

## **“Who Turned Out the Lights?”**

Isaiah 8:19-9:7

*Sermon Series: The Story Chapter 16 The Beginning of the End*

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When I was in high school, I belonged to the lighting crew. We ran the spotlights and stage lights for all the school plays. In my senior year, an adult choral group put on a concert in our auditorium. I was asked to run the lighting for the concert by myself. It was a fairly simple setup. Aside from general lighting on the choir and orchestra there were a few special spotlights on the conductor and four soloists.

The night of the concert I sat alone up in the lighting booth while a packed auditorium listened to the beautiful music below. Now the lighting board in our booth was enormous. Since it was so big and I am not big, I sat on top of the board to see out the window and watch for cues. The choir sang portions of Handel’s Messiah. With great majesty and power they proclaimed, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” I was so lost in the music...I missed a lighting cue. Just as the soloists, choir, orchestra and organ built to a grand climax, I jumped off the board to change the lights.

*And everything went completely silent!*

I peeked over the lighting board and looked out the window. The entire auditorium was pitch black. When I jumped off the board, I hit the breaker switches and shut off the lights. The only light in that whole big dark room was one small spotlight on the conductor. From the restless audience people yelled, “What happened?” “Lights!” “Who turned out the lights?” But the conductor calmly turned to the audience, pointed up at the light and said, “I hope this isn’t a sign.” After seconds of fumbling in the dark, I switched on the lights and the show went on. Three weeks later, I received a \$10 check and a nice note suggesting I stay out of show business.

“Who turned out the lights?” Do you ever ask that question when you watch the news or scan the internet? When you hear about the devastating earthquake in Nepal, the executions by ISIS or the tragic train derailment in Philadelphia, it makes one ask, “Who turned out the lights?” Despite our technological advances, hunger still stalks the globe, epidemics still wipe out villages, slavery still chains countless nameless people, the homeless still search for shelter, and safe clean water, that most basic of all needs, is still denied to millions.

And perhaps at some point in your corner of the world you’ve asked, “Who turned out the lights?”

- The credit cards are full and the checkbook is hemorrhaging red ink.
- You used to be able to handle your child’s tantrums. But now he or she is old enough to do some frightening things.

- Another couple you know is breaking up. You wonder if you can stay friends with both the husband and the wife. You secretly wonder if your marriage is next.
- You were really getting the hang of this job. Good reviews, bonuses. Then, without warning, you were let go. Your resume is out there but few people return your calls. Those who do give you excuses: it's the stock market, the economy, more downsizing.
- You feel numb. You wish your loved one were here. Life's just not the same. Nothing's been the same since the funeral.
- You felt it in your body – a strange ache, a mysterious cough, a small lump – but you're afraid to go to the doctor.

Who turned out the lights? And who will turn them on again? When the lights go out in our world, we wish and hope and pray for someone to find an answer to our problems. We look for a spotlight so we can say, "I think this is a sign." Where is the light to lead us through the darkness?

In our journey through the Story we come upon a people who walking in darkness, a people who live in the land of the shadow of death. Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, in the days of the prophet Isaiah, the people of Israel cry, "Who turned out the lights?" As you may remember, God's people are divided into two nations: two tribes form the Kingdom of Judah in the south and ten tribes make up the Kingdom of Israel in the north. Like two bratty kids, these sibling kingdoms fight each other constantly. But both are afraid of dark clouds from the North. The vast hordes of the Assyrian empire threaten to sweep down and turn them all into slaves. Fear seizes every heart. The end of the world seems near.

The man most filled with panic is Ahaz, King of Judah. Isaiah says Ahaz's "heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind" (Isaiah 7:2). Ahaz is a weak and wishy-washy leader. He is so afraid of losing his throne he builds an altar to foreign gods in the Temple of the Lord. Then he does the unthinkable: he burns his son as an offering to please pagan gods. The King of Israel in the north performs similar evils. But no one – no one – consults the Lord.

In 722 B.C. the Assyrian hordes sweep down and crush the northern kingdom of Israel. Trees are chopped down, cities burned, fields ruined. Nearly the whole population – men, women and children – are marched north into exile never to be seen again. They become known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. Thick darkness descends on the land and the few who are left pray for death. Isaiah describes the scene:

Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness (Isaiah 8:21-22).

In the depth of this darkness, they do not reach out to God for guidance and strength. Instead, Isaiah says they dive farther into the darkness.

When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn (Isaiah 8:19-20).

Everyone searches for some light in the rapidly growing darkness. They want answers to their questions. So God's people consult mediums and magicians, fortunetellers and false prophets. They pray to their dead ancestors and bow down to stone idols. These are the people who walk in darkness. Yet despite their rejection of God and their embrace of the powers of darkness, the Lord does not give up on them. Into that darkness, the Lord God promises to shine a spotlight.

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 Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan— The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. (Isaiah 9:1-2).

The Lord will shine a beacon into the deep darkness. It will be a sign to the hungry, the confused, the defeated and the depressed, a light which brings joy to their anguished hearts, a light which relieves oppression and wipes away the stains of blood from their war-torn lives. This great light, this heavenly sign, will be a child, a very special child, a child born to reign as God's appointed and anointed King, a descendant of king David who will be even greater than that great king. This King will establish His kingdom and uphold it with justice and righteousness for evermore.

What is the name of this King? He is so great He will have not one but four names. His name will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We hear these names so often but what do they mean?

- **Wonderful Counselor** – This King will govern His people with the wisdom of God.
- **Mighty God** – This King will defeat their enemies with the power of God.
- **Everlasting Father** – This King will care for His people with the love of God.
- **Prince of Peace** – This King will end war and bring a wholesome and harmonious life.

We need God to shine this spotlight into our dark world. Wouldn't it be great if God sent this sign to us, if God gave us this child-King? Hey God, we need a Wonderful Counselor – someone wise enough to straighten out our fragile financial and political messes. We need a Mighty God – a hero warrior who will forever clear away all our enemies. We need an Everlasting Father who will wipe out hunger and poverty forever. We need a Prince of Peace who will give us health, wealth and prosperity. When are you going to shine that spotlight on us God? We're ready anytime You are. In fact, could you hurry it up and send that King? You're already way behind schedule. We could have used that Messiah guy years ago.

Two thousand years ago a Child was born to a very common family. He never had any formal education. He was a tradesman. He worked with His hands. He never wrote a book. He never earned a diploma. Yet there was a wonderful wisdom in this man – a wisdom which

continues to change and guide the lives of people in every age, a wisdom which seems to come from above. He is the Wonderful Counselor.

This man never was a soldier, he never commanded an army, never killed anyone. Yet He was a conquering hero and a victor over His enemies. He won the war, not by killing others, but by sacrificing His life. For by His death the power of God conquered the greatest, toughest enemies of all: sin, death and the devil. He is the Mighty God.

This man never was a father, He never had any children. Yet it was through His care for the hungry and the hurting, the lost and the lonely, the sick and the sinful, the outcast and the oppressed that the love of God the Father showered upon His children. He is the Everlasting Father.

And this man was never rich. He was born among the homeless in a cold barn, died a condemned prisoner without a shirt on His back, and was buried in a borrowed grave. He was not what we would call a prince nor was there much peace in His life. Yet He said the only reason He came to earth was so we might have life and have it abundantly. He came so that, in our darkness, we might find joy, peace and abundant life. His throne is not in a palace. He reigns in the hearts of all who welcome Him and call Him King. For truly He is the Prince of Peace. He is the great Light that shines in our darkness. His name is Jesus.

There are many good ways to deal with the darkness in your life: cut some things out of your schedule, get the rest you need, talk about your feelings with someone you trust. Yet darkness is a closed circuit. We feel isolated, disconnected, alone. Self-pity and hopelessness imprison us. Too often, the cycle feeds on itself and we are drawn ever deeper into the darkness. What we need is a Light to shine in from outside us.

Trapped in the darkness, what we truly hunger and thirst for is love. Beth Moore vividly describes this thirst.

Several years ago when my heart desperately needed to be in God's ICU, He helped me picture something I believe all of us do virtually every day. We each have our unmet needs, and we carry them around all day long like an empty cup. In one way or another, we hold out that empty cup to the people in our lives and say, "Can somebody please fill this? Even a tablespoon would help!" When we seek to have our cup filled through approval, affirmation, control, success or immediate gratification, we are miserable until something is in it.<sup>1</sup>

The truth is: All love on earth is tainted. Our love can be idealistic or indulgent, possessive or abusive, manipulative or needy, fickle or fading. Even at its best, the love we give one another is not forever. At some point, the ones we love die and leave an empty space.

Jesus Christ is the only One who can fill our cup now and forever. He is the Wonderful Counselor who guides with the wisdom of God. He is the Mighty God who helps us break free

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Moore, Praying God's Word, Broadman & Holman, Nashville, TN, c. 2000, p. 91.

from depression and addiction with the power of God. He is the Everlasting Father who comforts and encourages us with the love of God. He is the Prince of Peace who guides us into a life of peace even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. In his Gospel John said,

In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world...To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:4,9,12)

And if Jesus has turned on the Light in your life, will you shine His Light in someone else's darkness. To my knowledge, the only title Jesus applied to Himself and to us is Light. He said "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5) and "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Shine His Light into the life of someone who is searching for God by inviting them to worship or your Growth Group. Shine His Light into the darkness of someone who is struggling with an addiction by encouraging them to seek help and come to the Recovery service. Shine His Light into the darkness of someone who is depressed and sad by sitting and listening without offering advice. Shine His Light into the darkness of someone who is a single parent, a widow or widower, a nursing home resident, a homeless person, a prisoner.

Charles Colson once met with President Borja of Ecuador to discuss Prison Fellowship International's ministry in Ecuador's prisons. They had no sooner been seated in luxurious leather chairs when the President interrupted the conversation with the story of his own imprisonment years before his election to the presidency. During his struggle for democracy in Ecuador the military cracked down and arrested him. Without trial, they threw him into a cold dungeon with no light and no window. For three days he endured the solitary fear and darkness that can drive a person mad. Just when the situation seemed unbearable, the huge steel door opened, and someone crept into the darkness. Borja heard the person working on something in the opposite corner. Then the figure crept out, closed the door, and disappeared. Minutes later the room suddenly blazed with light. Someone, at the cost of his life, connected electricity to the broken light fixture. That little spot of light was all Rodrigo Borja needed to endure. He knew the darkness would not win.<sup>2</sup>

Let Jesus turn on His Light in you and shine His Light through you. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald W. Nikkel in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker).