiritual Illumination (The phenomenon of salvation)*

The backdrop of the coming attack by Assyria and later the captivity in Babylon begin to form the language of spiritual and eschatological redemption. This too is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ who delivers us from the shadow of death. At the birth of Jesus, the faithful remnant saw the dawn of His light and interpreted these prophesies as pertaining to their present and future hope (cf. 60.1-3). They saw in the arrival of this miraculous child the hope of their deliverance from temporal enemies i.e. the Romans. Jesus would labor for the remainder of His ministry to show the true universal nature of His redemption and kingdom (cf. Mt. 21.43). Even as the darkness of Judah spiritually is vastly more important than anything going on politically, so too, any distress in our lives whether physically, mentally, emotionally, economically, or socially pales in comparison with our deepest distress our deepest darkness— the darkness of our sins. Here is the true nature of Christ’s redemption that He delivers us from our darkness and distress of sin.

Isaiah just finished reminding the nation of peril of deviating from the light of Scripture (8.16-22). Now Isaiah moves to remind the nation where true light is found. The child that will be born and the son to be given is where all redemptive light will be found.

**Colossians 1:13–14** 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**Ephesians 5:8** 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light

The illumination then that Jesus Christ brings is the illumination *first* of our sins; making us aware of our sin and misery. *Second*, He illuminates our hearts and minds to His truths, to the gospel and the cross. *Third*, He illuminates our minds in sanctification and transformation by renewing us in to His image. While the sins of the nation had landed them in the midst of heathen oppression and the complete reversal of all their covenant privileges until at last they find themselves situated in the darkness along with the Gentile nations; the light which Isaiah now announces will reverse the reversals and counter the curses of the covenant for those who believe:

“In place of the darkness of calamity the people saw the light of peace and blessedness; in place of the darkness of death, the light of life; in place of the darkness of ignorance, the light of knowledge; in place of the darkness of sin, the light of salvation.” (Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–18*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 325).

But the greatest illumination that Christ brings to us is the illumination of *himself*. To know who He is and what He has done for us. To know that He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14.6). To know that all of the fullness of deity dwells in Him (Col. 2.9). To know that He is Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and the Consummator of all things (cf. Rev. 1.8; 22.13). This is why Paul teaches that for a person to be brought out of darkness, out of a state of spiritual stupor is to have Jesus himself illumine you:

**Ephesians 5:14** 14 For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.”

By this prophecy, Isaiah restores the people’s future and their hope. That is why Isaiah speak of the light as “a great light” v.2; because only the light that shines forth from Jesus Christ can counter the darkness of our hearts, the darkness of our sins, the darkness of our future torment in hell apart from; only through His light do we see light (cf. Ps. 36.9).

*To Bring Everlasting Joy (The experience of salvation)*

As this prophesied salvation begins to dawn in Christ, true joy begins to rise in the hearts of His people. No doubt, as Judah saw historical and temporal victories over their enemies, a measure of joy could be found in Israel; especially among the elect whose faith was fixed in their future and ultimate deliverance (cf. 35.1-4; 49.19-23). But this joy was but a mere shadow of the fulness that was found in Christ. Still, this the richness of this joy is found in the metaphors appropriate to the historical situation- a metaphor in which Judah’s plight is reversed. The nation that had been stripped down will now be multiplied, the nation that saw gloom will not be filled with “gladness,” the nation whose face God was hiding from them will now have His glorious presence in their midst, their desolation will become a harvest, they who had become the plunder of their enemies would soon “divide the spoil” of their victory.

But there is a greater redemptive fulfillment here rooted in the arrival of Immanuel who would bring these prophetic disclosures of covenant joy to fruition. In fact, the Spirit who revealed and announced the good news of this joy to Isaiah in connection with the vision of heavenly temple would speak again in the earthly temple as He harkens back to the ancient promise found in this very text:

**Luke 2:25–35** 25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 A Light of revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.” 33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed— 35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Here we see the “consolation of Israel” incarnate. And the testimony of Jesus is the “Spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19.10). Everywhere Jesus goes, the Spirit accompanies Him. The Spirit who pleased to announce Messiah’s coming also endowed the faithful remnant (e.g. Simeon) with the Spirit to announce His arrival and to proclaiming the realization of His own promises (Lk. 2.32). What this Lukan text also makes clear is the universal nature of this joy, “A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel” (v.32). The revelation which was brought to us in Christ results in the fullness of joy. This is supported by two metaphors; one agricultural, the other a metaphor of war. The “gladness of harvest” indicates the joy of practical provision as God in Christ gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness (cf. 2 Pet. 1.3).

The reality is that, in Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (cf. Eph. 1.3-4). When we are so often prone to think that we should see greater temporal blessings consisting of health, long life, better marriage, family, finances, and culture; the completely opposite is actually the case. He blesses us most where it counts most, “in the heavenly places.” Those are blessings that will never end, that cannot be stolen and cannot be diminished or tarnished by time, sin and tribulations. The metaphor of war, “as men rejoice when they divide the spoil” (v.3) is also meant to accent the jubilation with which we should rejoice. Salvation in Christ is the experience of all having been put right, all our greatest fears having been conquered, and our greatest adversaries having been subdued so that we share in this victory one with another and with the Lord (53.12).

*To Bring Final Triumph (The goal of salvation)*

Building on the metaphor of war in v.3, Isaiah sets forth the hope of a future that will reverse the oppression of their times. In order to set the people’s faith firmly in the future, Isaiah harkens to the past. By looking to the “battle of Midian,” the people would have an anchor of future hope. For there at Midian, Gideon delivered the tribes mentioned here; Zebulun and Naphtali (also Asher) (Judg. 6.35). Also, at Median God acted in such a way that only He could receive the glory for the victory over the Midianites and the Amalekites (Judg. 7.2ff.). The whole episode at Midian was a redemptive-historical prefiguring of the circumstances of Judah here in Isaiah. Like in Gideon’s time, the people did “evil in the sight of the Lord” (cf. Judg. 6.1) preparing the way for redemption. Only an act of sovereign intervention on behalf of the people of God will due; an act in which human boasting is excluded. Such divine exclusivity is at the center of the gospel. In the gospel, like at Midian, God alone gets the glory! Here, Isaiah is his best interpreter. Even as the weight of redemption is laid upon the shoulders of the Redeemer so is the weight of Glory, “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this” (v.7).

Another note which redemption strikes is the sound of peace. War is not the final goal, victory is. And when victory comes, God will make peace and all warcraft will be fuel for the fire for the earth and all its works will be burned:

**Psalm 46:8–10** 8 Come, behold the works of the Lord, Who has wrought desolations in the earth. 9 He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. 10 “Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

The world was in turmoil then, and the world is in turmoil now. But the turmoil we see now is but a fainting sigh, a fading shadow, the last remnants of present evil age which has been already subdued under the complete Lordship of Jesus Christ. There will come a day, when there will only be one Warrior standing and we will share in His triumph forever:

**Psalm 110:1** 1 The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

All of the temporal deliverances of Israel are not only for our instruction but for our joy as well for just as Israel will see days in which the weary will rejoice, one day all our warfare will be over and our heads will be lifted up in His presence and the day of His salvation:

**Isaiah 35:1–4** 1 The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus 2 It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, The majesty of our God. 3 Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. 4 Say to those with anxious heart, “Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you.”