

We just finished a series on the Sovereignty of God.....and in that series we talked a great deal about God's plan and overall mission for mankind. Throughout Scripture God is revealing, foretelling, and accomplishing His mission on earth. Every moment ever recorded in history has been ordained and accomplished under the Sovereign Authority of God.

But in that series we spoke about the difference between God's Perspective and Man's Perspective. God knows the outcome of everything....and we don't. God often speaks of future events as if they are done and yet we have not yet experienced them.

When God looks at us, it is as if He is watching a rerun. He knows the outcome. It is certain. And that is exactly how many of us look at the Christmas Story. We think that we know the outcome and in many ways we do.

Picking up the Bible at Christmas can feel like watching Frosty the Snowman...or Charley Brown Christmas.....You know the story...you know the outcome....It is enjoyable...it makes you feel warm and fuzzy...it is tradition and it feels good....

But you don't sit stunned in wonder when you see Frosty head for the North Pole....because this is a rerun for you. Sure there was a time when it was new and exciting and fresh...but now you can almost mouth, "No money, No ticket!" as it is said.

So many of us read the Bible story of the arrival of Jesus....and as much as we want to be blown away with wonder...we realize that this is a rerun for us...and worse...we have access to most of the sequel.

We read about those that first Christmas Morning and speak of their excitement, joy and wonder....and honestly we don't really connect with it....because it is like we are watching a rerun. The birth of Jesus is cool but what He does when He is here is even cooler. It is hard for us to get to amped up about His arrival when we have read about and know about His incredible departure.

So it is easy for us....each Christmas...to go into autopilot. To read the story....Sing the Songs.....attend the services.....and miss in many ways the wonder....because we are watching a rerun. The same rerun we watched last year...and the year before...and the year before that.

But what if we could get Christmas Amnesia? What if we could go back and experience Christmas the way they did...on that first morning. That is what I am going to challenge you to do today. To go back and try to put yourself in the First Century...knowing only what they knew....experiencing the birth of this God child the way they did.

I want you to imagine that you know nothing about the Messiah. That you are living in the times of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasion of the Holy Land. It is about 600 BC. Not too different from our times today.

The 12 Tribes of Israel have rejected God. They have turned away. God's Wrath for their many sins is being delivered to them...in the form of the dissolution of life as they know it.

A hundred years ago or so, there had been a Northern Kingdom...10 Tribes of Israel....now gone...no really gone...we have no idea where they are. The Assyrians took them all to foreign lands.....10 tribes of Israel....people who are a covenant people with God....nowhere to be found....at least by man.... and now our Northern neighbors are the Assyrians. It was brutal, ugly, and still left scars on many. Now the prophets were saying that the same thing was going to happen in the South...in Judea...in Jerusalem.

Only this time....the Babylonians are on our borders. They are ruthless, godless, and blood thirsty. God's wrath is coming upon us. We know our nation has turned away from God. We know a just and righteous God can't ignore what we have done. But God has always blessed us....His city is Jerusalem...We are His people....but we are an unrepentant stiff necked people. Has God given up on us? Have we gone too far this time? Has God's patience run out?

The prophets speak of one day.....one day in the future...God will save a Remnant. But that means right now...in this place....God's wrath is coming.

Isaiah 11:10–12 (ESV) 10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. 11 In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. 12 He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

God will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners? Wait a minute...that is us? We are about to be destroyed and dispersed.

Then there are those who say God will include the Gentiles amongst "His People" We are being replaced...

God also has made a promise....a promise of a deliverer....Someone who will save us....Someone who will set up an everlasting peace....Who will rule Israel as King David did.

He is the promised One...the Messiah. But the prophets have given clues.

He would be a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He would be from the Tribe of Judah....Good thing...it is the only tribe really left.

He will be an heir to King David's throne and ...His throne will be an everlasting one and it will be anointed by God.

The Messiah will spend a season in Egypt....but He will be called a Nazarene. The prophets say He would be preceded by Elijah...and a forerunner would announce his coming arrival.

He would save us from our sins....we have plenty of that around here....But now the Prophet Isaiah is revealing even more about this Messiah...This Savior.

It is as if...God is pouring out hope through Isaiah because we have so little of it. We are about to be invaded and destroyed....Yet God promises us...that one day...one day that we may never see....Messiah will Come.

But some of what Isaiah says is more confusing....

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV) 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

This makes not sense..It is impossible on so many levels. First, A virgin can't get pregnant much less become a mother. Conceive and bear a Son....no...not possible. Everyone knows how you get pregnant and virgins don't get pregnant. And pregnant women and Moms are no longer virgins. Second His name....means God with us....God can't be with us...look around our sins are filthy. This is the last place God would come.

God can't be with us...and be born a son. God is not human...He is Holy...He is in Heaven...and If God somehow came to earth....He would light up the skies, flood us with His Majesty...bringing Earthquakes and dark clouds....just like He did on Mt Sinai.

There is no way....God would come here as a baby. A child is born and now God is with us? Maybe this child would be surrounded by God's angels...His army.

But it could just be that Isaiah is just losing it.....He makes some even more crazy claims about Messiah.

He would be a light to the....get this...Gentiles. The pagans. Light means understanding....revelation...awareness...What does our God has to do with pagans. He destroys them....women..children...and armies...wiped me out of our promised land. Messiah is going to reveal Himself to the Pagans....yeah right.

Isaiah says that He will be called a nazarene and he would also bring light to Galilee...that is way up in what used to be the Northern Kingdom...Messiah would be in Jerusalem...If God was with us...He would be in His city. The same place David ruled from.

Every time Isaiah opens his mouth He makes less and less sense. This Messiah he says....

Will be silent before His accusers....What Accusers? Who could possibly accuse Messiah of anything? He will be King...Sovereign King...Accusers of the King are killed...and no King let's someone accuse them of anything and live through it...much less remain silent while doing so.

Isaiah says that this silent Messiah would be spit upon and struck! Spit on the King? Strike the King? Not just the King but the eternal anointed King? The One sent by God...perhaps surrounded by God's army....Spit upon...struck...Isaiah...this can't be true.

Isaiah says He will be killed with criminals....not just killed but stretched out somehow in torture....and then buried with the rich....what?

What kind of man...what kind of King...what Kind of Eternal Messiah...gets killed and buried?

Maybe this Messiah stuff is just a government propaganda campaign to keep us calm and hopeful while the Babylonians destroy us.

One thing is for sure. If a virgin conceived, came birth to a baby, a baby who will spend time in Egypt, come from Galilee and was called a Nazarene.....Forget about the spitting, dying and burying...Just a virgin giving birth would be enough to convince the World that He is Messiah.

I mean seriously...if a virgin truly conceived and gave birth...that would be all the proof we ever needed. Who could argue against that?

But Isaiah said one thing...that made everyone wonder about his sanity....maybe he had finally cracked under the pressure....He said God told Him....

Isaiah 53:9–10 (ESV) 10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief;

Sovereign God crushes His own Messiah....no way.

The Jewish people had tons of prophecies about the coming Messiah. The problem was that most of them made no sense. As the time of Messiah's arrival came closer...they learned more...and anticipation was peaking. Much like we know Jesus' return to earth is imminent...The knew Messiah would be here soon.

The prophets foretold of Messiah's arrival at the Temple on a very specific day...A specific day, time and year where Messiah would present Himself to the Temple in Jerusalem....oh yeah...and this King on that day would ride into Jerusalem...on get this ...a donkey. The King of the World...on a donkey..But still... That day was marked on their calendar. It was only a few decades away.

The Prophet Micah said that he would be born...there it is again...a baby...in Bethlehem. And Jeremiah said young children would be massacred there...Crazy right?

The Psalmists have now confused us even more....They said..the Jewish King..our Messiah...Our Savior would be rejected by His people...us. They said He would be called the Son of God...we call Him the Son of God...and then reject Him? Our Messiah? Our Savior?

The Psalmists say children will praise him and adults will betray Him. He will be falsely accused....hated without cause...His hands and feet will be pierced...what does that mean? Guards will gamble for his clothes? All while this Messiah is praying for His enemies?

The Psalmists make the craziest claims...musicians...sometimes out there...they say this Messiah will resurrect from the dead...ascend to heaven...and sit at the right hand of God.

Things are crazy. The Babylonians are going to destroy us...The Northern 12 tribes are gone and we are next. All this stuff about the Messiah seems crazy. It seems everyone....including the prophets...and Isaiah.. have gone mad...God better come soon...before there is nothing left.

Galatians 4:3–12 (ESV) 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

In the fullness of time.....I love that....It is a pregnant moment...a moment so full that you know something new must happen. A moment that could not wait one second longer or come one second earlier. A time ordained by God before humans even kept track of time.

That is where everyone was on that first Christmas day. God had been silent for 400 years...no prophecies...no revelations...just silence. Had God given up on them? Had He forgotten His promise...His Covenant with them....had they finally gone too far? Did God harden their hearts too?

God promised He would not flood the world again...but would He let us self-destruct...implode...destroy ourselves? 400 years of Spiritual darkness...God was with us...but now? Crickets...haven't seen or heard a word. Would Messiah still come? Thus far each day brings a bit more doubt. All we can do is trust God, trust His promises and claim His truth. Remember what Isaiah told us.

Isaiah 9:1 (ESV) 1 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 the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

Those are two of the Northern Tribes of Israel...Zebulun and Naphtali....they were destroyed, animalized by the Assyrians...they were in anguish...they got the brunt of the Assyrian assault...almost all of them were tortured and killed. God's wrath was all over them.

We honestly don't know where they are now...if a remnant survived or not....no doubt God had scorched their land....but Isaiah says a day is coming when that land will be glorious...blessed.... of all places...Galilee

Galilee of the Nations....sometimes called upper Galilee. It was called Galilee of the nations or Galilee of the Gentiles. It was a derogatory term...similar to Samaria....the extreme northern part of Galilee was surrounded by Gentile nations. The area was full of hills and caverns and thus the gentiles had never really been fully driven out.

Some stayed and intermarried, intermingled and brought pagan practices to Northern Galilee.

They were far from Jerusalem, and, consequently, the influence of religion may be supposed to have been less felt among them than among the other Jews. The true religion was, in a great measure, lost upon them, and ignorance and superstition took its place. Hence, in the New Testament, they are spoken of as almost proverbially rude and ignorant.

Isaiah 9:2 (ESV) 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

That is us....We have been walking in Spiritual darkness for 400 years. If Messiah is coming He must come soon. We have walked in darkness but our nation has been in the land of deep darkness....we need a light of hope at the end of this horrible darkness. Isaiah promises a light is coming.

While the entire Southern Kingdom was clearly walking in darkness, at the time of Isaiah's writing...Galilee of the Nations was the epitome of the darkest dark. The inhabitants of the region of Galilee. They were far from the capital, and from the temple; they had few religious privileges; they were intermingled with the heathen, and were comparatively rude and uncultivated in their manners and in their language.

In addition, for over one hundred years...those in Southern Judah believed that God had protected them and was punishing the Northern Kingdom of Israel because of these pagan practices. The Assyrians were used by God to bring His wrath on Galilee of the Nations.

Much like today, In their arrogance, they don't see that God's wrath will soon come to Judah in the South....for the same reasons....at the hands of the Babylonians.

This disdain for the North and Galilee would carry on 500 years later in Jesus' day.

John 1:46 (ESV) 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Mark 14:70 (ESV) 70 But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

Light is not only an emblem of knowledge in the Scriptures, but of joy, rejoicing, and deliverance. It stands opposed to moral darkness, and to times of judgment and calamity.

It is unfortunate in my view of the translation chosen for this concept of deep darkness. The same word is used in Psalm 23. It is salmawet....In David's psalm it was translated, shadow of death.....Though I walk through the valley of Salmawet...shadow of death...I will fear no evil.

This verse could just as correctly read.....The people who walked in the Shadow of Death have seen a great light. It has a richness to it that I think is missed in deep darkness. I see that oppressive shadow of death come over people every day....and I have seen many who seem to see something....a light....right before they die.

In the same way...The Messiah comes to those walking in darkness just desperate to see a light...some hope of the horizon of their gloomy life.

Matthew would later reference these words of Isaiah...In doing so...He links the two passages...using Zebulun and Naphtali again....to draw our attention....Jesus was going to Capernaum...To Galilee of the Nations....To reach the nations...He is the light that Isaiah spoke of. Also notice, that Matthew more correctly repeats Isaiah's words and deep darkness has been replaced with shadow of death.

Matthew 4:12–17 (ESV) 12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Learning to study linked verses is very important. Jewish writers used repetitive phrases...unusual wording...that would be known by all to draw attention to other verses.

Shadow of Death and Zebulun and Naphtali link Isaiah 9, with Matthew 4 and Psalm 23. It is an invitation to dig for Gold and God.

Perhaps some homework for us. The darkness of Isaiah's day, the darkness of David's valley and the darkness that Jesus stepped into that Christmas morning when the fullness of time had come...were all the same....and so was the light..the hope...and the promise of God. Matthew quoting Isaiah, Isaiah and David all used the same Hebrew word for Shadow of Death.....John would uses the same concept...but switch to the Greek.

John 1:4–5 (ESV) 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

These links in Scripture tell me that this book was written and ordained by God.

The theme of Jesus being God's Light continues all the way through Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Genesis 1:1–4 (ESV) 1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.

Revelation 21:22–25 (ESV) 22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.

One consistent theme in Scripture is God bringing His light into darkness in the very first word spoken in creation.....and in the end....His light shines and there is no darkness ever again. Jesus the Light of the World stepped into the Spiritual darkness that Christmas morning....and began the journey of replacing darkness with Himself.

And notice something here that could be missed....This is not a light that they walked into...It is not a light that covered the area that they were in....Notice how personal this is.....ON THEM has light shone.

This light is a headlight not a helicopter search light. It is for them...personally.....others may still walk in darkness...but to those who understand....the light of hope has shown on them....personally. How personal is this light? Listen to Paul....

Ephesians 5:6–14 (ESV) 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

That quote is from Isaiah too....

Isaiah 60:1–3 (ESV) 1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. 3 And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Notice how personal this light is....Lord will arise upon you...His glory will be seen upon you...These are second person singular pronouns in Hebrew.....not you collectively...you individually. Jesus's light is shone upon each of us individually. It is that personal.

Isaiah 9:3 (ESV) 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. 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.

What nation is this? Certainly not ours....we don't have any joy TO increase. We have no spoil. We are spoiled, but have no spoil. Spoil comes to the victors....

But the rejoicing that occurs is similar to the rejoicing of two events....First, The Harvest...the greatest most joyful celebration each year....and Second, like the celebration that occurred in Midian when God used Gideon to deliver and give victory to the Israelites....It would be the same as saying...You know the Joy like in Time Square on the Day World War II ended and we had won.

The reader sees the pattern for the Lord's breaking of yoke, bar, and rod—symbols of oppression—on behalf of his people. Gideon did not win his battle by means of military superiority but "by the miraculous intervention of Yahweh"

Isaiah 9:5 (ESV) 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.

It was customary to burn the sandals of the defeated warriors and to use their bloody clothes as fuel for the victory fire.

Peace...Victory....No more burden...No more yoke...This is a victory celebration....How can this happen? What is going to change? Light in darkness, victory? God what is happening?

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV) 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;

That is Messiah! Messiah IS coming! A Child....that child...the one we are waiting for....He is coming to our darkness. He is the light at the end of this dark tunnel. He will restore the scorched land..He will bring joy to the people...He will bring us victory and the spoil...Just like in the days of Gidian.

A child is born....a Son is given....A gift...a gift from God....Is Messiah God's Son? Is that the Son? Is He the gift?

The arrival of God on earth came with more of a wimper than a trumpet. Unless you were the Shepherds and saw the angelic choir. But today, looking back, we miss what really caused the excitement that early first Christmas morning.

The reason His arrival was good news of great joy...is that....after centuries of silence....after darkness that just kept getting darker....God had kept His promise. God had not forgotten about His people. God had stepped into His creation...God was with them...Immanuel....but God was also WITH THEM...for them....Still loving, caring and faithful.

The arrival of Jesus that morning told the world....particularly the Jewish World at that time.....that God was really going to set things right. He would restore His remnant, He would keep His promise to Abraham, and He would....once again....like in the desert with Moses....dwell with His people.

To the Jewish people at the time of His birth....they had no idea what Jesus would do.....The prophets had spoken, but they didn't make a lot of sense....All they knew.....all that they needed to know...was that God was faithful, the Messiah was here, and the future once again had the bright light of hope.

Before Jesus spoke His first word, God had spoken to the world by His arrival. He shall be called Immanuel...because GOD REALLY IS WITH US emotionally, physically, and most of all Spiritually.

We miss the understanding of Christmas because we know the outcome. Every year we watch the rerun in our heads. But for those seeing God's Promise as it was occurring....To those who understood the Significance....Jesus' arrival brought about the same emotions....that His return would have for us.

Imagine the day in our future with Jesus returns. Think about the emotions that will stir in all the believers. After years of hearing people denounce our God....after years of hearing people say He doesn't exist....After years of hearing people defame Him and chastise us....After years of hearing people deny His truth, His existence, and His sovereignty.....After years of hearing churches don't matter, praying is forbidden, and teaching His truth is criminal..... Jesus returns to save us....Just as He had promised.

I think we will all be running around hugging, dancing, worshiping....and telling each other....IT IS TRUE...I knew it! God is faithful....He does keep His promises....He does Love us. All the trials, all the struggles, all the ridicule, all the suffering...It was all worth it. Because He is Immanuel....and He is with us....emotionally, physically, and spiritually....and now it is forever for all of eternity. I can only imagine...

Connect with the emotion of His Second Coming and you will begin to understand what it meant....to those who witnessed His first coming.

Isaiah 9:2–3 (ESV) 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. 3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,

Christmas...Joy to the World the Lord has come...Let earth receive it's King....let every heart prepare Him Room....Lets pray.