

# Joy in the Savior

Isaiah 9:1-7

The daughter of the king is locked away in the impenetrable darkness of a deep and twisting dungeon that no one can navigate except the rats, who – everyone knows – are creatures of darkness and despair. The King's men cannot find the princess, but there is one in the castle who can – a small mouse with enormous ears and a courageous heart, aptly named Desperaux.

## [Image of Desperaux mouse]

**“The world is dark, and light is precious. Come closer, dear reader. I am telling you a story.”** It's the story of a tiny mouse who was born - quite remarkably - with his eyes open. And true to this beginning, little Desperaux Tilling saw things other mice did not see - he was drawn to the light, which led him out into the castle where he heard music. That is how he met the Princess Pea, who greeted him, picked him up and called him by name. **“And then something incredible happened: the mouse fell in love.”**

But now the princess is in trouble - having fallen prey to the plot of a wicked rat bent on revenge. The rat had also been drawn to the light in the castle but his curiosity had a more tragic result. Peering down on the royal family, the rat slipped from a chandelier right into the Queen's soup - startling her to death and causing the king to outlaw rats and soup and kettles, bowls and spoons. And so the Rat Roscuro was banished to the darkness of the dungeon that is the fate of all rats who are, by nature, detestable outcasts. And as creatures in despair often do, Roscuro determined to bring others into the darkness of his pain along with him.

## [Image of Desperaux in the darkness]

And so the desperate and vengeful Rat tricked the serving girl and trapped her, with The Princess, in a secret chamber of the dungeon. Everyone in the Castle searched everywhere for the Princess but she was lost in the kingdom of the rats where, **“They sat together until the candle had burned out... They might be sitting there still, if a mouse had not arrived.”**

But emboldened by his love for the princess, and fortified with some soup from the kitchen, little Desperaux climbed down one step after another into the enveloping gloom of the dungeon, through the stench of rats, which is the smell of despair.

Coming off the final step, he was immediately confronted by the chief and most wicked rat. Consumed by his desire to heighten despair by showing his victim the thing he longs for only to take it from him, this despicable rat willingly led Desperaux straight to the princess. The evil rat wanted to eat the mouse **“seasoned with hope and tears... and thwarted love.”**

The brave mouse was reunited with the lost Princess and all the rats in the dungeon were gathered around hungry for the great conclusion.

## [Image of rat gathering]

**“Princess!” Desperaux shouted. “Princess, I have come to save you.”** The Princess Pea heard her name. She looked up. “Desperaux,” she whispered. And then she shouted it, **“Desperaux!” Reader, nothing is sweeter in this sad world than the sound of someone you love calling your name. Nothing. For Desperaux, the sound was worth everything: his lost tail, his trip to the dungeon, and back out of it and back into it again. He ran toward the Princess.**

**[Image of Desperaux with needle]**

Roscuro the Rat, “baring his teeth, blocked the mouse’s way. The princess cried, “Oh no, rat, please. Don’t hurt him. He is my friend.” And in that moment a familiar but long lost smell wafted into the dungeon - it was the smell of outlawed soup. And for Roscuro, **“the smell of soup crashed through his soul like a great wave, bringing with it the memory of light, the chandelier, the music, the laughter, everything, all the things that were not, would never, could never be available to him as a rat.”**

And then the Princess, whose heart was filled with sorrow, kindness and empathy, told Desperaux, her knight with a shining needle, not to kill the rat. Instead, the Princess invited Roscuro the Rat, whose heart had broken and had mended with a twist in it; she invited a RAT to come upstairs and join the royal family for some SOUP. And he did, dear reader. ***The rat led the Princess, the serving girl and the mouse back up the stairs***, out of the darkness and despair of the dungeon and into the light, ***so they could share some soup***. (I think we all know what we’re having for lunch today, right? There is no other book I know to make you crave soup so much as the Tale of Desperaux.)

Now, to bring us back to Isaiah’s prophecy. Listen to the end of chapter 8:21-22 and how the nation of Israel was like the Princess Pea in the dungeon with her candle about to go out.

***“They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.”*** Isaiah 8:21-22

**Like Roscuro the Rat, the children of God were locked away in a dark dungeon of despair - furious and vengeful.** Separated from their King and their Lord, thrust out of his presence, all hope seemed lost as they groped around in fearful gloom. But then a single ray of light comes piercing through the darkness, the fragrance of soup comes like a distant memory back into their world bringing the tiniest bit of hope - a longing to be back in the castle, back with the King, in the world of light and music, of joy and freedom and peace. Listen again to Isaiah 9:2

***“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”*** Isaiah 9:2

Suddenly, for a nation trapped in its own failure, anger and bitterness, there is a glimmer of hope. A ray of light breaks through into the twisting dungeon.

***“There will be no gloom for her who was in anguish... for to us a child is born, to us a son is given.”*** Isaiah 9:1,6

Just as a tiny mouse was an unlikely - even and impossible hero. So the promise through Isaiah is of an impossible hope. A helpless child. A tiny baby would be the Savior of the world.

Isaiah was speaking God's Word in the days when the nation was in decline, under nearly constant threat of conquest for generation after generation. And many prophets, including Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied exile. Judgment was coming in the might empires of Assyria and Babylon.

But here is God's promise: after the darkness of the exile, after suffering under a yoke of oppression for 70 years, a ray of light would break through their darkness. Their shame would be replaced with honor, their suffering with joy. ***"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."*** Initially this promise was fulfilled in Nehemiah and Ezra when the people returned to Jerusalem and started to rebuild after the exile.

But the ultimate fulfillment of this promise of light was in the birth, life and teachings of Jesus. After 400 years of silence from God,

***"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** John 1:14

What does light give you in a dark place? Sitting in a dungeon, ***what would a ray of light mean to you?***

- Sight, instead of blindness;
- perspective on where you are in place of disorientation;
- hope instead of despair;
- the prospect of joy in place of depression.

Here is the ray of light that God used Isaiah to shine into the darkness of Jerusalem - ***the light of hope.***

We see three hope-filled promises in this passage - the promise of joy, the promise of freedom and the promise of peace. Listen, dear reader, and let this true story make light in *your* soul.

First: **the promise of JOY.** Look at v. 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."*** Isaiah 9:3

God promised to multiply the nation - to give them increase in terms of biological growth and military expansion. This would increase their joy! In place of the defeat, deportation and depopulation of the exile, there will be the joy of growth through children and grandchildren.

There will also be joy in abundant harvests. Instead of drought and famine, the land will be fruitful and yield plenty to eat and to share and to celebrate. Growth, harvest, victory – replacing defeat, drought and deportation. These are the tangible blessings God promises will bring Joy – a bright beam of light that will break through the darkness and despair of coming judgment.

Then look at v. 4 for **the promise of FREEDOM:**

***"For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian."* Isaiah 9:4**

The exile into Assyria and then Babylon are pictured as a heavy yoke – something two oxen were connected to so they could plow up fields. It represented bondage, slavery, hard work. Ancient kings would boast of how heavy the yoke was they were able to impose on the nations they conquered - demanded tribute, taxes and slave labor.

But here the yoke is shattered by the LORD – not merely lightened or even removed, but utterly destroyed, broken to pieces. The comparison is to the day of Midian's defeat. You remember ***the story of Gideon***? A timid young man, surrounded by idolatry. He defied the corruption of his town by hitching his father's bull to the altar to Ba'al – pulling it down along with the Asherah pole next to it. (Of course, he did this at night out of fear of his father and the rest of the town - but still, he stepped out in faith to tear down the altar of Ba'al).

Then the Lord called him to take on the entire army of the Midianites – which numbered in the tens of thousands, possibly over 100,000, Gideon coming with only 300 men. But they surrounded the great Midianite army, smashed their glass jars, blew their trumpets and waved their torches, shouting, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" And the Midianites were defeated in a confused rout where they turned on one another in the darkness and confusion of what they thought was a massive Israelite assault.

So through Gideon - a very unlikely hero, like Desperaux - the Lord rescued Israel from the oppression they had endured under Midian for seven years (Judges 7:1-3) – the yoke of oppression was shattered in a single day.

From the darkness of defeat and despair for God's people, one day there will be joy and freedom and third, **the promise of PEACE**. V. 5:

***"For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire."* Isaiah 9:5**

Take in this vision of the final termination of violence and war. The picture here is of boots and bloody garments piled up to be burned. It is clear that if these items are cast aside, so too would be the weapons of war – the swords, spears, chariots and catapults. No longer needed, they would be burned up for a little heat from a fire.

Throughout the history of Israel, ***war had been a constant threat and often a reality***. All the way back to when **Abraham** had to rescue his nephew Lot; in the time of the conquest under **Joshua**; the following days of the **Judges** and all through the times of the **Kings** - right up to these days of **Isaiah**, the nation of Israel was almost always under threat of war.

Think of what this promise of peace would have meant to a Jewish mother with teenage boys who might be sent away to battle, most likely not to return. Instead of having boots and cloaks and swords and shields lined up for young men to be outfitted to march off to war, the bloody trophies of war will be piled up and burned - never to be used again!

In our days of increasing darkness and uncertainty - with threats of random violence and organized terror; with severe persecution of Christians increasing in parts of the world... into the darkness of this world and the fears of our hearts ***God shines the light of hope in these***

**promises** - the promise of Joy in the blessings God provides; the promise of Freedom from oppression and injustice and the promise of a PEACE that will end all wars, consuming the articles of war as fuel for the fire.

Then we come to verse 6: ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.”***

This joy and freedom and peace God promises will come in a very unusual and unexpected way. Like the tiny mouse who stepped into the dungeon to save Princess Pea, like a fearful young man named Gideon facing the unstoppable army of Midian, like a shepherd boy named David standing up to Goliath the giant, there is **a very unlikely hero** foretold in Isaiah 9:6. A child.

**A helpless child is the hope of the world.** Everything depends on this child. What a mystery that prophecy must have been! How can a child bring anyone peace and freedom and joy?

Isaiah has already used **the imagery of children** in his prophecy – but primarily as a sign of judgment. Chapter 3 says,

***“See now, the Lord is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support... I will make boys their officials; mere children will govern them.”*** Isaiah 3:1-2,4

In chapter 7, when King Ahaz refused to ask God for a sign to confirm his promise of deliverance,

***“The LORD himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*** Isaiah 7:14

So while children have been a sign of judgment for disobedient Israel and an unbelieving king, a child – a specific child – is a beautiful symbol of hope, whose very name means “God with us.” This is the One who will provide peace and freedom and joy for God’s people.

***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. 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.”*** Isaiah 9:6-7

**Everything depends on this child** who is clearly a king from the line of David. But this passage is obviously describing ***much more than a human king***, like Hezekiah, who would soon assume the throne in Jerusalem. The titles here make that plain: wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace. No king was ever called ***“Mighty God,”*** and even if some ancient kings claimed fatherhood over their realm, none were everlasting in that role. There are ***three claims to eternity*** in this passage and the clear divinity expressed in the title “mighty God.” Add that to the “Immanuel” of chapter 7, which means ***“God with us,”*** and **this cannot be a merely human child-king.**

Isaiah and the people in the kingdom of Judah must have struggled to hold on to this in faith. ***How could a newborn baby bring joy and blessing to the nation?*** How could a baby shatter the yoke of oppression, providing freedom from the powerful nation of Assyria? How

could this baby be called Mighty God and reign on David's throne FOREVER? How can he deliver on the promise of perfect righteousness and eternal peace?

We know that all of God's promises find their yes and amen in Christ. Look with me now at how Jesus' birth, death and future return directly and beautifully fulfill each of these promises.

Look back at verses 2-3 to see how the promise of joy is specifically fulfilled in **Jesus' birth as the child-Savior.**

***"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. 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."*** Isaiah 9:2

Doesn't this exactly describe what happened with **the shepherds**? They were literally sitting on a hillside in the darkness of night when a blindingly great light appeared to them and they celebrated with great joy the good news the angels announced to them. Don't you wonder if some or all of these shepherds became followers of Jesus and were a part of the explosive growth of the early church so the promise of enlarging and ***multiplying the nation*** would also have applied to them and filled them with spiritual joy - as those who rejoice at the harvest, but now the harvest is of the souls of people who were under the darkness of the shadow of death?!?

Yes, here is the fulfillment of the joy promised through Isaiah in the child who was born. The one who said, ***"Let there be light"*** and spoke the universe into existence to begin with is the one who came as the light of the world. The ***Almighty Creator*** of the world humbled himself to be born as a helpless child so that a world lost in darkness could see the light of life! The ***infinite wisdom*** of God was embodied in weakness. The ***eternal glory*** of the Son of God was wrapped in simple clothes to rest in a Bethlehem manger. The angelic hosts had their little shout out but then the Silent Night prevailed and the child-Savior disappeared into the obscurity of Nazareth for around thirty years.

Yes, the promise of joy was beautifully and wonderfully fulfilled in the birth of Jesus the Child-Savior. Secondly, the promise of freedom was fulfilled in **the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Conquering King.** v. 4

***"For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian."*** Isaiah 9:4

What was the yoke of burden for the nation of Israel? Physically it was Assyria and then Babylon. Later it was the Medes and Persians and then Rome. The final, physical fulfillment of this promise still awaits the return of Christ we will look at next. But spiritually, there are two freedoms Jesus won for us through his death and resurrection, two enemies he conquered.

The first was the heavy yoke or **burden of the law of Moses**. As we saw last week, the Law cannot show mercy, it can only reveal sin and how far we fall short of God's glory. The Law beats people down with guilt over their sin. And it wears people down with the weight of its obligations.

**The yoke of the law**, the heavy burden none of us could ever carry, Jesus has shattered by fulfilling it perfectly. He carried the full weight of the Law's obligations, all the way to the cross,



where He endured the full punishment for all of our guilt. In this way broke the heavy yoke of the Law.

No longer does that heavy burden weigh on our shoulders, but Jesus invites all who will come to him to find rest for their souls by working in tandem with Him and walking in the new law of the Spirit of life where the ***“yoke is easy and the burden is light.”***

So Jesus gives us freedom from the heavy burden of the law - the slavery that held us in prison, awaiting our final judgment. He also gives us freedom from our **slavery to the law of sin**. ***The Law of Moses outside of us shines light onto the Law of Sin inside of us.*** This is the natural condition of every human heart apart from Christ - they are dead in their sins; they are spiritually blind to their wretched and wicked condition; they are darkened in their minds and hardened in their hearts, trapped in a deadly whirlpool of depravity and evil. This is the Law that governs the hearts of all people who do not belong to Christ: the Law of Sin and Death.

As we travelled over the thanksgiving break, covering around 3,000 miles in the trek to and from Milwaukee, we visited four Christian universities as we pray through where to send our oldest son next year. At Toccoa Falls we met with Dr. Don Williams, a professor of English Literature who is even more of a Tolkien and Lewis nerd than I am - which is saying something. He literally greeted us in Elvish (and then went on in Klingon, which is another level altogether).

Dr. Williams shared some of the background to the New Testament in Greek mythology. Every god in the Greek pantheon would sometimes answer prayer, or at least appear to. The sun might shine, a baby might be born, crops might be good, wars might be won. But there was one god who never, ever answered prayer: **Hades, the master of death**. A central theme in all of Greek mythology is the inevitability and finality of death.

One story related to Hades is especially relevant. ***Orpheus was the greatest musician*** in history, having been trained by Apollo himself. His music was so powerful and inspiring that after his wife tragically died, Orpheus went to Hades and played such beautiful music for him that Hades agreed to make one single exception to his consistent and universal policy. He would release Orpheus' wife back to him - BUT - he could not look back until they were back in the realm of light. Of course - as in all Greek mythology - in his very last step, as they are about to emerge back into the world of life and light, his wife stumbled and Orpheus tragically reached back to catch her - only to watch her disappear into mist in his arms, captive again to the unassailable realm of death and Hades.

***There was no hero who had ever faced Hades and won.*** No hero, that is, until Jesus. Jesus is the only one who ever died - falling into the clutches of the unassailable Hades - and then walked right back into life. And not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but he broke the chains of sin and death forever. He dethroned Hades and proved him powerless next to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Then Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth was given, commissioned his followers to go forward with His gospel to assail the very gates of hell that could not prevail against them.

Yes, Jesus is not only the Child-Savior who brings us fullness of joy, he is also the the Conquering King who gives us freedom from sin and death and the heavy burden of the law.

Finally, Jesus fulfilled the promise of peace as the **Mighty God who rules in righteousness over all things** and will one day soon return to restore all things in Himself. v. 5

***"For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder."*** Isaiah 9:5

Here is the main point of this whole passage - **Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, reigns over all things**. The promise here is of a peace he will bring that will end all wars forever. The government of Israel is in view here but verse 7 says, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." When Jesus was born, the kingdom of heaven broke in to earth. When Jesus started preaching he announced, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." When he died on the cross and rose again, his spiritual reign began as the Savior who paid for sin and the King who conquered death.

Since his ascension into heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah 9:7 has been continually fulfilled as "the increase of his government and peace" still know no end. As believers pray "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and this prayer is answered by people hearing the gospel and surrendering their lives to Jesus in faith the spiritual reign of Jesus continues to expand in the hearts of all who know and love Jesus.

Jesus' reign started with his resurrection and ascension, but its final and complete consummation will take place when Jesus comes back. That is when it will be physically true everywhere that Jesus will "establish his kingdom and uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time forth and forevermore."

***Yet even now Jesus is seated at the right hand of God***, exercising his rule over all things which he sustains through the word of his power. When you think about the Lordship of Christ it's not a question of whether Jesus reigns over you - he is your king just as he is the true king of every person on this planet and every particle in the universe. Jesus does reign over all things - the question is whether you have surrendered willingly and joyfully to his rule or whether you will be forced to surrender when he returns.

**Jesus reigns over all things. Have you surrendered your life to Him?**

Philippians 2 assures us that every knee will bow before Jesus Christ and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. Some will bow as joyful servants before their King. Others will bow as defeated enemies. But everyone will bow. Have you surrendered your life to King Jesus - now, while you can do so willingly and become His servant?

Since we started today in a dungeon, let us finish in a prison with a young preacher named **John Bunyan**. Bunyan lived in the 1600s in England, a time of political upheaval in which Oliver Cromwell fought for freedom of religion but as soon as he died that freedom was taken away and preachers like Bunyan were thrown in prison.

Like many even today, Bunyan came to Christ through a woman. His wife was a believer and brought into their marriage a simple book called, *Man's Pathway to Heaven*. Bunyan, through reading this book, and discussing the gospel with his wife and his pastor, made a commitment to Christ. But he struggled to find assurance of his salvation.



**“A whole flood of blasphemies, both against, God, Christ, and the Scriptures were poured upon my spirit, to my great confusion and astonishment... My heart was at times exceeding hard. If I would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, I could not shed one...”** When tempted to renounce Christ, he writes, **“I felt my heart freely consent thereto. Oh, the diligence of Satan; of the desperateness of man’s heart.”** For two years, he felt covered by the doom of condemnation. **“I feared that this wicked sin of mine might be that sin unpardonable... despair was swallowing me up.”**

What was **the breakthrough moment** for this man who would become one of the most powerful preachers of his day? For this man who would write from a prison cell *The Pilgrim’s Progress* which the Lord has used more than any other book except the Bible to convert sinners and encourage believers? Listen to Bunyan:

**“One day as I was passing into a field... this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God’s right hand; there I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he lacks my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, ‘The same yesterday, today, and forever.’”**

**“Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away... now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God.”** (Piper, Hidden Smile, pp. 51-52).

The light that broke through into the darkness of Bunyan’s despair was ***the light of Jesus Christ in His perfect righteousness***. Bunyan knew his own rat-like unworthiness and was stunned to be invited into the light of the King’s house to share some soup. Even after accepting the invitation, Bunyan struggled to feel worthy to be upstairs in the light until he realized that “my righteousness is in heaven,” not in himself.

Oh brother, sister, friend. Have you seen that bright light of hope? Your righteousness is in HEAVEN. Your good attitude and efforts do not improve your righteous standing nor do your bad attitude and failures reduce your righteous standing. If you belong to Jesus by faith then HIS righteousness is YOURS.

The One who fulfilled the promise of Joy in his birth, the promise of freedom in his death and resurrection and the promise of peace in his soon return - HE is the hope of the world. Let Him lead you from the dark dungeon of despair up into the warmth and light of His eternal castle - where, I assure you, there will be plenty of soup.

Let’s pray.