

Sunday after Christmas 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure. It's an honor to be here with you this morning. I'm very grateful that I was able to make it. As you all know, there was a lot of fog this morning, and I drove from about an hour and a half away, and I thank the Lord that there was no problems.

So I'll open with the word of prayer, and then we'll jump into the scripture. Heavenly Father, as we open your word this morning, would you be with us?

Would you be pleased with us? Would you search us? Would you make us new in your Son's image? I pray that you would so bless us to be fed, but also to leave energized, energized by the Holy Spirit, confident, bold, and joyful in the Lord Jesus. And it's in his name that I pray. Amen. Amen. I trust that over the last week or last several days, you were able to celebrate Christmas. I know that over the last month, you were going through Isaiah and just getting a sense of getting a full biblical prophetic picture of who Jesus is, what Christmas actually means. And I'm sure it was a very beneficial time. As for myself, I was able to have a good time with my family, enjoy Christmas. And it's really, I was very fortunate this year to not work throughout the Christmas. I don't know if you were working, but it was nice that, you know, just being able to step back. There's also a very weird thing that, you know, next week, most of us, or maybe a lot of us, are going to go back into the real rhythm of life. Whether it's work, whether it's, you know, mom groups, community groups, whatever it may be, we're going to go back to real life, and it's going to be a big kind of contrast.

[1 : 5 1] You need to kind of go back into the rhythm. And one thing that is particularly, I don't know if it's challenging. I don't know if Christians really think about it all that much. But here's the question.

If Christmas is really as good, as great as it is, as the scriptures make it to be, would it not somehow impact next week? Would it land in some particular way? Would it sort of erupt, you know, the goodness of Christmas sort of erupt into daily life next week? And if so, how?

How could that possibly happen? If Christmas is so good, so great, and I believe that it is, how could it really, what is its meaning, and how could it land into the real world, our real rhythm of life? So we're going to look at that. I would invite you, if you have a Bible, to turn with me to Isaiah chapter 52. And we're going to look at just a few verses. And just to give a bit of a background to this text, Isaiah spoke around 2,800 years ago. He spoke several hundred years before Jesus. And he spoke at that time of things that were to come. Some things happened in his generations. Other things happened later on, not in his generation. And the text that we're looking at today is a poetic portrayal of God's redemption of the people that he was speaking to, the people of Israel. They were God's people. And so he spoke to these people of a time ahead. And so let's just read the text, and we'll get a sense of how Isaiah might have seen this or envisioned this.

So chapter 52, starting at verse 7. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns.

[3 : 5 2] And so let's pause here. We have an image of a messenger, just a messenger coming towards the city and announcing something, a type of victory. Verse 8, the voice of your watchmen, they lift up their voice together with, together they sing for joy. For eye to eye, they see the return of the Lord to Zion. And so here we have the people who are waiting on the walls. They're waiting for the messenger to come. And as the messenger comes, they celebrate, they rejoice. The messenger has come with good news. And so they burst out in great rejoicing. Verse 9, break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem. For the Lord has comforted his people. He has redeemed Jerusalem.

And so now as the watchmen are rejoicing, as they've received the news, they're rejoicing. They're looking back and calling the whole city behind them, behind the walls, to rejoice with them, to just join in the celebration of that great victory. And then looking at verse 10, the Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. And so we have a bit of an interpretation. We're looking, just kind of looking through the material, through the people, through the events, looking at an interpretation. What's actually going on? The Lord has won the victory. And lastly, in the last two verses, Isaiah is calling people to action. Calling people to action. Let's read that. Depart, depart, go out from there.

Touch no one clean thing. Go out from the midst of her. Purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord. For you shall not go out in haste. And you shall not go in flight. For the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard. Now again, this is a poetic description. And so there, in poetry, there are things that are, that are maybe more clear than other things. Some particulars are maybe left out, because it's speaking of a time that is to come later on. And this is truly the case of, of this passage. Where I live, I live on a mountain in Rego. I don't know if you've been skiing at Rego. It's kind of known for the little ski hill. I live on the mountain. And so I see airplanes coming from really far, far off. And it's the kind of cargo jets that, that go from Toronto to Montreal.

[6 : 32] And from really afar, it looks like a star. And I can stand there like five minutes. It just looks like a star. And then all of a sudden, I start seeing these little lights, little red and blue lights on the side. I say, oh, it is a plane. Okay, I thought that looked like a plane. And then all of a sudden, the plane drives right above my house. And I know it because the whole house kind of vibrates.

The airplane comes and me and my boys, we go to the window and we look, okay, it's an airplane. So cool. And so we experience the airplane in that sense. And reading the Old Testament is kind of like that, especially poetry. But reading the Old Testament generally, it's kind of like that.

You have something that, that is there in the past, in the distant past. You can't really put your finger on it. Sometimes it's very clear. Other times it's not so clear. But then as time goes, you start to identify, okay, this is not a star. This is a plane. And you start identifying the text.

This is actually talking about Jesus. This is actually talking about Jesus in a very particular way. And we see it in the gospel, how the life of Jesus gives life to that Old Testament kind of mysterious text. It's kind of like driving in the fog. You don't know what's next, you know, and a hundred feet from you. And then, not only that, but with the airplane coming over your house and just, you know, the house kind of shaking, the Holy Spirit doesn't leave us just to see Jesus in the distance, but he brings Jesus in us to change us, to shake us up, to change certain things about us that shouldn't be there anymore so that we can reflect Jesus. And so we experience the text in that way.

And that's my plan for us this morning as we read this text. So how does Jesus shine in this text? Well, we sang about it already. The cue is already there. The angels coming down from heaven, speaking to the shepherds. The angels were the messengers that came to bring tidings, good news of a king, Jesus. And the shepherds, they were the watchmen, and they were looking, and they received the message of the angels, and they started running.

[8 : 46] They participated in that big event that Jesus has come. And not only that, but you see, just to pause for a second, I'm kind of glad Daniel didn't ask me for a sermon title because the title that I had was a bit weird, like, beautiful feet in a pluralistic age, something like that. It's kind of like weird, but anyway, I'm glad he didn't ask me to do that, although I just didn't give it away. But anyway, that's something else. The feet, what kind of role do feet play in Jesus's life? Well, Mary sat at Jesus's feet, and she had the right, the good portion. She sat at his feet. And not only that, the other woman, the woman who, the sinful woman, came with perfume and washed Jesus's feet with expensive perfume. Why do you think that happened? Do you think it's just because, do you think it's just cultural? I mean, there's certainly a cultural element.

Or do you think it's because Jesus came to bring good news? And all those things were pointing to what Jesus would accomplish at the cross. Indeed, Jesus accomplished something magnificent at the cross. He is the one who accomplished the victory. Every single one of us, we experience what the Bible calls the fall. We experience brokenness, but not only brokenness, we experience the difficulty, and not only difficulty, but sometimes even hostility of choosing God's will. I had a friend who asked me at work, I work in the kitchen, she asked me point blank, as we were cleaning up the kitchen at the end of the night, nobody was around, just the co-workers, and she asked, Jonathan, do you believe in hell? I was like, believe in hell? I was like, oh Lord, where do I go from this? Like,

yeah, I believe in hell, but I don't want to just say, yes, I believe in hell, because, you know, that's the end of the conversation. So I asked her, what do you mean by hell? I said, well, you know, like, what the Bible, like, considers hell. Like, you believe in the Bible. I'm like, yeah, I do believe in the Bible. Okay, that's not very helpful. So I said, well, let's look at it this way. I do believe in hell, and I do believe that you also believe in hell. And all of a sudden, she was like, what? It's like, yeah. So when I was not a Christian, before I became a Christian, I had very deep anxiety and depression. And that's because I staked my whole life on music. Music was my idol. It was my identity. Performance was the meaning of my life. And as soon as music didn't return the life that I was giving it, you know, my whole life was on it. As soon as it was not returning it to me, I started experiencing breakdown.

See, I had experienced false worship. I worshipped music as an idol, as a god. And that is actually the breaking of the first commandment. And the experience that I had of doing that was depression, anxiety, darkness. And I, at that time, did not need anyone to tell me about, you know, about hell. I knew what hell was. I experienced it in my body, in my bones, in my soul. I experienced something of hell. And all of a sudden, I realized, okay, she was tracking. Like, she experiences something like that, too. And I say, from there, you know, here's the thing. If Hitler was able to just shoot himself in the head, he would get away with it. You know, he would get away with everything that he did. There would be no earthly justice. And if that's the end of justice, he got away with it, and that's it. But you don't want that to be true, don't you? Neither do I. I want there to be justice beyond this life. And so it is with everything, you know, with hell, with heaven, with goodness, with truth, with mercy. Anytime that we experience a shadow of those things, there is an eternal version in heaven.

[12:54] And so where am I going with this? So Jesus is the one who came to bring that victory over the very sinfulness that we carry and express from day in and day out. And how did he do that? Well, he, being perfect, went to the cross, having gone to the cross, sinless, not deserving of death, but he went willingly for the joy that was set before him, which is knowing us and having us in him and him in us, he endured the cross, suffered shame, so that we could have life. His blessing, his goodness, his riches would be our treasure, would be our blessing, and our doom was poured on him. That is the, that is the Christian message. That is the reason why Jesus came to earth to be born of a virgin and to live a perfect life, so that he could actually go to that very place, that very moment, so that we could be in him and him in us.

And as Jesus died, he was buried, real body, real grave. On the third day, he was risen from the grave. And what happened? He started preaching again. He started telling the disciples, went to go see him, go tell of the good news. And they became the watchmen. And it was kind of like a game of tag, you know. It was just kind of transferring across. And in a way, it's kind of linking, creating a new generation on earth through this message of the gospel, that when people are receiving it with great joy, they're, they're sharing it with their, with their neighbors, with their friends, their family. Now, we could all, we could see that this is the, the poetic and prophetic vision that, that takes flesh in Jesus. But what does that have to do in a pluralistic age? You know, like, as Canadians, we're very tolerant. We love to, to just kind of go easy on one another. And I've experienced that recently, had a friend over, non-Christian, and we had them over for supper.

And I shared with him a little bit of some of my, my thoughts on, particularly on Genesis. I'm writing on Genesis. So I got to share with him a little bit. And then he said, oh, why are you writing on this? I said, well, because I think a lot of Christians struggle on, on the topic of Genesis one. And, and I remember, you know, when I was younger and new Christian, I experienced a lot of, you know, backlash for my belief in the fact that God created the world. And he, and he said, really? Like, people actually, like, did that? They tried to undermine what you believed? I was like, yeah, yeah, really? And I was shocked, like, that he, he took that, that, that kind of angle. But it's true.

In Canada, there's sort of the, the strata of, you know, pluralism takes the shape of, you know, every religion is equal. Therefore, don't try to elevate your belief, your spirituality over those, that of others. And then there's another layer where it says, actually, you should affirm yourself, express yourself. If you're a Christian, you should be a Christian. If you, if you're a Muslim, you should be the best Muslim. If you're a Hindu, you should be the best Hindu. That's actually the, the situation at my workplace. Like, the first day I got there, my boss, when she found out that I was a Christian, was like, hey, if anyone, like, says bad words and, like, you're offended, like, just tell them. And I was like, okay, well, I have other, like, agendas than, than just telling people, like, like, what to, what to say, right? Like, I have other concerns than that. I want to showcase the gospel.

[16 : 42] But those are the kind of two strata of pluralism, which are completely contradictory. But underneath, you have these subcultures where people actually have very exclusive views.

At my Christmas dinner, where I, or day, rather, where I went, somebody wore a t-shirt saying, merry vibes only. I didn't know that the vibe kind of culture took on exclusivity, but apparently it did, uh, this Christmas. Merry vibes only. Um, fascinating. I heard of another friend who, as, uh, she grew up Hindu, and then she became a Christian after the, the bread man who, uh, who was friends with her dad, uh, shared the gospel with her family. She received the gospel, became a Christian, and then her parents invited her to do the, you know, the casual ritual sacrifices at the temple. And she said, mom, dad, I can't, I can't do that anymore. And they gave her the silent treatment. They didn't cook her any food, didn't talk to her for an entire month, shunned her. And so there are these exclusive pockets, uh, in this whole pluralistic kind of mix of what Canada is today.

Some of you might have seen the, uh, king's address, uh, his Christmas message. I, I've kind of started listening over the last few years what the queen would have to say, and I was really pleased.

Often times she would share the gospel. And, uh, this year, if you've seen it, uh, the king made mention of the great things that they do, and, uh, things that are values of Christianity, values of Jesus, but also of all the great faiths. Uh, so you have pluralism, even from the king of England. Uh, and so a typical Canadian might think, well, isn't it wiser? Isn't it better? Isn't it more tolerant to set our differences aside and learn to get along? Like, isn't that the best way forward, especially as our culture is becoming more and more diverse? Now that's a good question. And, uh, I'm reminded of my, my friend whom, uh, I, I talked about with, you know, the story of, of hell and all that. Um, I shared with her a very weird event that happened to me. Um, in the, in the spring, early spring of last year or this year, rather, I had burnt my hand quite badly. I was, uh, doing, I was boiling maple syrup, uh, cause I have maple trees and all that. And, uh, I took a pot that was on the fire and I had, I had my gloves. I took it off. Then I put it there. I did something else, came back, didn't put my mitten on and I took the handle, lifted it up and it was just like sizzling as I was, like my hand was burning as

I was bringing it up. And, uh, my hand was all red and it was like, it was bad. It was really, really bad. And I work in the kitchen, so I work in front of a grill and you know, if you've been burnt, you can't stay in front of heat for very long. Uh, you're like, you just have to stay away from the heat, put ice and hopefully you'll heal in a couple of weeks. And, uh, that evening, my son, my three-year-old, uh, just came up to me in his pajamas before going to bed and just, you know, sat beside me and I had my hand on ice the, the same evening where I, where I got burnt. And, uh, he started praying, uh, God, I pray for dad in Jesus name. Amen. And I thought, oh, he's so cute, you know, so kind. And then he starts praying again. God, I pray for dad in Jesus name. Amen. Like, that's so sweet. Like, thank you so much. And I looked at my hand, I was like, oh, you know, it hasn't worked. Then he starts praying a third time, fourth time, fifth time. I look at my hand, oh, sorry. Like, you know, but, but maybe God's going to heal me tomorrow, you know, and through the ice and all that fifth time, sixth time he prays, take my hand off. I'm like, son, you did it. My hand, uh, doesn't hurt anymore. Like Jesus healed me. And, uh, and, and he really did heal me. What happened, uh, was not that he didn't have red lines anymore, but it's just that they're never, it never swole. There was never water. It just kind of bypassed that process of healing. Uh, my hand stopped hurting. I didn't need the ice and I worked the next day in front of the grill. And, uh, that was clearly a miracle of Jesus. And I wanted to share that with my coworkers. And I shared that with my friend at work. I shared her exactly what I shared with you. And, uh, and she said, wow, that's so interesting. Such a good story. Um, I really do believe that when, when we have really good thoughts and we align our thoughts, we can actually do things like that. We can actually heal our body. And, uh, she asked me if I read the book, The Secret.

[21 : 24] And I thought, oh no, she didn't get it. She didn't get it. So what's the, what's the difference between The Secret and Jesus? The difference between Jesus and every spirituality, every religion, everything that you will find in this world, uh, on the bookshelf and the, and Dollarama, uh, you know, on the horoscopes at the end of your newspaper is that we have a hero. Christians have a hero.

There's no hero. There's no hero in the secret. There's no hero in Islam. There's no hero in Hinduism. There's no hero in self-help spirituality. There's no hero other than Jesus. And so I want to invite you to look, let's look at the text. Let's look at the text because this changes everything.

This changes everything. Uh, verse seven, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns. Now, what does this mean? Mountains in Isaiah are, are typically high places, places of worship, places where many gods would, would ensnare people to worship them and, and kind of go into this cycle of, you know, this dizzy cycle of worshipping this false God, this deity, maybe a material deity, maybe a force phenomena. You see the messenger just kind of walking on top, walking on top of these high places. The victory is, is Jesus' victory. And he brings good news, good news. This is the word for the gospel. He publishes peace in Hebrew, shalom, which is the image of wholeness. Uh, it's not just that we're going to quietly non-disagree. It's that there is peace.

There is actual peace. War is over. The war is over. And he publishes salvation. And if you look at the Hebrew Bible, uh, the, in the original language, it literally says who publishes Yeshua, who publishes Jesus. And that is just the, the, this idea of rescue, this idea of, of rescue from darkness, from, from forces that we could not disentangle ourselves from. Forces not only at the exterior of ourselves, but interior, our flesh, our, our desires, our affections that are misaligned. He has victory over them all. And the voice of your watchmen, they lift up their voice. Together they sing for joy. For eye to eye, they see the return of the Lord. And so here's my first point. Behold, behold, uh, just a simple word. Uh, my, my three points are just, uh, simple, simple like that. Behold.

[24 : 18] It doesn't say behold here, but that is the, that is the emphasis in this text. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who bring, brings good news. Uh, this idea of looking at and just admiring, uh, cheering on the messenger. Jesus wants us before we start doing anything, he wants us to sit at his feet and watch, to admire, to abide. He wants us to do that. He wants you to do that as you're considering your year 2025, uh, as you're going to mingle with, uh, in a world of pluralism. Jesus wants us to sit at his feet, to listen, to pay attention. And attention is the very beginning of worship. You know, worship takes on many forms. Uh, it's, but it's essentially service or love. And, um, if I am going to love my wife, the first thing I'm going to do is give her attention.

And I'm not going to wait until she tells me to give her attention. I'm going to love her and give her attention, uh, to just kind of watch and listen, be attentive. And the same thing with my children and same thing with, with friends, coworkers. And that's what makes me kind of set apart from my, my friends, not to boast or anything, but I tried to, you know, display my Christian values.

And it's just to give attention to people who are, whose, whose hearts and voices just fall on deaf ears constantly. Um, so attention, behold, we want to, Jesus wants us to just be enamored, like the best hockey player. You know, I, I remember when Mario Lemieux came back into the NHL, everyone was so happy, uh, and everyone cheered him on. The hero is back. The, what is he, he's not the great one.

Who's Mario Lemieux? He's the, I forget the title that they gave him, but anyway, everyone was kind of like cheering on the great hero. He's back. And that's the story of Jesus. He's back. The hero is here. Um, the, the, the mighty one. And so behold, and not only that, but the apostle Paul saw this as a template for Christian, uh, sharing of the gospel. Uh, he, he said that if people, uh, if there are no messengers, how are people going to hear? And so there's a necessity to open our mouths and share with people about Jesus. And I found that in a very pluralistic place where you have, where you often have very little time to share, uh, the best way to approach it is just to share it as your own personal experience. And you, um, like the apostle Paul did with the Jewish people, you arouse them to jealousy. You know, with my, with my friends who, uh, pray to the universe, that's a very big thing in Quebec right now. People love to pray to the universe, to the unknown God of the universe. Um, I can share with them that I do something actually quite similar to that, uh, except that I pray to a person. I think there's a person behind the universe and that person is God and he's made himself known, uh, through the universe, but also through his son, Jesus. And I actually have a connection with him, communion with him. Uh, so, so to rouse them to jealousy, I have something very similar that the good experience that you think you have, I have something similar, but mine goes a little further. Mine is personal.

Mine makes me more human, uh, as I meditate on Jesus and as Jesus dwells in me through the Holy Spirit. So behold, we want to participate. Uh, we want to, uh, look and enjoy the messengers, cheer them on, but also, uh, the message and also participate. Secondly, break forth. We see this in verse nine, break forth, break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem for the Lord has comforted his people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm

before the, the eyes of all the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Uh, here's calling us to worship, uh, to, uh, not only, you know, receive Jesus, but let him seep out, let him exude out of our being. Um, you know, in a pluralistic age, it actually affords a unique opportunity to be very subjective about your experience and, uh, and just kind of put it out there and, and see who bites, who, who takes it on, who's actually curious about your, uh, your Christian experience. And so we want to, uh, break forth, want to share into singing. Singing is a symbol of worship. This does not mean that you have to go to the Cineplex or to the, uh, uh, Canadian Scotiabank, Scotiabank and start, you know, you go there as a church and then you break forth into a, uh, singing like a flash mob. Uh, that's not how you obey this text necessarily, but if the Lord calls you to do that, do it with excellence and reverence. Uh, I commend it, uh, but, uh, it's not necessarily what it's speaking of. It's speaking of worshiping, making your whole life an act of worship, um, making your whole life an act of worship before God and in the eyes of others. And in that way, the, uh, the nations will come and see.

[29 : 28] And the, the notion that the Christian faith is the faith, uh, that's centered on a hero takes up, uh, an extra notch here. It goes up an extra notch in verse 10. The Lord has bared his holy arm.

Um, the Lord has flexed his muscles is essentially what it's saying. Uh, Jesus has flexed his muscles. He has shown, uh, in an age where there are many, uh, gods and, and many deities, uh, false worship everywhere, many ideas, philosophies. He has shown the strength of his arm. He has shown his power and his might to rescue feeble sinners as myself. People who are unable to turn his gaze upon God, unless it was by his goodness to lift up my chin towards him. And he will do it. If you're in that place where you are unable to do it because your desires have entangled you, your vision of the world is so blurred, uh, you know, following a certain ideology has led you to a path where you cannot even distinguish between good and evil, just cry out to him. He will lift up your chin towards him and he will begin to pour out his love upon your face. He'll shine his light upon you. And as it goes through your face, it's going to go through your heart and soul and change you, make you a new person.

That is how he rescues today. And lastly, depart, depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing. Go out from the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord, for you shall not go out in haste and you shall not go in flight for the Lord will go before you and the God of Israel will be your rear guard. And this is an image of the Exodus in the Old Testament, uh, the Exodus where the people of Israel were led out of slavery in Egypt, God will do the same. If you're worried that leaving, uh, a certain spirituality, ideology is going to cause you harm, it's going to cause you social harm, the Lord is going to be with you. The Lord is going to be with you. And one of the ways he does that is through his church. Um, and so here's my last point. Depart, depart. Be willing to make a step for Jesus.

Step out of 2024 towards Jesus in 2025. Um, one of the ways I love to do that is to read, uh, a great author named J.C. Ryle. He was a bishop, uh, in the, uh, Church of England back in the 1800s. And I just take one of his, uh, tracts or his, uh, sermons and I read it. Just at the very end of the year, the Lord just kind of puts one on my heart and I read it and I meditate upon it. And it's kind of a theme for me to carry me through the year. Last year it was zeal. This year is the Christian race. And, uh, I'm looking forward. I just started reading a couple nights ago, but, um, but we want to equip ourselves to go and depart, leave the old life and go towards Jesus. And what this image is for Israel at the time was that they were in exile and God was going to deliver them so that they can take up their, uh, their place in the world stage again as God's royal priests and holy nation. That was the point.

And for us, God is making us into his priests to the nations. Uh, so we have to leave the old, uh, the old ways of life and enter into this new way. And, uh, I want to, I want to read, uh, from Paul in second Timothy 21. He says, therefore, if anyone cleanses, cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. And that's the, that's the message for us is to be ready to, to leave the old ways, leave the old patterns of life. Be bold in what you're praying for, for this new year and enter it, uh, full speed, full energy, uh, full excitement running towards Jesus. Uh, let us pray.

[33 : 32] Father, as we consider these things, as we consider what your prophet, uh, Isaiah preached, as well as what was, uh, mentioned this morning, I pray that your spirit would so anoint us and bless us to, uh, discern these things, to ponder them, uh, and to, uh, to run in the speed and

in the, in the energy of the Holy Spirit towards you and, uh, towards, uh, God, our heavenly father.
Would you bless us and lead us in Jesus mighty name? Amen.