

First Sunday of Advent 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. We thank you as we take a look at this prophecy that you gave Isaiah centuries and centuries before the birth of your son, that promised that one day in the latter days you would right all wrongs and that it would be through your son. Lord, we thank you that we have this wonderful truth that's been preserved for us, but more than that, that it came to pass which proclaims to this world that you are good and you are God and you are almighty and that everything is under your sovereign rule and that's a good thing. So Lord, as we come to your word this morning, we pray that you would bless us, help us to have ears to hear and minds to understand, and most importantly, Lord, that we would submit ourselves to your word by your help and live according to it. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Some of you, if you've been to New York City, I mean, there's a lot to see. Obviously, it's an absolutely gigantic city, but if you've gone to the United Nations or the United Nations

Plaza, you might have seen this staircase that goes down into the plaza and on this wall that's right beside, butted up right against the staircase, it has a portion of our text just emblazoned on the wall. It says this, they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. So I don't know if this is the official title, but it's known as the Isaiah Wall. It's a beautiful message. It's a message of hope and presents this ultimate goal that world leaders ought to aspire to, that war would not mark this world any longer, that nations would be at peace. However, the Isaiah Wall has a problem, and the problem is that it does not quote verse 4 in its fullness. Verse 4 in its fullness reads like this, he shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. No mention of God on the Isaiah Wall. Maybe it's implied, whoever was the architect of it, maybe it was implied. I don't fully know the backstory, but as it stands today on the Isaiah Wall, it's a portion of Isaiah 2 verse 4 and not the full thing.

No mention of the Messiah, only that one day in some way war will end, everlasting peace would prevail, and yet not a generation later the Korean War happened. And after that the war in Vietnam as kind of like the big wars, not to mention the dozens or so of skirmishes in civil wars and conflicts that have existed unbroken until the present. Friends, swords are still swords. Spears are still spears. Peace is not, it continues to elude us, it does not exist. So as we begin Advent, we're going to spend our time in Advent over these four weeks in Isaiah looking at various prophecies. And as we begin Advent, this time of preparation and anticipation for the birth of Christ, for the revelation of Christ, we will see why the Son of God came to earth and why he clothed himself in humanity.

And we'll see that only he can bring about this fruition, this only he can bring to pass verse 4 of chapter 2 of Isaiah's prophecy, because only he has the authority to judge, only he has the authority to arbitrate between multiple nations and the peoples of the earth. Only through him can we approach this mountain of the Lord, and we'll see that shortly, and participate in this glorious plan of redemption. It is only through the Prince of Peace that we will know peace. So as we go through Advent, we'll keep this thing in our minds that it's only through Christ will all of our hopes and longings, both individually and collectively, all of our hopes and longings, will they be satisfied in him? So we're going to look at Isaiah chapter 2. Well, it's only five verses, so we're going to somewhat slowly go through it. So if you have a Bible, please turn with me to Isaiah chapter 2.

[4 : 57] I've broken up the text, there's five verses, I've broken the text into four points, and it goes like this, that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, can bring about peace, because in him we see the presence of the Lord. Verses 2, in him we see the mission of the Lord. In him we see this and receive this call of the Lord, that we actually get to participate in this mission, and finally we will see that he is the Prince of Peace, because he is the Lord of all. So look with me verses 2, actually just verse 2, and we'll look how Jesus is the culmination or the embodiment of the presence of the Lord, and why this brings us peace. I'll read verse 2 for us again. It says this, 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 to it. This verse opens with this term, this reference called the latter days.

You'll see variations of this throughout Isaiah's prophecy. Sometimes you'll talk about in those days, or in the latter days, and this is a very comprehensive term. It's not just talking about some future day that's kind of, it's in the future but doesn't really have a date. Rather, it's a biblical expression for the future, specifically the time when the Messiah will come.

In Isaiah's day, the Messiah, this figure, especially if you get into the servant psalm, songs later on in Isaiah chapter 40, there's this understanding of the Messiah being a Savior, but for Isaiah's time, this idea of the Messiah as we know him today in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there's just shadows, there's whispers, there's allusions to him. But Isaiah is saying that there will be a day when this Savior will come, and this is what he will do.

So this is what he's talking about, these latter days. This time marks, in the biblical sense, the righting of all wrongs, the redemption of all that is broken. It's the beginning of the fullness of time. It's the beginning of the end of the ages, and this inauguration of the good and everlasting kingdom of God. So, like I mentioned, the New Testament understands this as the time when Jesus will come. This would be the Advent season, the anticipation that we are in the latter days, the beginning of the end of the age, the beginning of when the Messiah will come.

Jesus will live, he'll die and rise again, defeating death. It is a beautiful picture and promise from God. But I also want to draw your attention to a second reference that might be familiar if you've gone to church for a while, but can also be a bit confusing as well. There's this reference on the second line here, at least in my Bible, it's on the second line, and it says this. We'll read the first part, 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 I'll pause there. This is certainly is a reference to the temple in Jerusalem. If you've been to Jerusalem, the temple does not exist. There's just the western wall. The temple would have been absolutely huge. It would have been a sight to see.

[8 : 37] This is surely a reference to the temple. But what's interesting here is that the temple in Jerusalem that is referenced here isn't called the temple. It's called the mountain of the house of the Lord. It's not to say that the temple is now referred to as the house of the Lord. There's a lot of overlap, but Isaiah's prophecy specifically uses this term, the house of the Lord, to signify the very presence of God amongst his people in these latter days in this messianic age. Why? A house is where somebody resides. And here we have a reference to the house of the Lord, meaning that there will be a time where God will once again be with his people. He will reside with them. His presence will be among them. Sin and the things that have come into the world because of sin have separated us from the presence of the Lord. On one hand, God is everywhere. There's no place where he is not. But in terms of a relational presence, because of sin, because of death, we are separated from this presence, this relational connection to God. This is saying that one day in these latter days, that will all be reversed. Redemption will happen. And the key bit to redemption, this beautiful salvation that this

Messiah will bring, this cosmic victory, is a promise that God will dwell with his people once again. There's also a reference to this mountain. And all of a sudden, we start to see a bit of a picture being painted here. Mountains are these high places, obviously. But in the ancient world, the mountain or the high place would be where the transcendent would meet the temporal. The place where we would go to get as close to the divine or to the divines as we could. Think about Mount Olympus, where the pantheon of gods live. It's a mountain up there. You traverse, you get as close to Mount Olympus as possible. You think about in the narratives of the Old Testament, where Israel would sacrifice to the false gods, the Baals and the Asheroths would be on a high place. It's a symbol of religious might and religious power. Now, Jerusalem isn't anything to write home about in terms of its height. It's about 2,500 vertical feet or so. It is not very high. Nevertheless, this mountain, this place where the house of God would be, it would be grander and bigger than any other mountain on earth, which is to say that the faith, the religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who created everything, Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit, he would be above all gods. That all faiths would not compare to him. That his mountain, his house, would be the pinnacle of what it meant to worship anything. For he is the only one. He is the most powerful. He is the Almighty. It is no wonder then that the nations would flow to it, which is somewhat bizarre language. I'm not a physics major. I'm not sure if you knew that. I know enough to know that gravity, it doesn't work in reverse, right? Things flow down. They don't flow up. So we start to see a bit of a bizarre picture of what this end of the age would look like. That there would be this mountain where God would dwell, and it would have this magnetic pull, and not just to the people of Israel, the ethnic descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but that all nations would be drawn towards the presence of the one true God. That from it, it will also say that peace would flow down.

So we have this picture of this mighty mountain where the temple, where the presence of God is, where the house of God is. People are flowing up. Peace and his word and his truth and his ways are flowing down. And all of it conveys to us that God's great desire for humanity, for men and women, for families, for all nations, for you and I this morning, is that he would dwell with us and we would dwell with him. This is it. It's this wonderful picture of God's desire to reverse all that was broken because of sin. All the chaos, all the sin, all the disorder, the evil, despair, the rage, the conflict. All that would separate us from him, he would traverse it. And that we who would come to him, we would know his presence and would know a true godly peace and relationship with our creator once again. So he states this purpose from the very beginning. Upon his mountain, in his house, the Lord will be found and you can come to him. It's a beautiful picture. It also is covenantal language. An agreement, a covenant is more than just an agreement between two parties. It is a relationship that people enter into. There's very specific rules and obligations, but also joys in a covenant. Marriage is a covenant. Adoption is a covenant. Here we have covenantal language used so that those that would come to the Lord would enter into this relationship with him. Here's the thing, though. This covenant that God has promised is an agreement made by him to us, an agreement that we can't somehow make on our own, but that he has initiated. And therefore, he will promise us in this covenant that if we are in him, we cannot fall out of him, that we are with him to the end.

The reality is we have no business being in the presence of the Lord, but because it is his will for this to happen, it's because he has initiated the covenant. He makes what is impossible come to pass.

[15 : 37] He makes rivers flow up. He makes it possible for us to ascend. Why is contentment so elusive for us?

For many in our city, I mean, again, I've, the economy is that, it's like every headline, and rightfully so. It's, from what we've known in Canada, it is tumultuous.

But even, even a difficult economy for us would be some of the most affluent living that people have ever lived in the history of mankind. It's remarkable.

I'm not trying to downplay the economy just to show our affluence. And yet, discontentment is still very high in our culture. We have, it seems to be, an insatiable desire for more.

We want more things, more opportunities, more progress. We want more authority, more prestige, more fame, immortality.

[16 : 41] We want it, and yet we cannot achieve it. Our discontentment manifests itself all the time, often in unhappiness or disappointment, but sometimes in anger and rage.

Could it be that we desire the presence of God without quite knowing it, so that we try other things in the stead of God, instead of Him, and we can't get it, and it's frustrating?

We use temporal things to achieve a transcendent joy, and we can never achieve that end. So we're unsatisfied.

Is that not because we were created to know and be in the presence of the triune God? To know Him, but more importantly, to be known by Him? It's remarkable then that even though we have all that we have, we are constantly trying to create and recreate ourselves.

Oftentimes in social media, our identity is at the very top of our priorities. I'm speaking generally here, but I'm sure it touches on all of us to one degree or another.

[17 : 51] But here's the wonderful thing about the gospel of Christ and the presence of God, is that it becomes our very identity that when we know Him, we are secure in Him forever.

And this is His mission. This is the culmination of all history, that God is drawing people to Himself. Friends, this is the mission of God. So how will He achieve this mission?

We'll see this in verse 3, and this will be the second point in verse 3. It reads like this, And 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, and that we may walk in His paths.

For out of Zion shall go the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Like we've seen already, nations are being drawn to the Lord, entering into this covenant with Him.

So that the house of Jacob, which is ethnic Israel, becomes expanded, so that non-ethnic Israelites can claim the God of the house of Jacob.

[19 : 03] It's a beautiful, incredible picture. This is true inclusivity here. It does not matter, then, where you are from. If you ascend the mountain, if you know the Lord, you are a part of His people.

You can enjoy His presence. So the mission of God towards humanity is a mission of expanding His presence, and most importantly, His love, so that all who are distant will be drawn near and will have satisfaction for all eternity.

And I'll say this. This is not just the mission of God, but this is who God is Himself. 1 John chapter 4 speaks of God being love.

It says, God is love. It's a wonderful passage, chapter 4 of 1 John. And this is precisely right, not because it's in the Scripture, but because we have a triune God, a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So St. Augustine, from the 4th century, he wrote a treatise on the Trinity. High-level thinking, high-level theology, but he has this absolutely remarkable line of talking about why God is love and how He can be loved and how only in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, can God be called a God of love and love itself.

[20 : 29] This is what it says. The Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Here it is.

But the Trinity is one, the Father who loves, the Son who is love, and love itself, the Holy Spirit. The Father who loves, the Son who is loved, and love itself, the Holy Spirit, so that in the Trinity, because God has always existed, there was never a time when He did not exist, the Father loves the Son, the Son is loved by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is love itself.

That love is constantly and integral to the person of the Godhead. Three persons, one God. And here's the mission of God.

To invite us into this love. To extend the love to us so that we would know the Father's love through the Son. That the Son gives us the Holy Spirit to love, not perfectly, but to grow in our love and to also know the love of the Father.

And all of a sudden, without becoming a part of God, God is God, we are not, we get to participate in the love of God. And this is what He invites us into. This is the mission of God. So you see, love is always an expanding force.

[21 : 56] It never contracts. It always expands. It always looks to invite and go forth and to find the lost and to remedy brokenness and to fix the outworking of sin so that people can know what it is to have the presence of God, which is the presence of love.

This is the mission of God. To seek and save the lost. How wonderful is this mission?

It is not an invitation to submit to a wrathful God so that we can get crushed and that we can become slaves to Him and live a life of black and white.

But rather, there is a God who is holy who pays the penalty for our sins so that we can know His love and live in 4K technicolor.

That we can enjoy all the beauty of life in its fullness. And a part of this mission, interestingly, and this will lead us to our third point, is to include us in this mission.

[23 : 11] That we get to participate in it. So, you'll notice that the nations flow to God but also, in verse 3, that there is that for out of Zion, the last part of verse 3, for out of Zion shall go the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

So, the people come in but also the law and the word go out. And this, surely, is a reference, of course, to the Spirit of God at work but, the call of God to His people to proclaim the goodness and invite people to know the one true God.

So, this is the third point, the call of the Lord on our lives so that we can too participate in this mission. We'll look at two verses here. The first and the last, verses 1 and 5.

And I'll read it now. The word that the, sorry, the word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And then verse 5. O house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord.

So, I mean, it seems like a prescript, verse 1. It just says the word just introduces this, this prophecy that's going to come from Isaiah. But here's the thing, if you notice. It says, the word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

[24 : 29] Judah and Jerusalem represent the people of God, the Israelites, the ancient Israelites. So this is the word for them. And yet, in the entire prophecy, it's about the nations coming to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

That the message for the people of God is to expand the people of God and to proclaim the gospel message so that the nations could also be welcomed in. verse 5 as well.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. That is a beautiful picture of this outworking of lives transformed by the one true God to mimic him, to imitate him.

And how do we imitate him? In the same way that we saw in the previous section, by seeking and saving those that are far away. expanding love, telling of the gospel of Christ, inviting people to the mountain, into the presence of the Lord, saying to people, listen, there is a better way.

There is a better way. The rat race does not have to go on indefinitely. The things that you find that you look to hope, that you look to for hope that fail to produce what you hope for, you don't have to continue looking for them.

[25 : 50] We found the solution and his name is Christ. And this is the call of the Lord upon our lives, to know him and to make him known. So as we grow in our obedience and trust, in our holiness and godliness, those very things will come to mark us.

And friends, we, and I've mentioned this and I'll continue to mention this, there is a vacuum of meaning and purpose in our society. And I think as we seek by God's help to live out this life where we have a purpose and an identity that is not rooted in the here and now but in the eternal God that is unchanging, it will be like a magnetic reaction so that people will be drawn to us but also people will be also repelled for those that are called but those that want to deny.

So as we walk in the light, we learn to walk in the Lord's favor and in his presence and care and in his truth and his revealed word and it cannot not be noticed.

It's a wonderful picture of the redeemed, the reality of the culture of heaven being established here on earth, the latter days coming to pass that justice will be promoted, that mercy will be promoted and that the gospel of grace will be proclaimed.

And all of this then leads us to verse 4, what true peace looks like and how it is only through Christ that the peace that is proclaimed on the Isaiah wall at the UN Plaza can really come to pass.

[27 : 39] I'll read verse 4 one last time. He shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war anymore. Learn war anymore. The only way that there can be a true abolition of war is when all forms of division within the human race will be eliminated.

This does not mean that there will be the elimination of differences but that that there will be no more division within the human race.

The promise isn't that through Christ humanity will morph into some indistinguishable ethnicity, culture, or even tongue but only that the divisions that are brought about by disordered allegiances are eliminated.

What do I mean by that? Here it is. all forms of nationalism or culture political ideology all of the things that are unique to different cultures or peoples or subcultures or subgroups that supersede supersede the supremacy of the one true God over all of heaven and earth and the Lord Jesus Christ will inevitably lead to differences that cause divisions, distress, conflict, and war.

[29 : 14] Differences are threats. They're not things to be celebrated. They must be treated therefore accordingly. If my ultimate identity is rooted in my political ideology or in my nationalism and somebody threatens that I have to eliminate the threat or else that's the end of me.

It's not to say that having pride of your country or having strong political convictions or being proud of your heritage cultural ethnic the language that you speak that's somehow a bad thing.

Not at all. It's a beautiful thing. Differences are beautiful but they become ugly when they are disordered. When they are not put in their proper place.

When they are elevated to supreme where only God is to be supreme. Friends, in the shadow of two devastating world wars it makes sense that the United Nations have these grand aspirations to see verse 4 come to pass.

And it's and really there's I think it's a good thing in a sense or at least an understandable thing that our Prime Minister and many of the Western world leaders have embraced a type of post-national view.

[30 : 41] I mean nationalism again I'm speaking in general terms was a very cause of two horrendous world wars and it seems like the elimination of nationalism would be the way forward to everlasting peace.

A globalist ideology seems admirable however any such vision that is unrooted by recognizing that only Christ is the judge and arbiter will inevitably collapse into itself.

It lacks the divine authority and power to achieve its lofty goals. To remove the first part of verse 4 that speaks of God himself being the judge between the nations the arbiters between peoples to remove that from the rest of the section is to kneecap and cut out the legs from any hope of peace.

The solution isn't to get rid of nations but is to worship God as the one true supreme God and that we recognize that in his son the Lord Jesus Christ he has made a way for us to know his presence.

It doesn't mean peace is going to come immediately but peace starts to work its way out. only in Christ can such differences be properly ordered. And then once they're properly ordered they can be celebrated.

[32 : 10] No longer is somebody else's nationality or ethnicity or language or way that they've gone about life no longer is it a threat.

With the caveat that there are some political ideologies that are threatening no matter what. But generally speaking people that are different no longer become a threat they become something to celebrate in their fullness.

The other ceases to be a threat to our personhood because our ultimate identity cannot be robbed from us. It can't even be robbed by death. So you see if you take Christ out of the equation this utopian vision will be hijacked turn into a dystopian hellscape.

It will have the opposite effect. So it is not a hopeful thing to quote Isaiah chapter 2 verse 4 partially.

It's actually leaving out the very power and hope of peace that is proclaimed in the scripture. So I'll close with this. the vision of verse 4 is not just that the practice and mentality and the means of war will come to an end although that is a huge part of it but there's more to it because here it says swords will become plowshares and spears will become pruning hooks which is to say that it's not just the elimination of war but the that there'll be a return so to speak to the garden joys of Eden where Christ will be among his people and that we will see things grow and flourish and we will have a part to play in the cultivating of the new heavens and the new earth.

[34 : 06] That the reign of Satan will be forever extinguished and that God will dwell among us once again. The mountain of the house of the Lord is this picture of a return to Eden but it's more than that.

For the possibility of messing up Eden once again will be eliminated. We will know the Lord and he will in us make it so that we will be like him unable to sin in the new heavens and the new earth.

The mountain of the house of the Lord that God is calling all the nations toward is the very presence of God among us. It is Jesus Christ himself.

He is God with us. He is God present among us. He is the place where true worship happens. He is the place of everlasting peace.

He's the one who judges with equity and truth. He is the supreme authority. So in the words of Isaiah, church, church of the Messiah West, let us walk in the light of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[35 : 22] Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the beautiful and true prophecy that you gave your servant Isaiah centuries and centuries and centuries before the coming of your son.

You promised a day and it has come to pass. Lord, help us to look to you, to trust in you, to see you as supreme in our lives, to know your goodness towards us that you purpose to redeem us and that in Christ you have.

Lord, help us also to be faithful and obedient by your Holy Spirit to proclaim this good news to those that are far off, inviting them up to you so that they through your son would know what it means to have their identity and purpose secured forever, never to be robbed, not even by the grave.

Lord, thank you for the coming of your son this Advent season. Help us in anticipation of his arrival. Lord God, to eagerly search our hearts so that we would be ready, that when he would come, we would be ready to receive him worthily.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Tennesseeoney in■■■■ some immigrants nameayips in the ré city