

## Isaiah 9 A Child is Born

It's hard to be optimistic in the short-term when your country is being run by child-killers. If those in power don't respect the life of vulnerable infants, how can there be respect for anyone or anything?

The prophet Isaiah had served in Judah around 700 years BC during the reigns of fine, honourable kings Uzziah and Jotham. But new king Ahaz was what we might call a modern thinker who followed the trends of Canaanite religion. The Bible tells us Ahaz sacrificed his infant son in the fire to the idol Baal.

What a cruel, heartless, depraved thing to do!

We like to think we've come a long way since that sort of thing but fast forward to the first century and the gospel of Matthew records how King Herod ordered the slaughter of innocent children in Bethlehem in a desperate attempt to protect his grasp on the throne.

OK but we're progressive, we have human rights these days, we have rules, we're not allowed to take innocent life or cause unnecessary pain to children, we're better than those kings aren't we?

Apparently not. No amount of political correctness can establish true respect, true righteousness and justice. These things stem from godly reverence.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has abused children everywhere, child soldiers, child slaves, child prostitutes.

And it's official as well as criminal. This week Ireland passed abortion legislation which spiritually and morally makes us complicit with Herod and Ahaz. Whatever spin we try and put on it let's be assured that governments, organisations and individuals that reject God and His laws must expect dire consequences.

If we don't believe this we might as well throw our Bibles away!

Isaiah was bitterly disappointed with the policies of Ahaz but he continued best he could to serve God and his community for good, declaring the true words of the Lord. He spoke out his faith, as prompted by the Spirit. He declared God's displeasure with all sin but also assured of God's tender grace towards sinners, His genuine compassion for people.

When the popular vote and government are as corrupt as Ahaz, our greatest hope must be the Lord God Almighty. As Isaiah continues to trust and preach in dark and cruel times, he is given this message to proclaim. God promises a child, a son, a better king Who will govern in justice and righteousness. Miraculously born, this 'son' will inaugurate a better kingdom, a kingdom of people *made* better by His redeeming love.

In our darkness, God shines His light. In lands shrouded by the shadow of death He brings a new dawn of hope and opportunity. In the most wicked, threatening of circumstances there is yet grace, strong to save! Believing people must welcome it, and walk in the light of it!

We may be seriously disheartened by some of the trends in our society. We have good reason to be concerned, and yet we're still preparing to celebrate Christmas. Why?

Because beyond the tinsel and the wrapping paper there is something worth celebrating. Unto us a child is born. To us a son is given. And the government will be on His shoulders. Note here three things.

We worship a faithful God Who keeps His word.

Through Isaiah and other prophets God warned of punishment for disobedience and idolatry. Jerusalem would fall, its people would be deported to Babylon. It happened 587BC. God promised a remnant would return 70 years later. He even named the foreign king who would authorise it and true enough, under Cyrus the Persian emperor, the exiles returned, Jerusalem was repatriated and rebuilt.

God's word can be trusted. We are only sensible to pay careful heed.

When we do we find secondly that consistently throughout scripture, both Old and New Testaments, we are told of judgement and salvation. On the very next page from today's well-known reading, in Isaiah 10, the preacher says, 'Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar?'

God will bring everyone to account for our life choices and those who have given their first devotion to idols instead of the Almighty, those who have broken the Maker's commands must expect retribution.

This same preacher speaks frequently of God's saving kindness. Take for example ch40 with which we opened the service where the Lord is described as a shepherd Who 'gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.'

This is God's Word. There will be judgement but salvation is available. Wouldn't it be wise to avoid one and seek the other?

For note thirdly this better king prophesied by Isaiah. After Ahaz came king Hezekiah who was indeed a better man and better ruler in every way. During his reign Jerusalem was miraculously rescued from besieging enemies. So within Isaiah's own lifetime he saw fulfilment of his prophecies. But his messages also set patterns and principles for every time and place and point ultimately to the greatest King, our Lord Jesus, Son of God and Saviour of the world.

Where His rule extends evil is overthrown. He himself said the very gates of hell would not hold out against His church when we practise obedient faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are called to be witnesses to the One Whose coming, and suffering for our sins, were predicted here in Isaiah centuries before His birth.

But for the world to see and appreciate and submit to the ways of mighty godliness, the way of the Wonderful Counsellor and Prince of Peace, we who profess to believe in Him must follow clearly His leading and *practise* justice and righteousness.

We need better government, not just nationally or locally but each of us personally. Let's surrender our wills to the Lord Jesus today and may His redeeming love and gracious presence produce a rich harvest of goodness in our homes, schools, colleges, workplaces, communities, countries and world, to His honour and glory.

Amen