"What is your problem?" the twelve-year-old says to the eight-year-old as the eight-year-old continually kicks his brother in the back seat. Most likely, the twelve-year-old isn't really all that interested in finding out what is troubling the eight-year-old. And even more likely, he isn't all that interested in helping solve the eight-year-old's problem. Perhaps the eight-year-old doesn't really have a problem at all. He just enjoys kicking his brother.

This morning I'm going to ask you the same question, hopefully a bit more tactfully and certainly more sincerely. "What Is Your Problem?" Then, we'll see from this section of Isaiah that, whatever your problem is, Jesus is the answer.

I. Perceived Problems

So, "What is your problem?" As I look out this morning I see all sorts of different people who have all sorts of different problems. Each of you is at a different stage in your life. Some of the children here have no greater concern than the fact that mom forgot to bring the little bag of Cheerios to church. Some of the young people may be devastated because they don't have a boyfriend. And it doesn't look like that's going to change any time soon. Some other young person has a boyfriend, and he is the problem. Those of you in school may have a paper due tomorrow or exams this week and your greatest concern is being prepared for those challenges. "What is your problem?" Are you are having a tough time making ends meet? Is a loved one ill? Are you ill? "What is your problem?"

The people of Isaiah's day had a problem. In fact, their problem makes some of ours look silly by comparison. Isaiah says in verse one, "In the past (God) humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali." Zebulun and Naphtali were territories on the northern edge of Israel. This was not the best spot to be, especially when an enemy attacked. You see, most of Israel's enemies approached from the north. So, when an enemy came sweeping down to attack, the first to be hit were Zebulun and Naphtali. Living in the United States of America in the 21st century, it’s hard to imagine what this must have been like. They had no sense of security. They were always looking to the horizon in case an enemy army appeared. Many of these people had seen their friends and neighbors killed. Some of them had family members snatched up and dragged off into captivity. Imagine living that way!

The only experience in my life that is remotely similar was the days following the attacks on 9/11. Living near the largest naval base in the world there was a sense that perhaps we would be next. It was unsettling to say the least. Well, that is what the people of Zebulun and Naphtili lived with constantly. They had a serious problem.

II. The Real Problems
And so do we. Isaiah describes us as, “The people walking in darkness... those living in the land of the shadow of death.” When you wake up at night and need a drink of water you walk to the kitchen like this...as you try to find the light switch. That is a picture of the spiritual darkness in which we live because of sin. And what inevitably happens as you are trying to find the light switch? You bump into something and hurt yourself. Living in spiritual darkness is no different. As we sinfully stumble through life we hurt ourselves. Sin does that. It hurts.

But it does even more than that. Isaiah says we are, “...living in the land of the shadow of death.” It is one thing to be stumbling around in your bedroom where you might stub your toe. It is another thing to be walking in darkness toward a cliff with a 1000 foot drop. But, that is the reality for all of us. We live in death’s shadow. For some of us that shadow may be longer and for others it may be shorter. But, sooner or later death’s shadow will catch up to us. That is our real problem – sin and death. But, God promises a real solution to our real problem.

III. The Real Solution

Here is what Isaiah said to Zebulun and Naphtali, "but in the future (God) will honor Galilee of the Gentiles." The regions of Zebulun and Naphtali would later be called Galilee. So, Isaiah was saying, “Things may look grim for you, folks. You may live in the most dangerous and unpredictable part of the country. But, in the future God is going to do something that will bring honor to your land.” In our Gospel reading we heard how this prophecy came true. Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee. The land of darkness and war would later be the land where the Lord would preach and teach and heal.

Listen to the difference Jesus would make, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (v.2). Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus shows us who God is and what this world is really all about. Jesus shows us that we don’t need to be afraid – we don’t need to be afraid of this life and we don’t need to be afraid of death.

Isaiah tells us why, "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" (v.4). Most of you know what a yoke does. It goes across the shoulder of two animals and forces those animals to walk in the same direction. It is a fabulous picture of what sin does to us. It weighs us down, pulling us this way and that. But many people believe the exact opposite. They believe that it is Jesus who restricts them. They figure they can't do what they want if they become a Christian. It's too restrictive.

You tell me, which is oppressive, sin or our Savior? Look at the broken marriages caused by sin. Look at the shattered lives destroyed by drugs and alcohol. Look at the bitterness and anger we experience because of sin. Sin is a yoke which burdens us. It not only burdens us now, it is a yoke which pulls us straight to the eternal punishment it deserves.

But Jesus shattered that yoke! He took the yoke of sin off our necks and smashed it against the cross where he hung. Now we can stand upright. We are free to move about. We are free to serve God. It is so liberating to have the guilt of our sins removed from our shoulders!

Isaiah compared it to the day of Midian’s defeat. Midian was one of those enemies who continuously attacked Israel. Every time the Israelites were about to harvest a crop, the Midianites attacked and took it. Things became so bad that people had to leave their homes and live in caves. Things were desperate. But God used a man named Gideon to rescue them. And, the way God rescued them is like something from a major motion picture.

The Midianites numbered 135,000 men. Gideon had 32,000. They were outnumbered 4 to 1. So, God told Gideon, “You have too many men. If you win with 32,000 people will think the soldiers were responsible and not me. So, if any of your men is afraid, tell him to go home.” 22,000 did. Now, with 10,000 soldiers, they were outnumbered 13.5 to one. If 14 Midianites were killed for every one Israelite, the battle would still be a draw! So, what did God say? “You still have too many men.” Can’t
you picture Gideon at this point? “Did you say ‘Too many men?’” The LORD told all the men to take a drink from the nearby brook. Those who put their faces in the water to drink should go home but those who scooped the water with their hands should stay. 300 scooped the water with their hands. Now they were outnumbered 450 to 1! Even with these impossible odds, God gave His people the victory and Midian was defeated. Imagine what that must have been like! Finally, they could leave the caves and go back to their homes! Finally, they could live without constant fear of being attacked! Finally, they were free!

That is the kind of victory Jesus won for us when He rose from the dead on Easter morning! The odds seemed impossible. There was no way for us to defeat sin and death. But, Jesus could and did! We don’t have to hide anymore. We don’t have to be afraid anymore!

Isaiah describes what it is like in verse 3, “You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.” Harvest time is one of the happiest times of the year for farmers. The crops are in, the work is done, it is time to celebrate. You know the feeling even if you're not a farmer. It's that special feeling you had on the last day of school when you were a child. It was time for summer vacation! No more bells and books and rules and regulations. You had a whole summer ahead! That is what it feels like to be freed from sin. It makes you want to run and shout and sing for joy! So go ahead and do it. Rejoice in your salvation!

"That's great. Pastor, but what does this have to do with my problem? How can this help me find a boyfriend? How can this help me pass my exams this week?” Well, if your God loved you enough to send His Son to die for you, if He was powerful enough to remove your greatest problem, don't you suppose He loves you enough and is powerful enough to get you through any problem? If you had a mechanic replace the engine in your car, would you worry that he couldn't change your oil three thousand miles later? "Sure, he did a good job of replacing the engine, but change the oil, I don't think so. That's a bit too complicated." You can see how silly we are sometimes when we think that God can't help our situation.

What is your problem? We all came here this morning with problems. But, we have seen Jesus. And so we can leave here and go back to our lives saying, “No problem!” Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria