

Isaiah 9:1-4

There's a dual going on in our text. No, not a duel to the death like in the Old West. A dual, meaning two. More specifically, dual contrasts. We see in these verses: darkness vs. light, gloom vs. joy, death vs. life, defeat vs. hope of victory.

The reason we see all these dual contrasts is because God is gracious and loves to forgive. His people were spiritually unfaithful. The result of such rebelliousness is darkness, gloom, defeat, and death. But God is merciful, and so He contrasts all these with light, joy, hope, and life.

And He still does this today. If you have been walking in darkness, upon you the light now shines. If you have lived with gloom and defeat, there is for you joy and victory. And if death has been stalking you, here now for you is life. We can sum all this up in two words: tragedy and comedy.

Now you will need to put on your Shakespeare hats this morning, because these two words were understood very differently when he was writing plays. Today a tragedy is a sad event, and a comedy is a television show or movie that makes us laugh. But thinking Shakespeare, if he wrote a play that was a tragedy, it began with joy, success, and happiness, but ended with sorrow, pain, and suffering. And a play that was a comedy began with suffering, pain, and sorrow, but ended with joy, success, and happiness.

There was tragedy going on in the days of the prophet Isaiah. The northern tribes of Israel believed life was good. Yet the prophet warned them what was coming: sorrow, pain, and suffering. So did they repent? If they had, it would not have been a tragedy. And so God sent the Assyrians to plunder their towns and villages and drag the people off into captivity. Their good and happy life ended in gloom and defeat. A real tragedy.

Every person's life is either a tragedy or a comedy. But a person cannot tell which until the end. Take a snapshot of your life in the last few weeks, and it would be tempting to guess, based upon if your life was happy or sad in that time, filled with suffering or with health and success, that your life was a tragedy or a comedy.

But that would be walking by sight and not by faith. No person's life is a tragedy whose life ends trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. And every person's life is a tragedy who perishes in the end because he failed to trust in Jesus.

So as with Shakespeare, so with God. Quite often, I don't know maybe always, He leads His people through pain and suffering – this vale of tears – to avoid tragedy in the end. Yet, as with the northern tribes of Israel, those who refuse to be led by God quite often enjoy success and happiness here on earth but lose everything in the end.

Everyone's life, including yours and mine, would be a tragedy were it not that God is merciful. In our text we see His mercy being extended to the very people who had forsaken Him. Those northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali – *“There will be no gloom,”* Isaiah writes, *“for (these) who were in anguish.”* Upon these people who *“walked in darkness,”* he says, *“has light shined.”*

That light is Jesus. He began to preach and teach, to do miracles – to heal the sick and raise the dead – in this very place of deep darkness...Galilee, in the towns of Capernaum, Cana, and Bethsaida. And what a contrast! Jesus begins calling to repentance and life those who are the farthest away from Him.

He wants no life to end as a tragedy. And this is true also of you and me. This is why He ended His life in the gloom, darkness, and sorrow of the cross. He took the tragedy out of life for you. He suffered, He sorrowed, He felt the pain and agony of hell. Jesus is perfect, and so He could have had the perfect life. But instead, He let it become a tragedy so that your life will be a comedy.

“Blessed are those who weep now,” Jesus says, *“for they shall laugh.”* *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* The Christian life is a comedy because the life of a Christian is one of repentance. I’m not proud of my sins, nor are you. We weep in our hearts that we offend God daily by our disobedience. But this is how your life and mine is a comedy. Now we struggle with sin. We do not want to give in, but we fail for we are weak. Now we sorrow and suffer because we who are God’s baptized children are targets of the devil.

But God remembers His people no matter what they have done. He forgives no matter what the sin. He forgives you, my friend; all of you He forgives. And because He does, He removes the word tragedy from your life.

You know Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. A classic story of tragedy and comedy. The rich man enjoyed success and happiness here on earth, but he perished in the gloom and suffering of hell. He did not repent. This is why his life was a tragedy. But Lazarus lived with suffering and sorrow here on earth, yet his life was a comedy for he was taken to heaven because he trusted in Jesus.

And so with you. You know now that your life is not a tragedy, but a comedy. Remember your baptism into Christ Jesus. Look into these waters daily and see yourself as Lazarus. Whatever sorrow and pain you must endure here, joy, happiness, and bliss await you in heaven.

It’s all because of God’s mercy in Jesus Christ. He is the light for your darkness, the joy for your gloom, and the hope of victory for whenever you are and feel defeated. Amen.