

The King of Peace

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[0 : 0 0] So, as we've already noted, this is the Advent season, and I love Advent. I love the anticipation. Often for me, the buildup and anticipation for Christmas is as good, if not better, than Christmas itself.

Maybe it's just me, but I love the anticipation. And every year we, during the Christmas season, Christians all around the world turn to the book of Isaiah as a way of preparing for the celebration of Christmas.

And since we in the Anglican world and at Church of the Advent follow the lectionary this time of year, which we're actually going to be doing in this church through next Pentecost, so we're going to be just following the lectionary for a while, this year the lectionary readings come from Isaiah in the Old Testament.

And so, it's a great preparation for Christmas. Isaiah was a prophet living in the 8th century B.C., and many of his prophecies talk about the coming of God's Messiah, God's Savior King who's going to one day heal the world.

And Christians believe that these prophecies point to Jesus. And so, the reason that we read Isaiah is because we see this as a way of gaining a much deeper, fuller sense of the meaning of Christmas.

[1 : 2 2] So that when we come into that Christmas morning, we have all of these verses in our minds giving us that background, that depth, those layers of meaning of Jesus' coming.

So, we're going to be looking at Isaiah for the next few weeks, and this morning we're going to be looking at Isaiah chapter 11, verses 1 through 10, which shows us that Christmas carries with it the promise that one day there will be peace in the world.

There will be peace. So, Isaiah 11 shows us a world at peace, the king of peace, and then the cost of peace. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You for Your Word, and we thank You for these words in particular that were written down so long ago. Isaiah never could have known how these words would be used, and yet here we are opening to these pages in this time and place.

And we know that because of Your Holy Spirit, these words can continue to speak to us, that in them we can hear Your voice. And we pray that we would do that this morning, that we would be able to hear Your voice through the power of Your Holy Spirit fulfilling Your promise to speak to Your people, and that You would give us a deeper understanding of what it means to know Jesus, because He has come.

[2 : 3 9] We pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen. So, I'm going to look at this a little bit out of order. I want to start in the middle of the passage, verses 6 through 9, and look at the world at peace that Isaiah describes.

Starting in verse 6, He gives us these images. A wolf living alongside a lamb, a leopard lying down next to a young goat, a calf and a lion and a fatted calf together being led by a little child, a cow and a bear grazing alongside each other eating grass, their young lying down together, a lion eating straw instead of meat, eating straw like the ox, a nursing child playing over a den of poisonous snakes, a weaned child, a small child putting his hand over an adder's den.

These are wild images meant to ignite our imagination. Isaiah is describing a world of profound peace, but it's a kind of peace that goes far beyond anything we can imagine, because this isn't just a ceasefire.

This isn't just an end of war and hostility. We have wolves, leopards, and lions, and bears living together in harmony with lambs, goats, calves, and cows. No more predators, no more prey.

We have children and snakes playing together. I mean, for some of us, and I know some of you, just the thought of a snake makes your heart rate increase.

[4 : 29] We actually, Riley got a pet snake for his birthday, and it's at our house, and there are some people, they come over to our house, and they come into our kitchen, and we're talking, and, hey, you know, can I get you something to drink?

And they look over, and they say, is that a snake? As though the snake is going to leap out of the container and latch onto their face. And this is not a poisonous snake. It's a very safe snake. But just for the idea of a snake makes some of us nervous. This is an image of a child playing alongside snakes. In the world that Isaiah describes, an infant would be just as safe laying in a den of cobras as it would be in its own crib.

It's meant to shock us. And then we see in verse 9, this is a world in which all violence and oppression cease to exist. It's a world in which primal archetypal rivalries have been transformed. So, you say, well, what would that look like in our culture if Isaiah lived in D.C. at this time? What would he have written?

[5 : 37] What examples would he use? And Israelis and Palestinians celebrating and sharing meals together. MAGA Republicans and Antifa activists dancing through the streets together.

White nationalists and BLM supporters living together, singing together in perfect harmony. You know, we have a deeply divided society.

There was an NBC poll conducted in mid-October, just ahead of the midterms. And in this NBC News poll, they found an almost identical share of Democrats and Republicans.

It was roughly 80% each. And I think the sample size was roughly 1,000 people surveyed. 80% each, Democrats and Republicans, who believe that if the other party is not stopped, they will destroy America as we know it.

They don't just say we disagree politically, we have our differences. They say, if we do not stop them, our society will be destroyed. And what this poll found overwhelmingly is the good news is voter turnout is very high.

[6 : 52] That's the good news. What's motivating the voter turnout? Well, overwhelmingly, it's fear and anger. This is a society that is deeply divided.

Think of the people in your life that you are deeply divided from. Think of the family members that you can no longer speak to, maybe because of political differences.

Call to mind the person who has hurt you the most. Call to mind the person or the people that you can never imagine forgiving. Call these names and faces to mind.

Isaiah is describing a world in which all of that pain and division has been eradicated. Where they're not even memories anymore. Where all people live together in absolute peace and harmony.

There is no more oppressor, no more oppressed, no more victim, no more perpetrator. Everyone lives together in absolute peace, what the Bible calls shalom.

[8 : 02] Now, here's the most important thing to see. This is not merely an outward peace.

There has been an inside-out transformation. In other words, natures have been transformed. Carnivores have become herbivores.

Now, this isn't necessarily prescribing vegetarianism. It's a metaphor. It's a metaphor that's meant to show us that human natures have been so radically transformed that there's no longer even the possibility of harm or violence of any kind.

Those concepts no longer exist because the nature of these creatures has been changed. Now, we ask, well, why is that important to point out?

Well, it's important because in the West, most everyone wants world peace. That's not up for contention. Most everybody wants world peace. But we've come to believe that we can achieve this kind of peace if we only work together.

[9 : 12] If we get the right kind of people into office. If we educate the masses, if we apply the right social pressures, then we can overcome all of the racial tension and injustice and poverty and violence.

We can create a world in which wolf and lamb lie down together. That's an outside-in approach. It says, if we do all the right things out here, surely our hearts will follow.

And that is precisely why it will never fully succeed. Because the biggest obstacle preventing us from having the kind of world we want is not out there.

It's the problem in here. It's in the human heart. It's in our natures. We need new natures. And the kind of world that Isaiah describes is only possible if there is an inside-out transformation, a change that begins in the human heart with a new nature, with a new set of inclinations.

So, this is the world that we all want. Isaiah paints a picture. Now, let's look at the king of this world, the king of peace. Now, we have to say right off the bat that the idea of a king, any king, makes people nervous.

[10:33] And of course it does. Because we assume that people with the kind of power that a king has, that those people are going to be corrupt. That they are going to use that power to abuse and mistreat other people.

And we can point to many examples throughout history that back that up. Because it has happened many, many times. And what we need to understand is the people of Judah in the 8th century BC would probably agree.

At this point in history, they would probably say, yeah, we're not really a big fan of kings either.

Because at this point in history, it seemed like their best days were behind them. Long ago, they had this great united monarchy under David.

That was the high point in Israel's history. No longer. Things had faded quite a bit. That by the time of Isaiah's ministry, Judah was in an economically precarious place.

They were being bullied by geopolitical powers. They were weakened by syncretism and injustice and formalistic religion. Their priests just wanted to keep the peace.

[11:41] They just wanted to go along so they could get along. They were cowards for the most part. Their kings, so-called kings, were puppets of their Assyrian overlords.

They were vassals. King Ahaz, who we read about in Isaiah chapter 7 through 10. Ahaz sits in the background of Isaiah 11.

Ahaz was a thoroughly wicked man, even sacrificing his own children in order to gain and hold on to power. Now, it's not often today that we see people burning their children on altars, but we do see people who are willing to sacrifice their children, willing to throw their friends and family under the bus if necessary to gain and to hold on to power.

Isaiah had prophesied that God is going to bring judgment on Israel and Judah through the Assyrians, and later the Babylonians, that He's going to reduce the line of David down to a stump, which makes things sound pretty hopeless.

And yet, right, and yet. I remember reading somebody one time who said that he thinks the whole Bible could be reduced down to two words, but God.

[13:05] Right? The whole story of the Bible could be reduced down to that. Things seem hopeless, but God. God says there's going to be a new king who comes like a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

Even though Israel's never again going to be the great United Nations state with a king like David, from his bloodline there's going to come a new king. And he's not merely going to be a human king, it says in verse 2.

He's going to be a divine king. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. And look at these characteristics. We've got the 2024 election coming up, presidential election. Imagine a candidate emerging with these qualities.

Wisdom. He has right judgment in all things. Understanding. He has the ability to see to the heart of an issue. Counsel. He always knows the right course of action to take.

Power. The ability to actually say and do, and then do what he says he's going to do. Right?

Knowledge. Here, knowledge doesn't just mean information.

[14:11] It means a king who knows God intimately. Imagine those qualities in a 2024 presidential candidate. And in verse 3, we see his central qualification for leadership.

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. The problem with many of Judah's kings, and I would say the problem with many of our own political leaders, is that once they get into power, their chief concern becomes holding on to that power.

So, a lot of things get said and promised during campaign season, but then it becomes about keeping your supporters happy. Ensuring that when the next election comes around, they'll stay with you.

And that drives a lot of the priorities, the decision-making. And that drives a lot of the priorities, the decision-making. But not this king. Right? His central overarching driving motivation is to please

God.

And because of that, he's a perfect leader, verses 3 to 5. He's not swayed by appearances. He's immune to lobbyists.

[15 : 26] He's unconcerned about approval ratings. His only central concern is to follow God's way.

And here's something we need to see. Because of that, he's able to care for the poor and the needy. Because that's what God cares about.

But He does so with perfect justice, giving everyone exactly what they need. And it says with the slightest breath, you can imagine a little poof, he could topple the wicked.

He's unconcerned. And verse 5 says, This king's integrity is such that if you were to strip everything else away at his very core, you would find righteousness and faithfulness.

A continuing concern to be right and true in all his ways. This king is totally and perfectly equipped to meet all of the challenges of this world and to fix all that is broken to make everything as it ought to be.

[16 : 38] I just want to think for a minute about what this is saying. Right? Why is this king so wise? Why is this king able to have such clear and righteous judgment?

What makes him such an effective leader? And the answer is, his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. And, you know, I read this and it strikes me, I think that we can learn something from this.

Right? In some ways, this king goes far beyond anything that any mere human king would be capable of. But in some ways, we can learn something from this. I mean, I know most of you well enough to know that we spend enormous amounts of time and energy investing in our education, in our career, attaining credentials that we believe will allow us to do great things.

Right? The kind of people who come to D.C. are the kind of people who, for the most part, have invested enormous amounts of time and energy into education and training and credentials so that they can make a difference in the world.

They want to use all of those things for good. And that is amazing. That is wonderful. Right? We should be thinking that way. But often, we spend so much time attaining all of these credentials that our relationship with God gets whatever time and energy we have left over.

[18 : 02] It is sort of an afterthought. As we are doing school, as we are doing internship, as we are doing fellowship, as we are doing residency, as we are making connections, as we are putting in the hours, as we are climbing the ladder, all in the name of doing good in the world, the relationship with God kind of gets pushed to the side.

But the one thing that this world needs more than anyone else, more than our credentials, more than our expertise, men and women who delight in the fear of the Lord. That is actually what the world needs.

People who no longer crave the approval of other people. People who no longer fear the rejection of other people. People whose sole overarching driving desire is to please God.

As we look at this world and as we look at this king, one big question remains. What makes all of this possible? What is capable of bringing the kind of inside-out renewal the change in nature that is necessary for this kind of world to become possible?

What makes it possible for human beings to be so devoted to the Lord that we begin to reflect the heart of this king? And we see, finally, the cost of peace.

[19 : 28] Notice that all of the examples Isaiah gives us of reconciliation, right, all of these paradigmatic predator-prey relationships transformed, all of these examples Isaiah gives us of reconciliation are like a great ripple effect.

These are all signs that an even deeper, more fundamental reconciliation has happened. And we see this alluded to in verse 9.

It says, This does not mean that everybody in the world will know about the Lord as though everyone gets a PhD in theology.

It means close, intimate, personal relationship. This kind of world is possible for because the earth is now filled with people who know God intimately.

Finally, once and for all, there is peace between God and the human race. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. The point is that world peace like this is only possible after there is peace with God.

[20 : 56] Another way to put it is we can't fix the horizontal relationships in the world until that vertical relationship has been restored. And so then we ask, well, how does that happen?

And we see just the merest hint of this in verse 10. This is saying that when God's King comes, He's going to be lifted up like a signal.

And the word here really means banner, like a banner that people would see and rally around. You know, like you feel outnumbered, your troops are scattered, you know, and then all of a sudden there's a banner that goes up and everybody comes from all and everybody sees the banner and they begin to rally around the banner.

A banner goes up and people see it and they begin to move toward it from the four corners of the earth. The one thing that's odd is the way it's written, it makes it sound like the king is the banner. Normally a king, the standard bearer or whatever, they would hold up the banner, but this makes it seem like the king is the banner.

In John chapter 3, Jesus is talking with a man named Nicodemus, and they're talking about the kingdom of God, something that Nicodemus had thought quite a bit about. And Jesus tells him that the only way to get into the kingdom of God, the only way to be a part of this new world, the world that Isaiah is describing, is to be born again.

[22 : 30] Is to gain a new nature. And Nicodemus asked, well, how does that happen? And Jesus answers, 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.

And of course we know now that He was talking about the cross. How does God's King come into the world, make peace between God and humanity, and begin to remake the world to reflect what we see described in Isaiah chapter 11?

He allows Himself to be lifted up. He gives His own life to pay for the sin that divides us from God. He makes possible a great reconciliation between human beings and their Maker. And then through His resurrection, He shows us a preview of the world as it will one day be, a resurrected world.

So, when we see in Isaiah the banner being lifted up, what we're meant to think of is this banner being lifted up. And as God's people see it, they come from the four corners of the earth.

[23 : 53] But then it says, of Him shall the nations inquire. Over time, as this message goes out, as that banner is lifted up by Christian brothers and sisters all around the world, the nations begin to inquire.

The nations begin to come in. And this world of Isaiah 11 begins to be birthed, one new nature at a time. And, you know, Isaiah 11 verse 10 really is the entire mission of the church today.

We could just put that as our mission statement. We are here to lift up and hold high this banner of hope in the world, right? To point to Jesus Christ as the once and future King who will bring lasting peace.

I think it's important to note, and I'm always so thankful that in the overlapping of the liturgical calendar and our secular calendar here in the United States, I love when there are overlaps that help us make sense of things.

And I always love that the Advent season comes right after election season because we always need a reset, especially here. You know, in our society, many people look to politics as the ultimate source of hope.

[25 : 06] And I think that's part of the reason why things have become so polarized. As Christians, we're called to be people who recognize that politics is important.

A lot of you work in politics, extremely important, but it's not ultimate. A good friend of mine, Michael Weir, likes to, I think he coined the word ultimatizing, that we have a tendency to ultimatize politics. And our society needs people who are full of hope. Our society needs people who are full of joy. Our society needs people who are fully engaged in politics, and they're full of hope, and they're full of joy, precisely because they don't look for security in their politics.

But they look for security, and they look for peace in the King of Peace, Jesus Christ. People who have a right-sized view of earthly politics, because our identities are firmly rooted as citizens of God's kingdom.

And this is the great hope of Christmas, the great hope that we have the joy of announcing, the King has come. And now is the time to lift high the banner of hope for the world to see.

[26 : 20] And the promise is that when Jesus comes again, He will be the one to put the world right once and for all. Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for Your Word, and we thank You for Your Son, and we thank You for this banner.

And Lord, we pray that as You give us strength, we would hold this banner high, regardless of the cost. We pray that it would offer hope first to us.

Lord, I know in me, evangelism often begins with my own heart and my own mind. They need to be re-evangelized. Lord, I pray that it would begin in us, that we would be reminded and re-centered on this cross, and then I pray that it would radiate out from us.

Lord, that this Advent season not only would Christians look to the cross as their great source of hope, but that the nations would inquire, that the nations would come. We pray this in Your Son's holy name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.