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## Introduction

Merry Christmas! The Christmas countdown has commenced and it's just nineteen days until the big day. From the looks of it, people are fully engaged as they **wait** for Christmas to arrive. While **waiting** for Christmas to arrive, people are **waiting** in long lines of heavy holiday traffic. Many of those people are in route to stores to do their Christmas shopping, and once finished, they find themselves **waiting** to check out in long lines. So, to avoid **waiting** in long lines of traffic or to check out at stores, increasing numbers of people are doing their Christmas shopping on line, such as at Amazon.com. Then they **wait** for their purchases to be shipped to them. But, to avoid **waiting** for the gifts to arrive, they purchase Amazon Prime to cut down on their **wait** time.

**Waiting.** Christmas is about **waiting**—and not just in long lines at the cash register or in traffic. The Christmas season has another name for it. This time of year is called Advent, the Advent season. Advent means “an arrival,” specifically referring to the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The word “advent” is not found in the Bible, but what the word implied certainly does, and that happens to be all of the long **waiting**. The people of God were **waiting** and **waiting** for the arrival of the Messiah. Hence, it was a prolonged, painful season of **waiting** for the Messiah to arrive.

We often think to ourselves, “How long do I have to **wait** in this line?” How long did the people **wait** for the Messiah to arrive? A long time, a very long time. Entire centuries passed by until His arrival. The prophet Isaiah wrote of the coming of the Messiah. His book is the first book of prophecy to appear in the Bible, and in it, Isaiah wrote often of the Messiah. As a matter of fact, chapters 7-12 are sometimes called the ***Immanuel Scroll*** (i.e., “God with us”) because of the frequent references to the Messiah in those chapters. Let's take a look at one of those passages.

### Isaiah 9:1-7

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. 4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. 5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. 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.

Writing from Jerusalem, Isaiah wrote this seven hundred years before Jesus was born. Even then, the people were desperately wanting the Messiah to come and rescue them. Why? "The people were walking in darkness"...as the "lived in a land of deep darkness" (v. 2). How deep, how thick was their darkness?

- There was a national darkness. The Northern Kingdom (i.e., "land of Zebulun and Naphtali" vs. 1) was destroyed by the Assyrians, who invaded the nation and destroyed it.
- There was a personal darkness. The Assyrian army carried off thousands upon thousands of Israelites into exile as slaves. Their homes were pillaged and then destroyed. They had nothing left.
- There was a spiritual darkness. Why did all of this happen? God allowed this suffering in their lives because they turned from Him and a spiritual darkness swept over and throughout the land. Isaiah had warned them that they had become a people far from God: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness..." (Is. 5:20).

So they longed for a Messiah to come and rescue them from their bondage, from their exile. Moreover, their long **wait** was made all the more painful with a long silence. Even though Isaiah wrote this seven hundred years before the Messiah actually arrived, the last four hundred of those years were years of silence. There is much more than a blank page in our Bibles between the Old and New Testaments. There were four hundred painful years of silence as they **waited** and **waited** on God to send the Messiah. Imagine four hundred years without a word from God – no prophet, no voice, nothing. Just silence. Did one generation after another ask, "Where is God? Has He gone? Was He ever here with us?" There they were, **waiting** in the silent darkness.

#### Life Application:

Some things never change. Here we sit **waiting** in the silent darkness. Think of it this way. We sing, " 'Tis the season to be jolly." Is it? Is the season a jolly one? The song says it, so it must be so.

Yet, not everyone is jolly. Why? They are **waiting**. They are **waiting** to get a new job because they have none right now. They are **waiting** for the test results to see if they have cancer or not, while others are **waiting** for healing to happen to their bodies. They are **waiting** for the healing of a broken marriage and family. Some are **waiting** for the grief to be gone because it is so heavy now that their loved one is gone from this earth. This season is far from jolly for far too many. And why? People are **waiting**, and the **waiting** it is hard to wait because of two things: 1) the darkness, and 2) the silence.

What happened 2,700 years ago to Israel is happening to us today. History repeats itself. A national darkness is spreading across our country. Just days ago, violence erupted again in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, which then ignited similar violence in other cities across America. Shootings too numerous to mention are happening in schools, malls and businesses. There are so many happening that some don't even make the morning paper or the evening news. Addictions are destroying this once-great nation. These addictions are to a drink or drug of choice, to money and the things that money can buy, as well as to sexual pleasures outside of marriage. Addictions of all shapes and sizes are crushing the life out of millions of people, destroying one family after another. The list is long and seemingly endless of the ways in which our country is struggling in darkness, which then spills over into our personal lives. There is a personal darkness taking its toll in our lives. Could it be that this deep darkness is due much in part to a growing spiritual darkness, as more and more Americans call evil good and good evil? As a nation, we walk further away from God with every day that we exist. Not only is the darkness deep, but...

The silence is deafening. Not hearing from God makes waiting on Him all the more difficult. An explosion on board Apollo 13 caused the crew to abort her mission of being the third space vehicle and crew to land on the surface of the moon. Every attention and effort was then invested in the hope of saving the lives of the crew, returning them safely to earth. When any of the Apollo mission returned to earth and made the space capsule made its re-entry, there was—on average—a three-minute communications black-out. But, the Apollo 13 crew had a black-out twice as long. For six painfully long minutes, no one knew what was happening to the men of that crew; if they were dead or alive. Then, the silence was finally broken when contact was made. Imagine 400 years of silence! The voice of God was not heard for four long centuries.

Located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, there is a sound-proof chamber. It consists of 3.3-foot-thick fiberglass acoustic wedges, double walls of insulated steel and foot-thick concrete, which enables it to be 99.99 per cent sound absorbent. The longest any one has been able to sit in this chamber is for a staggering 45 minutes. People could not stand absolute silence for even one hour. The same is true when it comes to God's apparent silence in the midst of our waiting. We don't like it. But, is He really silent with us? Could it be that with all of the holiday hoopla going on around us and with us that we miss God's voice? Maybe we think God is not speaking when He actually is, we just think He's silent because we don't like what it is that He is revealing to us.

So then, we **wait**. If we will be honest with one another, we all hate to **wait**. Many of us think, "Just how long am I going to have to wait here?" So, businesses try to help us **wait**. If we are in a long line at store, there are impulse purchases that capture our attention to "help" us while we are **wait** to check out. We can stand there and read about an alien abduction in the latest tabloid. While sitting in a **waiting** room, we can watch the large high definition flat screen television or read any number of old, out-of-date magazines to help us in our **waiting**.

So, is there something that can help us while we **wait** on God? Absolutely, and it is right here in the text. Isaiah wrote a message of hope to the Israelites who were **waiting**.

So, for those of us who are waiting: waiting on a deal to close, a job to come through, a diagnosis to be provided, for a solution to a problem, for the rescue of a relationship, for a breakthrough of some kind; the text provides us with some insights to help the time to pass while we **wait**.

### ➔ The Promise

In verses 1-2, the transition from "distress, darkness and fearful gloom" to the time when "there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress" may not occur swiftly, but it is certain. This certainty is seen in the phrases: "The people...have seen, you have enlarged..." There is the use of a Hebrew verb tense for completed action to refer to a future event, and it emphasizes confidence that the event will take place. For example, "A light has dawned" (vs. 2) or "For to us a child is born" (vs. 6) declares certainty. The prophecy of Isaiah was the declaration of a promise: you may be certain that God will come through. It may not be swiftly, but He certainly will come through.

The problem is with our sense of timing, which is not always the same as God's sense of timing. For example, Daniel, a hero in the Old Testament, prophesied to King Nebuchadnezzar that he—the king—would be driven from his throne to live like a wild animal, even taking on the appearance of an animal, eating grass like that of an animal. That prophecy did not come true until "twelve months later" (Daniel 4:29). Did Daniel think that he blew it in giving the prophecy in that it did not come swiftly to pass?

Moreover, did the king think that Daniel was a false prophet when this did not happen? To the contrary, God has His own sense of time. Jesus came into this world at God's appointed time. He died and rose from the dead at God's appointed time. And, Jesus will return at God's appointed time. God will certainly come through. It may not be swift in terms of our thinking. But there will come a day when the waiting will be over.

### ➔ The Place

Where would the help and hope arrive? Verse 1 states: "In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations..." In the very place where they were destroyed by their enemy, the Messiah would arrive. In the land to the north, the Messiah would arrive in the north by the Sea of Galilee. We would come to know Him as Jesus of Nazareth, a city in the northern land of Galilee. God "showed up" in the dark place of their suffering, and He does the same with us, we just struggle to recognize Him.

### ILLUSTRATION

A customs officer observes a truck pulling up at the border. Suspicious, he orders the driver out and searches the vehicle. He pulls off the panels, bumpers, and wheel cases but finds not a single scrap of contraband, whereupon, still suspicious but at a loss to know where else to search, he waves the driver through. The next week, the same driver arrives. Again the official searches, and again finds nothing illicit. Over the years, the official tries full-body searches, X rays, and sonar, anything he can think of, and each week the same man drives up, but no mysterious cargo ever appears, and each time, reluctantly, the customs man waves the driver on. Finally, after many years, the officer is about to retire. The driver pulls up. "I know you're a smuggler," the customs officer says. "Don't bother denying it. But [darned] if I can figure out what you've been smuggling all these years. I'm leaving now. I swear to you I can do you no harm. Won't you please tell me what you've been smuggling?" "Trucks," the driver says. [Source: Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms our Lives* (Henry Holt and Company, 2007), pp. 3-4]

The customs officer could not see and recognize the obvious, and we do the same. We need to have eyes with which to see God sending both help and hope into the very place in our lives that our Enemy has ravaged. Whether in our finances, health, marriage, family and more, God can and will meet us in whatever aspect of life it is in which we need hope. **Wait** for Him.

### ➔ The Past

In verses 4-5, Isaiah made deliberate mention of a battle between the Israelites and the nation of Midian. God's people won. God provided them with a decisive victory over their enemy. Just as God enabled Israel to defeat Midian in Judges 7 (500 years earlier), He will be faithful again and enable them to be victorious (v 4). A yoke often refers to being under the weight of an enemy's oppression. The yoke of oppression will be gone. God even promised that there will come a day when the ravages of war will come to an end (v. 5), which is one of the greatest causes of human misery. Even boots and uniforms will no longer be needed for they will be thrown into the fire as fuel. Looking back in the past, we always see that God is not fickle, He is faithful; even more than faithful.

### ILLUSTRATION

Have you every longed for the "good old days?" That's pretty easy to do at this time of year. We think back to Christmases past, especially those of us who are older and our kids are grown. But, turn the

proverbial hands on the clock of time way back. What if every one of us could go way back in time to the beginning of our lives. What would it be like to be a baby again? We would have to give up language, as well as the ability to walk. We could not eat solid food, as well as control of our bladder. We would simply fill our diapers again. Most of us would say “yuk” at the prospect of becoming a baby again. So, how do you think God felt on Christmas day? On that morning in Bethlehem, the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe—the One who spoke all of life into existence—became a helpless newborn. From the time Jesus God entered our world and moved into our neighborhood, He has been faithful.

### ➔ The Person

And just who will come through? A child will be born, and He will come through. The dark, deafening silence of the long and endless night will be broken with the cries of a child. The silence of heaven will suddenly be broken with the war cry of a legion of angels, declaring: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” The one for whom they had **waited** so long had finally arrived. Advent happened. Christ, the Messiah, rescues and saves us today just as He did those who welcomed Him over 2,000 years ago.

Isaiah prophesied that He would be given four unique titles: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” These titles were given to no other king of Israel, for there was and will be no king like Jesus. Wonderful Counselor means literally “the wonder of a Counselor.” The word for “wonderful” is used to refer to a supernatural act of God. Hence, this title means “supernatural counselor or one giving supernatural counsel.” Jesus will provide supernatural counsel to rescue us from our deep darkness. Jesus is “Mighty God” Himself! A king was often called “father” by his subjects; yet, King Jesus is our Everlasting Father—King, for He is timeless, eternal! He is our Prince of Peace, ruling in our lives in such a way that we can know and experience absolute peace and security.

### ILLUSTRATION

Picture a board room in your mind. There in the center of the room is the large oval table, surrounded by leather office chairs. Every board member has a say, as well as a vote in controlling the company, and every board member is going to control the company according to his or her perspective. That is how we often live our lives. A board sits around the table in our minds, our hearts. Our hearts are divided into different aspects of our lives. One chair is our spiritual self, another is our social self, another is our work life, and another is our recreational life. Don't forget we have a married or family life. Every chair around the board room table in our hearts, calling attention to itself, while arguing and debating with the other parts of our lives. Our hearts are divided. Then, when a person comes to Christ, it's as if we invite Him to take a seat at the table. We even give Him a vote. To “accept Jesus” is inviting Him to take a seat at the table and join the debate, but not to be in charge. We don't “accept Jesus.” We surrender to Jesus. He alone must sit in absolute control of every aspect of our lives. Jesus can rescue us from the deep darkness of our sin ONLY when we allow Jesus to “take over the government of our lives.” Only when we surrender to His Lordship will we know the complete rescue from the darkness of our sin. Perhaps we are “walking in darkness” because we have never surrendered our lives to Christ.

### ➔ The Passion

What will accomplish all of this? Why will the **waiting** come to an end? “The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this” (v. 7). The word “zeal” refers to God's passion for us. God is passionately involved in our lives. God demonstrated His love for us in this: that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God is not slow. He is merciful. Every day that passes and we have not heard the trumpet call of God, when we

have not seen the clouds split and Jesus Christ returning is another day of mercy, another day of extended grace for more people to repent of their sins and to turn to God for forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ. He loves every person on this earth and He waits for them to find their way home. Our God is not slow. He is merciful.

Ever since he was a kid, Bob Goff had a dream to sail across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii. So Bob and four of his buddies entered the Transpac Race, a semi-annual sailboat race from Los Angeles to Hawaii. With limited sailing skills, Bob and his friends loaded their thirty-five foot sailboat with canned chili and bottled water and set sail for Hawaii. But for Bob and his friends, the most moving part of the journey was the arrival at the finishing line. Bob writes: "There's a tradition in the Transpac Race no matter when you finish the race, even if it's two in the morning. When you pull into the Ala Moana Marina in Oahu, there's a guy who announces the name of the boat and every crew member who made the trip .... It's the same guy, and he's been announcing each boat's arrival at the end of every Transpac Race for decades. Just when we came to the end of our supplies, we sailed across the finish line just off Diamond Head and into the marina. It was a few hours before dawn. It had been sixteen days since we set out from Los Angeles in our little boat knowing very little about navigation. Suddenly, the silence was broken by a booming voice over a loudspeaker announcing the name of our tiny boat .... Then he started announcing the names of our ragtag crew like he was introducing heads of state. One by one he announced all of our names with obvious pride in his voice, and it became a really emotional moment for each of us onboard. When he came to my name, he didn't talk about how few navigation skills I had or the zigzag course I'd led us in to get there. He didn't tell everyone I didn't even know which way north was or about all my other mess-ups. Instead, he just welcomed me in from the adventure like a proud father would. When he was done, there was a pause and then in a sincere voice his last words to the entire crew were these: "Friends, it's been a long trip. Welcome home." Because of the way he said it, we all welled up and fought back tears. I wiped my eyes as I reflected in that moment about all the uncertainty that had come with the journey, all the sloppy sailing and how little I knew. But none of that mattered now because we had completed the race."

"I've always thought that heaven might be kind of a similar experience .... After we each cross the finish line in our lives, I imagine it will be like floating into the Hawaiian marina when our names were announced, one by one. At the end of our lives, after our many mistakes and midcourse corrections, our loving Heavenly Father will simply say, 'Friends, it's been a long trip. Welcome home.'" [Source: Bob Goff, "It's the Journey that Makes Coming Home Sweet" Donald Miller blog (3-19-12)]

That's hope, and hope lives here. We find hope while we **wait**. **Waiting** on God is never a waste. Even when we fail to see what He is doing, God is always orchestrating the events of heaven and earth to accomplish His purposes for your life and mine. Trust Him. **Wait** patiently, knowing that **waiting** is never wasted when we **wait** on God. Advent simply means an arrival, and for us, it means the arrival of Jesus. But Jesus didn't arrive without a **wait**.

#### **Psalm 27:13-14**

"But I am still confident of this, I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be strong, take heart; and wait on the Lord."

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