

# 12/01/2019 - Isaiah 2:1-5

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find out more by visiting [gracepeacechurch.org](http://gracepeacechurch.org). I hope your Thanksgiving was good. I hope it was a good time with family.
- Ours was really good. My family and I, we were in Dallas visiting all of our extended family that lives there, and it was really a rich time, in my opinion. Not too much drama.
- A little bit of drama, but not too much drama. Hopefully you avoided some of that drama. As we were leaving Thanksgiving dinner at my sister's house, I made a classic mistake.
- Classic rookie move. I asked the family, so was Thanksgiving fun? Did you have fun at Thanksgiving? Thanksgiving. Total rookie mistake.
- [ 1 : 0 1 ]     Because my kids were like, fun? That seems to be the wrong adjective. You know? Worthwhile? Yeah, maybe. Not miserable? Okay.
- But fun seems like the wrong word to use to describe an event where you have to go and, you know, wear a nice sweater and a shirt and sit around with adults and eat food and not run around and play necessarily.
- And so fun seemed like the wrong word. So, you know, after a little bit of discussion and we finally realized that you can have, people can have differing opinions about how the same thing, the same event went.
- There can be two different stories that are going on at the same time. And so I learned a lesson not to ask them if they had fun at something like that. And families, I think family events bring this reality out that two people can step into a room and feel something totally different.
- They can see different stories in which they want to live into. Like, you know, that the meal, the dinner was fun or it was miserable. Or you could watch the same football game and decide that was a glorious outcome or that was tragic and horrible.
- [ 2 : 2 2 ]     Or you can have it in bigger ways. You know, my mother-in-law is or your mother-in-law is insane or your mother-in-law is just quirky. Depends on how you're telling the story.
- You can tell it in a couple of different ways. Or it could be that, you know, around politics. Our country is going towards a disaster. Or things will be okay in the long run.
- Or we can think about it with God. God loves me. And I know that he loves me. Or God is just kind of irritated with me and he barely tolerates me.
- There's all these competing stories that we're constantly thinking about. And thankfully, even as Josh reminded us, God has spoken to us. We no longer live in that in-between time where God was not speaking.
- God has spoken to us in his word. He's spoken the true and the enduring story. We have a name for those people to whom God speaks that they tell us what God wants us to know.

[ 3 : 26 ] We call them prophets. We have them in the scriptures. Isaiah is one of those prophets. Did you notice in verse 1 that it says, The word that Isaiah the son of Amos saw.

The word that he saw. Isaiah sees things. What does he see? Well, sometimes the prophets see the future. Right?

They can tell you what's going to happen. But most of the time, they're just seeing reality better than the rest of us. They're helping making sense of the things that we can't make sense of.

Making sense of the unexplained. Seeing the why behind God's providence. They're helping us see past the competing stories that are floating all around us.

We want to interpret things in different ways. And the prophets come in and say, No, this is the way that God sees it for us. How God has designed it to be. And then they tell the rest of us about it.

[ 4 : 26 ] And that's why Christians have often, in this time of year, read Isaiah. Because Isaiah was one of these prophets that was able to look at the reality of the world that we live in and to tell us about something that was more true than what we can see.

So what did Isaiah see? Well, he saw here in Isaiah chapter 2, he describes the ideal Jerusalem. What Jerusalem is going to be. What the end game for God's people really is.

The problem was, he didn't just describe ideal Jerusalem. He actually also describes actual Jerusalem. Later in the passage, if you keep reading in Isaiah 2, he talks about actual Jerusalem.

So what I want to do this morning is just look at ideal Jerusalem, what he describes here. And I want to spend just a second looking at the actual Jerusalem, where he lives. And then I just want to ask the question, spend the bulk of our time asking the question, So what?

What does this have to do with us 2,500 years after the prophet Isaiah? So what does ideal Jerusalem look like? Well, it's pretty great.

[ 5 : 36 ] God's vision for Jerusalem is pretty wonderful. In fact, this passage, Isaiah chapter 2, is quoted by another prophet who comes a few years later, the prophet Micah.

It seems that the people of Israel gravitated to this particular passage because it somehow encapsulated their hopes for what Israel would become.

This is what they wanted their society to look like. It kind of captured their longings and their hopes for themselves. So what did they see in it? I want to highlight four different little pieces.

Okay? First thing is the mountain, verse 2. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord, of the house of the Lord, shall be established as the highest of the mountains.

It shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.

[ 6 : 34 ] Now, if you've ever been to the Holy Land, you'll know that when it talks about Mount Zion, you know, Jerusalem as a mountain, is a little bit of an exaggeration.

It's not that big of a place. It's more like a hill. You know, some of the kind of hills you might find around here. It's not that high. And in fact, it's not even the biggest mountain in the region.

There are mountains that are legit mountains that are much bigger and dominate this. And yet, from the earliest times, Jerusalem has been a place that, because it is up, even just a little bit, that height has had spiritual significance.

What it meant was that God dwelled on that place. It was a place that you went up to. You looked up to God, up to God's presence.

People went up to Jerusalem. And so here, what Isaiah is saying is that Jerusalem is going to be the highest of the mountains. It's a metaphor. It's a metaphor for saying that Zion's significance over the world will be great.

[ 7 : 44 ] That the God of Israel, who dwells on Mount Zion, will become the chief and most important God amongst the other gods of this world.

That no one will be able to deny that every other god and religious system will be insufficient to deal with the problems of this world. What he's saying is that God will be shown to be not just one of the many gods, but the greatest among all.

It's a great vision. Okay, so that's the mountain. Secondly, the river. I don't know, you may have missed this. And shall be lifted up above the hills. The end of verse 2.

And the nations shall flow to it. And many people shall come. The image here is that there's like the people will flow to Jerusalem like water flowing to it.

Water flowing uphill to Jerusalem. In fact, in the Chronicles of Narnia, if you remember this, C.S. Lewis picks up this image. As the very ending image for going to Aslan's country is that there's this image of water flowing uphill.

[ 8 : 59 ] Being caught in it. And that's the image is that there's something so attractive about the God of Israel that the nations will flow to it.

That people will want to be a part of this story. Look, here's the thing. As Christians, you are not a Christian because you have to be a Christian.

You know? That you have some sense of obligation. Some sense of cultural expectation. This is actually one of the benefits of our culture becoming a less Christian-y culture.

A less Bible Belt culture. Is that if you are a Christian, you are a Christian because you want to be. Because you realize that the message of Jesus is something that answers more of the questions of this world than anything else.

Secularism doesn't answer the questions of suffering and pain. Eastern religions don't answer the questions of fortitude, of discipline, of being present in difficult circumstances.

[ 10 : 09 ] No other faith gives you the ability to deal with this world as it really is. And what Isaiah is saying is that there will be a day when that will be so crystal clear that people will flow to God and to the worship of Him.

Like a river. It's cool. It's cool. Okay? Mountain, river. Verse 3. And many shall come and say, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.

Why? That He may teach us His ways. That we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion, like someone calling out, out of Zion shall go the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between nations and decide disputes between peoples. There's this calling that God's word would be proclaimed from Zion to all the world, to all people.

The truth of God's law will decide between right and wrong, decide, dispute, settle in peace. It's this cool picture that God is declaring what is true to the nations through His people.

[ 11 : 25 ] Isn't that what is so lacking in this world? That there's no ability to see what is true. You know, we've got fake news. And then we've got the biased response to fake news.

No matter which side you're on, there's fake news. There's people who are shaping everything. Even your feed on your phone, on your app, is curated by someone with an agenda.

We have this suspicious culture that we don't believe anything that we see. What is true? That was the question that Pilate, if you remember this with Jesus.

Pilate asked Jesus, you know, you say you're the king, but what is truth? How do we know what's true? How do we know what Isaiah is envisioning is a world in which God's truth will be proclaimed and that people will find truth in this world through Him?

God's Word was always meant for a bigger audience than just the people who sit in the pews at church. God's Word has always been meant to go out to the very corners of the world to provide the kind of clarity and truth that people need, that people desire, that they want.

[ 12 : 42 ] Okay, so there's the calling out. So there's a mountain, there's a river, there's a calling, there's peace. This is what most people like about this passage. He shall judge between nations, decide disputes for many peoples.

They'll beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

When God is lifted up, when He's seen, what you'll see is the kind of peace and the settling of hostilities that we all long for.

Where weapons of war begin to be used for cultivating and building up life instead of tearing it down. Instead of teaching our children about how to defend their rights and attack their enemies, we'll teach them about building a world of beauty in God's truth.

I think that's what Jesus was talking about. Right after the triumphal entry, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, He stood up in the temple and He said, When the Son of Man is lifted up, when He is lifted up on the cross, what did He say?

[ 13 : 53 ] He said, I will draw all men unto Me. That in Jesus' reconciling work, there is something about it that is so attractive that it will draw the world to Him.

When Jesus is seen for who He really is and what He is really like, He will draw all people to Himself. That's a beautiful vision.

That's the kind of world that I want to live in. I want to see the kind of peace that Isaiah is talking about here and envisioning here. I want to see that in my community. I want to see that in my family.

The problem is, that's ideal Jerusalem. That's ideal Jerusalem that hasn't yet arrived. There's still actual Jerusalem.

And I want to read a little bit of that. If you have your Bibles, you can follow along. I just want to read a couple of passages to show you what Isaiah is looking at. So I'll read verses 6 to 8 of this passage.

[ 14 : 52 ] And I want you to listen to this. And you don't have to go there. You can just listen. That's fine. But there's a key word in these verses. And it's the word full. Listen to what Israel is full of.

He says this. For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of things from the east, of fortune tellers, just like the Philistines.

They are full of striking their hands with the children of foreigners. Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there's no end to their treasures. Their land is filled with horses.

There is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols. And so they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.

Israel is full. They're full of all of these things that Isaiah would want you to realize are not just aspects of their culture, but they represent spiritual accommodation.

[ 15 : 57 ] They represent ways in which the culture of Israel looked exactly like the culture of the surrounding peoples. There was no distinctiveness about the worship of the God of Israel, the people of Israel.

There was no distinction between them and everyone else. They were people who made deals in business the same way everybody else made deals. They tried to understand the gods and understand fate through fortune telling and other divination just like everybody else.

They were full of materialism and money just like everybody else, but without any spiritual life. They were full of the weapons of war. They had chariots.

They were full of violence and self-protection, just like everybody else, instead of peace. They were full of idols and spiritual rot.

They were just like everybody else. They were full, just like everybody else. Let me read a couple more verses, starting in verse 12. And there's another key word in these verses, and it's the word against.

[ 17 : 08 ] This is how God is against them. Listen to this. For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and it shall be brought low, against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up, against all the oaks of Bashan, against all the lofty mountains.

Do you see the contrast here? The mountain of the Lord will be lifted up, but the people of Israel are lifting themselves up. And God is against that. Against all the lofty mountains, against all the uplifted hills, against every high tower, against every fortified wall, against the ships of Tarshish, against all the beautiful craft, against the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of man shall be brought low.

And the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. It's saying that God is against arrogance. He's against pride. He's against the self-determining ways that they have figured out life.

They've got relative prosperity and peace and they've become self-important. Actual Jerusalem is a place that cultivates life without God at all.

It sounds a little bit familiar. I don't know if you read David Brooks. I read him some. He's a New York Times columnist. And he wrote a piece back in the spring. And he talks about the five lies that we as adults in American culture tell our kids.

[ 18 : 42 ] It's a really good piece. I'm going to have our kids read it during their Sunday school class today. But here's his five lies. He says this. You believe, we are telling our kids that career success is fulfilling.

If you've been successful in a career, you know that that's not the case. We say too, here's the second lie, that I can make myself happy through my own efforts.

Here's another lie, that life is an individual journey. Of course it's not. It's a journey with family and with friends. It's with a community.

That we tell them the lie that you can find your own truth in this world. Of course you can't. We tell our children that the rich and successful people are worth more than the poor and the less successful people.

It's a world of relative prosperity, relative peace without God at the center. This is the culture that we've created.

[ 19 : 51 ] This is the culture of actual Jerusalem. It looks a lot, our world, our city even, looks a lot more like actual Jerusalem than it does ideal Jerusalem.

There's a gap between the kind of world that we live in and the world that we would like to be living in. And that's the point for Isaiah. That's the point.

In just a couple of chapters, he's going to have this vision where he's standing in the throne room of God and Isaiah's first response to God's glory is to fall on his face.

And here's what he says. I am an unclean man. And I live among unclean people. That the world that I live in does not match the world that God has created this place to be and that God desires for it to be and what I desire for it to be.

There's a gap there. So what do we do about that? So what? Isaiah is showing this to us. He's letting us see something. What does that mean?

[ 20 : 55 ] What does he have to say to Christians that are 2,500 years after this time period? Well, I think that we can think about it this way. There are three different responses you could give to this.

On the one hand, you could have kind of the cynical response where you look at the brokenness of the world. You look at actual Jerusalem, which is problematic. You see the pain and the brokenness.

And you recognize it. You just kind of say, you know what? This just stinks. Life just stinks. You know? It's like kids going to a formal Thanksgiving dinner. And they're just like, you know what? No, it's not fun.

It stinks. I don't want to be dressed up. I don't want to be formal. I want to go play. I want to do my own thing. We can have this cynical response where you decide that nothing is going to get better about it.

That no problem is going to be fully and finally resolved. That nothing about life is going to substantively improve. That there's no real hope for change. And so what you do is you just make the best of life that you can make it.

[ 21 : 57 ] And there are millions of people who are living this. Many people who go to church every Sunday, but they have no actual belief that this thing that we're doing here actually changes the world in any substantive way.

And so what they're doing is they're trying to just shape the margins. It's the cynical response. Nothing's going to change. So if I can just get a better house, if I can go on a better vacation, if I can have a little bit more comfortable life, if I can have a little more less conflict, if I can just deal with the margins, that'll be fine.

It's a cynical response. But there is the other equal and oppositely problem in the, what I like to call the super spiritual response.

You know, this is the one that I think a lot of Christians go for, is that they ignore the realities of the world that we live in and focus almost exclusively on their hopes for the future.

So what happens here is that those, those people who have the super spiritual response, what they do is they pretend as though life is not as bad as it really is.

[ 23 : 06 ] They become self-protective. They push away all of the bad stuff and reside back in their own little self-protective bubble. They become aloof.

This is where people come into churches and they realize that the people who are sitting in the church haven't been living in this world in decades. And they have no idea of the realities that are there.

You see, either one of those responses doesn't actually help. That's not what Isaiah wants you to do. I think what he wants is, is what I like to call a gospel response.

And here's what it is. It is having a courageous hope. A courageous hope. This is what I think the season of Advent is all about. It's a clear-eyed look at the world in which we currently reside, but looking past it to see the light of Christ dawning.

It's like being out in that early morning time where you can hear life beginning to come up, but you just can't see it yet. And what Isaiah wants you to do is he wants you to sit in the gap.

[ 24 : 15 ] In the gap between what the ideal is and what the actual is. And he wants you to just sit there in that tension and live there because that is the place where faith gets born.

Tish Warren is a writer that I really like and she says this, to practice Advent is to learn, is to lean into an almost cosmic ache, our deep, wordless desire for things to be made right and the incompleteness we find in the meantime.

It's the idea of raging against, against the things of this world and following after the light. It's raging against the cancer and mental illness that will come to most of our families.

the guilt and shame that we have for our past failures and sins. The injustice and the racism we see in our world. The loneliness in our relationships.

The poverty and the addiction and the abortion and the divorce that we see in our world that is literally killing people in our society.

[ 25 : 29 ] He's saying, I want you to see it, to rage against it and yet to do so with hope. It leads to two specific practices that you and I should see in our life.

And the first one is that it gives us a hope. Here's a very practical way to do this and it's right after Thanksgiving so this should come easily for you. I want you to imagine a person in your mind.

I want you to imagine that family member that is most irritating to you. You probably don't have to reach very far. Who is that person that you just kind of every interaction is kind of the same?

Have you lost hope that that person might actually be changed at some point? We ought to live with the hope that the gospel of Jesus and the power of the kingdom of God coming in Christ has the potential to bring transformation into every part of our life even that person that it feels most hopeless with.

I want to challenge you to have hope. Now, it may not happen. We know that we live in the reality of this world and the reality says that it may not happen.

[ 26 : 57 ] But God calls us into a place of hope even if that hope is going to be disappointed in this life because it will not be disappointed in the world to come.

Your hope will not be disappointed ultimately. And you're to live now in light of that hope. That's the first thing, hope. The second thing is courage. Because if you live with that kind of hope it's going to get messy.

It means you're going to engage people in a different way. It means you're going to step into awkward conversations. It means you're going to do things like inviting people to a Christmas party or to church or to have coffee with you.

And it means that there's going to be some mess and you have to have courage. You've got to have fortitude to do that. And that's what God calls us to this courageous hope. You may have heard of a guy before by the name of Bob Goff.

I don't know if any of you know him. He's one of my favorite authors. He's not really an author. I think of him he's more of an enthusiast. Like this is one of these guys he says yes to everything and it gets him into some of the craziest circumstances the biggest adventures and he writes books about them.

[ 28 : 12 ] and I can show you one of those books. But just the craziest things happened to him which are hilarious and wonderful and he's a Christian so he reads it all through a Christian lens.

But one of the things that he tells this story about is on 9-11 he came home to his house to tell his children. He had young children at the time and he wanted to talk to them about what was happening.

And so he sat down with them and he tried to explain that day which as you remember it was a really challenging thing to understand. And so he found himself asking his children okay if you could talk to a world leader for five minutes what do you think you would tell them?

What would you ask of them? And so his kids kind of gave some ideas and they began to write down some of these ideas. One of the ideas was I would invite them over for dinner. If I could talk to a world leader I'd invite them over for dinner or I'd see if I could go to their house for dinner which sounds exactly like how kids would operate.

A little naive but you know that's really cute. And so they wrote these down into some letters and the kids said well you know why don't we just send these? And so he said great.

[ 29 : 26 ] So they got on the United Nations website and they got world leaders addresses and they started sending letters and the kids said well if we're going to send a couple of letters why don't we send letters to everyone?

Every every like leader in the world got a letter from Bob Goff's kids inviting them to his house and offering to come and to meet them.

And so Bob and his wife Maria said they said well you know if anybody decides that they'll come we'll figure out how to make it happen. Or if you get invited there like we'll figure it out. You know and so they sent off you know however many hundreds of letters and they waited.

And sure enough a couple of months later they start to get letters back from staff people that you know polite no's and these very nice letterhead and all these kind of very elegant kinds of responses.

And then one day after a couple of months they got a yes from the office of state in Bulgaria. and he was shocked.

[ 30 : 34 ] He was like okay well you know what we got invited to go meet with whoever was the head of state in Bulgaria so we're going. And then over time they got more invitations.

They got 29 invitations from world leaders in all. And so they went to the school and they said well you know we're pulling our kids out of school and they sold a couple of cars to buy plane tickets and they decided to go on this trip.

to go and go meet with these leaders and sure enough they'd go and they'd show up and the leader would take them into some room and sometimes they would have a few minutes with them.

Sometimes they'd have you know some treats and he said what was most interesting is as soon as these leaders realized that these really were just kids without an agenda that they just wanted to be friends.

It was like all their defenses went down. They ended up going back to private residences being invited into offices of all of these people all over the world and at every one they brought a present for this world leader at every place and it was a key to their house and an invitation that they could come and have a sleepover anytime they wanted because that's what you do with your friends right?

[ 31 : 53 ] You know you invite them for a sleepover you give them a key and he said amazingly a couple of years later they had one world leader he didn't say which one stop by their house in San Diego and spend the night which is just amazing.

The thing that I love about Bob Goff and I love about that story is that he is choosing what story to believe in. He's choosing that he's not going to believe in simply the story of the actual world in which it exists.



he's choosing to say this is not while it is real and we're going to deal with it we're going to fight against it we're not going to believe that that's the only story out there we're going to believe that there's a bigger story at work that God has something to do in this world that is bigger and grander than we think that it is and that God can do something beyond our expectations and he might even just use children to do it.

He's like Isaiah's vision here. The last verse verse 5 of this passage is the key one. Oh house of Jacob let us walk in the light of the Lord.

You see this is what Romans 13 was talking about that God's light has come into the world through Christ and we now walk in that light. It may be dark in the world that we live in but a light is dawning and we sit at the very center of that nexus that reality and we live with a courageous hope.

[ 33 : 30 ] The season of Advent trains us to do that. It forces us into this place and if you will sit in this over the next few weeks and let yourself feel the tension vision of the actual and the ideal what you'll find is Jesus meeting you there and giving you a vision for how he's calling you to follow him.

It'll be exciting. You might just end up in Bulgaria who knows it'll be pretty amazing. Okay let's pray. Father we do ask that you would give us that kind of vision.

Help us to follow Isaiah's vision we pray in Christ's name Amen. Amen.