

PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE VERSES

Isaiah 9:7

This review of my favorite Bible verses has been a pleasure for me. As I have thought on these verses and referred to them so often through the years, preaching on these verses is **akin to attending a family reunion**. Sure, there may be new experiences with these old relatives that we haven't seen in years, but at least we don't have to try and learn their names. They all look older, but we already know them, and know them well. That's how preaching on these verses has been for me

Now today's verse – Isaiah 9:7 – caught my attention many years ago. Those familiar with the Bible are well acquainted with Isaiah 9:6. It gets quoted every Christmas season. But 9:7...well, that is where there is a bit of a catch. So let's read Isaiah 9:6 and 7...

Isaiah 9:6-7

As I said, Isaiah 9:6 gets quoted every Christmas season because, at least among Christians, there is no question but that this was a future reference – a prophecy – regarding the coming of Jesus. George Frederick Handel forever cemented that notion in our minds when he made this text a centerpiece for his famed "Messiah" oratorio.

(Listen to 4 minute oratorio chorus?)

That's verse 6.

But verse 7 is the catch. For in verse 7 there is this **audacious suggestion** that **unlike any** previous governmental leader, there will **"NO END"** to this leader's rule. And not only will there be no end to his rule, but there will be no end to the INCREASE of his government.

Now before you nod your head in agreement and offer a faint "Amen" I want to suggest to you that you likely **have not** really understood this at all. And, furthermore, that what I am going to suggest to you this morning is **SO RADICAL an idea** that not only have most Christians NOT HEARD IT, but if they have heard it they actually find ways to try and contradict it.

So here goes...

What would you think if it were suggested to you that this world is NOT coming to an end in your lifetime...that Christ is not coming back in your lifetime, or your children's lifetime or even in your grandchildren's lifetime? Christ left this world roughly 2,000 years ago promising to come back. The church has held on to that promise all these years, going through various periods (particularly around big anniversaries like the year 500, the year 1,000, the year 1,500 and then again as we neared the year 2,000) believing that most certainly Christ was THEN going to finally return.

But what would you think if Christ didn't come back in the next 100 years...1,000 years...10,000 years...or more? We think we're near the end of this period of gospel expansion, but what if we are actually more near the beginning? What if...to compare the growth of Christ's kingdom to that of a person's life...what if instead of the church being like some old man awaiting death, it is more like an infant, still in diapers, just learning to crawl?

For much of the church (and the bulk of Evangelicalism) such a view...such a **delay** in Christ's return would, I believe, prove to be more than devastating.

Luke 18:1-8

So while there is this implied promise that God is eager to answer our prayers "speedily," Christ ends that section raising the question as to whether, when he returns, the Son of man will find faith on the earth.

I believe the answer to that question is an unequivocal YES...**Yes, he will find faith, plenty of faith** when he returns. But long before that time comes, people who **lacked in patience and trust will have faded away**, including a lot of people from Evangelical circles.

You see, it is only within conservative evangelicalism (and the cults) that notions and schemes tied to a return of Christ **within our lifetimes** has arisen. Bumper stickers about the rapture, books about a coming war with Russia, or the magazine articles about Syria and the rise of the antiChrist...well, they're not marketing those items in the Catholic, Orthodox or Episcopal Churches. It is the Evangelical community, **and only the Evangelical community**, that has been putting out or buying these materials. Hal Lindsey wrote his books (suggesting Christ would return by the late 1980s) and sold them to the evangelical community. He then took the millions that he made and (from what I have read) invested his money in **long-term** real estate investments (go figure!) What am I saying? What I am saying is that **the Evangelical church has been sold a bill of goods**...a slickly marketed bill of goods...all aimed at exciting the church with the notion that the rapture is an any moment affair and that Christ's return is imminent. I truly believe we've been snookered. P.T. Barnum said that there's a sucker born every minute, and I'm afraid we've been the sucker. For, to me, so much of what we have been fed **flies in the face** of what the Bible appears to actually be teaching, beginning with Isaiah 9:7. For Isaiah 9:7 teaches not only Christ's unending rule, but an...get this now...**an UNENDING INCREASE of his government and peace**. Schemes about the rapture and the return of Christ are fairly consistently presented as taking place within the context of a persecuted church that is losing or has lost the battle against Satan and his cohorts. All acknowledge the battle, but Isaiah 9:7 seems to be presenting a very different future from the one we have been told we can expect.

Now Isaiah 9:7 doesn't tell us to what end is that increase. That is to say that while Isaiah 9:7 teaches an UNENDING INCREASE of the Messiah's rule and peace, the text doesn't tell us at what point that increase can be expected to end. For example, a company that sees its market share go from 5% to 6% to 7% to 8% of the total market share is an unending increase. But what if the board of directors at that company said it would be satisfied when they reach 9%?

Or to be more clear to the point...

If roughly 33% (one-third) of the earth's peoples in some way or another today name Jesus as Lord, who is to say that God's goal was not 35%, and that when Christ's kingdom reaches 35% of the world's peoples God will not just "calls it a day?" I might WANT the goal to be 100%, but maybe that isn't the goal. ULTIMATELY we do know what the goal is. It is given to us in Philippians 2:9-11. Let's look at that...

Philippians 2:9-11.

But maybe the day when EVERY KNEE bows and EVERY TONGUE confesses is when its **all over**. And while some will bend the knee in heaven, others will bend it in hell? Who knows? But short of this 100% submission to the Lordship of Christ here mentioned in Philippians 2, maybe the Isaiah 9:7 increase of Christ's rule and peace need not reach that high of a goal.

And as I don't know what the goal is, it is impossible to know just how close we are to having met the goal. Maybe we **are REALLY close** (and that Hal Lindsey was even closer that he could have imagined). And if that is the case, then praise God! I'm ready for the end...how about you?

Romans 11:25 talks about a "fullness of the Gentiles" suggesting that it isn't until the "fullness of the Gentiles" has been reached that God's attention will again turn back to seeing "all Israel" saved. But what is that fullness? At what **number** or what **percent** or what **saturation point** will the fullness of the Gentiles be considered complete?

No one knows for sure! No one!

So let's get back to at least **acknowledging the possibility** (and that is all I would ask of you today) that Christ's return is NOT as imminent as many have suggested and it could actually still be a **VERY LONG WAYS AWAY** as Christ's kingdom takes over more and more and more of the earth's peoples. I am very ready to grant that the re-establishment of Israel as a nation sure seems like one of those things that seems to have been prophesied in scripture (in Ezekiel 36 and 37) and that it is a sign of end times. But maybe there is a whole lot more that awaits Christ's kingdom expansion...

Daniel 2:1-45

It is my firm conviction that this dream was prophetic of Christ's kingdom. Christ was the stone that struck the image (which represented the man-made kingdoms of this world). Christ's kingdom, which began in the age of Rome, is that kingdom that will replace all others, shall "fill the whole earth (verse 35), never be destroyed...and stand forever (v. 44).

Has Christ's kingdom reached that point yet?

I don't know. It doesn't seem like it has.

Interestingly the apostle Paul was clearly convinced that within the very first century the gospel **had already been proclaimed "in all creation under heaven"** (Colossians 1:23) and that "in the whole world" it was bearing fruit and growing (Col. 1:6). So the gospel has gone out...

And just as it was bearing fruit 2,000 years ago it is still bearing fruit today.

But at what point will God **say it has reached the saturation point** that He decided it needed to reach before bringing this world to an end?

You see, it seems to me that these popular evangelical writers and preachers are quite **presumptuous**, suggesting that **they have decided we're at the end**. But **how do they know?** Is this some new form of gnosticism whereby only dispensationalists are in the know? I don't think so. **These preachers and**

writers are far more presumptuous than they are good exegetes. And some of them are plain charlatans, not prophets.

So Isaiah 9:7 speaks of Christ's government and peace as having no end and of which there will be no end to its increase.

(By the way, imagine having a stock investment in which there was no end to its INCREASE! That would be a stock you would want to own!)

This is what we learn about Christ's kingdom. But just **how** does Christ's kingdom grow?

1. It grows by God's design.

Acts 2:42-47.

In a few months we will be starting our way through the book of Acts. I am particularly looking forward to the time when we deal with these verses that we just read in some detail. But all I would have you see today is the single word that begins the second part of verse 47. Each sentence prior to that begins (in the English text) with the word "and." In the Greek text the word is kai. Kai...kai...kai...kai. Each sentence begins with kai. And, and, and. But the very last line...the LAST SENTENCE of verse 47 does not begin with kai. It begins with de – a short two-letter Greek word most generally translated as "But." For some inexplicable reason nearly every translation of the Bible into English translates de – in this last sentence – as "And." But by doing so **they miss the clearly intended CONTRAST** that was put in by Luke when he wrote the book of Acts.

You see...and this is the point of the word de...the church can seem idyllic, acting in a perfect way. I mean, doesn't the description of the early church given to us in these verses sound pretty good? It sure does. But whether the church is idyllic or not, whether it is doing everything right, or it is doing everything wrong...either way...de...BUT it is God who adds to the church those that he has ordained to be saved. We can TRY and do everything right – and we should – but that is no guarantee for growth or success. For, in the end, **it all depends upon GOD** and His design, His plan, for growth.

2. Christ's kingdom grows steadily. It may not grow uniformly, but it grows steadily.

Back in the first few centuries after the church began we can see how Christianity grew quickly throughout Europe. And after the discovery of the new world (North America) we can see how it grew so quickly there as well. But only in the last 100 years or so has it REALLY TAKEN OFF in South America, Africa and Asia. And as it has increased in these other parts of the world its original increase in Europe and North America has come into a period of decline. At one time Great Britain was a true BASTION for the gospel, but now it has become a mission field as it has become overrun by both agnosticism and Islam. All in all, God's kingdom has increased throughout these many centuries, even though here and there we can see more of an ebb and flow. And so while we in America, are witnessing Christianity's **decline**, other parts of the world are witnessing **phenomenal growth**.

- 200 years ago someone visiting Vanuatu – what used to be called the New Hebrides Islands – would have been killed and eaten. The people there were cannibals. Today it is one of the most Christianized and peaceful places on earth

- South Korea knew almost nothing about the gospel 150 years ago, but today is one of the most Christianized places on earth. The largest weekly gathering of humanity takes place there every SUNDAY as nearly a million people arrive at the Four Square church in Seoul, South Korea.
- And the expansion of the church under Communist suppression has been phenomenol.

As this has taken place the center of Christianity has been shifting eastward and southward.

In the west we are, in a sense, still living in the age of Luther, Calvin, Whitefield and Moody – white, male Protestants. But the future of the church as a whole is looking increasingly less white, less male dominated and maybe even less Protestant. And should the Catholic Church ever truly come into a period of evangelical reform, the sky is the limit as to where it might go. Its current occupation with its internal corruption, sex scandals and papal uncertainty all add to the idea that a reform is needed. The Protestant Reformation was only 500 years ago. Just imagine what might happen if there was another Reformation? Just imagine where things might go in the next 1,000, 5,000 or 10,000 years!

3. Christ's Kingdom is certain to take over more and more and more of this world's peoples.

That's what Isaiah 9:7 is teaching. And how does it do that? It does it one person at a time. Here a little, there a little. But ever on the increase.

And haven't we all seen EXACTLY that as we have learned of the conversion of ONE family member only to later hear of two, and then three, and then four and so forth. Sure, here and there we hear of people "losing" one or more of their family members (meaning losing them to unbelief). But we also hear the exact opposite of that as here and there we hear of people's family members COMING to Christ.

Mark 4:26-32

This is how Christ's kingdom grows. It starts small and increases. **And in the end it becomes massive...**like a plant that has grown up to the point that the birds of the air may lodge in the shadow of it.

4. Christ's kingdom will continue to grow until that time when God says, "Time is up!"

In that sense, Christ's kingdom is like our own lives.

We're here until that time when God knocks at our door and says, "Time's up!" The church within the world is the same way. We are to be active and busy doing our heavenly Father's will. But there is coming a day when God will, in effect, tap us on the shoulder and say, "Put the plow down and come with me. It's time to go home."

And when that happens, it won't matter what our understanding of the end times will be. We won't be in a position to argue with God saying, "But we had our charts and our graphs, and we were waiting for certain geopolitical activities to take place BEFORE you brought everything to an end!" No. When he says, "Time is up" then time will be up, regardless of our understanding of what we were SO CERTAIN was sure to take place.

5. Isaiah 9:7 should be seen as an encouragement to us.

Sure, it was and is prophetic of Christ and his rule. But the text is meant to be an encouragement to us. It is like the book of Revelation. We may not understand all the details, but this much we know from reading it and that is that JESUS WINS in the end. There may be a lot of upheaval before the end comes but in the end JESUS WINS.

And that is the same encouragement we should gain from Isaiah 9:7: Jesus wins. And he wins big!

So if you are discouraged. If you look around at our world in the west and think, "We are truly going to hell in a handbasket," take heart! Jesus is still on the throne, and of his government and peace there will no END, nor will there be an end to the INCREASE of that government and peace.

So hang in there and hang on, my brothers and sisters.

For

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*