

Promised: From Curse to New Creation

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[0 : 00] Amen. Amen.

At the moment is 401,000 potential, right? That's one post, okay? So that's not total number between now and Christmas, the Christmas carol service.

If we posted this morning or tomorrow and every one of our followers reposted, it has the potential to reach 401,000 people, right?

Now, we're doing that every single day. Those numbers don't dramatically go up, actually, if you do it every single day for the next 30 days. But the way I like to think about it is this.

Let's take one of Zach's amazing reels, right? Sorry, Zach. It's, what, like a 30-second clip of a sermon, right?

[1 : 37] And I'd like to say that he sits down and trawls through the sermon and finds the best spot to clip and then makes all these wonderful graphics.

And he does, but there's a program behind that helping him do that. Yeah, he used to do that, yeah. So imagine that you could take that one single 30-second message about Jesus to 401,000 people.

We'd all be up for that, right? So that's the opportunity right there. So, like, we would never be able to do that with just the 40 of us.

But we do have the potential to do that. And so we're not paying for any social media ads or sponsorship or anything like that. That's a little bit of a waste of money. But we have 500 followers on Instagram, 700 followers on Facebook.

And so we just need to repost. Now, for those of you who are old and decrepit, let me just tell you that liking a post helps our algorithm but does nothing for the reach.

[2 : 45] So it's the repost that makes the difference. I know some of you are like, I know that. But I'm just telling you, right? Like and repost is the thing that makes a difference, all right?

And so we have had people, actually fairly regularly, I think, Zach, reach out on social media and have come to the church because they found us on social media. And quickly, you know, it's like they've come because of this weird post that maybe I've put up.

And I'm like, I'm sorry about that. Your normal duties will resume soon when Zach comes back from holiday or something like that. But so anyway, that's just a clarification on that, that it would be amazing to reach the whole of everyone in Southampton almost twice over by one post.

Great. So I'm glad we agree. So should we open our Bibles? And today we are in Isaiah. Which if you just go to the middle of your Bibles and turn turn right just a little bit, you'll probably hit it.

It's quite a large book. We're going to be in chapter nine. And we have started a kind of a little mini Christmas sermon series called Came.

[4 : 01] And this morning we're talking about this word promised. And we always go to Isaiah 9 at Christmas. But we all we never go to Isaiah 9 verse 1.

So today that's where we're at. All right. So it's like I know that you've heard it. I know that you've seen on Christmas cards. For unto us a child is born. Handel wrote about it in his famous Messiah.

Right. But we're not going there today. We will get there eventually, but we're not going there to start with. And so Isaiah chapter 9 verse 1 says this.

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwell in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy.

[5 : 02] They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest. As they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you are broken as on the day of Midian.

For every boot of the trampling warrior in battle turmoil and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For unto us a child is born.

Now we arrive at Christmas. 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.

And of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Let's pray. Father, we come to your word and we just want to ask, Lord, this morning you would help us. Lord, a challenging section for us, Lord, but if one filled with hope.

[6 : 12] Lord, and we do pray this morning, Lord, that we would be reminded, Lord, that we have a hope that is way beyond anything that we can conjure up or anything that this world can give us. Lord, that our hope rests in you and you alone.

Lord, remind us of that this morning as we read this section, as we explore this section in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I wonder if you've ever broken a promise. You don't have to confess out loud.

I'm just going to go with probably yes. You can always tell a lot about people by the promises they make, but more by the ones that they keep.

Think about the promises that we make to each other. I'll just be two ticks. No, you won't. You are, you know, that's really code for, I'm still in my house looking for my keys, discovering the meaning of life.

That'll be two ticks. I'm not really one to make those kind of promises. Instead, I'll say, I'm on my way. Technically, it's true. But if I'm honest, it's a little bit misleading.

[7 : 20] Because what I'm really saying is, I'm absolutely intending to be on my way at some point in the near future. And at the moment of sending the message, I'm still in the house debating whether I have time to make a quick coffee.

Just ask Laurie. I don't even get me started on New Year's resolutions. If breaking promises was an Olympic sport, I dare say most of us would be gold medalists by the second week in January.

Promises. Promises, promises, promises, right? I promised myself last night I would get up early for the gym this morning. But my bed promised that an extra hour in bed would be more beneficial.

Amen? Here's the point. Humans often over-promise and under-deliver. We've not only been at, we've probably been at both ends of that.

We've probably over-promised and under-delivered. And we felt the disappointment when someone has over-promised and under-delivered to us. And because we know this, if the promise hasn't been upgraded, listen to this.

[8 : 29] I love this. If the promise, what we do now is we upgrade promises. Now you think I'm joking, but we do. I promise doesn't cut it anymore. Now it's a pinky promise.

Don't you dare be breaking a pinky promise. Because of that, we carry out quiet suspicion of any promise.

Looking for the extra, looking for the loophole or the fine print. So when we open our Bibles and we see God making promises, and these are massive history-shaping promises, our instinct is to read them through the grid of like our human experience.

Sure, that sounds great, but will he actually come through? Well, the story of Christmas answers that question with a resounding, earth-shaking yes.

Because unlike us, God doesn't break his promises. He doesn't forget them like I do. Are you sure?

[9 : 36] Are you sure I promised? Did we even have a conversation? It's the most common conversation in our house. God doesn't let them, he doesn't forget them, he doesn't revise them, he doesn't let them slowly fade into the abyss like last year's gym membership.

When God promises something, he weaves the entire universe around fulfilling it. God keeps his promises, and Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to break the curse.

That's what we're looking at this morning. In the arrival of Jesus, promised in the Garden of Eden, was echoed through the prophets, anticipated for centuries, and that is the ultimate proof that God keeps his word, even when humanity doesn't.

So the big unavoidable question to think about today is, can Christianity be trusted? Can God be trusted? If God's making promises, can he be trusted to deliver on those promises?

The Bible claims that God promised a saviour long before Jesus arrived, and fulfilled those promises in him. And if that is true, this speaks to the existence, the faithfulness, and the sovereignty of God to keep his promises.

[11 : 09] Now the text we've just read was written several hundred years before the birth of Jesus. And we immediately look for an asterisk fine print loophole.

And the asterisk fine print loophole is often said, yeah, but surely that must be an addition. It must have been written after Jesus did it. They're not talking about the historicity of Jesus.

Like, they're not questioning that Jesus actually came. What they're questioning is, what the fine print we think says is, surely Isaiah 9 must have been written after Jesus arrived.

And so it's easy to dismiss the promises found here, simply by stating they must have been written after the birth of Jesus. But the problem with that is 1947. Now you say, what happened in 1947?

It wasn't that Bill was born in 1947. Was it 47? No way. Okay. 57. 55. 55. I was way out.

[12 : 15] Something almost equally as important as Bill's birth. In 1947. Nowhere near but Bill's birth. You're welcome.

Was that the Great Isaiah Scroll was discovered. Now you might go, well, whoopie doo, what is the Great Isaiah Scroll? You may have heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Yes? So part of the Dead Sea Scrolls was the Great Isaiah Scroll. It's a seven meter long scroll. And it contains the complete set of, or the complete book of Isaiah.

And it dates 125 years before the birth of Jesus. So even if you say, oh yeah, so the loophole is, surely this must have been written after.

Well, it's not written after. It's written 125 years before the birth of Jesus, spoken some 750 years before the birth of Jesus. In it is a promise made by God.

[13 : 28] But before we get there, let me remind you that the promise is there because of a problem. And the problem is introduced, not in Isaiah, not even in Joshua before it, way before it.

But the problem is introduced on page two of your Bibles. That tells us a lot, doesn't it, about humanity. That the problem surfaced, not in chaos, but in paradise.

We have this idea, like, if I can just get my life together, if I can just move to the country, if I can just, you know, go on holiday, my life is going to be fixed. Yeah?

Ask Adam and Eve how that went for them. Right? Because on page two, we get introduced to the problem. And the problem is where humanity rebel and relationship with God is fractured.

And look, the world now, what you're looking at, as you look out into the world, or as you are talking to people in your daily relationships, or even in the struggle that you have, what you're experiencing now is the result of that rebellion and relationship with God that has failed.

[14 : 40] Now, look, God's response is also found really, really close to the problem. Right?

Like, God doesn't discover the problem and then go, what are we going to do about that? And then several hundred years later, Isaiah 9 pops up, and God goes, ah, I'm going to make a promise.

No, no, he makes a promise just a few verses after the problem. And the problem is twofold.

Excuse me, the promise is twofold. The first promise is a promise of judgment. Oh, we don't like that, do we? It's a promise of judgment.

But the second promise is a promise of hope. So in verse 6 of chapter 3 of Genesis, you see that God curses Satan, he curses women, and he curses men.

[15 : 48] Right? And these curses are the sobering consequence of humanity's rebellion. Right? So he curses, he curses everything.

But embedded in these curses is a promise of a coming deliverer to break the curse. So Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, God says that the coming one, the coming deliverer, he says to Satan, he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

That's the promise. That a coming deliverer is basically going to undo the curse. Now, scroll forward to our text in Isaiah.

It's now 8th century BC. And we see a nation in crisis. You're welcome to draw comparisons to our own nation.

Or not, as the case may be. The nation of Israel is a divided nation. It's a divided kingdom at this point. And so we have Israel, what we normally call Israel.

[17 : 03] That's the northern kingdom. And then we have Judah, which is the southern kingdom. And Isaiah, the guy who's on the scene at the moment, his ministry takes place over about a 40-year period in the southern kingdom, in Judah.

And the immediate crisis is that Judah is faced with the threat from the Assyrians. So the Assyrians, if you remember, Jonah ran away from the Assyrians, right?

And the Assyrians were brutal people. They had refined the art of skinning human beings as punishment.

That's what they did. And then they would take them out into the desert and kick sand at them. Hope you enjoy your lunch. They were the most feared superpower of the day.

And the time is 735 BC. And Syria and Israel, they form this anti-Assyrian alliance.

[18 : 20] And they come to Judah and say, Judah, we want you to join that alliance with us to fight off the Assyrians. But there is a king on the throne of Judah whose name you will know.

His name is King Ahaz. And so King Ahaz says, no, I'm not going to join with you.

Actually, what I'm going to do is I'm going to join with Assyria. And I'm going to join a coalition with Assyria against Israel and Syria.

Because of that alliance, Judah was now in real trouble. And into this fearful and chaotic moment in Judah's life, God sends Isaiah.

And he sends Isaiah to speak two promises. Ringing any bells? He sends him to speak a promise of judgment and a promise of hope.

[19 : 33] So look at verse 1 of Isaiah 9. He says, in the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. The word contempt is the word curse.

He has cursed Zebulun and Naphtali, or at least the land. Because Judah trusted political deals instead of God. And look, you know, the truth is, isn't it, sometimes we were tempted in the UK to put our hope in our leaders or on our policies or in the budget.

And sometimes we think that's where our energy needs to go into challenging our leaders. And we do need to keep them accountable. But our hope doesn't come from them. It doesn't come from Westminster.

Real security comes from the one who rules over history itself. And Judah had lost sight of that. And so God says, I'm going to judge you for that.

And you're going to go into exile. And you're going to be carried away. And your name is going to be forgotten. You're going to become a curse.

[20 : 50] And so, within 150 years, even after God was gracious and sends him Hezekiah as a king, as a good king, even after Hezekiah leaves, off the scene, the people rebel again.

And 150 years, from the time this prophecy is given, the people are carried away, the temple is destroyed, and Jerusalem lay in ruins. This is a message of judgment. If you want to know why there is pain and suffering and darkness in our world, look at Judah.

because their physical exile in, their physical exile is our society's spiritual condition without Jesus.

Cut off from the one we were made for and stumbling in the dark. But even under judgment, God's promise is trustworthy because their pain isn't permanent.

Our pain isn't permanent. And the curse doesn't get the final word. Jesus does. And so, here's the second thing that Isaiah says. The second message of hope that God would provide a future king, not Hezekiah, although that's the short-term immediate fulfillment, but a future king who would raise up and deliver them.

[22 : 13] And this hope centers on this future, this future, but this future ideal king. One unlike Ahaz. And so, verse one says, in the former times, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

But in the latter times, he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. Now look, Isaiah mentions these northern regions of Judah that were called Zebulun and Naphtali.

So they're obviously two sons of Jacob. When those tribes settled in that area, they became known as the land of Zebulun and then the land of Naphtali. And these two tribes who were among the ten tribes who gave up their faith in God.

And they were actually, these two tribes were actually the first to fall to Assyria. But Isaiah says, I get that there is judgment.

I get that there is a curse. But, don't you love that word? God says, but. Right now, there's a curse. But, in the latter times, he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

[23 : 28] which means that the place of greatest darkness, Zebulun and Naphtali, will be the place where God brings the first light. Now, look at Matthew chapter 4.

Because Matthew explicitly says that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy when he began ministry in Galilee. leaving Nazareth, verse 13 of Matthew 4.

Leaving Nazareth, he, that is Jesus, went and lived in Capernaum by the sea in the territory of where? Like, why is Matthew telling us that? Like, who cares?

Do you know what I mean? We care. Why? Because what he says in verse 14. Matthew says, you know that prophecy in Isaiah 9 that you always skip over because you want to get to verse 6?

Slow down. Because when Jesus showed up, he didn't show up in Jerusalem. He didn't show up in any other major capital of the world. He showed up in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

[24 : 53] Why? Because God promised he would. And if you look at a map and if you turn to the Bibles at the back of your, the maps at the back of your Bibles rather than the Bibles at the back of your maps, you'll see the land of Zebulun and the land in Naphtali and if you could over trace that with the area of Galilee and Capernaum, guess what?

They're exactly the same places. Right? When we talk about Galilee, when we talk about Capernaum, where Jesus actually walked and did ministry, where did Jesus do ministry when he was here?

The land of Naphtali and the land of Zebulun. Just as God promised. so that he can say that in verse 2 of Isaiah 9, the people, the people who were there, he said, look, even though they're walking in darkness, they've seen a great light.

Those who dwell in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. So what Isaiah is saying is that God is making you a promise. And the promise is that this new king, this new promised king, will walk into every place where darkness is.

He's not going to dodge a place. He's not going to say, look, notice how Isaiah says it. It's very poetic, right? And you have to kind of get your head around the poetry and what that means. But he says, look, those who walked in darkness and then skip the next bit and those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, darkness.

[26 : 35] Right? He's not saying, well, Jesus, this new king, he's not just going to go into the darkness and leave the dark, the really dark places out because they're too dark. He's saying, look, the places where you feel most lost, most ashamed, most overwhelmed, it says, he has made glorious the way.

And that word, that word glorious is the word for honor as opposed to curse, as opposed to shame. He brings a great light to shine on them.

And look, this is brilliant. Why? Because God doesn't abandon his people to the dark. Right? He doesn't say, oh, it's too dark. It's too dark there.

God here is leaning in and saying, the curse won't get the final word. Anguish doesn't get to win. You're not going to be like that forever.

The same God who watched his people stumble under the weight of fear and failure and foreign armies is the God who steps right into our shadows today.

[27 : 49] And notice what happens in the national life of those who are now ruled by this new king. Right? So Isaiah is saying, there's a new king coming and he's not like Ahaz.

He's going to be one like Hezekiah but much, much better. Watch what happens when you are ruled by that king. Verse 3. You have multiplied the nation.

You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest as they are glad when they divide the spoil. So, you know, what happens when the king comes to lift the curse?

There is a significant increase in joy. joy. Should I say that again? There is a significant increase in joy. Can I tell you something? I struggle with joy.

Sometimes I just struggle being happy. Tomorrow morning, 7 o'clock, I ain't going to be so happy. Probably going to be struggling with joy too. But God's people are called to be joyful people.

[28 : 51] not fake joyful people because they're just annoying. You know the fake happy ones? Leave me alone. But genuine happy, genuine joy that comes from knowing that we are ruled by a new king, a good king, the ideal king, the one we've been waiting for.

And so he says, look, there is a, what happens when the king comes to lift the curse? How to increase your joy? Focus on the curse that has been lifted because of Jesus.

That's how to increase your joy. There is a significant increase in joy likening it to a celebration of good food, good harvest. Verse 4, for the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of the oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

So God will break the oppressive forces. And here he links this to Midian. So go back to the book of Judges and you see that the Midianites would come and attack God's people and then God would raise up a judge and they would fight back the Midianites and then the judge would die and the Midianites would come and there's this cycle of cycle and the Midianites became like this symbol of God's enemies people who would come against God's people and oppress them and God says he has a promise that that oppressor that cycle of oppression is going to be broken because the new king has come for every boot of the trampling warrior in battle turmoils and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire and he's simply saying this that there's going to be an end of war there's going to be an end of destruction all of the instruments of conflict will be no more he says that in other places right that those instruments of war will be made into instruments of harvest and joy and things like that for verse six and now he introduces this new king unto us a child is born immediate context hezekiah god is saying look you're not always going to be ruled by ahaz hezekiah is on his way but we know that this prophecy because

Matthew has told us that already goes way beyond hezekiah and is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus and so at the time this is given this is not only a immediate hope but for Judah but it's a longer term hope for the world unto us a child is born a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulders and his name will be called wonderful counselor mighty God everlasting Father notice that it's a child that is born who is going to be God the Father right he's going to be the Prince of Peace and you might like well you know what Hezekiah brought in peace absolutely brought in prosperity into Israel into Judah but then the prophecy goes one step further in verse seven and he says of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end which is a poetic way of saying that when he arrives he will continue to move into the domain of darkness time and time again it will continue to increase does that make sense peace will increase until there will be no end and on the throne of

[33 : 06] David which is an interesting phrase not the throne of Hezekiah not even the throne of Solomon but the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for how long so look these verses emphasize this this unending nature of his reign which will be characterized by justice and righteousness now Hezekiah sat on the throne and there was an end to his reign when his reign ended actually Judah fell into rebellion again and God says okay fine I'm done the Assyrians can come get you you've got to learn the easy way or the hard way but

God here is saying look there is going to be a king whose reign is going to last forever and and and and you're going to enter into that fullness of that king the fullness of joy of that king when that curse is lifted it's going to be a time of justice and it's going to be a time of righteousness your life is is going to unravel under the weight of sin you will experience financial pressure you will experience mental and physical battles that will drain you of your identity your you will walk in broken relationships that won't be able to be repaired you will lose loved ones without reason or warning and even at the end of the day you will leave work exhausted and never satisfied but there is a king coming who is going to put an end to that because what Judah experiences on a national scale we experience on a personal scale on a personal level the curse that began in

Genesis 3 absolutely affected Judah but it affects each one of us Christianity is the story of the God who keeps his promises Paul wrote this in 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 he said for the son of God and then he defines what he means by who that is Jesus Christ so Jesus Christ the one who has been promised the son of God Jesus Christ whom we proclaimed among you and he says was not yes and no but in him it's always yes for all the promises of God find their yes in him question can Christianity be trusted can God be trusted Paul says yes in

Jesus absolutely he's the promised one he's the one who has come to undo the curse see what God promised to do Jesus did so he came he walked into the darkness of the cross and he lifted the curse by dying for our rebellion but the curse isn't on you anymore Genesis chapter 3 verse excuse me Galatians chapter 3 verse 13 says this that Christ redeemed us that's what he came to do Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written cursed is everyone who hangs on the tree and so he came and he walked into the darkness of the cross he lifted the curse by becoming a curse and having then been killed he then rose again why because the curse no longer gets the final word of your life life in Christ gets the final word and the resurrection is God's declaration that sin shame and death have been defeated and that the brokenness we inherited from Genesis has been overturned by the power of the risen king this promised king who's come the resurrection means new creation it means new life it means new hope it means new identity it means you can start again not because you're strong enough to fix yourself but because

Jesus walked out of the tomb and brought a redeemed world to him where the curse brought decay Jesus brings renewal where it brought despair he brings joy where it brought death he brings life everlasting but listen where this is a promise it is an unfulfilled promise unless it is received John says in John chapter 1 to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God so look the responses to Isaiah 9 verse 1 the response our response should be to receive listen not the promise but the person in the promise the king the king who has made an end of the curse for all who trusted him and look sometimes look we live our lives don't we assuming that the curse is won we look around and we think this can't change my loved ones aren't going to receive Christ

[39 : 39] I'm getting sicker and sicker the bills are going up and I'm not suggesting for one moment that God's going to start paying your bills but we can sometimes live our entire lives assuming the curse is just the way things are that's life but it isn't and this is the promise that God makes God says to Isaiah there's going to be a disruption there's going to be a change and the change is coming Jesus looking back has come light has dawned and for those living in Judah when Hezekiah came that would have been a momentous occasion right that would have changed everything in their lives and I guess the question for us is how does the coming of this new king change our lives day to day does it bring joy the promise isn't automatic is it it's offered and we but we have to receive it which means admitting our sin and our need believing

Jesus is God's promised saviour who died and rose and then receiving him as our Lord and saviour as our new king and so as we move and Joe quite rightly said the beginning of advent as we move into this kind of advent season this isn't an opportunity to gaze at a baby in a manger but to submit to a new king who brings justice and righteousness let's pray father we thank you this morning Lord for your word and Lord we want to thank you Lord that you lifted the curse by becoming a curse for us Lord thank you Lord that the curse is no longer on us Lord that we can say Lord that we truly can live in peace and in joy because we have you and Lord so we pray this today Lord and really for the rest of the week Lord that we would have more of you in our lives

Lord that we would be reminded Lord that you have broken the curse Lord and that fact alone would bring joy to us that we can walk with God that we can know God Lord that though we might still struggle in this world that we have an eternal hope that one day we will see you returning bringing true righteousness and true justice to this world as you set up your throne as the prince of peace who will reign forever forever and so Lord we pray Lord for ourselves Lord that we would again just be reminded Lord that you have gone before us Lord you it was you who went to the cross Lord thank you for that Lord and we pray Lord that this message Lord would resound this Christmas Lord we've prayed before Lord and we pray again Lord bring revival to this world Lord it's it's so wonderful to walk into shops and whatever and hear your songs

Lord we pray Lord that it would be more than that Lord that people would come to know you Lord as their new king the one who rules over them Lord not with anger or spite or you know a desire to destroy them Lord but one who reigns over them with mercy and grace and compassion Lord we ask this in Jesus name Amen Amen