

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 at Victory of the Lamb on December 24th, 2017.

Series: What the World Needs Now

Today's Focus: God Himself

"Jesus—Just What I Always Needed!"

Dear Jesus, "You came to us in darkest night To make us children of the light; Like angels in the realms divine Around your throne we, too, will shine. Alleluia!"

Imagine a little girl coming down the stairs. The lights on the ornamented tree beautifully cast shadows on the gifts wrapped below in shiny paper. She then selects a gift—one with a big, fancy bow on it. She rips it open. Her eyes open wide and like a Disney princess she lets out a shriek of delight. Then she exclaims, "Daddy, thank you! It's just what I always *needed!*"

Except...hold on. You're like, "Wait a minute, Pastor Ben." Because nobody says that, right? Except perhaps a cynical teenager or a sarcastic adult. I mean have you ever heard a small child say with a genuine, joyful twinkle in their eye, "Thank you, it's just what I always *needed!*?" I suppose that would be pretty spectacular if our kids were that pragmatic and mindful of their blessings...but, come on, parents. What we're usually hoping for (right?)... is the joy of our child saying, "Thank you, it's just what I always *wanted!*"

Friends, what do you want for Christmas? Or let me take it a little bit deeper, What have you *always* wanted? There's a little more longing in that question, isn't there? Because now we're in the realm of our innermost desires, the dreams of our hearts that we almost don't dare say out loud for fear that they're impossibly too optimistic. But what have you *always wanted?* And how different would your answer to that question be from the question, "What have you *always needed?*"

Well today we're going to see how God comes to each and every one of us with a gift that perfectly meets and satisfies our deepest needs. You see like the people of Isaiah's day who lived 700 years before the time of Christ, we live in some dark times. Now granted in a physical sense, there are lights all around us. We've got LED lights strung up on our houses, bright screens in our living rooms up to 70 inches across, and shiny gadgets in our pockets. I'm guessing we could turn our planet into an interstellar beacon with all our technology if we wanted to! Yet at the same we are like a people walking in darkness.

The realities of racism and injustice continue to plague our country. Deep divisions exist between the cities and the suburbs. There is human trafficking right here in Milwaukee. The pornography industry in our country makes more \$ than the NFL, NBA, and Major League Baseball combined. There are opioid, heroin, and other devastating addictions. The rates of teen depression, loneliness, and anxiety are climbing with increased usage of social media and smart phones. And with Time Magazine's naming their person of the year as "the Silence Breakers" ... we've just begun to see how much darkness has been hiding in the form of abuse

behind the platforms of power and influence. People are being fired. Politicians are being called upon to resign. Public apologies. Broken hearts. Broken lives. Broken families. All around.

And maybe you're experiencing some of this right now too. Some of you I know are. My heart hurts for you. Some of you have avoided these issues yet you're dealing with your own inner darkness, your own sense of shame, your own insecurities, your own anxieties, your own doubts, your own fears, your own sins.

As one NBC news host said: *"We are all so broken. We need somebody to put us back together."* If we're honest, isn't that what we all really need? What in fact we have *always* needed?

Friends, from the beginning the Bible is the story of a loving God who generously gives us what we need even when we as the human race have continued to seek only what we think we want. And maybe that by itself shows how broken we are... that we are always seeking what we think we want instead of celebrating what God has done to meet our greatest need.

But that's why we celebrate Christmas—because what we really need is someone to put us back together. We need someone to put us back together with God. And for that no mere human would do. We're all too deeply flawed for that. No, we need a "Putter-Back-Together-Person" from outside our broken world. We need a Savior—someone uniquely and perfectly qualified to come and permanently repair the damage that's been done. What the world needs...what we need...is God himself! This is what Isaiah foretold 700 years before the birth of Christ.

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. I sometimes try and imagine what it must have been like to witness the miracles that Jesus performed later in life—like being in the crowd when he fed the five thousand plus. Like being in the boat when Jesus calmed the raging storm and the sea became as smooth as a mirror. Like being in the crowded room where Jesus forgave a paralyzed man's sins and then gave him the ability to get up and walk. Or like standing outside the dead man's tomb as Lazarus came out again alive. How would I have reacted to witnessing the Light of the world at work? You ever think about that?

Going back a bit further to that first Christmas night I try and imagine what it must have been like to be one of those shepherds outside Bethlehem—out there in the fields keeping watch over my flocks by night. Fighting against sleep, against the cold (that part's not too hard to imagine!), watching warily for the wolves who might be prowling around and probing for weaknesses. And I try and imagine what it must have been like to all of a sudden see the shining of a bright light—the glory of the Lord!

You know every time in the Bible an angel appears... people freak out. **⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified** (Luke 2:9). I'm sure I would've been too and so would you for angels are holy messengers of

God who dwell in the unapproachable light of Almighty God himself. In contrast, we are sinners, mortal beings like prisoners condemned to die, deserving of hell.

And yet what do we celebrate on Christmas? ¹⁰ **But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord** (Luke 2:10-11). Do not be afraid! A Savior has been born to *you*. Jesus—He is the Messiah—not you, not your spouse, not your boss, not Aaron Rodgers, not your favorite politician. Jesus—he is the Messiah. Because we could not climb up out of the darkness of our sin into the light of God’s perfect holiness...God’s Son came down as a little human baby to be our Savior, not down the stairs to find presents under the tree...but down from heaven into our darkness, into our busyness, into our ignorance. Why? It wasn’t so he could hang out and have fun. It wasn’t so he could accumulate the most cool stuff. It wasn’t so he could enjoy all that life has to offer and post all his experiences on social media to see how many likes he could get. And it wasn’t merely to show us how to behave better. He came on a collision course with the cross.

From the moment of his miraculous conception within the womb of the Virgin Mary, Love incarnate came down from heaven to this earth because unlike us... Jesus didn’t think, “What do I want for myself?” but rather because he thought, “What do they need?” He came down because unlike us he didn’t think, “What’s in it for me?” but because he thought “What’s best for you?” Friends, for *you* Jesus willingly embraced the busyness, the brokenness, the indifference, the injustice, the hostility, the abuse and the agony ultimately of the cross to which he was nailed and on which he hung as he suffered the punishment for this world’s guilt...ultimately because he wanted to so that you and I wouldn’t have to. He wanted to do this for you and me even when we weren’t wanting it for ourselves. He wanted this for you because he loves you!

What else can you call this but a gift—something we did not and could not deserve! 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 Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

⁷ **Of the greatness 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.**

**The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.**



You ever feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders? (Pic). In Greek mythology, Atlas was a Titan whose punishment was to hold up the sky, or as he'd depicted in this famous sculpture, holding up the world. You ever feel like this? I know a lot of Moms do. I know a lot of Dads do. I know a lot of kids do too. I know a lot of sales people do and customer service people do and teachers do and coaches do and pastors do and nurses do and police officers do and

business managers do and in different ways we all do...right? We all do...when we think everything depends on us or we feel like we have to have control of our lives or we think we have to have everything figured out ahead of time. Because what we're doing then is we're acting as if the government is upon our shoulders. How silly! Friends, what would change in your life if you realized that the government—the rule, the dominion, the responsibility—isn't really on your shoulders? But on His?

Because you know he Jesus is? He is the one who is uniquely and perfectly qualified to do this job of being our Lord and Savior. His shoulders are broad enough to carry the weight of the world. He is the **Wonderful Counselor**—in other words he doesn't need our advice. He doesn't need to pick up some tips on Wikihow. Rather his Word guides us and lights up the path of our lives if only we would take the time to read and listen to his voice. He is the **Mighty God**—our real, true super hero! In other words that little baby born in Bethlehem is so much more than meets the eye. Yes he is fully human like us, but at the same time he is no mere mortal. He is God himself! God with us. The God/Man who in our place overcame every temptation to sin, conquered death, crushed Satan's power to accuse us and proved his victory on Easter! He is the **Everlasting Father**—in other words he truly cares for us and always provides just what we need. He is the **Prince of Peace**.

Because of Jesus we have peace *with God*. He puts us back together again *with God* through the forgiveness that he won and the righteousness that he credits to us by faith. Because of this he broke the cycle of our needing to get even with those who sin against us because he paid our sin debt to God in full. That means we are free then to humbly acknowledge our own sin contributions to the brokenness of our earthly relationships because we have a Savior who has reconciled our relationship with God himself.

So don't let God be the last person you look to for help. Instead run down the stairs of your pride and rip open the gift of Jesus this Christmas...the gift of God himself for us all. But if you prefer to let fear, worry, loneliness, bitterness, anger and despair...if you want to let those things increase in your life...then stay upstairs in the attic of your pride. Stay away from church until Easter or next Christmas. Don't crack open the Bible. Just act like you can fix things all on your own and keep moving on as if you are the Messiah. Do it your way.

Otherwise, let God have his way with your heart. Begin to make your relationship with God your top priority. Come to church weekly. Start studying the Bible with a group of Christians from church. Read it on your own. Talk with God. It's called prayer. Get honest. Be real. Ask him

for help. Say, “Here’s my guilt, God. Here’s my worry. Here’s my anger. Here’s my stress. Help me. Forgive me. Give me your peace for Jesus’ sake.” And you know what will happen?

The greatness of His government will increase in your life. Your peace will increase. Your anxiety will decrease. Your forgiveness reservoir will increase. Your resentment levels will decrease. Your love will increase. Your grudges will decrease. Your faith will increase. Your fear will decrease. Your generosity will increase. Your selfishness will decrease. Until...get this...you actually get what you’ve always wanted.

In one way or another we’re all pursuing our own version of happiness, right? Isn’t that what most of us ultimately want? Yet when we do it our way we usually find out it doesn’t make us happy...no, not in the end. But if you cling to Jesus who came to meet your deepest need...your need for a Savior...God is so gracious and good that he also throws in as a bonus what you and I have always wanted deep down.

Perfect contentment. Perfect happiness. Everything made right in the end. And you’re right...that’s not a gift you can buy with Amazon Prime. It’s a gift established and waiting in the paradise of heaven. The kingdom that never ends. Where justice and righteousness dwell. Forever and for good. And for you. Bought and paid for in full by Jesus—the gift we’ve always *needed!* Amen.