

Isaiah 9:1-7

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[0 : 00] December 25th, 8.30am. It would be a clear night, a cold frost on the ground and then sunrise! It's 1914 and it's World War I. Imagine war in the trenches.

! But it is December 25th and Christmas trees decorate the parapets and across no man's land comes the sound of carols. You might have seen the very sanitised version on the Sins Bizarre. But here's the diary of Captain Sir Edward Holtz. A scout named Merker went out and met a German patrol and was given a glass of whisky and some cigars. Soon you had troops standing around on no man's land swapping cigarettes for haircuts and taking photos. There's a German lieutenant who wrote a diary to, I practice the translation, Kurt Zamich. He kept a diary as well. The English brought a soccer ball from the trenches and pretty soon a lively game ensued.

The score was 3-2. Well you can guess who won. There's no record of penalties at all. And it's a great story since my sense of use of peace on earth, goodwill to man. His diary goes on, it says how marvellous, how wonderful, yet how strange it was. The English officers felt the same way. They wrote, Christmas, the celebration of love, managed to bring mortal enemies together as friends for a time. But that is it, isn't it? Is that enough? The last man alive to remember that Christmas truce said this in 2005, we shouted Merry Christmas even though no one felt merry. The silence ended early in the afternoon and the killing started again. It was a short peace, wasn't it, in a terrible war.

And Captain Sir Edward Holtz, who was killed three months later, is 25. Mortal enemies became friends. I don't think so. Five in every nine people died in that war that we remembered this year. Kurt Zamich, amazingly, he survived the war. He lived on to rejoin the German army in World War II and he died in Russia in November 1945.

Even on that day, peace wasn't everywhere. The sort of nice Christmas picture that we have in the adverts.

[2 : 37] Here's another English captain and hear what he writes. The Germans tried a truce, they came over towards us singing, so we opened rapid fire on them, which is the only truce they deserved. Don't you wish for peace? Don't you wish that the darkness of death and war which hangs over us all was dealt with?

100 million people died violently in the last century, to a minute. Bad news comes in, doesn't it? On the internet, on the TV, every day. Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan. And don't you wish for just more than a moment, a Christmas moment, for the start of a truce that might last longer than a Christmas football match?

Longer than a day where Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus was born, if you'll look at this, it describes a day like that. Do pick it up and look at it. And Isaiah begins, really, like Christmas Day in the trenches.

We start in gloom, don't we? And there is darkness. And there is anguish. But that is about to change, dawn is about to break. In the disgrace land of Zebulun, can you see that?

The land of Naphtali and Galilee of the nations. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, verse 2.

[4 : 03] On them, light has dawned. And it's much more than whiskey and football matches. This is a nationwide party. Look at verse 3. You've enlarged the nation and increased their joy.

They rejoice before you. They're full of joy. As people rejoice at the harvest three times, it talks about joy and rejoicing. Joy and victory. And why are they so happy?

Well, we get the answer in verse 4. Can you see that? And verse 5, verse 6. They all begin in the same way. Why are they so happy? Well, in verse 4, it's because the yoke of burden has been broken.

You've shattered the yoke that burdens them. And then this lovely last line, isn't it? The rod, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. That's something to be happy about, isn't it? When slaves are freed, when oppression is ended. We know what it is to rejoice about that. And so how did it happen? Look at verse 5. Every warrior's boot used in battle, and every garment rolled in blood will be destructed for burning, and will be filled for the fire.

[5 : 12] It's the end of war. It's one enormous bonfire. It would be quite a bonfire, wouldn't it? If every piece of military equipment in the world was gathered in one place and was torched.

In World War I, the British Army issued 46,973,000 pairs of boots. Imagine them on fire. For Isaiah, do you see, a day of peace is not enough.

He wants oppression to be snapped forever. Isaiah wants peace forever. He wants every soldier stood down and disbanded. But it will need, won't it, much more than a nice feeling and a few candles and a happy moment for this to happen.

So Isaiah, how will it happen? Well, look at verse 6. Here's the secret. Here's the climax. It's the famous words we read at the Star Wars. It says, for us a child is born. To us a son is given. There's this bright daylight of dawn. A new day of peace. Because slavery is both broken. Armies are disbanded. Because, when a baby's been born.

[6 : 24] Now some children arrive, when they're in the world, with big expectations on their shoulders. Poor old Prince George. I don't know if you've seen these photos of him. In a kind of funny tack job with socks pulled up for his knees.

This little two-year-old boy, or one-year-old boy. They have great expectations there. Around Brooklyn, Beckham, when he was born. Some children, celebrity children, they're born, aren't they? With unrealistic expectations. Well, look at this father. Look at verse 7. This son, this baby that is born, where he's going to rule the world. A government that increases, and a throne that increases, and a kingdom that will be from this time forth and forevermore.

And we've been using his name all night. Jesus, our Emmanuel, we sang. You shall call his name Jesus. He will be given the throne of his father David.

And of his kingdom there will be no end. It'll go on forever. There are Gospels. If you ask me for one reason, we'll give you one. We'd love you to give you one. We'd love you to read them.

[7 : 27] Where they are, what is a Gospel? It is an eyewitness account. Of the Lord Jesus, of this son. The man who was written about by Isaiah 700 years before he was born.

With the expectation of the nations on his shoulders. And if you read through Matthew's Gospel, you would come to this bit of Isaiah chapter 4. So when does dawn break?

It breaks when Jesus moves to live by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. And the Gospel writers want to ask you, is this the one? Is this the guy? Does he live up to his prayers? Does he do enough to give us more than an afternoon of peace in the middle of war? And a fuzzy feeling. Is he different? And to see the difference, I just want us to look at the four names that are there in verse 6.

Can you see them? Four prophetic names. Four names given to you 700 years before he was born. Which tell you what kind of man Jesus and Nazareth three is.

[8 : 31] And we're expecting a baby next month. And we're at the stage of trying to decide on names. We think we're at one with a girl, but we don't know what to do with a boy. And so we're looking at these books, isn't it? And the dictionary of first names.

A comprehensive list in easy to use A to Z order of 5,000 names for boys and girls. Your name can say a lot about you, whether you like it or not. So it is vital, absolutely vital, to choose an appropriate name for a new baby to give him or her, you know, the best possible start in life.

This book promises a comprehensive list of names from around the world with their derivations and meanings to help you make the right choice. Do you know who it's written by? Geddes and Grosset. And isn't it ironic that they don't put their first names on that? And so the four inverse things, they're not in here actually. I checked this afternoon.

Princes, but all the rest are not. Wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. You never find those names on a human child.

[9 : 38] Look at them, the first thing it says about what the Lord Jesus will be like is he will be the wonderful counsellor. That means to have the supernatural wisdom of God. This baby is different.

Don't we need rulers like that? Should we spend however many millions of pounds it's going to be to build high speed train link number 15 or whatever it will be?

Don't we need wisdom for our country to know how to get the economy going? Or Barack Obama and David Cameron when they meet to decide how should they respond to the Middle East? How should they respond to what is going on in Iraq?

Do you know what they should do? Do you? Are you wise enough to rule? Is anybody? Well we've read from Luke's Gospel tonight and if you were to read on in Luke or in Matthew's Gospel you would see Jesus amazed with his wisdom.

He starts doing it at 12. They are amazed at his answers and how wise he is. People throw hostile questions at him and he can turn them back at them. As he faces sensitive personal questions or as he gives a way to live that millions still live by today 2,000 years later.

[10 : 55] He is the wonderful counsellor. But he's also mighty God. You see the only way to end war forever is to face the armies of the world the way a teacher or the way a parent faces a fighting child.

Do you know how you do that? You see them sometimes. Do you? You simply put your hand on their forehead and you hold them like that. They're that small aren't they?

They might fly their arms around or try and kick but if you put your hand on their head you stop them. Don't we need rulers like that? Can anybody guarantee security?

Can they? Can anybody secure a border or a single life or read on in Matthew and you find this Jesus of Nazareth he tells the tall stone to be still as easily as I turn off the tap.

He raises the dead with a word in public view all the power of mighty God. The ministry of Jesus is like a three year window.

[12 : 05] It's like a three year window into the future. The world that Isaiah longs for and I guess the world that you long for as well. Jesus and his life works as a kind of three year try before you buy for human rights.

Read the eyewitness accounts of the Lord Jesus. Hear his disciples. Let them persuade you that this is the one. We run a course here called Christianity Explores and if you want to do that in the company of others asking the same kind of questions it's a great thing to do.

Speak to me or the person who brought you or the person who invited you and we'd love you to do it. We'll be running one in the new year. That is a great way. Read the evidence and see Jesus live up to his press.

He is different. He's the everlasting father. The everlasting father. See only God lasts forever. It's a puzzle isn't it?

It must have puzzled Isaiah. How could a newborn baby do you get that? Be an everlasting father. Because in Jesus God became a human being.

[13 : 22] The everlasting became flesh. with all the strength of God but all the care of a father. And don't we need that as well?

Someone to care for the hungry. Someone to protect the weak. Again read on in those gospels you see Jesus cure every sickness. You see Jesus restore families and minds and seek out the sinner and rescue them.

And he is the prince of peace. And here the gospels give us two great pictures. They give us a future Jesus who will bring peace by destroying every army and every enemy.

The Jesus of Isaiah 9 who will return as God and King and Mighty God. But before Jesus returns as Mighty God to wipe out every single enemy we get a Jesus don't we?

That lives out perfect peace. who says turn the other cheek who they come to arrest him and he will not allow a fight. He accepts a beating.

[14 : 35] He keeps silent at his trial and he walks willingly to his death. And that is where we see that there are no pat answers to the problems of this world and your problems.

Jesus the promised son of God is crucified. world peace is not as simple as changing prime minister or changing government.

And Jesus' life and his teaching are not enough alone. More is needed. Jesus' life is a window on the world that will come when Jesus comes back one day.

It's a window of peace but necessarily it is a short one because Jesus must die. Jesus must die.

This baby must die. This son must die. You see because the war between human and human is not really the big deal.

[15 : 36] not for Isaiah and not for Jesus. We fight each other actually only because we're really fighting God.

And that is the real deep darkness. We all sit in our trenches giving God the rapid fire. And the darkness of death is this just response to what Jesus must deal with.

It's easy to see tonight if you are in the trench firing at God by checking your attitude to Jesus. You see Christmas is not really the story of a nice little baby.

It's the story of your recently arrived new boss. It's the government on his shoulders. The king forever. You should think about Jesus the way that those of you who were in work.

A new boss arrives in the office. He's a new boss. Maybe you're pleased to have him. Maybe you're scared of what he might do. Maybe you just plain don't like him.

[16:44] But he's in charge now. And like it or not he calls the shots. But most of us react to King Jesus the way that the Welsh rugby team would react if I was announced as the new head coach.

Can you just imagine it? There's a press conference and then I roll up to the training ground. Can you imagine Jamie Roberts or Alan Wynne Jones, this 6 foot 6 giant, looking down at me, this kind of 12 stone weakling who's very out of shape.

You can imagine the team kind of falling apart. They would do it differently, wouldn't they? Depending on what they're like. Some of them, some of the players, they would ignore me completely.

They would say, what do you know? And they'd be right to say it. Some would probably try and do their own training. Some of them would be more direct, possibly even more physical, and they would try and get rid of me as fast as they can.

And so tonight, can you look at Jesus in the eye and tell him that you live with him as king? Maybe, probably tonight, you politely ignore him.

[17:53] Or you urgently maybe want Jesus out of your life, but either way, we don't submit to him as God and king. And if he returns to destroy his enemies tonight, and bring peace, human beings like us would actually be his enemies.

So if Jesus wants to end all war, he has to bring peace between man and God first, which means he has to die. You see, there are no easy answers. Death stands over us, doesn't it?

And Jesus swallows it up on our behalf. Which means tonight, Jesus can speak like those singing and voices over the trenches.

Marvelously wonderful, yet how strange to bring mortal enemies together as friends. And he will bring peace between human beings one day.

He will wipe out all his enemies one day. But the amazing thing is this, he offers you today in West England tonight, between you and God that peace.

[19:09] And it is much better than voices calling over the trenches. Christmas is saying to you that God has crossed the lines and God has become a human being. He set out unarmed to be killed.

It's better than whiskey. It's better than cigarettes. It's better than a game of football. And that is the difference. He died so that God could end the war with us.

And it could end today for you. Jesus began his preaching in Galilee as the dawn of that light. And he said this, he said repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And Christmas is a call to take up his offer. To stop fighting God. to repent, to turn from that way of life and to join the kingdom of the king, the king of peace.

And anyone who will crawl out of their trench and ask for peace, hold their hands up and say I'm sorry. you can be sure of the answer.

[20:23] The prince of peace, the king of all, will happily accept you in his kingdom. No matter what you've done, no matter how much darkness you're in that you walk in, there is Christian forgiveness.

He swallows death for you and asks for peace and nothing stands between you and God. Call Jesus your king. Repent and change him and want to join his kingdom and thank him for his death which made peace between God and us.

And so following him will mean recognising him as king. And we repent of living our own way and we say I want to join your kingdom and I thank you for your death.

I thank you for forgiveness. Jesus made peace between me and God and to do that is more amazing than two sides kicking a football around in the middle of a war.

To do that is to move from darkness to light. To join the increasing celebration of verse 3. To be part of why his kingdom has been increasing for 2,000 years.

[21 : 38] Increasing one by one as people put their trust in him. It is a great hope that we look forward to the return of King Jesus when he will stop all wars.

And you and I can be his people free and at peace. And that can begin tonight. Let's pray.