

## **Sermon Reading: Isaiah 8:19-9:2**

*<sup>9</sup> When someone tells 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? <sup>20</sup> Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.*

***9** 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—*

*<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.*

## **Living in Our Living Lord's Light**

A small child wakes up screaming in the middle of the night. They aren't sick. There doesn't seem to be anything wrong. They can't really explain. But you figure it out. They are afraid of the dark.

You wake up with a start. Heart-pounding, mind racing, you wonder, "What was that noise?" You check and there's nothing wrong. You still can't shake the feeling. Houses make weird noises in the dark.

Children are afraid of it. Imaginations run wild with possibilities of what's hiding out there. There's something about the unknown of the dark. But it's not just rooms without light or a certain time of day where we find darkness. There's the darkness of the future and what is going to happen. It's the darkness of not knowing the best decision for you and your loved ones. It's the darkness of what to do when nothing seems to be working. It's the darkness for why something is happening in your life. It's the darkness of evil and sin in this world. It's the darkness of sin and evil that I still wrestle with and struggle against every day.

We hunger for the light. We don't want to be left in the dark. We want to be enlightened, to be in the know, and to be in the light. But how do you get there?

Curiosity about the unknown has been on mankind's minds since our first parents, Adam and Eve. But since the fall into sin there's this darkness over God's creation that leaves us with more questions than answers. What is right? What is actually wrong? What does the future hold? Is there any hope? Is there a light at the end of the dark tunnel of this life?

In order to find those answers, some are telling God's people (v.19) to consult mediums and spiritists. These people claim to be able to communicate with the dead. The idea was if you want to know what the future holds, the best decision you should make, the spirits of the dead would be able to give you the answers. So the mediums would reveal what was hidden with mutterings and whispers, chirping noises and groaning. It was all very covered, hidden, and unclear. So why would anyone go to such people? Because they want some light on their situation in life. They are desperate for hope against the darkness of this world.

You probably do not turn to mediums to know your future or fight against the darkness of this world. But we hear a lot of chirping and muttering that is supposed to bring some light in the darkness. You hear we need to hold on to traditions of the past and how things you used to be. Others will point to changes we need to make with different causes and social agendas. You hear whispers that you need to have certain experiences, and if you do this, you will have a fulfilled, enlightened life! There's whispered promises that having certain things or a certain number in your bank account and retirement fund will assure you in the face of the dark unknown future. You hear chirping that the most important thing is to make sure the kids have the best future possible with the most opportunities available.

But it's all chirping and muttering that leaves you in the dark. Nothing is quite clear. Sometimes it works. More often it does not when those good causes and experiences—whether they are for yourself or for your children—rarely live up to what you expect. Too often they leave you feeling more drained. They steal from tomorrow's happiness. You can feel overwhelmed with the feeling of darkness that you can never do enough. The amount you save and the things you have are nice. In fact, God blesses you with them. But they pass away. And if you are not careful, you may love them too much! Too quickly we get upset with God when we don't have what we want or expect. Then it lead us into a darkness of always needing more and never having enough.

You hear mutters from within. You feel the pressure of the darkness, so you hear the mutters that tell you to do what you feel is best. If it makes you feel happy, there's your light in the darkness. You feel the darkness of judging eyes and glances, so you hear the whispers that you need to fulfill all the expectations for what a mom, dad, child, or spouse is supposed to do. You feel the darkness of knowing you did something wrong. You lost your temper and said things you shouldn't. You didn't listen when someone just wanted a little attention. You found yourself caught up in the moment and you can't believe you did it. What are you supposed to do? There's mutterings that you need to do something to show that you were sorry. You need to make up for you what you did.

But the darkness is still very real and very present. Your good actions may lighten the load of an aching conscience. But it doesn't take the wrong away—the person you hurt still feels it and you remember it. Fulfilling all of the expectations may work for a while. But then it burns you out and leaves you in a deeper darkness when you know you can't make everyone happy. Doing what you feel is best sounds great. That is, until someone tells you

what you are doing is hurting yourself, your loved ones, and wrecking your relationship with God.

When we listen to the chirpings and the groaning from the world and within, instead of bringing light, it leaves us in a deeper darkness with more confusion than when we started. Everyone seems to have an opinion, very few are worth listening to. We want the light. But it's darkness that we keep finding. And that shouldn't surprise us. It's darkness that fills our hearts since the fall into sin. The slimy darkness of selfishness, self-serving, and self-destruction is our default by nature. The darkness that goes back to the things that we know that we should not do and ought not to do but keep on doing. Darkness shadows and stains even our best intentions and kindest words. When darkness surrounds us there is no hope. Even when we realize that something is wrong or should be better, our nature and this world leads us deeper into the pit. What makes it even worse is that when we are in this darkness of sin and this sinful world, we fail to realize how deep we are in the darkness.

If we are trying to get out of darkness, why do we search this sinfully dark world or sinfully stained natures for a way out? It's the blind leading the blind. So Isaiah asks, **"Should a people not inquire of God?"** God doesn't leave his people hopeless and helpless, lost and alone. **"Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning."** To God's Law and the testimony of the prophets. Listen to God's Word. It's not just words on a page. Words are cheap. God gives you more and shows you the light. Through Isaiah God promises, **"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"** (9:1).

Because they continued to go against God's will, God humbles the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. They are the first tribes of Israel that foreign invaders will ravage, plunder, and carry her people from their homes. They are a people who see little hope in the darkness. But God does not abandon his people, **"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned"** (9:2). Hundreds of years later Jesus fulfills these words (Matthew 4). These lands that seem lost in darkness would have the glory and honor of being Jesus "home-base" as he carries out his ministry.

Even worse enemies have ravaged and plundered this world we live in. Satan with his empty promises, half-truths and lies carries and leads people away to further darkness of eternity in hell. Sin with its enticing temptations and intriguing pleasures plunders our lives of true happiness and joy damning us to eternal suffering and death. Death comes to all bringing decay and destruction to our relationships with each other and relationship with God.

But God does not leave you hopeless and helpless, lost in the darkness. This world would have the honor of God taking on flesh and living among us.

But is this the real light or is this just something to lead us deeper into confusion?

To the Law and to the Testimony! The Old Testament points to him. The work he does reaffirms him. When the devil schemes and threatens God's promise of a Savior, the light prevails and Jesus is born. He is the Word who becomes flesh. When the devil comes with his lies and empty promises, Jesus shines the light of God's Word to show the truth. When he faces our same temptations and darkness of sin, Jesus resists never falling once.

But what about the darkness? It looks like the darkness wins when sinful men condemn Jesus to death on the cross. It looks inevitable when Jesus hangs on the cross becoming the darkness of sin for us. It looks like there is no hope when they place Jesus' lifeless body in the tomb. The darkness of death looks like it has won. But three days later, the light shatters the darkness of death. Our Lord lives! His light shines! The darkness will never overcome the Light of Jesus.

The darkness of death is now a mere shadow of sleep for God's people. Death is defeated. The darkness of sin does not cling to you or stain you any longer. In Baptism Jesus washes you and promises your sin died with him on the cross and will not be held against you. The darkness of the devil with his accusations and lies against you hold nothing. The light of Jesus reveals the truth. Your sins are forgiven. There is nothing more you need to do. Jesus does it all. Don't listen to the lies: "But now you need to do this to make sure you are forgiven." When Jesus declares you not guilty of sin that is what you are. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, you are forgiven for all your sins you have or will commit. With the unknown darkness of the future, you are able and willing to face whatever comes your way. Because you have peace with a God who loves you and cares for you, it is going to be okay. He proves it in Jesus. For the sake of Jesus' perfect life and innocent death, your living Lord is on your side. And when your time on this earth is done, your living Lord promises you will continue living with him forever.

When the darkness threatens to overcome you, you are not alone. When you feel the temptations overshadowing you, the light of Jesus still shines. When you have fallen into the darkness of sin again, God still does not abandon you. To the Law and to the Testimony, Isaiah says. To the Word, Jesus, who comes in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper to give you his body and bloody and takes away your sins. To the Word who does not speak in mutterings, whispers, or chirping but the clear teachings of the Bible. There Jesus strengthens you to resist sin and the devil, encouraging, and giving you confidence in the face of doubt. To the Word who shines his light in you and through you to put your neighbor first so they too may be brought to know God's light. You who were walking darkness have seen this great light of Jesus, share it! Speak the Word into the ears of your family and friends. Speak it onto hearts and unburden a heavy conscience with the simple truth, "Jesus forgives you. He forgives me." Live in your Living Lord's Light. Amen.