

# CHRISTMAS 2017

Week Three | December 10, 2017 | Joy

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone in God's Word reading through Isaiah 9:2–7. Pray that God would bring to life the truths of this text and encourage others with the truth of Scripture.

### THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in this week's guide. Many questions have been included in this lesson for discussion. Determine which questions will work well to encourage, push, and grow your love for God and others in the best way.

### DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together with your group; that the Spirit would make effective the teaching to bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those present.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

By reminding ourselves of Christ's coming, His character, and His future reign, we can experience great joy as believers.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Though the world around us cannot experience both joy and dark circumstances at the same time, God gives believers this ability through the light we have in Christ. We don't have to face dark seasons the way the world does. We have access to deep joy in Christ's coming, His character, and His reign.

### MEDITATE

*"You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you" (Isaiah 9:3).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *Have you ever been in a dark season (medically, relationally, financially, vocationally, or otherwise) waiting to hear news that could change everything? What is it like while you wait in darkness? What emotion comes over you when you hear good, relieving news?*

Q: *What does our culture find its ultimate joy in? Why do you think those things fail us?*

In the movie *Cinderella Man*, Jim Braddock is a washed-up boxer who hurt his hand in the ring, rendering him unable to continue his boxing career. His wife, Mae, is conflicted about the incident. On one hand, he doesn't have to fight anymore or jeopardize getting seriously hurt. On the other, now the family lacks provision. As America enters the Great Depression, despite his many attempts, Jim faces a total inability to provide for his family. This results in his wife and kids living on barely any food in a freezing shack during a cold, New Jersey winter. The odds were stacked against them in every way, and they never thought they could get out of the dark hole of their circumstances.

On a whim, Jim's old manager lets him enter a one-time fight to cover another boxer's last-minute cancellation. Stunning everyone, Jim beats the number two contender in the world. With the prize money, he pays off some of his government debt. Hoping to see one of their own go from rags to riches, the public rallies around him and cries out to see the "Cinderella Man" fight again. Eventually, Jim faces off against Max Baer, the current heavyweight champion.

Mae is horrified by Baer, knowing well his reputation for brutality that has killed two other men in the ring. She fears for her husband's life. She can't bring herself to watch. Instead, she heads home and listens on the radio with a friend, biting her nails and fighting back tears with every word that blares from the little box. Hearing her husband getting beaten to a pulp, Mae is beyond distraught. With starving kids in a freezing house, she thought life couldn't get any darker, but somehow it has.

What if he doesn't overcome Baer? What if he is killed, never to return to his family? What if she is left all alone with the kids in this shack? Will it always be this dark? She paces, more anxious than she's ever been. Finally,

in one of the greatest upsets in boxing history, Jim defeats Baer, but the judges take a moment to ensure the fight was fair. In the longest few seconds of Mae's life, she waits to hear who won. Could he finally be done with all this? Will they have enough money to feed the kids? After what seems like an eternity, the announcer calls out the good news that rushes through her. Jim is the new champion! Not just of the heavyweight ring, but of their family and their future.

At first Mae is shell-shocked, and then when the news sinks in, she tearfully screams with her friend, jumping up and down. She simply can't contain her joy. It overflows into shouts of thanks as her anxiety lifts and life doesn't feel so dark anymore. Jim's alive and he's defeated the enemy! Not only that, he's going to be able to provide for a family that was in total darkness!

In many ways, Mae's experience is the story of God's people in Isaiah 9. They are in total darkness, afraid for their lives, wondering if they will make it. But God promises Someone is coming who will not only defeat their enemies, but will provide for them and give them fatherly care forevermore. Like Mae, they overflow with joy at the news. Not all is lost! Someone is coming to help us! Though we are experiencing horror now, we will survive and be taken care of! This is the joy of Isaiah 9.

An unlikely Champion is soon approaching who will ensure the safety and future of His people who sit in darkness, waiting to see Him overcome the enemy. He is coming in the form of Christ, and in the greatest upset in all of human history, He will overcome sin and death, offering the fruits of His victory to His faith family. As we ponder the great and relieving news of Christ's coming, His character, and His future reign, our anxiety also lifts, and we too can overflow with the same type of joy Mae Braddock felt.

🗣️: *Do you respond to Jesus' victory in the gospel the same way that Mae Braddock did for her husband's? Why or why not?*

🗣️: *Share about the most joyful season of your life. What made it joyful?*

## 🔗 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In this Christmas series, we are learning about four concepts commonly referenced during the holidays: *hope, peace, joy, and love*. So far, we have studied hope and peace. Now we will explore the Biblical idea of joy. Isaiah begins this selected portion of chapter 9 by prophesying that, after undergoing a deeply dark season, the people of God will experience an overflow of joy. As we look at the ways God's people rejoiced in Isaiah's prophesy about a child who would save them, we can also have joy in these three ways:

1. JOY IN CHRIST'S COMING
2. JOY IN CHRIST'S CHARACTER
3. JOY IN CHRIST'S REIGN

## GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's Biblical truth.

## JOY IN CHRIST'S COMING

### ISAIAH 9:2-6A

- Q: *What do the people see in verse 2 that gives them great joy?*
- Q: *What type of person usually has great joy during harvest season? What type of person has great joy in the victory of battle, enjoying its spoils? How does this influence or determine your understanding of verse 3?*
- Q: *Is it hard to miss a great light when you're in a dark room? Why or why not? Why do you think Isaiah likens the child's coming to a "great light"?*

Earlier in the book, Isaiah foresees that Israel will face a season of overwhelming darkness. The Assyrian invasion will result in a severe food shortage (Is. 3:1; 7:23-25). Hunger will drive the people to anger, and the anger will transition to shifting the blame, (rightly) in part to their wicked king, and (wrongly) in part to God (Is. 8:21). Without help from any human authority, the people are left searching for anyone who could alleviate their burdens and desperation. On top of this, they repeatedly reject God's Word through the prophet (8:11, 17, 19-20). In this way, they bring much of their "deep darkness" on themselves. Internally and externally, physically and spiritually, it seems God's people will be lost in a self-appointed darkness forever.

In these bleak circumstances, Isaiah keeps prophesying. Though the people will face this miserable darkness, God plans to give His people a light again! Though their own rebellion has brought them to their sad state of affairs, God

will eventually rescue them. The Lord promises a great light will break through this miserable fog, and they will once again be able to see.

**Q:** *In your own spiritual story, in what ways did you choose darkness by rejecting God at certain times?*

Isaiah describes the people's response to his prophecy as joyous. Through this "great light," God's people will once again rejoice as they look on all God has done for them. First, no longer will they be a small remnant. Instead, God's people will multiply through the power of this "great light," making them strong and mighty. By painting the pictures of a farmer rejoicing at an unprecedented harvest and a successful soldier gazing at the heaping spoils of war, Isaiah helps the people understand what this new era under this "great light" will feel like—an overflow of joy.

Second, the people also have great joy in God's ability to overcome their enemies. Isaiah paints God as their freedom fighter, who will break the bonds of "darkness" that have oppressed them in the past, especially in the form of foreign armies. The boots that come to trample them will be no more, the yoke of burden that seeks to enslave them will be broken, the rod that comes to beat them will be smashed by this "great light" who will one day break forth just as the dawn does in the darkest part of the morning.

As Isaiah moves on, he makes it clear that this "great light" is a person, a child in fact. A Son will be given to Israel to accomplish all this and more for God's people. We now know this light-filled Son to be Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:4–5, 9; 8:12; Lk. 2:32; 2 Cor. 4:6). When thinking of this chosen, coming Son, the people can't help but show overflowing joy. We, being on the other side of Christ's first coming, also find uncontainable joy when we think of the light Jesus became for us when we were trapped in the darkness of sin and death. Let us, like the Israelites, rejoice in this light-filled Child who came to break every bond and rescue us from our self-appointed darkness!

**Q:** *In considering the trampling boots of mighty foreign soldiers, intense hunger, and oppressive enemies, why would the promise of a little child be an unexpected solution to Isaiah's hearers?*

**Q:** *Share about the time you first understood the significance of Jesus Christ's first coming. How would you explain His first coming to a non-believer?*

♀: *Explain why Jesus is still the “great light” our dark world is looking for.*

♀: *How does Isaiah’s message about Jesus’ first coming give you overflowing joy this holiday season, regardless of your present circumstances?*

## JOY IN CHRIST’S CHARACTER

### ☐ ISAIAH 9:6C

♀: *How is it clear in this verse that the child who is coming to rescue the people will eventually grow up beyond the phase of an infant?*

♀: *When you think of Christ the Messiah’s character, have you ever started in the Old Testament, or do you immediately turn to the New Testament? Explain your answer.*

While Israel certainly rejoices in this coming Son who will be a great light in the midst of their darkness, they also rejoice in what this Son will be like. As verse 6 reveals, Isaiah wants the people to know the character of the coming One. To spell it out for them, he gives four names to this Son who is to come, the One we now know as Christ.

The first two names, Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, suggest that this coming Son’s character will include heavenly power and wisdom (Is. 11:2; 1 Cor. 1:24). Divine power is seen in the words “Wonderful” and “Mighty God.” Here, Isaiah is saying that the coming Son will not be an ordinary person. He will be divine in His power and strength! The term “wonderful,” which points to the concept of power, has obvious undertones of deity. Its root word was used many times for God Himself in the Scripture Isaiah had access to (Ex. 15:11; Ps. 77:11, 78:12, 88:12, 89:5). Even later in Isaiah’s book, he attributes “wonders” not to ordinary humans, but to the Lord his God (Is. 25:1). His point is clear. This coming Son would be full of “wonder” and able to do “wonderful” things on the level of God Himself! The people can rejoice that this coming One, who we know as Jesus Christ, will work wonders with the very power of God.

Divine power is also communicated in the term “Mighty God.” Here, if it wasn’t clear already, Isaiah says it point blank—this coming Son will be God! The Israelites had no trouble remembering all the places that God’s character

was referenced as “mighty” (Deut. 3:24, 10:17; Josh. 4:24, 22:22; Ps. 50:1, 71:16), so when they heard this word from Isaiah, they knew exactly what he meant. The child who was coming to rescue them from darkness would be God in the flesh.

To communicate the divine wisdom of the coming Son, the word “Counselor” is used. Throughout the Old Testament, “counsel” and “advice” are common references to wisdom. Isaiah clearly uses this term for God Himself later in his book (Is. 28:29). By calling this coming Son a “Wonderful Counselor,” he is again communicating His divinity. Isaiah is telling Israel they can find great joy in knowing that the character of this coming Son includes not only being divinely powerful, but being divinely wise in using that power.

In a world full of leaders who use their power in the wrong ways, this was news of great joy for them, and also for us today. For believers in today’s time, knowing that the “coming Son” is Christ who died for our sins and gave us eternal life, we can rejoice even more than the Israelites did in Jesus’ character. What they hoped for, we have already experienced. What joy we have in seeing the divine power and wisdom of Jesus Christ displayed in the gospel. While those in Isaiah’s time looked forward to this wise and powerful One, we get to walk with Him daily!

❓: *How does the balance of Jesus’ divine power and wisdom bring you joy in dark times?*

❓: *Why do we often forget to find joy in Christ’s character? With regard to relationships, does our current culture find its primary joy in another person’s character? Why or why not? How has the culture’s value system crept into your ability to find joy in Jesus’ character?*

The next two titles Isaiah gives this coming Son, “Everlasting Father” and “Prince of Peace,” are the character traits the people get to experience after the Son has accomplished all of His work. As their “Everlasting Father,” this coming One will offer benevolent protection over His people for eternity. What great joy this particular character trait brings the people, who at the time had no place to go for compassion, safety, or direction. Soon, the coming One would interrupt their misery and guide them forever with fatherly care.

It’s important to note here that this verse is not equating the roles of Jesus and the heavenly Father within the Trinity. In ancient times, a “father” of a people was simply the leader in charge of an entire family, clan, tribe, or nation. Since everyone in the tribe or nation was ethnically related, it made sense to refer to their head leader as

a father. By calling the coming Son a “father,” Isaiah is simply calling this coming child a good king over all His people. In Christ today, we see our benevolent Protector and the Head of His church, whose members are all related to one another in the family of God through His blood. We, too, can take great joy in the fact that we now get to experience this benevolent care from Christ.

The last title Isaiah gives the coming One is “Prince of Peace.” As we saw in last week’s lesson, the promised Son offers peace with God, joyful news to a nation who is currently at war with Him! After hearing that Assyria is coming to crush them due to their sin, the people desperately needed to hear that, after the destruction, someone would finally come to give them peace with God. In our day, we know that this has happened! We finally have harmony with God through Christ, the child born in Bethlehem, from the line of David, who came to bring peace to those at war with God.

❓ *How does knowing Christ’s character as a benevolent ruler impact your life?*

❓ *In seasons when you don’t run to Christ’s character to find joy, what other sources of joy are you usually running to instead? Why? Do these sources have the same perfect and everlasting character of Christ?*

## JOY IN CHRIST’S REIGN

### ❏ ISAIAH 9:6-7

❓ *Why do you think Isaiah connects this coming Son to the concept of government?*

❓ *How long will the coming Son reign from David’s throne [v. 7]? Why is this joyous news for Israel and also for us?*

❓ *Why is it difficult for American Christians to think beyond what Christ is for a person individually, and move into what He will be for the church, and eventually, the whole world? How or why is the category of a “reigning king” a foreign concept to democratic societies?*



In these verses, Isaiah points the people forward to a time when the divine One will reign forever from David's throne. As he has clarified before, this coming King isn't any ordinary king of Israel or Judah. He's a divine one! In the midst of the people's grim circumstances, Isaiah wants to make sure they know that one day the entire world will be governed and ruled by this coming King who is powerful, wise, just, and compassionate, standing in stark contrast to their current leadership. Every institution and nation will be under His reign, and He will invite even believing Gentiles into His kingdom, extending the reach of His rule to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah's hearers, who want to be joyful in this great news but are perhaps afraid that it's too good to be true, are guaranteed this will happen by God's own passionate intensity, or "zeal" to His covenant people. In other words, Isaiah makes sure to finish this prophecy by saying, "It's not on me to bring about something this miraculous. It's on the Lord Himself, the only One who's zeal and ability can do it!"

On our side of the New Testament, we know exactly how God fulfilled this promise to His people. Jesus Christ is the King who came to not only save individual sinners, but His corporate people. As believers throughout the world share the gospel with others, more and more are added to Jesus' kingdom, and His reign extends farther and farther throughout the earth. One day, when this world is no more and we live in the new heavens and earth, King Jesus will reign, and we will be His glorified, sinless, joyful subjects. This future reality gives us deep joy even in the darkest of seasons because we know Jesus is our truest and best authority, regardless of any type of earthly authority, and He will one day reign over the entire world in benevolence, wisdom, and power.

**Q:** *When you think of how Jesus saved you, do you think of it in individual terms, or as someone who has been added to God's corporate people? Explain your answer.*

**Q:** *How often do you meditate on Jesus' future reign as King over His people? How would this practice offer you more joy in your daily living?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- Q: *List the personal ways Jesus has entered your darkness and offered you great light, overcome your greatest enemies, and broken the bonds that once held you captive. Use this list to help you cultivate joy in all the places Christ has trampled over the enemies that once trampled over you.*
- Q: *Think through the character of Christ as seen in this week's passage. Which do you struggle to find joy in—that He's divinely powerful, that He's all wise, that He's a benevolent protector, that He's a bringer of peace, or that He's perfectly just? How can you cultivate joy in this particular part of Jesus' character this week?*
- Q: *How does knowing Jesus currently rules His church (and will one day rule the world publicly) change the way you engage with the people of God now? How can you help other members of Christ's body find joy in Him?*
- Q: *If Christ came to rule His people and the entire world right now, who would you wish was a member of His people but currently is not? Take time this week to share the joy you have in Christ with that person.*

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- God, thank You for sending Christ as the fulfillment of your promise to save Your people from their darkness. I cry out to You in great joy that You did not leave us in our current state, but came near to us instead!
- Father, remind me often of Jesus' incredible character, and let it create uncontainable joy in my heart.
- Holy Spirit, give a spirit of joy that is undeniable to my church as a whole, as we celebrate all You've done for us.
- Jesus, thank You that one day You'll set all things right again and rule the earth in perfect wisdom and power, offering a joyful eternity for all Your people.

**ISAIAH 9:4** The prophet says that a day approaches when the coming One will break the yoke and rod of the oppressor, “as on the day of Midian.” This refers to the story, well-known in Israel, of Gideon’s improbable victory over Midian by the power of God (Judges 6–7). Just as that victory was unlikely and incredible, so the coming Son would overcome Israel’s greatest enemies (sin and death) through unlikely and incredible circumstances (crucifixion and resurrection), all empowered and orchestrated by God.

**ISAIAH 9:4–5** A common feature of Isaiah’s work is his tendency to use vivid imagery to communicate a simple point. Instead of simply referring to Israel’s enemies, he illustrates them through visual examples like “boots of the trampling warrior” (a foreign army) or “rod” (a harmful power that oppresses the people). Similarly, instead of simply stating that the coming Son would crush Israel’s enemies, he uses visual imagery that communicates brutal war victories like the enemy’s “garments rolled in blood” burning into oblivion. He wants the people to know that their enemies won’t be pacified or exiled. They will be utterly destroyed. For us today, this would be the equivalent of saying that Christ didn’t sweep the enemies of sin and death under the rug. On the contrary. Through His death and resurrection, He burned these enemies to the ground.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the New American Commentary (Isaiah), and the Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Proverbs-Isaiah).*

