

"Before the Line"

Isaiah 9:1-7

Series: The Line

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All right, we're gonna see if we can't make some headway here this morning. How many of you ever saw The Chosen? You see that TV show or that series? Pretty cool series. There's one line in there that I think is the best line of all of them. And it's when Mary is talking to Nicodemus. Nicodemus had seen her before when she was a nightmare and now she's different. And so, she makes this quote.

She says, "I was one way and now I am completely different. And the thing that happened in between was Him." I love that statement because for you, you might be like me that I look at my own life and I say there was a time where there was pre-Jesus Dustin, right? I was a horny 13 year old, right? Going to school just not thinking at all about God or eternity or anything. And the next thing you know, there's post-Jesus Dustin. Totally different cat. Totally different cat. And for you, you look at yourself that way and you say, man, this is the way I was before. And then it's not just us as individuals. It's the world in general. There is the world as we know it before Jesus came. And then there's like a line in history.

And then there's after Jesus came, right? And we even in our calendar, it's 2025. It's about to be 2026. What does 2026 mean? It means 2,026 years since Christ. We have this term AD, which means Anno Domani, which means "the year of our Lord." That's what that means. And so, every year after that, we don't have a year zero. That was the year of our Lord. Every year one, two, three year of our Lord, it keeps going. And then we have before Christ. So human history is even divided by Jesus. And so, I was thinking about that and I was like, what's the difference between before Jesus and after Jesus? There a profound difference? And why do we celebrate the line? Why do we celebrate that day that Jesus was born? And so, a lot of times I come to church and you'll hear us do Christmas scriptures, right? And there's a bunch of Old Testament scriptures. When were they written? They were written before Jesus arrived, right? These are Old Testament scriptures. And so, you got quite a few of them in Isaiah.

One of the important ones in Isaiah is in Isaiah chapter nine, verses one to seven. And you've heard it. It says he will be a mighty counselor, a wonderful counselor, mighty God, prince of peace. You've heard that. I thought to myself, when the people in Israel heard that prophecy from Isaiah, what were they thinking about? Have you ever thought about that? Did they hear that prophecy and say, oh, there's gonna be a manger and there's gonna be a little kid named Jesus. And all of a sudden all our problems are gonna go away. You think that's what happened? Do you think they knew anything about Jesus? They didn't even know anything about Jesus.

They didn't get this prophecy and say, oh, wonderful counselor, that's gonna be Jesus. They didn't know that. And it's talking about gloom and doom. And that this child is gonna overcome the gloom and the doom and you're thinking, well, what did they think? Because I think it's important to know what the context was of a prophecy like that so that we can better understand what these Christmas things are about. So we're talking about before the line today. Before the line. And so, to do that, I thought, I hope you're okay with this. I'm just gonna run through a little bit of biblical history if you're all right with that.

So, if you've read the Bible, you'll know a lot of this. Well, maybe if you've read it once or twice, you might not remember all this, but I'm gonna kind of explain to you what happened in history. So, before the big three kings, Saul and David and Solomon, who was the king of Israel? Anybody know who their king was? They didn't have a king, right? No, their king was God, right? God was their king. God's intention for His people is that He would be their king. You say, well, that's not like all the other nations. All the other nations have a king, and that's what the Jews said too. The Jews were like, hey, we don't want to be different than everybody.

We want to be just like everybody else. Maybe that sounds familiar to some of you in your life. You're like, well, I don't want to live with God as my king. I don't want him to be in charge of my life. I don't want him to rule me. I'd rather have something else do it, something lesser, something less important, right? So, that's what the Jews did. They said, we don't want God to be our king. We'd rather have an earthly king, a person to be the king. We want a person. We don't want God.

And so, God was, so God sends a message and says, you know, that's not a good idea. If you have a human king, he's gonna rule over you. There's gonna be oppression. There's gonna be bad things that happen, because human kings are human. They've got issues. You don't want that. They said, no, we want a king. So, God says, all right. Because God oftentimes gives us what we want, even if it's not good for us. He allows us to have what we desire. And so, they get a king, and the first king is Saul.

And you've heard about Saul, and Saul is an okay cat for a while. But then he disobeys God. And then we have a king after that, who is King David, right? And King David. And during this time, all of Israel, all the 12 tribes, have one king, Saul, then David, and then Solomon. The temple gets built under Solomon. And so, everything is great, right? It's all good.

Everything is great. And then something happens. There's a division. When Solomon dies, who's going to be the next king? And so there's this division that happens, and they end up having two kings. So now it's not a united kingdom, it's a divided kingdom. And 10 tribes in the north, known as Israel, all those 10 tribes take on the name of Israel. They are led by a king. And two tribes, they jet off. They don't want to be a part of that. They don't want to be a part of that. They don't want to have that same king. They want to be down in the south. And so, they're in the south. Those tribes are Judah and Benjamin, and they have their own king. And so now you've got two... A divided nation of God's people.

And it's a nightmare. So, we're going to throw some maps up here. And so, each kingdom has its own king. And Assyria, can we throw the map up? There we go. So, you'll see kind of this whole area there. You can see like Naphtali, Asher, East Manasseh. All those are the names of tribes. All these tribes you're seeing here, those are all northern tribes. But then you can see here, you'll see Judah. See that's down by the Dead Sea. That's going to become... It divides off and it becomes this other kingdom. So, there's Israel's north, Judah's in the south. That's what you need to know for this. All right.

Now, there's a dominant superpower that you can't really see in this one. There's a dominant superpower. All right. Let me just kind of run through this with you. So up in the top right, it says Assyrian Empire. So, we have superpowers. Now we have the United States. We have China. We have, I guess, Russia. I don't know. I don't like to give them that. But there's superpowers, right? Well, Israel was the superpower.

Well, what happens is a new superpower comes in. And they are ruthless. And so, what they're doing is they're coming into different lands. And they'll come into a country and they'll say, "listen, pay us tribute, give us money, give us whatever we want, or we'll come in and beat you up and take your lunch money and take your people as slaves." So that's what's happening here. And so, there are two kings,

In the south in Judah, (That's the yellow part) there's a king named King Ahaz. And King Ahaz is ruling down there. Now if you go up in the northern kingdom, there's a king called King Pekah. So, these are two different kings. What happens is there's also a king of a country that's off to the side. Now they don't believe in God. They're pagan. They're not Jews. They're not any of that. They're just a pagan country, believes in different gods and everything. What happens is King Pekah, he's afraid of the Assyrians, because the Assyrians are coming in and taking everybody and beating them up and taking their lunch money, and taking their land and making their people slaves. And so, what do they do? They find allies. That's what we do as a nation. We find allies. And so, they find allies. Because they're afraid of the Assyrian Empire. So, King Pekah from the Kingdom of Israel and King Rezin from the king of Aram.

Okay? Aram is the name of the country. Aram, they are Arameans. They speak a language that Jesus would speak later called Aramaic. That's where that language comes from. King Pekah and King Rezin, get in together and they say, we got to do something. You know, we don't believe in the same God, but the Assyrians are going to beat us up. And so, let's team up together and make sure that I got your back and you got my back. And so, as you read scripture, we see that. It says here in scripture, look what it says.

*When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. ² Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with^[a] Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. **Isaiah 7:1-2 (NIV)***

So let me explain a little bit more. So, what happens is king Pekah and king Rezin want Judah to be a part of their alliance. They're like, "We want you to be a part of this alliance. We want you to be a part of this. And then together the three of us will be able to keep the Iranian empire from being able to do it."

King Ahaz, don't want no part of that. And they're like, "well, that's a fine how do you do?" We need him to be a part of that. So, what do they do? King Pekah and king Rezin attack Judah in an attempt to override and take king Ahaz, kick him out and put in their own puppet person there that will then align. And then there'll be three companies together. And so that's what that passage was about. So Ahaz is in the south. He won't team up with them against the Assyrians. So they try to overthrow Ahaz, so they could put in this puppet king.

Now, if we go to second chronicles in verse 28, and I know you're like, what is going on here? This is a lot. Just follow with me, because this is really kind of cool when it gets done. A has and Judah are defeated. So, the southern kingdom gets defeated. Those countries in the north, they are able to defeat him down there. And so anyway, this is what happens.

*⁵ Therefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hands of the king of Aram. The Arameans defeated him and took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hands of the king of Israel, who inflicted heavy casualties on him. **2 Chronicles 28:5***

And they lose in the south, it says 20,000 soldiers in Judah, because Judah had forsaken the Lord. So, the coalition takes a bunch of prisoners, and they end up going back with all these prisoners. When they get back there, a prophet says, hey, listen, you guys are just as sinful as they are and because you're just as sinful as they are, you can't take all these prisoners from the south back up to the north. You got to send them back.

And so, they do. So, we're finding that both of these kingdoms are evil. Then Isaiah prophesied to Ahaz to reassure him, because this king in the south is freaking out. He's sitting here like losing his crap, because he's thinking it's so scary. These guys are going to beat us up, and the only reason we're still around is because they let us stay here, and they could beat us up at any time that they want.. He's scared he's going to be attacked by these kingdoms in the north. And so, when he does that, when he's afraid of that, instead of Ahaz saying, listen, I'm going to go back and ally with those guys. That'd be a good idea. A prophecy comes to him.

*⁷ Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." ⁸ And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. ⁹ The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death." **2 Kings 16:7-9 (NIV)***

He doesn't go and align with his brothers with Aram. He goes to the Assyrians. He goes to the superpower.

And watch what he does. It says, "*I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hands of the king of Aram and of king of Israel who are attacking me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord.*" He ransacks the temple of God with all its gold. And he sends it to the Assyrians. What kind of a freak show does that? "*And Ahaz took the silver and gold from the temple of the Lord and treasure of the royal palace. And sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria, complied by attacking Damascus and captured it.*" So, because of this southern king, the Assyrians come in and they ravage the north.

That northern kingdom of Israel. And this military act that the Assyrians bring, that happens in the year 732 BC. And they take over large parts of the northern kingdom. And so, it's not a united kingdom, but now they're even losing big sections of the kingdom. And Assyria has taken over. And the areas that they hit first, are that big lake up there right next to King Pekah's hand. And see that above it? See a Galilee up there? The place that gets ravaged the most, the people that get taken first are the people of Naphtali and Zebulun. Which is Galilee. Maybe you've heard of Galilee. It's an important place in the New Testament. And so, Jews are deported from their own land.

Galilee is ravaged and there's a physical and there's a spiritual gloom. All these people are like, we've lost our nation. It's one thing to be divided. It's another, we're losing our nation. Now we are slaves. People are being taken out having to carry a yoke and being forced to leave their country.

This is horrible. **This is the context for the famous passage of Isaiah chapter 9.** You've got a bunch of people in the North in Galilee who have now been taken captive, who have been involved in war with the South, the Assyrians, a mega power that they could never in their wildest dreams ever ever ever be able to defeat. It is hopeless for them and there is gloom and now they have to live in the oppression and the suffering of being taken over and being in basically slavery and subject to them.

They've lost everything. That's the context of the Christmas passage in Isaiah. Some of you and me, we might relate a little bit to that. Like it's not just, it's not that this comes in and they immediately start thinking when they hear this prophecy, oh, there's going to be a little baby named Jesus. This is the context. Now, you know the context.

You've never heard this story with the true context. Now you have new ears. To hear the word of God, listen closely to what the prophecy is about Christmas. Isaiah 9 verses 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—" Isaiah 9:1 (NIV)

Can you throw my mat back up there? Naphthili, those are up in the north. Those are the places that got attacked. And what he's saying, he says, nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who are in distress. In the past, he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphthili, but in the future, he will honor Galilee of the nations. By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. Isaiah 9:2 (NIV)

They're not thinking about a little baby. They're thinking about the gloom. They're not thinking about sin, except they're thinking about the sin that's caused them to be ravaged, that's caused them to be in the situation they're in, that's caused them to be slaves. And here's a prophecy saying it's not over. And you in the north who've been taken over, you know what, I have a prophecy for you. I'm going to fix this. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. So prophetically, he's saying, I've seen that there is a light at the end of this tunnel. They've seen a great light in those living in the land of the deep darkness, a light has dawned.

So, Isaiah is telling them what's going to happen. It says,

"You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder." Isaiah 9:3 (NIV)

How could that possibly be? They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. So, these people that are in this deep gloom are being told that you're going to rejoice like people who have won the war and have all the plunder. You're going to rejoice like that. It goes on and it says,

"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." Isaiah 9:4 (NIV)

So, this defeat is going to be like the defeat from back when Gideon was around. That incredible defeat, a defeat that you couldn't have anything to do with. God is the one who made it happen. He compares this victory to Gideon and it says the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressors. So, the rod of their oppressors, the yoke, is being forced on them by their oppressors. They're being led out, carrying stuff.

Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. **Isaiah 9:5 (NIV)**

Here's why that's important. Because, he's describing the boots that somebody wore in war, which are covered in blood. And the garments they wore in war are covered with blood. What they would do after a war when they defeated somebody is they would take all of that blood-soaked stuff, blood-soaked boots, and they would burn them because they were unclean. And they would burn them for a couple of reasons. The main reason is because they were unclean, but also to show that we don't need them anymore. We don't need boots and we don't need these kind of clothes. We don't need battle clothes anymore because we have definitively won it and we don't have to fight anymore. That's what he's saying in this passage. He says,

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. **Isaiah 9:6a (NIV)**

Now, how is that relevant to me? They're hear this and they're like, a child? What child? It must be Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz. Maybe he's going to be the child. They don't know who this child is going to be. He says the government will be on his shoulders. Some of you are saying, well, my nation hasn't been taken over and I haven't been taken as a slave and my gloom is different and I'm oppressed by the consequences of maybe my own mistakes and the injustice in the world or by evil people, but it's not the same as despair like these guys are facing.

But I want you to understand something. **The answer is exactly the same.** The answer is the same.

The answer that is given here with a son is given is the same regardless what your gloom, whatever your doom, whatever your oppression, whatever it is, the answer is always the same. So, the Jews before Saul, David and Solomon, they wanted a human king, right? They didn't want God to be their king. They wanted a human king. And so, God gave them what they wanted. And now it has ended with nightmare.

And so, what God says is I'm going to fix things. But the way I'm going to fix things is I'm going to send you a king. I'm going to send you a king. And that king is going to rule, right? You don't want God to be your king. You wanted a human king. So, you know what I'll do? **I'll give you both. I'll give you a human king that is also God. And he will reign and he will rule. And the only way you will have peace and the only way you will not be oppressed and the only way that you will not be under this burden is that I will send a king and this is what he's going to look like.**

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Isaiah 9:6b (NIV)**

Well, the one person that's going to guide you rightly is a wonderful counselor. Unlike the wicked kings before. They were guiding them to build temples to other gods and a share of poles and worship other gods. No, this is going to be the good counselor. Not like Satan. Satan was a wicked counselor. He gave counsel to Adam and Eve and said, disobey God. Not this counselor. He will be a wonderful counselor. It says he will be mighty God. Here's a clear declaration that this new king is not only going to be a human child king because it says child, but he's also going to be God. He's going to be the mighty God of the body and not just any God, the mighty God.

Everlasting Father. Now, that's just not saying that Jesus is going to be in the Trinity, the Father also. By Father, He's talking about the Creator. The Father is the creative being. Jesus is the creative being in there.

So, when it talks about everlasting Father, He'll never end. He'll be the Prince of Peace. He's going to bring peace, particularly between God and man, but also on all over the earth. So, watch this, verse 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. **Isaiah 9:7 (NIV)**

So, this child prophesied by Isaiah is going to bring the one thing they want more than anything since being defeated. He's going to bring the one thing you want more than anything in the despair in your life. He's going to bring you a kingdom of

peace. Look around at the world we live in. There's not any peace. People wake up in the middle of the night, can't even sleep, because they can't have any peace. People are struggling all over. There's no peace. I go to work, well, there's no peace. I go over here, there's no peace. There's no peace anywhere.

Why? Because you've got all these factions that all disagree with each other and they fight with each other and they yell at each other. And it's because this person doesn't know nothing and this person doesn't know nothing and you're getting bad counsel here and bad counsel there. And it's just ridiculous. And it describes here this leader of this kingdom that we're going to be a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting father, a prince of peace, and his rule it says won't end. Once we get this king, there's a time when this kingdom will come and it won't end anymore. We won't have to worry about another kingdom coming in and defeating it and throwing us back. We won't have to worry about that. Once this kingdom is established, that'll be it.

Now, some of you are like, well, that sounds good. How many of you think that sounds good? Sounds really good. Wouldn't it be great if this kingdom, that Jesus himself, God, wouldn't it be great if the government was run by God? That all the judges that were making judgment were God? Wouldn't that be a great kingdom? Wouldn't it be great if you didn't have to worry about stuff because you're not being taxed like half yourself for salary, for stupid stuff? Wouldn't it be great if you didn't live under the rule of Pritzker or the rule of some of these other... Any human ruler, I mean, you could say about any other human ruler as we've got. And you had a God who was perfect and loving and imagine that kingdom and you say, yes, that would be great. That was what was promised to these people in the context of just getting their butts kicked by the Assyrians and being taken away. Your distress is the same. And the answer is the same. A child is born.

A son is given. And here's what's great. **You say, well, how soon can that come?** Like, I'd really like that kingdom to come. I'm going to give you some theology real quick. Let's say that the tribulation of Jesus, that could come at any time. Let's say that the tribulation, the seven years of tribulation started tomorrow. If it started tomorrow, the reign of Christ on earth is less than a decade away. If he came tomorrow or if he came today, we have less than eight years until we're living in the kingdom we're dreaming of. You realize that? It's not like a hundred or a thousand. We don't have to think that way. We can think, wait a second. Jesus could come at any moment. Have faith. I'm going to give you one passage at the end.

I know I'm a little over, but you know what? You didn't get anything last week, so I'm giving you twice as much sermon this week. If you turn to Matthew, Matthew wants you to know something about that Old Testament passage. He wants you to know that that passage is about Jesus. And so, when you get to Matthew chapter four, let me read it. It says,

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."^[1]

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Matthew 4:12-17 (NIV)

That's Naftali and Zebulun. Where does He go? Where's the first place He goes? He withdrew to Galilee. Leaving to Galilee, he went and lived in Capernaum. That's right there on the Sea of Galilee. That's where he goes and sets up camp. This child that is promised, sets up camp.

Once John the Baptist is dead, right there on the Sea of Galilee in Zebulun, Naftali, that area, the north. The ones who took a beating the worst. I'm coming to those people that took it the worst. I'm coming to them first. It says, Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naftali. That's the Sea of Galilee.

"To fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah. Land of Zebulun and land of Naftali, the way of the sea." What's the way of the sea? The way of the sea is actually a trade route, that goes all the way from Egypt all the way up to Mesopotamia. It runs right through Galilee. It says here, *"land of Zebulun and Naftali, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles."* He chooses to bless the world by using Galilee in its location to reach Gentiles all around the

world. Did you know that? One of the reasons why Jesus ends up in Galilee is because that's a trade route that goes all over the place. The gospel ends up being proclaimed to Gentiles and to Jews in this area up there. Then those people spread the trade routes going and the gospels going all over.

God had a plan way back when the Assyrians were defeating Israel. In order to share the gospel with all these people. Verse 16, The people living in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. From that time on, Jesus began to preach.

And this is the message that he preached. Listen, *“repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come.”* What kingdom? The kingdom of heaven is at hand. He is inaugurating in with His birth right there. When He's in Galilee, He's inaugurating in this kingdom that we're talking about. It could be here within eight years.

He's inaugurating it in. But here's his message to us. This is how we take advantage of that. And some of you in here need to hear this. ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*** With the coming of Jesus, the message to each of us is, You need to recognize what is sin in your life.

- Where do I fall short?
- What am I doing?
- How am I being stingy?
- How am I acting sexually in a way that's not appropriate?
- How am I dishonoring God in the way I speak to people?
- Maybe I'm sleeping with my girlfriend, or maybe I'm sleeping with my boyfriend. Maybe I'm doing stuff. I know I shouldn't do it.

The answer, according to Scripture, he says, and I'll tell you, 90% of churches don't want to tell you this, but I'm telling you what Scripture says. He says, repent. Turn from that. Repent means turn away from my sin and grab on to this Counselor. This counselor. This mighty God. This Prince of Peace. And be a part of this kingdom that God has for you by faith.

I hope that helps you a little bit to understand the passage and maybe understand a little bit more about the prophecy and who Jesus is. We've just talked about before the line. Next week we'll talk about the line. All right.

Closing Prayer: God, I thank you so much for these people here. I thank you for your Word. God, I thank you for the way you sewed human history together and even the despair and the gloom of the northern kingdom and Pekah and Aram and Zebulun and Naphtali and Galilee. How you wove that in and how Jesus came to that place. There's so much. God, we say as we prayed earlier, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. God, we are thankful. We put our faith in the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. In Jesus' name, amen.