

“The People Who Walked in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light”

“A New Thing” Series, July 25 & 26, 2026 | Isaiah 9:1-7

Rob O’Neal, Senior Pastor

Do you ever feel like the darkness is winning?

During the pandemic, I fell in love with *The Great British Baking Show*.

The pandemic involved so much sickness, so much loss, and so much isolation. At times it felt like darkness closing in. So, when I had a chance to watch TV, I wanted something lighthearted and hopeful. *The Great British Baking Show* was that. Contestants go on to bake cakes and tarts. There is judging involved, but the judges almost always have something uplifting and hopeful to say. Contestants support one another. It wasn’t exactly light in the darkness of the pandemic, but it was something lighthearted when the darkness felt heavy. I wasn’t the only one who thought so. Viewership grew by nearly 50% during that time.

How does darkness trouble you?

Do you watch the news and find yourself wanting to call someone and tell them what you just heard because it makes you angry or anxious? Are you troubled because you see someone you know and love making what you know are awful choices that are going to wreck their future? Or have you been touched by darkness personally? Have you been caught up in something dark or been hurt by the darkness?

Darkness is real; just ask the father of a man who asked an AI chatbot for help with his marriage.

Jonathan was close with his family. They worked together in the family’s business. When his marriage fell into trouble, he separated from his wife. That’s when he turned to the chatbot for advice on how to be a better person. Over time, he became convinced that the chatbot was a real person. He thought of it as his new wife. He wanted to be with her. Eventually, he ended his own life in hopes of joining her in the digital world.¹ Darkness is real. We don’t want to deny that fact because it would be naïve. But we can become fascinated by the darkness and forget that there is light!

We can end up wearing “Sunglasses at Night.”

Some of you may remember the 1984 classic song by Corey Hart. It talks about wearing sunglasses at night to shield your eyes so that you don’t see the truth and so that other people can’t see your pain. What if those sunglasses stop being a shield and become a lens through which we look at the world? We would see darkness everywhere. So, here’s the question—are you wearing sunglasses at night? It’s like the opposite of looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. If you’re seeing nothing but darkness everywhere, it may be the lenses through which you’re looking at the world.

Isaiah tells us something critically important and different—we have seen a great light!

Isaiah lived in deeply dark times. The kings were evil more often than they were good, the people had done great evil, and they were suffering. Isaiah was absolutely aware of the darkness. But in the

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/gemini-ai-wrongful-death-lawsuit-cc46c5f7?mod=Searchresults&pos=1&page=1>

darkness, he proclaimed that light shines. That's bold, but it's also true because that light is Immanuel, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus. The fact that He is in the world changes everything now and forever. But that's not just a statement of fact; it's a reality that changes how we face the darkness.

We can become consumed by darkness.

Last week, we left Judah and Israel at war, with darkness threatening.

Israel was one of the nations that had invaded Judah. Israel's attack had been devastating—they carried away 200,000 people to become slaves. While God told King Ahaz of Judah to trust Him to deliver Judah from its enemies, the king was planning to pay Assyria to destroy Israel.

In Isaiah 9:1, darkness has fallen.

Assyria had attacked and defeated Israel. They deported a many people from the north, from the region later known as Galilee. **Isaiah 9:1** reports:

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.

Israel had been devastated, and Judah had been occupied. But where do your eyes focus in these verses?

Publishers selling newspapers fixed our eyes on darkness in the 1890s.

In the 1890s, improvements to the printing press made it possible for more newspapers to print more often. In the mad dash for readership, some publishers wrote sensational headlines over articles that skewed or even skewered the truth. Take coverage of the Cuban revolution against Spain. Coverage drummed up support for Cuban independence. There were real Spanish abuses, but Spain was accused of throwing children into the water to be eaten by sharks. That wasn't true. When the USS Maine was bombed and sank, the public demanded war, and it came quickly.² There are consequences when we focus on darkness.

Sometimes we don't just see the darkness; we persevere on it.

When we persevere on something, we replay it. We go over the same images and fears repeatedly. Sometimes we persevere on the darkness. When we do, fear takes over. What do you do with the darkness? Do you let it make you cynical? Do you get angry? Or do you get overwhelmed by it and just give up?

Darkness is real, but it is not the only real thing or the most real thing.

One commentator wrote, ""The darkness is true but it is not the whole truth and certainly not the fundamental truth." – J. Alec Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, p. 99) God is realistic about the darkness. Isaiah is realistic about the darkness. We can be realistic about the darkness. But we don't want the darkness to be the only thing we see. There is something more real and more important, and it is breaking in.

² <https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2024/02/the-spanish-american-war-and-the-yellow-press>

Light has already pierced the darkness.

A great light is flooding the darkness.

We have heard already that Galilee and the lands in Israel just decimated by the Assyrians will one day experience a glorious dawn. **Isaiah 9:2** makes that promise more explicit,

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.

Israel and Judah have been through the darkness, but they will be filled with great light. They will feel the warmth of sunshine on their faces. For them, the promise of light is a promise that there will be something good on the backside of all this suffering. But what? That's just starting to become clear.

True peace is breaking out.

Isaiah 9:3 is a promise of joy and prosperity,

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.

Isaiah 9:4 promises freedom from oppression,

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.

Isaiah 9:5 adds that warfare is over forever,

For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

That's true peace, *shalom*! That's what God is promising His people.

Isaiah is so certain of God's victory that he says it has already happened.

Israel was defeated. Judah was occupied. But Isaiah talked about peace as though it had already come. God had already brought joy and prosperity. He had already set His people free. That's how certain Isaiah is that God is going to do it. Plus, God has done it before. Did you catch that reference to Midian? It refers to a time—hundreds of years before this—when God delivered Israel from a powerful enemy with just a handful of men. Isaiah is certain of God's victory for His people.

Isaiah is naming Jesus. (v. 6)

In chapter 7, Isaiah began speaking about the birth of "Immanuel." Here, he begins describing the work of the Messiah, God's anointed leader, who will deliver and save His people. Isaiah gives us other names for the Messiah. **Isaiah 9:6** tells us,

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given ...

Messiah is going to be born as a child, a real flesh and blood human.

... and the government shall be upon his shoulder ...

He will change the real world.

... and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor ...

He will provide wise and righteous leadership. He will be,

... Mighty God ...

Not only human but divine at the same time. He will be,

... Everlasting Father ...

He isn't God the Father but is fully God and will rule over His people forever. He is the

... Prince of Peace

who brings lasting and perfect *shalom*. This could only be Jesus. He is going to change everything. He will bring light into the darkness.

In the cosmic struggle between light and darkness, we already have a clear winner.

Darkness may be everywhere—pressing in like the damp on a cold, rainy evening. But Almighty God is the champion Who steps forward on our behalf. We are surprised that He comes as a child at first, just a shaft of light, like a candle sputtering in front of a fan. But the light shines defiantly, powerfully. The light keeps shining, brighter and brighter, as the Savior steps out on the hills of Galilee—exactly where Isaiah said He would be—teaching and miraculously defeating the darkness. Briefly on the cross, the light seems to go out. All is dark. But then, light floods the world from an empty tomb. Light. Endless, marvelous light! The darkness flees and tries to hide its face, but there is nowhere to hide! In the end, light fills all creation until there is no darkness, none at all. We have a clear winner. The end is written.

Jesus is Light breaking into our darkness now and forever.

Jesus is the Light Isaiah promised us.

The New Testament makes that fact crystal clear. **Matthew 4:13-14** tells us that Jesus started His ministry in Capernaum,

... in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled ...

Then Matthew quoted Isaiah. As if to make sure we can't miss the point, Jesus Himself said in **John 8:12**,

... "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Isaiah is pointing to Jesus! He is the Light of the World, shining on all of us who are otherwise walking in darkness.

Right now, Jesus changes our address and our status.

We all start our lives in the kingdom of darkness, slaves to sin. But when we come to faith in Jesus, that changes right here and right now. **1 Peter 2:9** describes what happens,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Our status changes; we are no longer slaves to sin, but our chains are broken, and we're set free. Our address changes; we move from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of God, which is the Kingdom of Light. That means that God breaks chains and sets captives free from sin and evil right here and right now. That's good news to every person in the room!

But Jesus is just getting started!

Isaiah 9:7 tells us just how big Jesus' impact is going to become,

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. ...

When Jesus returns, the darkness, problems, and governments of this world are going to end. Jesus will rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Isaiah is either seeing a period called the Millennium before New Creation, or He is seeing New Creation dawning right here. Opinions are divided. Whatever the timeline, Jesus' government spreads irresistibly. It is eternal. There will be justice—we will be right with each other. And righteousness—we will be right with God. It will be peace—*shalom*—in its fullest sense.

God is offering us hope like an outstretched hand.

He isn't just speaking to His people who had been walking in darkness in 733 BC. He is speaking to us, His people in 2026, when we walk in darkness. On us, light has shone. Hope has dawned. Hope means freedom from sin now, a new identity as sons and daughters of God now, and a new home in the Kingdom of God now. Hope means eternal life plus justice, righteousness, and true, everlasting peace when Jesus returns. If you're walking in darkness right now, God is reaching out a hand with hope. Can you take that hand?

We sometimes respond to God like hostages on their way home.

In 1979, a group of students in Iran stormed the United States embassy and took the staff hostage. Hostages were tortured, and kept hungry and isolated for 444 days. Then, on January 20, 1981, they were blindfolded and taken to the airport. It was hard to trust that they were really going home. Their captors took off their blindfolds and they saw each other. They took off their handcuffs, and they could hug. They got on a plane, but as long as it was over Iranian airspace, they knew that someone might still shoot them down. How do you believe that you are really going home, back to freedom? We sometimes respond to God like hostages on our way home—wondering if our hope is real. Eventually, though, the hostages landed on American soil. They were welcomed with a parade!³ They were free—really, really free. And it was okay to celebrate! It's okay, if you are a follower of Jesus, to celebrate your freedom and hope. You ARE free, really, really free!

Let's walk in the light of Christ, instead of dwelling on the darkness.

We will either be the light or be consumed by the darkness—hope requires a choice.

Our choice isn't just between hope and despair. It is a choice between having hope and letting the light fill us and radiate out of us or falling into despair and being consumed by the darkness. Hope is something God offers us, something we have in Christ already, but something we choose along the way. The only way we can choose hope is if we believe, have faith in, and trust God.

³ <https://www.npr.org/2006/01/21/5166956/a-captive-reflects-on-the-iran-hostage-crisis>

Do we believe that “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this”?

Isaiah speaks on behalf of God. He tells us what God is promising. God is the One who is promising to do everything that Isaiah has said. Isaiah makes that crystal clear at the end of **Isaiah 9:7**,

... The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The question isn't so much whether we believe in light or hope or the future. The question is whether we believe in God. God is promising light and hope and future.

If so, then it's time to take off our sunglasses at night.

For some of us, that means things will need to change today. We may need to think seriously about where we focus our eyes and what we let fill our minds. If you are given to filling your mind with worrisome signs of darkness, be very, very careful. You may think you have the mind and heart of a prophet who is confronting wrongs, but you may just be inviting the darkness further into your soul. You'll be able to tell by what fills your conversation and your time. If we sit around with friends bemoaning the darkness, lamenting the state of affairs, and worrying about the world, then we are wearing sunglasses at night—lenses that make us see nothing but darkness. Hope and faith will take those lenses off.

Let's acknowledge the darkness but talk about the light!

Let's talk about who God is. Let's talk about what God is doing in us. Let's dream together about what God can do through us! Because Jesus is risen and the Holy Spirit is working in the world. Many people are heart-ready to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's serve people and show them the love of God and the power of the Gospel. Let's plan and prepare to share the Gospel and see lives changed. Then let's celebrate and enjoy what God has done through us!

Let's be light in the world because we belong to the Light of the World!

For weeks, we have enjoyed lights strung up across the lobby. A powerful reminder that God is stringing lines throughout our great big backyard here in Hartford and Litchfield Counties. He has put you and me in place like bulbs on that string lighting up our own backyards. Jesus, the Light of the World, shines on us, giving us unshakable hope. He shines through us, dispelling darkness. May the Light of Christ shine on your face, through your words, and in your deeds. The darkness doesn't stand a chance.