

Isaiah 9:1-7; Luke 22:63 – 23:3

December 17th, 2006.

Sermon

III – A TV reporter went out on the street to ask people what they thought the meaning of Christmas was. One woman said: “Oh I don’t know – is that the day Jesus died?” Perhaps there’s a lot of truth in that statement. Perhaps when it comes to Christmas time in our society, Jesus is dead. He’s no longer the centre of the celebrations.

III – Arthur Stace wrote the word “Eternity” in copperplate script across the streetscape of Sydney. At least 50 times a day for 30 years. He heard a preacher preach on Isaiah 57:15, and Stace said: *“Eternity went ringing through my brain and suddenly I began crying and felt a powerful call from the Lord to write Eternity.”*

Stace was a man who thought in terms of eternity in a world that often only sees the here and now.

Isaiah is a book which calls out “*eternity*” in practically every passage we read. And as we come to Isaiah 9, we are struck firstly with a picture of the immediate future that Israel is facing. Darkness, sadness and oppression.

Verse 1 tells us how Israel had refused to listen to God for hundreds of years, and so from the very north of Israel, in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, God allowed Israel to fall into the hands of their enemies, the Assyrians and then the Babylonians. Eventually, the whole nation faced a long period of darkness and slavery.

Israel will live in slavery and darkness and oppression for hundreds of years. For dozens of generations. They will be continually ravaged by war and defeat and live under an enemy government. It is a *hopeless picture* for God’s people over the next few hundred years.

III – Last holidays, our family visited Timbertown which was a lot of fun. At Timbertown they had a real working Bullock team. Before the railways took over, Bullock teams were used to haul timber out of the bush. Massive trees that had been logged were loaded up and hauled out by a team of about 12 or 14 Bullocks. These animals would generally haul out about 14 tonne at a time. And across their backs were these huge pieces of wood called a yoke. These yokes tie them together so the bullock driver can make them pull the load behind them. Without these yokes, the animals are free. These yokes keep them under a huge burden of weight.

Because of their disobedience, God’s people are about to be under a heavy yoke of oppression. The bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressors.

Yet this passage also tells us of their *long term* future. They give us an incredible picture of God’s people in the future. A light has dawned. People will rejoice. And God will shatter the rod of their oppressor and bring an end to their slavery. But this picture is not just about a *day* in the future. This is a picture of the *eternal* future that God’s people will see. This is a picture of what life under God will be like in the future and into eternity!

III – Australia is coming up again to another Federal election. And I guess most of us have probably already decided who to vote for. And if you’re like me, you’ll be thinking “who is the best party to lead our country for the next 4 or maybe 8 years?” We’re not thinking 20 years ahead, or 50 years ahead. Because the governments of this world don’t usually last 20 or 50 years! They’re short term governments.

But Isaiah is telling us about a government that will reign for a lot longer. More than a hundred years or a thousand years. This government will reign *eternally*. Verse 7:

7 Of the increase of his government and peace, **there will be no end**. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness **from that time on and forever.**”

This is a picture of God's eternal reign. Darkness ended. People rejoicing. No more oppression, and an end to war... ETERNALLY!

So who is this King that will reign? Let's turn to verse 6.

“6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

III – When I was about 12, I travelled up the central coast with my parents in our little hatchback car, with a trailer on the back. The trailer had about a tonne of weight in it. Half way there, the trailer was so heavy that it lifted the front of the car off the ground so we couldn't steer, and basically headed into oncoming traffic! And yes, there was a smash! The car was way too small to carry the weight of the load we had.

And I guess when we think that if God is going to set his people free from oppression and carry the government on his shoulders, the last thing we think of is a child King. How can a child carry the weight of government on his shoulders? How can a child have such huge names as “*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*”?

If you've ever held a new born baby you'll know how helpless they are. They can't even support the weight of their own head! Yet it is on the shoulders of a weak child that God chooses to rest his government. It is this child who will **be** a wonderful counsellor. This child will **be** Mighty God. This child will **be** Everlasting Father. This child will **be** the Prince of Peace. HOW? Because this child is God in the flesh.

But as if this isn't amazing enough, verse 6 says more: “For to US a child is born. To US a son is given.”

This child is a gift. To us and for us. This King will be born for us, live for us, he will serve us, and he will die for us. He will ascend in to heaven for us to prepare a place for us. He is “*for us*”.

At Christmas we remember the great gift that God has given us in Jesus. God didn't just SEND us a King. He GAVE us a King. In Luke 22 we hear this King of ours before the other kings of the world. Kings who have him beaten and flogged and handed over to be crucified. Yet on whose shoulders does the government of God rest? On Jesus' shoulders. This King is not carried by the people. He is a King who *carries* his people.

Jesus is the King who gives himself to us so that we can give ourselves to him. And when we do that, Jesus doesn't drag us along behind him. Jesus doesn't push us and pull us like the governments of this world, or like a team of bullocks. He carries us. He removes the yoke of burdens and slavery, of everything that pull us down in this life, and he lifts us up on his shoulders and carries us. And not only does he carry us, he carries our sins. On a cross. For us. A child for us. A son given. With the government on his shoulders. With our burdens on his shoulders. With the sins of the world on his shoulders.

III – Fortune cookies

I bought these the other day. Fortune Cookies! Just to illustrate a point for you. Listen to what they say...

The world thinks in terms of the here and now, and if the world *does* think about the future, it only thinks about a few years ahead, or a few generations. The world generally doesn't think in terms of eternity. Even when Satan uses Psychics or fortune tellers to tell people's future, he never talks of

eternity. Because he knows his future in eternity. An end to evil. An end to war and oppression and an end to Satan and all his work. But **God** speaks to us about eternity. Beyond this present darkness. God talks to us about our future with him as King.

I guess we all get a little caught up in the presents at Christmas. It's a joyful thing to be a part of. It's about giving and sharing and celebrating. But most of all, Christmas is about *eternity*. Isaiah points us not just towards a King, but towards a *permanent* King.

It's not just about a child being born.
It's about a child being born and GIVEN TO US.

To many in the world, Jesus is dead at Christmas. He is off the scene. More and more we hear phrases like "*Happy Holidays*" or "*Seasons Greeting*".

And I think it's at this time of year that we can often find **ourselves** also bombarding Christmas with presents and food and family and everything else. Our focus can easily be on the *here and now*. And that doesn't actually make us much different to the rest of the world. The focus that Isaiah gives us is a focus on *eternity*. The baby Jesus is not just a King. He is an eternal King. In his birth we celebrate the beginning of the *eternal* reign of God in our world and in our lives, and we celebrate our eternal future in heaven with him.

How will you celebrate next week? With gifts? Food? Family? Or with thanksgiving and praise? Try this on Christmas Day. In the middle of whatever you're doing, whether family or food or presents or whatever you end up doing, take out your Bible and open it up to the book of Luke. Chapters 1 and 2. Read them together. Then pray. Thank God for what he has done in giving us Jesus. And pray for his kingdom to come. Bring the Christmas focus back to eternity and praise God that because of Him, we have that great future to look forward to.

Let's pray now.