

**Isaiah 9:6**  
*A Son is Given*

**Main idea:** Just when everything seemed hopeless, God gave us Jesus.

I read a story that came out of the devotional periodical "Our Daily Bread." It was about two friends who met for dinner in a restaurant and both of them ordered fish. So when the waiter came back with their order, there were two pieces of fish on the same platter, but one of them was large and the other was small. One of the men quickly proceeded to serve his friend. Placing the small piece on a plate, he handed it across the table.

"Well, you certainly do have nerve!" exclaimed his friend. "What's troubling you?" asked the other. "Look what you've done! You've given me the little piece and kept the big one for yourself." "How would you have done it?" the first man asked. His friend replied, "If I were serving, I would have given you the big piece." "Well," replied the man, "I've got it, haven't I?" At this, they both laughed.

I very easily could have been that first man.

One of the things that I have to work to overcome in myself is my selfishness.<sup>1</sup> I naturally tend to think about myself more than others. I think about my own happiness rather than the happiness of others. I think about my own desires and fears and hopes instead of those of others. And since I think about pleasing myself more, I naturally tend to work to please myself more, and this is a problem, because the Bible says that I should love my neighbor as myself.<sup>2</sup>

And it's hard for me to even imagine what a truly selfless life would like. Do I need to give away all of my money,<sup>3</sup> sacrificing my own well-being, or can I also pay my own bills, and get some nice things for myself?<sup>4</sup> Is it selfish to be what I call being responsible, or is that being wise with the money that God has given me stewardship over, even if that means sometimes not helping with a need that I hear someone else has?<sup>5</sup>

These are hard questions, but what makes them even harder is that I know that I'm selfish, which causes me right off the bat to want to hoard everything for myself, and not lose myself for the sake of God and others.<sup>6</sup>

But maybe you don't see selfishness as your problem. Maybe you think your problem has more to do with the selfishness of others. You think, "If they would just be more selfless, like me, then I wouldn't have these problems in my life!" I confess that I often think like that also, and that's a problem, because the Bible says that we should think like Jesus, who humbled Himself, even when everyone around Him exalted themselves, and He died on a cross for their sins.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:3

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19:18

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:21

<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:18-19

<sup>5</sup> James 2:15-17, 4:17

<sup>6</sup> Luke 12:16-21

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:5-8

Well, no matter what you think your problem is, I think we would all admit to having problems. And a lot of people begin going to church because of the problems that they're experiencing in life. They reason that maybe they've been having a hard time in life because they haven't been paying attention to God enough, and that if they just begin to pay attention to God more, then God will bless them with a life free of problems.

Of course, that's not the way that it works. We're never promised a life free from trials, in fact, we're promised just the opposite. Jesus said this in John 16:33.

**In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33b)**

So even though we will continue to have trouble in this life, we can have peace, hope, and courage, knowing that through Jesus, we also have overcome.

So, there you go. Have peace, hope, and courage, and you'll be able to overcome your problems! But is that the kind of overcoming that Jesus was talking about? And how exactly do we get that hope? I mean, how do we overcome, just because Jesus overcame? And how do we have the mind of Christ, so that we overcome our selfishness, giving to others just as God has given to us, without losing ourselves in the process? In other words, how can we be generous toward others, and still keep the big piece of fish for ourselves?

That's kind of what we all want, isn't it? We like the idea of being generous, but not if it's going to cost me something.<sup>8</sup> We want to give, but only if we still have plenty.<sup>9</sup> But maybe that's exactly the problem that underlies all of our other problems: that even when we desire to do good, we're unable, because at our core, we're sinful and selfish.<sup>10</sup> Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall rescue me from this body of death?<sup>11</sup>

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

*Father, help us to trust not in our abilities, or thoughts, or strength, but in Your gift, given to us. Help us to trust in Jesus. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

For the next three weeks, I'm going to be preaching a short series of sermons that I'm calling The Gift of Christmas. Jesus is the Gift of Christmas. Just when everything seemed hopeless because our sin, God gave us Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Samuel 24:24

<sup>9</sup> Luke 21:1-4

<sup>10</sup> James 1:13-15, 3:16

<sup>11</sup> Romans 7:24

<sup>12</sup> Romans 5:8

So I'll be focusing on how Jesus was given to us, but I'll also be talking some about how we're to give to God and others.

Jesus said this to His disciples:

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. You have received free of charge; [so] give free of charge. (Matthew 10:8)

Because Jesus was generously given to us, we ought to be generous toward God and generous toward others.

Well, I don't know about you, but I don't often feel very generous. I know that I should give my money, time, and energy to help others, but usually I spend much of my money, time, and energy on trying to make myself happy. And around Christmas time, when I'm supposed to be joyful about giving gifts to others, I often can't help but think about how much it costs me to do so, which means that I'm not giving very joyfully, am I?

The problem is that I have a selfish heart. Even if we do all of the right things, which we don't do, we still have a heart problem. Isaiah 29:13.

This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me. (Isaiah 29:13b)

And this has been the same problem that people have had since the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve sinned not only in eating the fruit, but in desiring the fruit.<sup>13</sup> Instead of relying on God to make them good, they desired to make themselves good and therefore had already abandoned God in their hearts.

This is what the Old Testament reveals about the Israelites over and over again, and it's that context that the book of Isaiah was written. Isaiah takes place nearly eight hundred years before Jesus was born. And as with much of prophecy, Isaiah 9:6 had an immediate as well as an ultimate fulfillment. The situation in Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, was that the Jews were worshiping false gods. Judah had just had a very bad king, Ahaz, who led them to abandon the Lord. So we read at the end of Isaiah 8 that everything was in gloom and darkness. Isaiah 8:22, just the previous chapter.

And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. (Isaiah 8:22)

Darkness is one of the many illustrations in the Bible for hell.<sup>14</sup> Which makes sense, because if we're not walking in God's light, then we're walking in hell's darkness.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 25:30

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 1:5-6

And that's how hopeless life is because of our sin.<sup>16</sup> We're in thick darkness, only concerned about our own happiness, and yet not recognizing that we're in a hell of our own choosing. So because the Jews were not trusting in God and obeying Him, they were in distress and anguish.<sup>17</sup>

But then comes chapter 9. Verse 1.

But 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. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. (Isaiah 9:1-2)

So while life may seem hopeless to us because of our sin, and because of the sins of the people around us, God always has a plan.<sup>18</sup> For the Jews at the time, that meant that the next king, after King Ahaz, there would be a good king. And, sure enough, King Hezekiah was that good king. He restored the temple to its beauty.<sup>19</sup> He led the Jews to worship the Lord.<sup>20</sup> So when King Hezekiah began to reign, the people who walked in darkness saw a great light.

But there's an even greater light being talked about in these verses. Because although what Hezekiah did was awesome, it was also short-lived. After his reign as king, Judah had a string of several bad kings who brought back idol worship, which led to the people of Judah being exiled from their land. So while Hezekiah was a brief light to those who were walking in darkness, there was a greater light still to come.

Skip down to verse 6.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

While Hezekiah was faithful to God in ushering in a time of peace and light for the Jews, he could never live up to the description of the one who was to come. So this passage doesn't find its ultimate fulfillment in Hezekiah, but in Jesus.

Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor. He heals our broken hearts of our sin and sickness.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus is our Mighty God. He's the Son of God, and God in the flesh.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Galatians 6:3

<sup>17</sup> 2 Chronicles 29:6, Romans 2:9

<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 29:11

<sup>19</sup> 2 Chronicles 29:1-3

<sup>20</sup> 2 Chronicles 29:20-36

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 147:3

<sup>22</sup> John 1:1-3, 14

Jesus is our Everlasting Father. Through Him we are given the right to be called children of God!<sup>23</sup>

And Jesus is our Prince of Peace, because only through Him are we forgiven of our sins, so that we can have peace with God, and peace with one another.<sup>24</sup>

You see, just as the people of Judah were living in darkness because of their idol worship, we also were living in darkness. We were dead in our trespasses and sins.<sup>25</sup> So unto us a child was born, and unto us a son was given.

Isaiah also makes it clear why this child was born unto us. Isaiah 53:5.

**He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)**

Because I am selfish, Jesus selflessly gave Himself for me on the cross, so that I could be healed. So the question I need to ask myself is this: am I healed? Am I healed of my selfishness? Because if I continue to live selfishly, not living in the reality that I'm healed from sin and selfishness, then I'm denying that Jesus really did die for me.<sup>26</sup> But if I rest in His gift, and believe His promise that I am healed, then I begin to love my neighbor, giving sacrificially to God and others, just as God gave to me, because I rejoice that with His wounds, I've been healed.

This is also how we overcome. We overcome through Jesus. By His wounds, we're healed. And it's not that we overcome everything that we might see as a problem, as least not yet, but rather that we can be sure that no matter what life throws our way, we know the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace, and because we know Jesus, and we have His Holy Spirit living in us, we have everything we need for life and godliness.<sup>27</sup>

You know, we celebrate Christmas by giving one another gifts. And some people think that's because Saint Nicholas began the tradition of giving gifts to children, and maybe that's true historically, but the reason we give gifts is because God first gave us Jesus. Unto us, a child was born, and unto a son was given. We give because God first gave to us. We love because He first loved us.<sup>28</sup>

And, you know, God didn't just love us with part of His heart. Jesus didn't just faint on the cross. No, Jesus gave us His life. His all. Even while we were completely undeserving.<sup>29</sup> Even when we were dead in our sins. So, in the same way, we should not just give some, but all.

So, should you give all your money to God and the church, helping even undeserving people, or should you pay your bills, and maybe even buy nice things for yourself? Well, yes. It starts with recognizing that everything is God's, and then using all of your money for His glory. Sometimes that means going

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<sup>23</sup> John 1:12

<sup>24</sup> Romans 5:1

<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 2:1

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 10:26, 1 John 3:9

<sup>27</sup> 2 Peter 1:3

<sup>28</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>29</sup> Romans 5:8

without, so that others can have. Sometimes that means paying your bills, so that you have a home where you can invite others and tell them about the love of Christ. And sometimes that can even mean buying a really nice ranch house so that you can better care for your medically fragile foster child that you'll soon be adopting.<sup>30</sup> So think about the nicest thing that you have. Are you using it for God's glory?

Being a Christian doesn't mean you now have to take a vow of poverty. It means that you've already taken a vow of poverty, because you see everything you have not as your own, but as a gift from God,<sup>31</sup> to be used for Him.<sup>32</sup>

Do you see your money that way? It is all God's, or just a certain percentage of it? For many years, the church has taught people from the Old Testament commands to the Jews that they should tithe,<sup>33</sup> that is, give 10% of their income to the church. But that's not what the New Testament teaches the church about giving! It teaches that everything is God's, and that we're to give joyfully and sacrificially back to Him.<sup>34</sup>

Gordon MacDonald said this:

One of the greatest missing teachings in the American church today is the reminder to men and women that nothing we have belongs to us." - Gordon MacDonald

And C.S. Lewis said this about giving to the church:

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them. - C.S. Lewis

In other words, what have you given up in order to give joyfully and sacrificially to God? And if you haven't really given anything up, the question is simply this: why don't you have the kind of joy in God that causes you to do that?

Let me suggest to you that it's the same underlying problem that we've all had, and which only Jesus can heal you of. Apart from Christ, we're sinful, and selfish, and even if we blame all our problems on everyone else, that only further shows that we haven't yet humbled ourselves before God.

I want to read you one more quote that kind of brings everything I've said together. In their book, "Contagious Generosity," Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard wrote this:

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<sup>30</sup> 1 Timothy 4:4

<sup>31</sup> James 1:17

<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31

<sup>33</sup> Deuteronomy 14:22

<sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:3, 9:7

Stewardship is more than an obligation. It's an opportunity to witness the reckless nature of God who gives the gift of salvation by grace to everyone who receives it. (Contagious Generosity)

So we have the awesome invitation to do the same thing that God has already done for us: to give. And we begin to do that selflessly with joy when we receive what God has first given us: He gave us His only Son, so that by His wounds we're healed, and we're given salvation by grace through faith, as a gift.

Have you received that gift? It's by grace through faith in Jesus that you can be healed of sin, and selfishness, and it's by grace through faith in Jesus that you can inherit eternal life, to live not in hell's darkness, but in God's marvelous light.<sup>35</sup>

So believe.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9, Acts 16:30-31