Series: Vintage Christmas

**God has given us hope.**

Isaiah 9:1-2 December 11, 2016

1. Pain can lead to darkness.

a. Israel suffered in anguish and contempt.

* V.1 *her who was in anguish … brought into contempt*
  + Defeat in battle and the humiliation of living under foreign rule was a huge blow to Israel.
* V.1 *the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali*
  + The Israelite clan divisions had even been abandoned as Assyria chopped up the land into new boundaries.

b. The suffering was a consequence of repeatedly ignoring God.

* V.1 *he brought into contempt*
  + The pronoun here refers to God. Israel had put her trust in anyone rather than God and the consequences were painful. Some actively supported the revolt against God; others suffered from the foolish decisions of others.
* Isaiah 8:22 *And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.*
  + Israel looked “to the earth” is a way of saying that they looked to people for their answers instead of looking to the heavens and trusting in God.

c. Momentary suffering can spiral into deeper hopelessness.

* V.2 *the people who walked in darkness*
  + While the anguish and contempt were hard, darkness expresses a sense of despair.
* V.2 *those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness*
  + The hopelessness which initially felt like a state Israel was just passing through, eventually became a place where she settled.

Q. The great sin that led to Israel’s downfall was “looking to the earth,” putting their trust in Syria as their deliverer. What are some ways we can ‘look to the earth’ instead of ‘looking to the heavens’ either as individuals, families or as a church?

Q. What’s the difference between pain and darkness? How does darkness compound the pain of trials and suffering?

Q. When you find yourself “walking in darkness” how can you avoid making it your home? What has helped you to turn back to the light?

2. Light can lead to hope.

a. Light shines in the presence and pleasure of God.

* V.2 *The people … have seen a great light; … on them has light shone.*
* Matthew 4:13-14 *And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.*
  + Jesus honoured Zebulun and Naphtali by doing the majority of ministry and the majority of his miracles in the land that had suffered the first and the greatest humiliation under Assyria.
* 1 John 1:5 *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*
* Psalm 36:9 *For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.*

b. Light overcomes meaninglessness.

* Psalm 119:130 *The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.*
* Former-President of Ecuador, Rodrigo Borja (on his solitary confinement): Someone, perhaps taking his life into his hands, had connected electricity to the broken light fixture. "From that moment," explained President Borja, "my imprisonment had meaning because at least I could see."

c. Light overcomes hopelessness.

* Psalm 27:1 *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*
* Desmond Tutu: I'm not optimistic, no. I'm quite different. I'm hopeful. I am a prisoner of hope. In the world, you have very bad people—Hitler, Idi Amin—and they look like they are going to win. All of them—all of them—have bitten the dust.

d. Light overcomes darkness.

* John 1:5 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*
* Hamlet: Marcellus explains that Christmas is a time of such holiness that the rooster crows the whole night through as though it is perpetually dawn, and thus for once, even the powers of darkness are powerless.

e. By faith we can turn to the Light and walk in its warmth.

* John 12:36 *While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.*

Q. Why do you think God chose to send the Messiah to the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali? How might that encourage you when you’re facing desperate circumstances?

Q. Why do you think that God chose light as a metaphor for Himself? What does light point to in God’s character?

Q. Why do you think light gave meaning to Rodrigo Borja’s imprisonment? How can God’s light give meaning to our trials?

Q. What is the difference between hope and optimism?

Q. John 12:36 says that by believing in the light we become sons of light. What does the phrase “sons of light” tell us about our role and identity as Christians?

**Notes:**