

Isaiah 9: 1-6; "For unto us a Child is born", A Christmas Sermon
Delivered on December 28th, 2008, in the Morning Worship Service,
by Pastor Paul Rendall

I believe, as I look around me, that it ought to be obvious to people that there is a definite and distinct connection between sin and the distress and gloom that many find themselves in, even at this time of the year, when they ought to be joyful and happy. But many people are not joyful, and they are not happy, and they do not see the connection. I would propose to you this morning that the remedy for a joyless spirit is to be found in believing the words which God has given to us here; "For unto us a Child is born." People are usually made happy by a child who is born into their family. This Child Jesus was born for you to consider whether He is yours or not today; right now. People by nature do not like to look at this connection that I am speaking of. They may be very happy for a time in their sin, but it will lead to gloominess eventually. A person may try to overcome their gloominess by participating in the holiday festivities. They may get together with their relatives and friends, and they may exchange gifts, and for a time they may overcome their sadness and gloom. All of those times with relatives and friends may be good, but life and Christmas are much more than these things. I would hope that for those who have come to church today, there will be better answers to their sadness and gloom if they will pay attention to what is said. This text that we are looking at will give each one of you who believes it, the lasting joy that you are looking for. It will be very hard to be gloomy if you have the story of the Christ Child resounding in your heart. It is such good news; it is such glad tidings. The first verse here says, "Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed...."

The land of Judah had been distressed by the judgments of God that had come to them because of the unfaithfulness of Ahaz, king of Judah. Not only was he a faithless king, but he was king over a faithless people. We looked at this two weeks ago week, in the sign that was given to him; the sign of the Virgin conceiving and bringing forth a Son named Immanuel; Immanuel meaning that God would be with him, God would atone for His sins through the Lord Jesus Christ, and God would help him to overcome all of his enemies. If he would only believe, he would be established. And we saw how, sadly, he did not believe these good words which were given to him. Because of this; God, it says here in verse 1, "lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali." The earlier judgments which came upon Judah and Jerusalem were comparatively lighter judgments than those which God would come to them later. You say to me, "But why would God come to lightly esteem a people who He had originally set His love upon and to whom He had given many promises of blessing?" The answer to that is found in 1 Samuel 2: 30, when God was reproving Eli the high priest for his sins in not restraining his sons.

"Therefore the Lord God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.'" "But now the Lord says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.'" This is the great principle of truth which God works by. Is your life being lived to honor God? I suppose that someone might ask, "Is God faithful to His promises?" We must answer, "He certainly is." But it was sin and unbelief which forced God to reconsider His goodness to an unfaithful people. This is what brought them gloom and sorrow and sadness. It was a despising and neglecting of God and His commandments; God and His true worship which is defined for us in the Scriptures. God is faithful, but sometimes men are not.

But happily for the nation of Judah, this was not the end of them. God was going to come some hundreds of years later and bring them the greatest of His gifts, the gift of His Son. This gift was, and is, meant to dispel the spiritual darkness in the hearts and lives of sinful people and bring to them joy and peace forever. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. God's coming to show mercy to Judah in the gift of this Christ Child is the picture of what God does for every person who comes to saving faith in Him. If you will receive this Christ you will come to experience great light, great rejoicing, and great victory in your battle with sin. Let's take these three aspects of the great salvation in Christ and think about them together.

1st - Christ is the Child who was born to bring great light to sinful men.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined." This verse 1 is quoted by Matthew in his gospel in Chapter 4, verses 12-16. Go ahead and turn over to that place. We must conclude from the way that these verses are used by Matthew that it refers to what would take place when the Lord Jesus came and dwelt in Capernaum in the beginning of His public ministry. Verse 12 says, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee." "And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'The land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned.'" What is being spoken about here is the dawning of spiritual light upon this benighted world through the entrance of Jesus Christ into the world in His incarnation. This world is a world which has people everywhere who are walking in darkness and sitting in darkness. I found it interesting that in the passage that we are looking at in Isaiah, it says, "The people who walked in darkness and dwelt in the land of darkness; upon them a light has shined." In the passage in Matthew it says that the people sat in darkness, and that they were those who sat in the region and shadow of death; that light had dawned upon. I believe that the implication is

that when men sit down in spiritual darkness after they have been walking for a while in it; that it is not their intention to leave that realm of darkness for the light. They are content to be ignorant of how they might be saved from their sins. They are content to remain in their darkened state of doing what they want to do in their sin and they will not come to the light, even if they see it. In this passage in Matthew, this is confirmed for us by what Jesus Christ said to these people in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali as He began His ministry. He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

But there is such a concentration of spiritual light in the Lord Jesus Christ that His light could not be ignored even from the time of His birth and all through His life. He is "the Sun of Righteousness who arises with healing in His wings", it says in Malachi 4: 2. His was the light of Deity which came to dwell in human nature; perfect, pure, and holy. "Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature; Son of God and Son of Man." "Thee will I cherish, thee will I honor, Thou my soul's glory, joy, and crown." "Fair is the sunshine, Fair is the moonlight, and all the twinkling, starry host: Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer than all the angels heaven can boast." This spiritual light of the Lord Jesus was a great light which was seen by men and it shone upon men. It began shining at the time of His birth; the light of light of God, joined together with sinless humanity. God dwells in unapproachable light, who no man has seen or can see; but Jesus is the light of this dark world and when He was walking upon this earth He was seen by men and shone upon men. Turn over to John Chapter 1 for a moment with me. Here we can see the great paradox of the first appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. "In the Beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and word was God." "He was in the Beginning with God." "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." "In Him was the life, and the life was the light of men." "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." So here we have the paradox; the life of Jesus Christ was the light of men. It was shining in the darkness of their world but they did not comprehend it. He is still shining in the darkness of our world today through His Church and by the good and gracious influences of His Holy Spirit, but men do not comprehend. They did not understand as they looked at the Lord Jesus how salvation could be found in a Babe, or how it could be found in a Man. But it was because Deity was there with humanity, coupled together. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." "This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe." "He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light." "That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." There is a general influence of the light of Christ which shines upon men, even as there is a general influence which through the preaching of the gospel reaches out to every man coming into the world, to be able to feel, and experience and know that there is salvation for every sinner who will believe in Him. This does

not mean that everyone who feels and senses these good and gracious influences of common grace will come to understand the special and particular influences of the Holy Spirit's working which will bring them to salvation. But it does mean that Jesus really does shine brightly and warmly in the spiritual realm. A sinful, unbelieving person can deny the truth of it, and never really want to believe it. But nevertheless it is so.

Jesus is the light of the World. The reality of His benign influences extend to all World through the gospel and through the working of His Spirit in the hearts of all kinds of people. Christians are those who are light in the Lord. They are a part of His bright beams to a world darkened by sin. They walk in the light and dwell in the light, even as it says in 1 John 2: 8 and 9. "Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and true light is already shining." "He who says he is in the light and hates his brother, is in darkness until now." "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him." "But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Darkness is not only ignorance of the truth of the Bible, but it is hatred of that truth because it convicts us of sin. Light is not only truth, the truth of the Bible which is found in the Scriptures, it is also truth lived out in compassion and Christian love shown to others around you, because you have seen God's love and light shown to you. This passage is saying that if there is some brother in Christ who you find that you cannot love, you need to question whether you are walking in light. The darkness has blinded your eyes, and there is need for you to examine what you are doing, and what you are thinking, that has led you to that place where you have broken fellowship with your brother. Christ's light shines in the darkness. Christ's light overcomes the darkness. Christ's light was shining even from His birth, because He was the gift of God's love to sinful men everywhere. "Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, love's pure light." "Radiant beams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace." "Jesus Lord at Thy birth, Jesus Lord at Thy birth."

2ndly - Christ was the Child who was born to bring great rejoicing to those to whom He was revealed to. (Verse 3)

"You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." In Luke Chapter 2, we find the first New Testament tribute to the Child who would be the Light of the World. In verse 6 it says, "So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for Mary to be delivered." "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn." "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night." "And behold an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone

around them, and they were greatly afraid." "Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.'" "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." The good tidings of the gospel are meant to bring joy to every heart who believes in them. Christ's coming into the fallen world of sinners is reason for great joy. "For unto us a child is born." And in Luke 2, after the angel gave these good tidings to the shepherds, it says in verse 13, "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'"

Why is it that men are to rejoice and to believe that they can find true and lasting joy in the Baby Jesus being born at Bethlehem? It is because these good tidings are for all people, not just some people. All men can rejoice in the multiplication of the nation of the redeemed, for they are the ones who Christ came into the world to die for. It is true that this prophecy relates in one sense to the multiplication of the nation of Israel as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were given great and precious promises of this. You can see this in the life of Abraham if you turn over to Genesis 22. You remember that this is the chapter where God tested Abraham's faith. He asked him to offer up his son, his only begotten son Isaac on an altar on Mount Moriah. Abraham went about by faith to fulfill this command given to him, but he was stopped at the last moment by the voice of the Angel of the Lord calling to him from heaven saying to him in verse 12, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." And if you look down to verse 16, He says to Abraham, "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son--blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies." Oh, what good tidings these were to Abraham. His own son, his only begotten son would not have to die. God would provide. How would He do it? We now know and understand that it was this baby in the manger who would be the provision of God to Abraham and all of his descendants. He would overcome sin and death. He would defeat the schemes of the Devil. It was because He would be born into the world that Abraham's descendants would be multiplied and would possess the gate of their enemies.

You see this same kind of language, spoken to Isaac, in Genesis 26. In verse 1 it says, "There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham." "And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar." "Then the Lord appeared to him and said: 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land which I shall tell you.'" "Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father." "And I will make your descendants

multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed; because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

Now this is not merely a promise to the children of Israel, the Jews. This is a promise that in Isaac's seed, that in the Lord Jesus Christ; "all the nations of the earth would be blessed." The Apostle Paul, in Galatians 3: 16 says, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made." "He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." "And in verse 8 of that same chapter he says, "And the Scriptures foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'" "So those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham." This is good news indeed! For you and I who are Gentiles are blessed with believing Abraham. We are given all the spiritual blessings of the salvation which is found in Christ, this little baby born so long ago in Bethlehem. It is the joy of the multiplying of the nation of Israel's blessings to include the blessing of all the nations on the earth through the great salvation which is found in Jesus Christ. Those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. Let us rejoice greatly that salvation is not of works, and it is not found in being Jewish; it is found in the simple exercise of faith in the Savior. "For unto us a Child is born."

It is like the joy of harvest, it says in Isaiah 9: 3. "You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest." The harvest of souls to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ will be all the greater because the Gentiles, the other nations of the world besides the Jews, have been given the gospel. The harvest will be all the greater because the barrier between Jew and Gentile has been broken down by Christ at the cross, and we who were strangers and aliens to the Covenants of Grace have been brought near by the birth of Christ which led eventually to the shedding of the blood of Christ on behalf of sinners such as you and I. This is why you ought to have such great joy. If you believe in the Lord Jesus you are a part of a great harvest which will be revealed on the last Day. The reason that you will rejoice so greatly, having believed in Jesus, is because you realize, if you have come to know Him, that there is a reality to Jesus Christ coming to dwell in your heart by faith. Christ has not only tabernacled among men having been born into this world and lived among us for a time; but He comes spiritually to dwell in our hearts and tabernacle with us by faith, as we walk through the journey of this life.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 16 and I will show you the type of this tabernacling of Christ among men and in men. After the instruction for the observation of the days of unleavened bread and Passover were given to the people by Moses, he relates this to them. Verse 9 says, "You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the grain." "Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the

tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you." "You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide." "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes." "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress." "And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates." "Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands so that you surely rejoice." All of these feasts which Israel was commanded to observe are typical of Christ and the work that He came into the world to do. But they are also typical of how we are to respond to them. Passover, which is typical of Christ as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Days of unleavened bread, representative of His sinless life. The feast of weeks counting 7 weeks of 7 days, 49 days and then the 50th day representing Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church 50 days after His resurrection. And the feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of the Ingathering, which was a feast which Israel would observe to the Lord to show their thankfulness for all that God had done for them in blessing the work of their hands in the gathering in of their crops. In the New Testament this has been fulfilled in Christ who has come to give us life and that more abundantly. He has chosen us and ordained that we should bear much fruit, in terms of righteousness and holiness and good works. We are gathered to Him as a part of the great harvest of souls, and then we bear fruit to him which produces a harvest of righteousness to His glory. Surely this is a cause of great rejoicing.

Turn over to Leviticus 23 and you will see another aspect of the Feast of Tabernacles which speaks to us of Christ dwelling with us. Verse 39 says, "Also on the fifteen day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest." "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days." "You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year." "It shall be a statute forever in your generations." "You shall celebrate it in the seventh month." "You shall dwell in booths for seven days." "All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God." I said to you in my morning sermon last week that

it has been thought that Christ was born on the 15th of Tisri, that is September, and not on December 25th. And we see that His birth really corresponds with the Feast of Tabernacles. Christ has come into the world, not only to save sinners, but to change their hearts and lives so that He is born in them and dwells in them. They are enabled by this great grace to abide in Him and they in Him. "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." "And we beheld His glory, glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." "Abide in Me, and I in you." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is the joy and rejoicing as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." "For unto us a Child is born."

And then finally - Christ was the Child born to bring great victory over sin for all those trusting in Him. (Verse 4)

"For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian." "For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, will be used for burning and fuel of fire." "For unto us a Child is born." As I close this sermon I want you take you back to see the connection between sin and gloom; sin and distress; sin and either winning the battle or losing the battle. If you have Jesus Christ as your Savior, you will win the battle with sin. It is sin that causes the majority of the problems in our life. James spells it out for us in James Chapter 4. "Where do wars and fighting come from among you?" "Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" "You lust and do not have." "You murder and covet and cannot obtain." "You fight and war." "Yet you do not have because you do not ask." How do we win this battle with our sin? We learn to put sin away and put sin to death by the power and strength and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." The victory against sin was won at the cross of our Lord Jesus. But the sin's fight against Him began when He was born. Herod would have put Him to death almost as soon as He was born; as soon as he heard about Him. He would kill all the infants 2 years old and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding districts; such was the strength and cruelty of his sinful jealousy of Jesus' being an earthly king who would supplant Him. But God protected His Son by means of the wise men who did not return to Herod to tell him where Jesus was. God warned them in a dream that they should not return to that wicked man. Some people who would not think of putting Jesus to death as Herod wanted to, nevertheless will attempt to put Him to death in their minds when the gospel is preached to them. They do not want Jesus, or think that they need Him. They do not like the idea that they must change and be saved from their sins. They do not like even the idea that Jesus came to die for sinners. What gloom and disappointment they shall come to experience in this life and the next, I cannot

begin to describe to you.

On the other hand, what great rejoicing comes to the one who is trusting in Jesus; to the one who never tires of hearing that the King of Glory came down to earth; that His nature was joined together with a human nature to make a sinless and pure person; holy and perfect in God's sight. How can a little child be the means of defeating all of God's enemies and ours and bringing war on all levels to an end? It is because Jesus, in His being, was in His nature everything that He would become as a man. To become what He would become as a man would take some development, of course, but when He was born, Jesus was the same perfect and pure and holy person that He would become when He became a grown man. There would be things for Him to learn and grow into as a man, but He knew where He was from and where He was going. He knew that He was born to live and to die to the glory of the Father and thus fulfill all righteousness. It is because He willingly chose to come to this fallen world and was sent by the Father, out of love to lost sinners; that sin in all its forms would be defeated and destroyed. People who believe in Jesus rejoice as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. They know that Jesus has bound the strong man and is spoiling his house; taking back sinners from the pit of destruction. They know that their warfare with God has ended even though their warfare with sin has only just begun. They know that God is sovereign and He not only can do these wonders of grace of for individuals, but He can also make wars to cease to the end of the earth. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. Has your heart been made glad with these truths this morning? Have you found the Lord Jesus to be your light, your source of rejoicing and your victory over all sin and the one who brings you peace? Keep those thoughts of Him and His word going in your heart that your may rejoice always.