

Advent of Hope: The Heavenly Jerusalem

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Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my God and Redeemer. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen. We begin a new church year today, and we do so, this new church year that we begin, we do so not with fanfare and celebration that the world typically ushers in the new year with.

You know, most new years are a party. Not so in the church calendar. That's primarily because time in history does not revolve around us.

It is not our story that is being written, but God's story. The times are in His hands. That is, history as it unfolds from creation to the end of time.

That is, history, I want to say that again, history as it unfolds from creation even to the end of time. And even our times, yours and mine, the humdrum of our daily lives to the big events of our lives, they are all, all of them are in His hands.

[1:25] So when we speak of the church year, I think the church rightly focuses the rhythm of our lives and the rhythms of our coming in and going out around the author of history.

The one whom all of history speaks of. That is why the church year revolves around Christ and His ministry as mediator, as priest, and as king.

And we begin the year with a penitential season. By penitential, I mean sober and reflective. But it does not mean sad or despairing.

We know what awaits us at the end of this penitential season. Do we not? The Savior of the world, Emmanuel, God with us, comes to tabernacle with us, becoming one of us so He might deliver us from the curse of sin and death.

That's what awaits us at the end of this penitential season. He came, bringing hope, peace, joy, and love into a world that is darkened and a world full of despair, a world full of war and hatred.

[2:51] He came bringing hope, peace, joy, and love. So in this season, we remember the advent of hope, the advent of peace, the advent of joy, and the advent of love that came into the world at the birth of Jesus.

Now each Sunday during this season of Advent, leading up to Christmas, we will dive into each of these topics. And today we start with the advent of hope. As you see, the advent candles there, there's a quick lesson.

Most of you are probably aware of it. Each of those candles represent those four words. Hope, peace, joy, and love. And in the middle is the Christ candle.

And then each coming week, you'll see more of them being lit as we approach Christmas. So I invite you this morning to turn into our text. This morning is going to be the Isaiah text.

I invite you to turn to Isaiah chapter 2. It's on page 673. Page 673 of your pew Bible. Please open up so you can follow along.

[4:04] Hope, as we know it, is defined as an expectation or desire. Or you may even say, you may even say, trust that the thing promised or expected will happen.

And the prophet Isaiah speaks with hope in this passage in the Lord regarding his holy city in these verses. Now, it would have been hard to be hopeful about the city of Jerusalem at the time of the prophet Isaiah.

Because it's not a city that was brimming with hope and righteousness and godliness. Here's God's condemnation of the city in Isaiah 1, verse 21 to 23.

God says of Jerusalem, This is the description of the Jerusalem of Isaiah's day.

This is the description of God's holy city. Yet, this city will be, according to the vision that is given to Isaiah in this passage, will be the universal center where God will be worshipped rightfully as Lord.

[5:51] The reality is that the city is a city in a downward spiral. It's a city in which corruption abounds. So, how does God intend to bring the changes about in this city?

Notice verse 24 and 26 of chapter 1 of Isaiah. If you just look there ahead of the passage. It says there in those three verses that God himself will do the refining work that is necessary to bring and to reform the city.

And to transform the city. But in the coming of God, there is a warning. A warning always comes with it. Remember when we went through that series through Habakkuk?

We know that, we saw there that whenever God comes to deliver, He also always comes to judge. He comes with salvation and judgment.

So, the question is whether you will be recipients, you will be recipients of grace, or be recipients of His condemnation and judgment. It all depends on your acceptance of His word.

[7:03] So, that's what's going on here. God comes, promises through the prophet Isaiah to come in salvation, in redemption of His holy city. And look there in chapter 2, verse 1.

We have the introduction, the word, the vision, that is, that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

How interesting the formulation there in verse 1. It's a word, but he saw it. Rather than, it didn't say the word that the prophet Isaiah heard. Rather, it saw.

Isaiah, I think, is communicating to us that what he's about to say, what he's about to speak of, is a revelation. Not made up by himself, but received from God.

But I want you to note the verbal nature, the verbal nature of the communication. God always communicates to His people verbally. That is, we worship a God who speaks.

[8:11] It's not a dumb and deaf God. We worship a God who speaks, and He does speak to His people. And as such, we come, as we do every Sunday, to hear Him, to listen to His word.

This is at the center of our gathering as the people of God. His word proclaimed to His people, and faithfully received by His people, gives meaning to everything else that we do in our gathering. It gives meaning to our songs as we worship Him. It is in the context of hearing His word to us. It gives even meaning to us when we come to the table. Because in the context of the God who speaks to us to come and save and deliver, that we come then to the table to receive what He gives us in His body and blood.

Therefore, the preaching of the word of God is not something to be taken lightly. Nor is it the time to check out in the Sunday service.

So if you plan on checking out, I hope that reels you back in. So as we look at verse 2-5, We are hearing God's word regarding the future.

[9:32] This is God's word of, it's a word of total wisdom. It's a word of power from a God who decrees and brings to pass that which He says.

Look there with me in verse 2. This is, the word of the Lord according to Isaiah says, It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow, that means stream to it.

Now, I've never been to Jerusalem. I hope one day to be there if God wills it. But as some people here have been there and they will attest to this and they can tell you that Jerusalem is built on a hill.

It's a high place. It's on a mountain. And Isaiah's point is this, in this passage, that Yahweh Himself, the Lord Himself, will restore and establish Jerusalem as the place where all nations, not just Israel, you know, all nations will flow to worship there.

Now, imagine in the Psalms, the Song of Ascent, in our lunch bunch, last year we went through, or was it this year? I don't know if you can remember. It might be earlier this year. We went through the Song of Ascent.

[11:04] And that's the pilgrimage song. That's the people of Israel go up to the temple in Jerusalem. They will sing this Song of Ascent. The Song of Ascent. Now, imagine that now all the nations, not just Israel, all the nations are going to Jerusalem, singing this Song of Ascent in the Psalms, as they stream towards God's holy hill.

The vision, according to Isaiah, takes place in the latter days. I think by that, Isaiah means that this vision that he sees is going to be at the end of history.

It's in the latter days. Now, when we talk about the end of history, we have to think about what the Bible means by that. Biblically speaking, we are in the last days.

These, and by the way, the last days are between Pentecost and the coming, the second coming of our Lord. So, the New Testament was the last days.

And we're still in the last days. These are the days in which God's gospel goes out and the nations hear it and they turn to the Lord. These are the last days.

[12 : 19] So, when you hear that, biblically speaking, when it talks about the last days, you have to think, I'm in the last days. That's what it's referring to. So, Isaiah said, in these last days, Jerusalem is described as the highest of the mountains.

It's lifted higher than all the other mountains where the pagan worshippers worship their dead gods. Now, you might not know this, but high places are where man meets the divine.

In the Old Testament, not just for the Jewish, all the other pagan religions, they usually have their temples or their holy places on mountains or on hills. You know, in the Old Testament, Mount Sinai was where God descended onto Mount Sinai to meet with Moses and give the law.

All the other pagan nations surrounding Israel, they also all had their high places as well. But according to the vision of Isaiah, Jerusalem is established as the highest mountain above all the other high places where the false kind of fake gods are worshipped.

And it says there that the nations, what would be the nations' response to this, to what God does in establishing Jerusalem as the highest of the place?

[13 : 35] The nations' response is that they will stream to it. Imagine that. It's an unnatural, divine thing. You know, water flows downhill.

The picture that's been painted is that they will stream as water up to Jerusalem, to the holy hill of God. The nations will respond and they will come.

It's not only Israel now, it's the whole nation. They will come to worship the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. They will come to worship Him as their Lord and as the only true God.

Why will they come? Isaiah tells us in verse 3, Many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways.

That's why they came. That we may walk in His paths. They will come to the city precisely to listen to God's word, which comes from there.

[14 : 44] For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. They're not coming to behold the magnificence of the city or the wisdom of its king as in the days of Solomon.

No. The nations are coming to meet with Israel's God and the true king. To be taught in His ways. And what are God's ways? The Holy Scriptures, which contains His own self-preparation, that's His ways. The Bible of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old and New Testament. Do you want to know God? You must be taught in His ways. You must hear His word and grow in the knowledge of Him.

That's what the nations are coming to have. They're coming to have the Lord as their own. They've recognized that the way by which that is done is to hear His word and to know God who speaks.

[15 : 55] And then upon knowing, after hearing His word and upon knowing Him, what are they going to do? How will they respond? To walk. See that? To walk in His paths.

That is to obey His words and to do His will. To live as His subjects. To willingly submit themselves to His rule and authority.

The nations are coming to the God of Jacob in total surrender and submission. salvation. This is a picture of a holy Jerusalem in which God Himself is King and all are coming bending the knee to Him and worship Him as Lord.

And verse 4 also paints further a picture of what happens in this city. It's a picture of unity and peace. Do you see it there? It says there in verse 4 that God will be the judge between the nations. And they will be at peace. What a glorious picture that is. The nations have recognized one Lord. They've forsaken their high places and come to God's holy hill in Jerusalem.

[17 : 17] They have submitted themselves to His word and His alone. They've come to be taught by Him and to do His will. And when this happens God judges between them rightly.

And as a result of His perfect justice and His righteous rule what happens? Peace reigns. And look what happens.

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation.

neither should they learn war anymore. Look at the picture Isaiah paints for us there. Under the perfect rule of this king in this holy city of Jerusalem there is no more dispute.

There is no more war. The nations bring their weapons their swords they bring it to be beaten into plowshares their spears into pruning hooks.

[18 : 22] that just means that weapons of war are being turned into tools for farming and gardening. I don't know if you know this there's a famous sculpture at the United Nations in New York City called the title of the sculpture is Let Us Beat Swords Into Plowshares.

It is a picture of a man it's a really beautiful sculpture it's a picture of a man with a large armor in his hand and a large sword and he's beating the sword in between two anvils and he's beating it into the shape of a plowshares.

It was given to the United Nations in 1959 as a gift. Ironically the giver of this gift was the Soviet Union.

Never mind the giver the gift does tell a story. the gift speaks of a worthy aspiration doesn't it?

The nations of the world desire peace and it's an institution and even the nations of the world desire peace so much that they established an institution like the UN created to bring about peace.

[19 : 40] But the question is how successful has that gone? How successful is that gone? Just look since 1959 when that gift was given until now how many wars have been waged in the world?

How many lives millions upon millions have died because of men's dispute and greed and war mongering?

That's because peace that is spoken of here and any kind of true lasting peace cannot exist unless people recognize one Lord.

Unless people hear only His word and unless people submit only to His judgment. That is the only means by which there can be true lasting peace.

A submission to God as king and a willingness to hear only His word above every other word and a submission only to His right judgment.

[20 : 54] The world longs for peace but it's wonderful to see that God also longs for peace and He does bring that peace about. That's why we as Christians proclaim and place our hope in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because we recognize that it is only in Him that the promises spoken of here in Isaiah or the aspirations spoken of in that sculpture are realized.

The author of Hebrews also refers to this vision of Isaiah. He contrasts in Hebrews chapter 12. You don't have to turn there if you want to you may.

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 18 to 24. The author of Hebrews contrasts the two mountains where people are to come to meet God. The mountain they came to in the Old Testament and the mountain they are now to come to in the latter days.

It contrasts the way in which God's people approach God on Mount Sinai and the way they do in this vision of Isaiah on Mount Zion which is the new Jerusalem.

[22 : 11] I read there Hebrews 12 verse 18 to 24. He says to the author of Hebrews says to us for you have not come to what may be touched a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken.

Do you remember what happened on Mount Sinai? This is the depiction of what happened to Israel when God came down on Mount Sinai. There was blazing fire and there was gloom and there was a tempest because God in His holiness was coming and there was foreboding in the hearts of the people and they begged that God would stop speaking to them and they said well Moses you go you go speak to God we will step back and they were right to do so because they were before holy and fear for God and they were sinners but the author of Hebrews says you are you who are in the new Jerusalem have not come to such a mountain look at verse 22 of Hebrews chapter 12 you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem and to the innumerable angels in festal gathering and to the assembly of the firstborn who were enrolled in heaven and you've come to

God the judge of all and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel the

author of Ebu rightly concludes or surmise that the Mount Zion that is spoken of in Isaiah's vision is not an earthly place it's not talking about the earthly city of Jerusalem now he speaks of a heavenly Jerusalem it's the city of the living God and ultimately I want us to see that the one to whom we come in this heavenly Jerusalem the one to whom we come he is also the one through whom we can come he is none other than Jesus he is the God of Jacob and he is the mediator of a new covenant and through his blood shed once for all and sprinkled as a guilt and sin offering we are given citizenship you and I as we are finding

Christ we're giving citizenship into God's holy city the new Jerusalem so do you know do you see now that you are ready if you're in Christ you're already a member not just a member a citizen with rights that comes with that of this heavenly city so you see that the one who secured the peace that's spoken of in Isaiah is Jesus he's the one that secures the peace he's the one to whom all the nations stream to he's the architect and the builder of the new Jerusalem and here's what the bible says about this new city of Jerusalem this is how the bible describes it there's a lot of description of it in revelations and in other passages of the new testament even in the old testament as well in in this city there will be no more death no sorrow no crying there will be no more pain there will be no more of the former things because they will be done away with all things will be made new there will be no one in this city who does not know

Jesus as Savior and Lord I hope you heard that this morning there will be no one in this holy city who does not know Jesus Savior and Lord there is still invitation to that city you may still be a citizen of that of that holy city but you must come accepting Jesus as your Savior and your Lord this new Jerusalem will be the center of worldwide worship and revelation in this new city nationalism is set aside the only thing that matters in this new city is an identity in Christ as his people are united to him the only thing that matters that gains you citizenship is not your earthly citizenship is not the tribe you come from is not the family you come from it is that you are found in

[27 : 25] Jesus Christ you united to him that is the only thing that matters and gains you citizenship in his news in this holy city and one of the inhabitants of this city they get to drink freely of the water of life for eternity they get to walk in its light and the kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor into this city this is Isaiah's vision and this vision of Isaiah is accomplished I want us to see that it is accomplished in Christ Jesus himself he's the one who ushers in this new kingdom he is ushered in this new kingdom that's what we are looking for during this season of Advent this is why this is an advent of hope we look as Israel looked to the Messiah in hope for the one the king who was coming the branch of

Jesse the one promised from from from of old he will come and reign supreme and bring deliverance and bring healing and bring salvation and he has come he is the ultimate fulfillment of the words spoken of here he has come and he is coming we get to live between those two comings brothers and sisters we get to live between those two comings and we have to have hope we as the people of God must have hope we must live in that hope we must look expectantly based on that trust in the word of God about his coming again but how are we then meant to respond to this to this vision are we to respond

I think we can look at the prophets call to Israel in verse 5 the way he called Israel to respond is the way I think we ought to respond as well Israel are the covenant people of God they already live in that city just as we as believers in Jesus Christ already are citizens of that holy city but as citizens of that holy city how are we to respond look there in verse 5 the Lord says through Isaiah whole house of Jacob come let us walk in the light of the Lord now those of you who know God already you have a special responsibility to walk in his light here then is Isaiah called you and me come let us walk in the light we cannot as

Josephus tells us claim to be in fellowship with Jesus and walk in darkness so come brothers and sisters in Christ people of God walk in his light allow his blood to cleanse you of all your sins this is the way to true lasting peace with one another this is the way to true lasting peace with God why do we speak of peace when we are not yet physically in the new Jerusalem we are citizens of it but we are not physically in it yet so why speak of peace I think we must speak of peace because we are already marked out as people of that city and as citizens of this glorious city we must walk by faith in Christ Jesus who is our king if you are in Christ then you have been raised with him Paul tells us in

Ephesians 2 and you are seated with him in the heavenly realms you might be seated here now but Paul is talking of a mystical!

[31:57] Union that even as Christ is seated in the heavenly realms! And so there are going to be other hills remember the pagans worship on their own hills and I wonder what are the hills that you are being tempted to come and worship on are you tempted are you being pulled from the holy city of God to worship and to listen to his word and to be ruled by his judgment are you being pulled!

to other hills where there are counterfeit gods perhaps it's the hill of career maybe it's family that do not know Jesus maybe it's ideologies of the world that are not grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ whatever those hills might be brothers and sisters heed the word of the prophet Isaiah come walk walk walk in the light of the Lord you have this hope and assurance from God through his living word that you are citizens of his heavenly city so walk as such let us pray almighty

God who in many ways and various ways has spoken to your chosen people by the prophets and you've given us in your son our savior Jesus Christ the fulfillment of the hope of Israel hasten we beseech you the coming of the day when all things shall be subject to him to him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit ever one God world without end amen