

**ISAIAH 9:1-4**  
**A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS**

Gloom. Murky, foggy, cloudy gloom. There have been many of those days this winter, and I don't just mean with all of the snow we've had. I think more of all the deaths our congregation has faced these past months. Gloom can come upon you in many ways from the darkness of winter to the darkness of death. Sadness, depression and hopelessness can set it. At times like these the words that open our reading can seem cold. You might wonder how they can be true or apply to your life.

"There will be no gloom in her who was in anguish." A life without gloom and anguish can seem like a fairy tale to many. What could a life like that be like? How could we achieve such a life? Some try endlessly to find such a life. Other give up trying. We seem to be stuck in this life of gloom in a world that's in turmoil.

In the past your life might've reached that point when you felt to be a complete success. You had the house with the white picket fence and two kids, a car in the garage and a great nine to five career. This was who you were, who you described yourself to be when you talked with people. But then your life changed, and started to fall apart. You lost your job, or retired. Kids moved away, or a grandchild died. Now what? Some can start to feel like they're a failure, or God is against them? They wonder if this is what life is going to be like from now on – one disappointment after another.

You're not able to do what you used to do as health declines. Have you fallen from your peak? Do you feel useless, like you can't do anything anymore, for family or church? Do people look at you like you're good for nothing. You question what they're thinking. Every action is questioned. You don't know where you stand anymore, and the hopeless despair settles upon you.

Maybe you did something wrong and you feel guilty. You might question if God is punishing you. You regress to apathy. Your life is a routine, or it's all falling apart.

Can hope return? Our reading tells us that it can. It might seem like a too far away distant hope to some people. It points to Jesus who would come about seven hundred years after this was written, but some still clung to that hope. Jesus might return tomorrow or in another seven hundred years, but we can still cling to this hope, and trust in Jesus by faith. We can move from the gloom to the glorious as the opening verse tells the people back in Isaiah's day, and now in our day too.

We don't have to make a big leap to find hope, but it can come to us little by little. You can live out your faith caring for and being cared for by the people around you. One situation or circumstance at a time. Just as you can't help everyone, but maybe only one or two people, not everyone has to be knocking at your door to help you, but one or two who care can lift up your fallen spirits. You don't have to attend to everything at the church, at home or in town, but one or two activities that you can get involved in can give purpose to your life. Your little world can be little, and that's okay. Live with what God has given you. A few things here and a few things there to live faithfully with is okay. Focus on a single person in your life and care about them, even if that person you have to start with is yourself.

Keep all these thoughts in mind as our reading talks about God bringing us from gloomy darkness to glorious light. Don't beat yourself up if the light around you isn't glorious, but rather more like a flickering candle in a dark room. We live in a dark world and our Christian faith may be that one flickering candle, but that's still cause for hope.

Darkness cannot overcome light, but light can overcome darkness. The Gospel of John opens up with these words speaking about Jesus: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (1:4-5). Hold onto that hope that the darkness of this world cannot overcome the light of Jesus that gives you faith.

At this point let's stop and confirm that this reading is about Jesus and His light. The first verse ends by saying that this glorious land that this points to is the Galilee of the nations. Jesus came from Galilee, and His connection to Galilee is mentioned three times in our Gospel reading, including citing fulfillment of our text. But if that's not enough for you just read past our text to verse six: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (9:6). Do you see Jesus now? Hopefully your answer is yes.

So let's jump down to verse four to see how Jesus brings us hope and then jump back up to verses two and three to finish with your transition from darkness to light, from gloom to hope.

Verse four talks about a yoke of burden. You might think of yokes on cattle or oxen to pull a plow, but yokes are also used on people when they're enslaved. The yoke is what shackles them. The staff and the rod is what is thought of from Psalm 23 as the Good Shepherd gently guides us, but rods and staffs can also be used for beatings, to control, discipline and punish those who are enslaved. All three of these, the yoke of enslavement to sin that you bear, and the rod and staff that Satan beats you with, **God has broken** them as on the day of Midian. The day of Midian was a day of great victory for the

Israelites over foes and oppressors. Your oppressors of sin and Satan have been broken. Their punishment and shackles **have been broken.**

God could see it as having already happened seven hundred years before Jesus was born, just as He can see your salvation before you get to heaven. You've already been set free. But still your life might not feel like the land of the glorious as our reading depicts it. So, I'll give you some Biblical examples of darkness changing to light and bringing hope and joy. If you can hold onto one or two of these ideas maybe they can bring you hope.

Our text says that "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." If you've lived in a dark cave all of your life, a light can be seen as a scary thing. You may be afraid of the light. Christianity has been described as a fairy story for people who are afraid of the darkness, and atheism has been described as a fairy story for people who are afraid of the light. Fear of the light is a real thing, and so God did something to help us.

God has "called you out of the darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 1:9). "The Father, has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" – Colossians 1:12-14. Other translations say God saved or rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought or conveyed us into the kingdom of His Son, the kingdom of light.

They all mean the same thing. You can't get to heaven by your efforts. On your own you'll never leave the cave of sin and darkness because on your own you're afraid of the light of Jesus. God has to break the power of sin over you, rescue you from sin, and bring you into His light.

King David called God a lamp who lightens his darkness (2 Samuel 22:29). Psalm 36:9 says, "For with [God] is the fountain of life; in [His] light do we see [the] light [of Jesus]. The Psalms and Isaiah are full of this hope for joy found in the light of God. Time prevents me from reading them all to you, so here are two for us to close with.

"Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to His holy name!" – Psalm 97:11-12.

"I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them" – Isaiah 42:16.

May your gloom be turned to joy by the light of Jesus in whom you have forgiveness. Amen.