

The Banner of Hope

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening to you all.

I'm glad to be back here together. As we've said already a couple of times, this is the Advent season. It's a season where we talk about hope and we talk about expectation and waiting.

It's also a time that we are able to freely acknowledge the reality that there are lots of questions that don't have easy answers. Lots of needs that don't get met or fulfilled.

Lots of problems that feel too large for us to solve. Those things that cause frustration or hopelessness are the things that we focus on in this time as we focus on the hope that is offered through Jesus Christ.

And I think particularly in this season, even though the election is over, I don't know about you, but for me, much of the conversation around the election is ongoing.

[1 : 03] In our own community, there are people who are hurt, who are bewildered, who are confused. That others in the same community would have voted for one or the other candidate.

There's a sense that something major has happened. Where do we go from here? And we've been talking a lot about that in this church. But one of the things that has happened, I think, more now than ever is that people have become deeply cynical.

And this is something that you see every four years. We have candidates who put themselves out to run for office. And what they're really doing every time they get on a microphone or give a speech is really they're offering hope in some form or another.

They're selling hope. They're selling a vision of a better world. And they're saying, if you elect me, I will be able to bring about this better world. And we heard often in this last election that you should think about what kind of world you want to live in when you vote.

And yet, invariably, many of the promises that are made during the campaign season are never fully realized. Right? And maybe this time around some of you are hoping the promises won't be fully realized.

[2 : 23] But many times that is the case. And so that breeds a kind of cynicism. And what we need now more than ever is real hope, I think.

And that's why we're looking at the book of Isaiah through this Advent season. It was written in the 8th century BC. So it's a very old, ancient text. And yet there are some amazing parallels between this time in Israel's life and where we are right now.

You have a human king named Ahaz in chapter 7 who refuses to trust the promises of God. And he ultimately fails as a king.

He's a wicked king. But even the best of the kings, right? Even the good kings like Hezekiah. They all inevitably fall short.

They all fail to do what God has called them to do. And Israel ultimately fails to be the nation that God has called them to be. And so what God says just before the passage we're looking at tonight is that He's going to do two things.

- [3 : 28] He's going to humble Israel. And He likens them to a forest. And their pride is like this great forest. And He says, I'm going to clear cut the forest. I'm going to clear cut it.
- I'm going to reduce it to nothing. You're just going to be smoldering stumps. Pretty shocking imagery. And then He makes a promise. He says that one day, His response to this is He's going to Himself send a king.
- And the king that He sends is not going to be like any king or ruler or president that we've ever seen. But He says that through this king, the entire world is going to be remade.
- Through this king, the promise will be fully realized. And the world that comes from this king's rule will be the world that we all long for. The world as it ought to be.
- And so that's what we're going to look at in Isaiah chapter 11. The first ten verses. Verses 1 through 5 tell us about the king. Verses 6 through 9 tell us about the kingdom.
- [4 : 35] And then lastly, verse 10 shows us the invitation or the way into this kingdom. This new world order. So let's pray for the Lord to lead us. Our Heavenly Father, the great promise of Christmas is that you're a God who enters in.
- Who has come to pitch your tent in our midst. That your word has come. And we know that the purpose of your written word is to reveal to us your living word, Jesus Christ.
- So we pray that by your power, that we would see your son Jesus Christ face to face. Through your word. We pray this in your son's holy name.
- Amen. So first of all, Isaiah chapter 11, verses 1 through 5. Look at what this tells us about this king. It's amazing if you realize what Isaiah is saying.
- In verse 1 it says that he'll come like a shoot from the stump of Jesse. So imagine a stump. And then imagine a little shoot coming up out of the stump.
- [5 : 42] With a few little buds on it. Right? That's what he's saying. There's going to be, all is not lost. There's a little shoot that's going to come up out of this stump. And what he's saying is that even though the line of Jesse.
- That produced the greatest king Israel had ever known, King David. Even though there will never again be a united monarchy with a great king like David. That from this lineage, from this bloodline.
- God's king is going to come. And do things that David could never even imagine. And then in verse 2 it says he's not merely going to be another human king.
- He's actually going to be a divine king. It says the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. That's what that means. And look at these characteristics. Imagine a presidential candidate being described in this way.
- He has divine wisdom. Which means he has right judgment in all matters. He has divine understanding. The ability to see to the heart of an issue.
- [6 : 47] He doesn't get distracted by secondary things. He can see right to the heart of the issue. Counsel. Means he always knows the right course of action. Always knows what needs to be done.
- And then with it, power. Means he actually has the ability to do what needs to be done. A lot of people can know what needs to be done. He can actually carry it out.
- And then knowledge here doesn't just mean academic knowledge. It means intimate knowledge of the Lord. He knows God intimately. An intimate familial connection.
- So all of these are amazing characteristics. But verse 3 is where you see the central qualification of this leader. And what makes him different. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
- Think about what that is saying. It's a kind of odd thing to think about. My greatest delight is being afraid. My greatest joy in life is feeling fear.

- [7 : 51] But what this is really saying is his central driving motivator is God's pleasure. More than anything else, he wants God's pleasure.
- More than anything else, he dreads God's displeasure. The only thing that drives him is God's delight and pleasure. Imagine that quality.
- And because of that, because of that quality, he's a perfect leader. It says he's not swayed by appearances, right? Or what he hears. He's immune to lobbyists.
- They have no impact on him. He's immune to presidential approval ratings. He doesn't care. He doesn't care if they're up here. He doesn't care if they're down here.
- He doesn't care. Because he's not looking at you. He's not looking at me. He doesn't need our approval. He doesn't need our thumbs up. If we reject him, it doesn't matter. It's not going to sway him one centimeter from his course.
- [8 : 50] Because the only one he's looking at is God. That's the only thing he cares about. So he's able to deal with the poor and the wicked with perfect equity. No partial treatment.
- No blind spots. No good old boy systems. Perfect equity. Gives everybody exactly what they need. And verse 5 essentially says that this king...
- Now verse 5 is poetic. It talks about righteousness and faithfulness being like a belt and a sash. Now what we need to understand is that that's a way of referring to your most intimate undergarments. Undergarments. So it's...
- I mean in layman's terms it's saying that his character is so rock solid... That if you were to strip off all of his clothes... You have loyalty and integrity printed on his boxer shorts. That's essentially what it's saying.
- Right? And it's a way of saying if you take everything else away... Loyalty... Righteousness... Faithfulness... Integrity... That these are central to who he is.
- [9 : 48] So imagine these qualities in a king. And the point that it's making is that this king is totally and perfectly equipped... To meet all of the challenges of this world.
- To fix all that is broken. To make everything as it ought to be. He's the one who can do it. Now I want to think for a minute because even though this is describing a divine king...
- I think that we can learn something from this. What is the thing that makes this king so effective in his leadership? It's what we just said.
- It's that his delight is in the fear of the Lord. So he is always in line with God's will and God's desire. And I think that even though this is a divine king...
- That we can actually learn something from this. Because listen... I think this really applies to this community. You know, as smart as you may be. As well educated as you may be.
- [10 : 47] As influential as you may be. As connected as you may be. Right? As effective an organization as you may be working for. As wealthy as you may be.
- Or may one day become. All of those are great assets. They all can be incredibly useful. They're all potentially blessings from the Lord.
- But what this is saying... If I'm reading this correctly... Is this is saying that the world... This broken world... More than your smarts. More than your education.
- More than your wealth. More than your influence. That what this world actually needs... Is this world needs... Men and women... Who are sold out...
- And whose delight... Is in the fear of the Lord. That that's what the world needs. People whose overarching...
- [11 : 43] Central driving motivator... Is God's pleasure. People whose central fear... Is God's displeasure. In other words... People who are immune... To approval ratings.

People who don't care... Whether or not others like them... Or don't like them... Or approve of what they say... Or approve of what they believe. People who aren't crippled... By fear of shame... Or rejection. People who have lost sight of that...

Because it's dimmed... In comparison to the light... Of God's joy. People who are in other words... Fearless. Fearless.

Say what you want about me. The only thing I care about... Is God's pleasure. Imagine if people like that... Were unleashed on this world. You can have wealth...

You can have intelligence... You can have education... You can have credentials... You can have influence. But how is it going to be used? In ways that satisfy the masses...

[12 : 42] Or your own desires... Or in ways that reflect... The heart of God. You want to make a difference? Start there. And the point is really this... That I think we spend a lot of time... And a lot of energy...

Investing in our career. Investing in our education. Investing in all of these things. And that's good. You're called to do those things. Right? Those are good things. But often times...

Our relationship with God... Gets sidelined. It gets the leftovers. And this is saying... That needs to be reversed. Right? Strive in your spiritual life...

In all that you do. Strive to see God become bigger... And bigger and bigger. And approval and rejection... Become smaller and smaller... And smaller. Until God fills your vision. And then see how that ignites you...

In your vocation. See how it ignites you... In your relationship. See how it frees you... To do what you're called to do. The good news of Isaiah 11...

[13 : 40] Is that God is sending someone... Exactly like that. And through him... It's possible for us to become... Like him. So let's talk more about... His kingdom.

Verses 6 through 9... Go on to show us... What the world will be like... Once this new king... Has remade it. So the result of this kind of leadership... In a word is...

Peace. It's peace. But you know... Even as I say that... I wish we had another word. Because all too often... We use peace... In ways that... Come nowhere near...

The kind of peace... That you read about... In Isaiah chapter 11. You see primal... Archetypal rivalries... Being transformed. Things which have been divided...

Since creation itself... Are now unified... Once and for all. You have wolves... And leopards... And lions... And bears... Living together in harmony...

[14 : 33] With lambs... And goats... And calves... And cows. No more predators... No more prey... All are one.

You know... In this image of a child... Over a den of poisonous snakes... You know... We discussed this passage... With our staff... And you know... Deborah said... You know... Just the thought of... Holding my hand near that...

Kind of makes my blood pressure rise... And I feel the same way... I don't know how many of you... You know... Just the idea of holding your hand out... Over that dark hole... You know... I mean that makes me nervous...

Just standing here... I don't think there are any snakes in here... I hope not... But it makes me nervous... Just thinking about it... And yeah... This is saying that... In this world... An infant...

Would be... In a den of snakes... Every bit as safe... As being in their own crib... It's that kind of world... So what might that look like...

[15 : 30] In our society... Right? The Israeli and the Palestinian... Right? The young black man... And the white police officer...

You know... The Trump supporter... And the Clinton supporter... You know... You could go on and on... I don't know if anybody saw... That Saturday Night Live... Skit... Three days before the election... Of Trump and Clinton...

You know... Sort of saying... We're done with all of this... Don't you feel awful... Don't you feel dirty... And they join hands... And they run out of the studio... And they go dancing... Through the streets of New York... Hugging each other... And hugging one another's supporters...

And it was kind of a funny sketch... But for me... It provoked... An enormous longing... I didn't laugh... I almost... I almost teared up... When I watched it...

Because I realized... It feels like the only chance... That we have to ever see anything like that... Actually happen... Is a comedy sketch...

[16:26] Why does this have to be a comedy sketch? Why can't this be real? And I think a lot of people felt that way... I think a lot of you feel that way... Why does there have to be such division?

Hostility... Hatred... Because this goes beyond... Simple togetherness... In verse 7... You see that natures... Are actually transformed... Natures are transformed...

Carnivores actually become herbivores... Now I need to point out... This is not necessarily an argument for vegetarianism... We can talk about that later...

But I feel compelled... This is a metaphor... That is meant to show us... That the world has become so permeated by peace... So permeated...

By peace... That the concept of violence... Does no longer even exist... Natures have been transformed... Total cosmic peace...

[17:21] It's not even possible... For me to be hostile anymore... It's not even in me... Anymore... My nature has been changed... These images have inspired artists...

And thinkers... For centuries... I'm sure if you asked Ellen... She could tell you all about... The greatest paintings that have been inspired...

By these verses... Beautiful... The question it raises is... How is it possible? And the answer is this...

That all of these signs of reconciliation... Are like ripples... It's a ripple effect... Coming out from a central... More deep...

More fundamental... Act of reconciliation... That has taken place... And all of these are symptoms... And signs... That a more fundamental... Reconciliation event... Has happened...

[18:18] And in verse 9... We learn more about that... It says... They shall not hurt or destroy... In all my holy mountain... For... And that Hebrew word actually means... Because...

So... The reason they shall not hurt or destroy... Is because... The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord... As the waters cover the sea... The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord...

As the waters cover the sea... Now... This does not mean that everybody will have a PhD in theology... It's not that kind of knowledge... Again... This is intimate... Personal knowledge... Everyone on the face of the earth...

Will now intimately... Know the Lord... Like you would know a lover... Or a family member... Intimate relational knowledge... The whole world has come to know God... Like that...

So why is the entire world at peace... In Isaiah 11... It's because finally... Once and for all... There is peace... Between God... And human beings...

- [19 : 14] Peace on earth... And mercy mild... God and sinners... Reconciled... Reconciled... Because God and sinners are reconciled... There is peace... Everywhere... And as a result...
- We are given... New natures... Hearts that are full of... In emanating... Peace... So the point here is this... The point of this next section...
- Is that world peace... Like we long for... Is only possible after there is peace... Between God and humanity... Another way of saying it is... There can only be horizontal peace...
- If there is... Vertical peace... That's where it begins... Now why does this matter? Well because I think in the Advent...
- And the Christmas season... We talk a lot about hope... We talk a lot about longing... We talk a lot about peace... We talk a lot about justice... But more and more and more...
- [20 : 12] What I hear... Is people talking about all that human beings... Are capable of... Right? If we... If we... If we join hands... If we get over our petty differences...
- If we roll up our sleeves... If we work hard... Then through human ingenuity... We can solve these problems... We can overcome... What's wrong with the world...
- We can deal with the racial tension... And the injustice... And the poverty... And the violence... We can create a world... Where the wolf and the lamb... Lie together... We can do that...
- Human beings can do that... And that has become more and more... The message of the Christmas season... We can bring the kind of hope and peace... The world needs... Us... Right?
- And we don't know... Maybe that requires... Making all claws... And all fangs... Illegal... So we do away with that... Right? Then we give lambs... Equal rights...
- [21 : 06] And protection under the law... And then we... We enforce those laws... And then we make all wolves... Attend sensitivity training... Training to learn... That even if they're not... Tearing a lamb to pieces...
- There's such a thing as a microaggression... Or maybe we just do away... All together... With the arbitrary social construct... Of wolf and lamb... But regardless... We get to a point...
- Where... There is peace... And it's a nice sentiment... But I wonder... Is it true? Is it true?
- If you know anything about... Vaclav Havel... He... Was one of the great... Thinkers and political leaders... Of the 20th century... He was the first president... Of the Czech Republic... He had had an opportunity...
- To see socialism... And capitalism up close... And he had become... More and more convinced... That... Neither... Was capable of solving... The greatest problems... Facing...
- [22 : 03] Human beings... He had seen that... Solving issues like... Nuclear conflict... Ethnic nationalism... Environmental degradation... That that takes more...
- Than just changed policies... That you have to be able... To change people... Change hearts... Change natures... And he said... You know... It's all well and good... For politicians...
- To reiterate... A thousand times... How important it is... To have universal respect... For human rights... He says... Yeah... You can say that all day long... Universal human rights... Say it all day long...
- But that's not going to make... Any difference... If we reject the God... From whom those rights flow... The one who endowed us with them... To begin... To begin with...
- And you know... Over his career... Kind of as his career... Went on... Europe was so... So fascinated with capitalism... And a kind of...

[22 : 56] Technocratic approach... To solving these problems... That Havel more and more and more... Became a kind of... A kind of oddity... You know... They would sort of... Trot him out... To make his speeches...

But then people... More and more sort of... Disregarded... What they thought to be... Esoteric or unrealistic... Ideas... And yet again... And again... And again... Havel would say...

That the one... Thing that we're lacking... And the one thing that we need... If we ever hope... To make this a better world... Is that we have to turn... Back to God... It has to start there...

And in one speech... He gave at Stanford... He says this... Given its fatal... Incurability... Meaning... We just can't be convinced... To change our minds...

Humanity probably will... Have to go through... Many more Rwandas... And Chernobles... Before it understands... How unbelievably... Shortsighted... A human being can be... Who has forgotten...

[23 : 54] That he is not God... The only hope... For this world... Is for us... To remember that we are not God... We are not the light... We are not the hope...

And then to be reconciled... To the one who is the light... Who is the hope... Who can actually give us... New natures... And that brings us to...

Verse 10... How does that actually happen? Verse 10... The invitation into this kingdom... So we've seen the king... The king who is able to... He's perfectly qualified...

To deal with the problems of the world... We've seen the kingdom... A place of total... Cosmic peace... A place where we are given... New natures... The world is given... A new nature... But then we see...

That that's only going to happen... Once human beings... Are reconciled to God... And so the question becomes... How does all this happen? And in verse 10... The last verse of our passage...

[24 : 53] It says... In that day... The day that we're... Describing here... The root of Jesse... Now that's interesting... Is he a shoot? Or is he a root?

Right? He was a shoot... Coming up out of the stump... But now he's the root... Under the stump... So he's not just coming out of... From Jesse... He's actually... The one from whom Jesse came...

He was there before Jesse... He's the root and the shoot... What does that mean? The root of Jesse... Who shall stand as a signal... For the peoples... Of him shall the nations inquire... And his resting place...

Shall be glorious... Now stand as a signal... Means like a banner... So imagine on a battlefield... You know... You raise the banner in the air... And people...

Everybody around... Sees the banner... And they all rally to the banner... Okay that's where we're meeting up... Right? Town meeting... Banner... Big banner goes up... Everybody knows... Okay that's where I need to go... Everybody rallies to the banner...

[25 : 46] Now this would have been... A mysterious thing... For people to read... Because wait a second... You're talking about a king... And now you're talking about... The king being lifted up...

Well normally kings... Lift a banner... Or they have their standard bearer... Lift the banner... Right? But kings don't normally get... Lifted up like a banner...

And yet this is saying... That the king is the banner... He's the one... Who is lifted up... What does that mean? Well it probably didn't make... A lot of sense... For quite a long time...

Until in John chapter 3... We begin to see... What it's talking about... Jesus is talking... With a man named Nicodemus... And they're talking about... The kingdom of God...

They're talking about... This new world order... And they're talking about... The new nature... That is required... To be a part of this... New world order... The new heart... And Jesus is telling...

[26 : 42] Nicodemus... That the only way... Into this kingdom... Is that you have to be... Born again... Again... You have to be given... This new nature... And Nicodemus says... How can you possibly...

Be born again? How does that work? Right? And look at what Jesus says... Verse 14... As Moses lifted up...

The serpent in the wilderness... So must the son of man... Be lifted up... That whoever believes in him... May have eternal life... The son of man...

Must be lifted up... What's the banner? The banner is Jesus Christ... On the cross... The son of man... Has to be lifted up... So what happens?

Jesus comes... As this king... But he enters humbly... Right? As a child... And then he grows up... And why does he come... That first time? Before he can remake the world...

[27 : 36] He has to remake us... Before he can remake us... He has to reconcile us... To God... How does that happen? Somebody has to pay for the sin... And that's what he does... He's lifted up... Pays for the sin...

Atones for the world... Reconciles us to God... God and sinners reconciled... And then the renewal can begin... And has begun... It's happening right now...

Isaiah 11.10... Is I believe... The entire mission... Of the church today... This is why we are here...

It's not to have... Enjoyable services... Or to do projects... Or to all that thing... All that's great... And all that we do is great... But listen... If we lose sight of our...

Central purpose... We'll lose our way... We are standard bearers... We're here to hold up the banner... The banner of hope... To lift it high... To point to it...

[28 : 30] To say... To a world that is suffering... And struggling... And confused... And lost... And sad... And divided... If you want hope... There it is... This is your hope...

It's the only place you're going to find it... All other promises of hope... Will fall short... This is the only one... That will deliver... More than you can imagine... It's here... Of him will the nations...

Inquire... People from every tongue... And tribe... Streaming... Streaming... In... Realizing... That the cross... Is the only place... Where true hope... Is offered... Realizing that in the resurrection...

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 15... We actually see a preview... Of this world... Described by Isaiah... A resurrection world... Brought about by a resurrected king...

This is the purpose... And how do we do that? Not just by standing up here... And pointing to this beautiful cross... But in the way we live...

[29 : 26] In the way we move... In the way we have... Our relationships... We embody the peace... Of Isaiah 11... In our daily lives... We seek peace...

We seek justice... We are people of peace... People of justice... In a divided world... We are the agents... Of reconciliation... We're the first... To lay down arms...

The first to withhold... The hateful words... The first to withhold... Judgment... The first to put ourselves out there... And to become vulnerable... And risk being hurt... Or alienated... Or rejected...

We do that because... That is exactly what our king did... We become agents... Of peace... And renewal... And hope... And we do this... Not because we are the light...

Or the answer... But because when people see that... And they wonder... Where is that coming from? We can then say... It's coming from the banner...

[30 : 19] That's where it's coming from... So this is the great hope of Christmas... That the king has come... And the king will come again... So now is the time...

To hold the banner of hope... High in the air... For the world to see... And to declare the promise of God... That one day... The lamb and the wolf...

Will lie down together... One day this world will be made... New... The world it ought to have been... The world that we long for...

Through the glory and the power of Jesus Christ... Amen... I think that the helper's pigeons will not be usual... For the ironically so wanted to be seen... For the dépendance of the Holy Spirit...

Annoyed anyway... To bake... The opinion should not be mentioned... It's like a doctor that's dumb... The cause of this over... To engage... To engage... To make the Holdm... But where is that... The defender of the life... I just await Ahhh... I just like theons... Jesse Give me the opportunity to Revelation...