

Advent: Joy to the World

No End

Isaiah 9:3-7

Mark Vroegop

*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. 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. 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 shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall 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** (Isa. 9:3-7).*

I don't know how old I was, but I remember exactly where I was when I finished reading *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. We were camping in northern Michigan. I think it was raining, and I was curled up in one of the beds of our old pop-up camper. I was already a Christian, and the connections between the themes and characters to what I believed were deeply moving. God-exalting emotions were right on the surface as I finished the last page.

My gratitude for the book was so high that I asked my parents if they knew how I could write to the author, C.S. Lewis, to thank him. You can imagine how sad I was to learn that he passed away well before I was born. I think *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* may be the first book I remember moving me like that.

Sadly, I never read the rest of The Chronicles of Narnia. About five to six years ago, I decided to complete the journey. While it wasn't the exact same experience, I do remember the final chapters of *The Last Battle*. And I especially remember a phrase: "Farther up and farther in."

It's a statement made by Aslan, the lion, as the Narnian travelers make their way to their true home. It's an invitation to continually experience and explore the new world that they've entered—to "impossibly climb waterfalls, run faster than they ever imagined possible, and slowly come to the recognition that though they have left Narnia, they have actually come home."¹ Jewel, the unicorn, speaks for everyone:

¹ Joe Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life: Becoming Truly Human in the Presence of God*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 263.

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now."² Farther up. Farther in.

Lewis uses this storyline to give his readers a category and language for the concept of eternity. But he means more than just never-ending. Lewis means eternity as that which is so satisfying and enjoyable but only grows and gets bigger and better. Joe Rigney says, "In heaven, we will always be giving away what we are receiving and thereby receiving more than we've been given."³

"So they ran faster and faster till it was more like flying than running, and even the eagle overhead was going no faster than they. And they went through winding valley after winding valley and up the steep sides of hills and, faster than ever, down the other sides, following the river and sometimes crossing it and skimming across mountain lakes as if they were living speed-boats, till at last at the far end of one long lake which looked as blue as a turquoise, they saw a smooth green hill. Its sides were as steep as the sides of a pyramid and round the very top of it ran a green wall: but above the wall rose the branches of trees whose leaves looked like silver and their fruit like gold. "Farther up and farther in!" roared the Unicorn, and no one held back."⁴

I want you to keep that in mind as we look at another statement in Isaiah 9 today: **"Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom"** (v. 7a).

Last week we looked at the names of God: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. I tried to help you see how the answer to our individual and collective problem is the Messiah. Before that we looked at what it means for the government to be on his shoulder. And we started the Advent series with keeping our eyes on the horizon with "unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given."

What is the hope and promise of this phrase "of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom"? Let's tackle this with four why questions: **1) Why Government and Peace? 2) Why Increase? 3) Why No End? 4) Why Throne of David?**

This phrase and twenty-three words are packed with meaning and hope. Let's explore them together.

Why Government and Peace?

Let's start with two words that we've already talked about in previous weeks but which are repeated here. We looked at the words "government" and "peace" over two sermons from Isaiah 9:6, and it's both interesting and instructive that they are highlighted again. There's a reason.

² Rigney, 264.

³ Rigney, 268.

⁴ <https://www.worksofmacdonald.com/far/2020/2/7/farther-up-and-farther-in>

Here's why: government and peace are needed and desired for human flourishing. Even if you are skeptical of the government and if peace seems illusive, they are still a core longing of humanity. We want the certainty and order of good government. We want the completeness and the emotional safety of peace.

Two weeks ago, we talked about the "government upon his shoulder." I suggested to you that the ordering of society is essential for life. Perhaps you are familiar with the TV series *Law and Order* where the narrator says: "In the criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate yet equally important groups: the police, who investigate crime; and the district attorneys, who prosecute the offenders. These are their stories."

Legislatures and courts, laws and regulations, police officers and prosecutors provide structure so that everything else can happen. Government is meant to provide control, consistency, and security. It's one of the ways humans try to protect themselves.

Last week we talked about the name "Prince of Peace." I spent quite a bit of time talking about the Hebrew word "shalom." It means more than just tranquility or the absence of conflict. Shalom means completeness. If you look at the cross and stone memorial from 2012, you'll see that the wall has a completion, but it's still being built even now. Shalom is the sense of everything being in the right place. You could think of it as a deep sense of contentment, a perspective or satisfaction that life is the way it's supposed to be. Our lives are filled with tastes of this but always a longing for more.

I love how C.S. Lewis captures this in his book *The Problem of Pain*.

"The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world: but joy, peace, and merriment, he has scattered broadcast. We are never safe, but we have plenty of fun and some ecstasy. It is not hard to see why. The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose an obstacle to our return to God: a few moments of happy love, a landscape, a symphony, a merry meeting with friends, a bath, or a football match, have no such tendency. Our father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns but will not encourage us to mistake them for home."⁵

Why government and peace? Well, because security and completeness are what humans deeply crave. Oh, we crave it so deeply. That's why some people are obsessed with national politics or office politics. That's why some people call themselves "news junkies" or get involved in "office gossip." We crave security.

Our longing for completeness is one reason most people only post pictures online of their best moments. And it's underneath the sexual and gender identity confusion in our culture. It's why people bounce from relationship to relationship, job to job, and sometimes even church to church. We're longing for the "missing piece" in our lives. We crave completeness.

⁵ Rigney, 266,

That's why government and peace make the list here. They represent a core longing of every human, and it's only through Jesus, the Messiah, that true security and completeness are able to be accomplished. Jesus makes us eternally safe and secure. Jesus makes us whole.

So, you can see why government and peace are mentioned here again, can't you?

Why Increase?

Isn't it interesting that we have the word "increase" here? Isaiah could have simply said that his government and peace will never end. But we have this word here. The word means many, great, and abundant. The root of the word is connected to something that is abounding, becoming numerous, and growing. It's used to describe the abundant water that flowed from the rock when Moses struck it in Numbers 20:11.

Now think about governments and peace. Success is often determined by growth and spreading. Wars are fought to expand territories. Laws are written to address new issues. Peace comes to one region, and it spreads to another. It's one thing to have security and completeness but think about how much of our human effort is spent trying to keep it all together.

The Messiah will not only bring security and completeness; his rule and reign will never go backwards or diminish. What's more, his rule will continually expand, and peace will spread. Imagine this world. It bends the mind a bit to think about it. We're talking about an existence that is always moving forward, continually new, and getting better and better. Think about that. There are no boundaries and limits to its expansion and growth.

In *The Last Battle*, the Narnians run, then fast, and then faster. Farther up and farther in. Think of it as the opposite of aging. At some point, you start to realize that your health and abilities are headed in the other direction. That's an understandable assumption that we make. But what if the reverse were true? What if we lived in a world where everything always became better, more beautiful, and more glorious?

It's hard to imagine—almost like we are 3-year-olds being told that one day we'll be big and strong. Our little minds might be able to imagine what that's like, but we wouldn't grasp the full scope of adulthood. That's what this is like—something that we can partially imagine but will be even better than we dream.

Why No End?

The text continues to describe these mind-bending realities with a shift toward eternity. The government and peace will not only continually increase; it will never end. It will continue forever and ever and ever and ever.

At one level, this is meant to communicate that no one will ever be able to defeat the Messiah. Earthly kings and kingdoms are always evaluating risks and threats. History is filled with countless examples of palace intrigue, espionage, betrayals, revolts, and aggression. Safety and security are always in view. So, this statement is clearly indicating that this kingdom will face none of that.

But it's not just that the Messiah is more powerful than any other ruler and leader. That is true, but it's that his victory removes the concept and principle of rebellion from the world. The Messiah's victory is more total than we can even imagine. He'll change the cultural DNA of the world in which we'll live. Listen to these words:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:1-5).

The Messiah's victory will be so complete that the possibility of it ever ending will be removed because those concepts and ideals no longer exist in the world.

Think of the safety this brings! It's one thing to find "shelter" in someone or something when life is hard, scary, or threatening. It's comforting to run to someone who can protect you from danger. But what must it be like to run to the One who removes all possibility of danger. He doesn't just protect you from evil. He's removed the idea. Everything is new. Evil is gone—forever.

As you let that sink in, I trust you know that from a spiritual perspective this is what Jesus has already done in terms of our relationship with God: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The gospel is such good news because it permanently and eternally removes the condemnation from us.

As a result, those who are "in Christ" are more secure than they can even imagine.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

Why Throne of David?

Our journey concludes with a reference to the throne of David. Why is this here? It harkens back to a promise that God made to David. His covenant with him was that someone from his family line would reign forever. 2 Samuel 7 records God's words to David that "your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16).

Using this language tells us that Isaiah, three hundred years after the death of David, is pointing to the fulfillment of that promise in the Messiah. This is Messianic and hope-oriented language. He's telling Ahaz and the people of Judah about the promised One.

And here we are 2,700 years since these words were written by Isaiah. And we can see the full picture of how God fulfilled his promise. At Advent we celebrate the arrival of the Christ child. Gabriel said this to Mary in Luke 1:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:31-32).

In other words, God kept the promise.

But there’s even more. God kept that promise in a way that was even better than what people imagined. They were looking for a political leader and a religious leader to restore the glory of Israel. And God’s plan included that but in ways that bless the entire created order.

The plan for the Messiah was to bring about a change deeper than they knew and a kingdom whose glory is more glorious than they could even imagine.

What does all of this mean? There are many layers of applications, and I invite you to think about the vast implications of this.

If you are not yet a Christian, this sermon explains both the future and the present. It helps us see that Jesus provides the atonement and forgiveness we need. And it shows the plan of God to reclaim the world from the clutches of sin. Oh, I hope you’ll be part of that plan by trusting in Jesus.

And if you are a Christian, I trust that your heart is burning with deep joy and gratitude for what you are hearing today. This text reminds us why our salvation is so amazing. It shows us the mind-blowing realities of God’s love and plan for our lives. It encourages us that God can be trusted to work out his plan in our lives and in the entire world. And it invites us to persevere, to keep moving, to keep following him.

Farther up. Farther in!

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