

Isaiah 9:1-4: ¹But 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.

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

³You 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.

⁴For 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.

“From Gloom to Glee”

INTRODUCTION:

Have you ever been in a big stadium before a big game? The home crowd is pumped and everyone is excited—the optimism of victory fills the air. Now, have you ever been in a big stadium the moment when the home team gives up a big play and loses? The players are quiet, dejected—gloom fills the air—and the fans are doing the “surrender cobra”—that’s what this posture is called. A lot of Dallas Cowboy fans were doing the “surrender cobra” last Sunday after Aaron Rogers’ amazing pass put the Packers in position to win the game. The Dallas Cowboys had the Super Bowl in their sights, but they were crushed in defeat—sent packing by the Green Bay Packers—no pun intended! Their season is over—the gloom of that defeat will hang over player and fan until next season.

The word “gloom” is in our text for today. It is used to describe the sense of hopelessness and darkness that overcomes a people who’ve been defeated by their enemies. It also describes the sense of defeat and hopelessness we feel when confronted by God’s wrath over sin.

But God’s Word brings good news for those who have been defeated by sin, who are in the depths of gloom, who feel the weight of their guilt:

GOD SHINES THE LIGHT OF HIS SON ON THE DARKNESS OF SIN AND GUILT AND
TURNS THE GLOOM OF DEFEAT INTO THE GLEE OF VICTORY.

I.

You might recognize our Old Testament reading as a Christmas reading, and a portion of it is. But the first verse isn’t read at Christmas: “¹But 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.”

While gloom may fill a football stadium after the home team has been defeated, it’s only a game. But the “gloom” in our text describes the physical and spiritual condition of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They were feeling the heavy hand of God’s wrath—utterly defeated and laid to waste by the Assyrian army. The northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphali were especially hard hit by the wicked Assyrians.

God brought this people into “contempt” because they had rejected Him. In the place of the one, true God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land, they did what they thought was right in their own eyes. They worshiped and served idols—they looked to false gods for provision and protection. They rejected God’s Word and His prophets and His plea to repent; and after hundreds of years, God’s patience ran out. He raised up a foreign nation to defeat them and take them from their land. Now, because of their sin, gloom and anguish were their lot.

Things haven't changed. Doing what's right in our own eyes—and not God's eyes—is a common problem for all of us. Instead of following God's way, we follow the ways of our sinful nature and the world around us. For protection and provision—for answers to our problems—or to make our problems go away—we turn to the false gods around us. Now, we're too sophisticated to call them gods or idols, but anything that comes between you and God is an idol—whether it's money or government, sexual immorality or possessions—even football or baseball—these things become gods when they become more important to us than God.

We've all watched as people fall away from the Lord because they prefer leisure over worship, they prefer immoral lifestyles contrary to God's will, or they prefer the pursuit of earthly treasures over following Christ. As sinners, we're all vulnerable to such temptations.

Whenever we choose something worldly over God, there are consequences—temporal and eternal. When we make choices that are against God's will, God's Law is quick to convict us—and we end up filled with guilt and shame—gloom and even anguish. Last week I talked about the sacredness of human life from the moment of conception. But contrary to God's will, millions of babies are sacrificed to abortion every year with the result that there are countless women and men who carry a burden of guilt with them their whole lives.

You can sense this anguish and gloom in a woman who wrote *Lutherans for Life*. She said: “You see, I didn't just kill my child that day. I killed something inside of me, something that is now replaced with the knowledge that I, too, can do a very wicked evil.”

II.

The opposite of gloom is glee. For hearts burdened by sin and guilt, glee is the result of God's grace. For the people of Zebulun and Naphtali, who paid an especially hard price for their

sin, the prophet Isaiah said, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. 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.”

That great light that turns gloom into glee is Jesus. He began His earthly ministry right there in Northern Israel, in the region of Capernaum. There, Jesus began His ministry of the Gospel—of declaring God’s grace to sinners! There, Jesus called His first disciples, healed the sick, calmed the sea, cast out demons and forgave sins. There, Jesus first shined the light of God’s grace on people trapped in the gloom and darkness of sin.

As He did 2000 years ago, Jesus still does today. To us who dwell in the gloom and darkness of our sins—who found that doing what was right in our own eyes only leads to the gloom of guilt and despair, the light of Christ shines through His Gospel! This light has dawned on us not because we got our act together or because we did the right thing, but because Christ has reached into our sin-darkened lives to give us the light of His grace and mercy. Through the forgiveness He won on the cross, Jesus brings glee—the joy of salvation to hearts trapped in the gloom of sin.

That woman who wrote *Lutherans for Life* also wrote, “My heart’s cry is to be a flashing neon sign to those who will listen. I want to give the devil a bad day! Do what you can. Do all you can. The people must hear!” The devil loves gloom and anguish—he gets you to sin, then he revels in your guilt and despair. But we can give the devil a bad day and turn the gloom of guilt and despair into the glee of hope and salvation by announcing God’s victory over sin, death and the devil to all people—but especially to those who suffer from the gloom and anguish of their sins. That’s what the Church is here for—to faithfully proclaim the truth of God’s Word—to be

God's light in the darkness—but also to faithfully proclaim God's forgiveness—to be God's earthly mouthpiece of hope, forgiveness and renewal in Christ.

CONCLUSION:

As a baptized and redeemed people, you dwell in the light and victory of Christ—your own guilt over sin taken away by the Lamb of God. But also as a baptized and redeemed people, You bear His message of life and forgiveness, and in so doing, you too become light-bearers of God's grace in this world of darkness and gloom.

You see, you never know on any given Sunday as we gather here who may be carrying a burden of gloom and anguish—not because their team lost, but because they carry the burden of a guilty conscience. You may not know just how bad a day the devil might be giving someone, which is why Christ's word of forgiveness must always be on our lips. By announcing Christ's love and forgiveness to those who dwell in the gloom and darkness of sin, you too participate in breaking the rod of that oppressor, Satan—you can give the devil a bad day” and lift a soul from the pit of gloom to the heights of glee in Christ Jesus.

In Jesus Name. Amen.