

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to echo David's welcome to you, a very warm welcome to all of you this morning. It's really good to be going through this passage of Isaiah 35.

We are on the second in a series of four carols that we are looking at during the season of Advent. And this carol is called, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus.

So the best thing to do is to have this open to the page where Come Thou Long Expected Jesus is. What is that? Page six, I think.

Yeah, page six. And also in your Bibles on page 595. Page 595. Charles Wesley is the greatest writer of hymns in the world, ever in history.

He is the one who wrote this hymn. And he was an Anglican minister. And he was somebody who was converted after his ordination.

[1 : 05] Now this is not the... Did that happen to you, David, too? There's hope for us. It was at least three years after his ordination. And on the day of Pentecost, May 21st, 1738, his heart was warmed.

He realized that God was the living God, that Jesus came to save him. And that God, by his grace, forgave his sins and gave him a new life.

And on that day, he opened his Bible to Psalm 43, which says, He has put a new song in my mouth. Many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord.

Well, that was Charles Wesley's life. He put many new songs in Charles' mouth. And many people in England came to fear and trust the Lord by his ministry and his brother, John, who was converted a little while after.

Can you turn this up a little bit, Noah? Thank you. And they may have changed the course of history in England because their ministry was especially to the poor and downtrodden.

[2 : 18] Great transformation came to people like that. There was no revolution like there was in France. God's grace came through their ministry. And a lot of it was through the hymns.

He wrote 8,500 hymns at least over 50 years. So he had to write at least four hymns every week. So that's how prolific he was.

He wrote, Hark the Herald Angels Sing. He wrote, And Can It Be? Oh, for a thousand tongues, which we just sang, Love divine, all loves excelling, Jesus, lover of my soul, Christ the Lord is risen today.

Rejoice, the Lord is king. These wonderful hymns that we sing now, they're filled with Bible verses and references. And the feeling of those hymns is always of a deep love for Jesus Christ.

There's warmth in those hymns. There's a liveliness. There's a depth. There is a joy to his hymns because of his relationship, a personal one with the Lord Jesus.

[3 : 23] It really reflects his personal faith in God. And the hymn that we sang, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, on page 6, is one of my favorites.

As the children did this morning, we used to sing that hymn when we, as a child growing up, lit the Advent candles each day.

And so that hymn is very much a part of my life as I grew up. And there are two very popular tunes to that hymn. And I'm very glad that Terry chose this tune because that's my favorite tune.

And I think that that tune has a feeling of longing in it. That's what's communicated in that tune when I hear it. And that is the character of that hymn.

It is a song of deep longing. It's a prayer to Jesus by Charles that Jesus will come again and make things right.

[4 : 31] And it's a prayer from the heart. It expresses this in-between time that all of us are in as believers in which we know the deep blessing of Jesus coming to us in Bethlehem, forgiving our

sins, bringing us into his life.

But at the same time, we wait eagerly for Jesus to come in glory, to complete the salvation that has come to us on the cross.

So there's an already and not yet theme that runs through this hymn. Jesus has released us from our fears and sins by his death on a cross, but we still get entangled by that sin in our life.

And Charles Wesley prays for our complete release when Jesus comes in person to bring the new heaven and the new earth, making all things right. We know that Jesus has brought his gracious kingdom, but Wesley is praying that one day the earth will be filled with the glory of God when Jesus comes as King of Kings.

Jesus does rule in our hearts, but we know that there are other rulers that come into that heart as we live our lives. This prayer says, may Jesus rule in all our hearts alone, which he will when he comes as King of Kings, when we will perfectly love him.

[5 : 57] And then finally, at the end of this great hymn, we look for the day when he will raise us to his glorious throne. This is the substance of our faith that we will be with Jesus in his glory forever.

That is the great hope of Jesus coming again. And it is a hope so certain that Wesley calls it expectation. Come thou long expected Jesus.

It's a certain hope that shapes us, strengthens us to persevere and to be faithful to Jesus. And wonderfully, 700 years before Jesus was born, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to tell us about this hope and how it changes us.

So I want to look at that Bible reading. It has lots to do with what Wesley was singing. 700 years before, Isaiah gives us pictures, pictures to help us understand this hope.

And the three pictures are of two renovations and one highway. And that's how this sermon will be shaped. It all points to Jesus.

[7 : 08] Because first of all, God promises that he will renovate the world. So look at verse 1 and 2. The wilderness, Isaiah says, and the dry land will be glad.

The desert will rejoice and bloom like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it. The majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

You see, Isaiah says to the Hebrew people, think of the most desolate place you can think of in Israel. And I was there in June, hottest time of year, and I was in the desert, and it is like an oven, and it looks like the moon.

So he says, think of that, and now think of the most incredibly beautiful places on earth, the trees of Lebanon, which was an amazing marvel, the stunning beauty of Mount Carmel, and the fertile lushness of Sharon.

He says, now trust that God will one day give this kind of glory to the awful desert on this earth so that it will blossom into a place of abundance.

[8 : 18] Nothing will grow old. Nothing will decay. It is a vibrant earth that enjoys God and what he is doing. I thought that psalm was just wonderful.

It talks about the heavens being glad, the sea roaring, the earth rejoicing, the fields exulting, the forests are singing for joy. You see, it's a picture of the earth that is renovated.

And this is the hope that only Jesus can give to the world. He created the world. He was at the world in creation. In his life, he showed his rule over all the world as he calms the sea, when the storm happened with his disciples in the boat, when he provided bread and fish out of just a very small amount, his authority over all evil and disease.

It is a lordship over creation, which means that Romans 8.21 says, Jesus will one day set creation free from its bondage to corruption.

And it, the earth, is going to experience a renovation. It will be freed from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[9 : 37] And that's why the hymn, Long Expected Jesus, says that, Jesus, you are the hope of all the earth, the hope of the earth of creation.

We can't imagine how magnificent this renovation of the earth will be. And that's why we need that picture of one and two verses to give us a sense, a little morsel, a taste of that renovation.

Now, I want you to notice something interesting in verse one, because our translation says, the wilderness will be glad. And there's a full stop. But in the original, it actually says, the wilderness will be glad over them.

So the question is, who is them? Well, it is God's people. Something happens to God's people that makes creation extremely glad, happy.

And that is the second aspect of hope, because God will renovate His people. And that's the source of the joy in creation. Look at the end of verse two.

[10:43] There is a sudden change. We've been talking about this beautiful earth, and now suddenly, they, talking about people, shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of God.

And we don't know who they are until we go down to verse 10. And those people are called, if you turn the page, verse 10, they are called the ransomed of the Lord.

What that means is they are people that God has paid a price to free, and they belong to Him. You see, Isaiah, 700 years before, is prophesying directly about Jesus Christ.

And that's why Charles Wesley says, Jesus was born for this, to ransom. Come thou long, expect to Jesus, born to set thy people free.

From our fears and sins, release us. Let us find our rest in thee. That's what ransom is. Jesus was born to free every person who trusts in Him from the grip of sin by His death on a cross.

[11:54] And by that cross, He frees you to know God and to know His glory and one day to fully rest in Him.

You know, Augustine said, our hearts are restless until we find our rest in you, Lord Jesus. That's what it means to be freed, to be ransomed.

It is to find our rest in Him as freed people, knowing His glory. It's an amazing promise. And Isaiah says here that it nourishes our souls.

Look at verses 3 and 4. He says here that the majesty and the glory of God strengthens the weak hands, it makes firm the feeble knees, and it drives out fear from the anxious heart.

That's what that vision of glory does, that hope. Today, you may have weak hands, you may have feeble knees, you may experience anxiety in your heart.

[13:00] Isaiah is a pastor and a prophet. And he understands that our trust in God weakens. All of us have witnessed the news of the world and in it great evil that can really bruise our souls.

It injures us as we see it. But not only that, you may have suffered great pain in your own life. A pain that has been inflicted on you from other people.

The pain of broken relationships. The pain of losing a loved one to this death that God will change one day. you may have known the grief of very different kinds in your life and loss.

And all of this can really challenge you. It challenges your faith because it looks as though evil wins out and there is no justice.

Why doesn't God stop the pain and the suffering that I experienced? I've been praying for this. Why does he allow this? It isn't right. And in this way we relate to the disciples who saw Jesus executed and were devastated to see what looked like God's failure.

[14:14] They were people without hope. And certainly we do not, God does not show us, he does not reveal to us why he allowed evil into the world and into our own lives.

But he does very clearly and powerfully give the final answer to evil. And it's in verse 4. It's very, very important this verse. It's the key to this whole chapter.

In our suffering, Isaiah the pastor says to you and I, speak God's words to one another. And here's what you say. Say to those with an anxious heart, be strong and fear not.

In other words, hold on to your hope. Persevere with your faith. Because why? Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God.

What he is saying here is that God alone can and will judge all evil. There is a day of reckoning. His wrath will be unleashed against all that corrupts.

[15:18] Everything that kills, that inflicts pain upon people that he has made. He hates evil and one day he will destroy it forever. There is an expiry date for all of our suffering, for all of the pain in the world.

Only God, the judge, can and will make right all that damages you and his good creation. And the very next line, there is a personal promise for you.

Isaiah says, this God will come to save you. This God will come to save you. By his grace, he will do what you cannot do for yourself.

He will gather God's people to complete the saving work that he began in you when you first trusted in him. There is a sense here that he will search you out personally and gather you to himself with all his people so that you dwell with him forever.

So that God will be your God and you will be his people. And verse 10 tells us what this life will be like. There is everlasting joy upon your heads.

[16:34] They shall obtain gladness and joy. Sorrow and sighing shall flee away from you forever. That is the picture of life completely restored in all of our relationships in a healed, glorious resurrection body that only Jesus can give.

There is the essence of our hope. Jesus, God himself comes to save. It is, as Wesley says, the dear desire of every nation.

It is the joy of every longing heart because in this final salvation we are changed so that we will be like him.

And I want you to look at a little note here in verses five and six as to how you will be changed. In verse five it says that your eyes will be perfectly open so much so that you will see Jesus.

You will see him perfectly in all of his glory and you will be like him. Secondly, it says your ears will be unplugged. You will hear God's voice clearly all of the time.

[17:44] This is the gift of God's word for us now. And we see through a glass dimly, but then we will see and hear face to face. And not only will we receive the blessings perfectly in that way, but in that promise you will be freed to do God's will perfectly, which is also our longing.

Verse six says you may have been lame in following God, you may be physically lame as well, but he will strengthen you so that you will leap like a deer as you serve him.

There is an exuberance in the life of heaven. You and I may have been often silent in expressing God's goodness. I cannot talk about the hope we have in Jesus.

But one day you will continually be singing for joy, it says here, because of God who is for you. It will be the life of praising God.

Let's start practicing this now. You see, Jesus himself said these verses describe him and his ministry. Jesus physically healed people in all these ways to show that he heals us spiritually today.

[18:56] And one day he will perfectly renovate us with a perfected body like his. I have a friend in a wheelchair who whenever I talk to him or think of him, my faith is strengthened.

And that's because one of the stories he has told me is that people have in the past come to him and said, if you really believed in Jesus, he would heal you.

Or a non-Christian would say, why doesn't God heal you if you believe in him? And his response is this. He says, the greater miracle is that God has given me faith in Jesus.

He has opened my eyes to his truth and his love. He has opened my ears to his truth. And I will be with him forever. And one day I will be perfectly healed in every way imaginable.

That is what faith is. That is the substance of the things that we hope for. It shows that life, it is a life that is defined by that certain hope.

[20:08] And so as we leave this passage, the question that comes to us is what does that hope, that God will renovate the earth and that God will renovate my body, mind, and soul, what does that have to do with me today here in Vancouver on this dark Advent morning?

Well, the thing that, the reason for this passage is to strengthen you in the depths of your soul so that you can persevere. And that doesn't just mean survive or cope, but it means to flourish as you wait for Jesus, as you long for his coming again.

And the picture that God uses for that life of flourishing is a highway. So look at verses 8 through 10. God makes a highway and he puts you on it.

And you live your Christian life on this highway. It is a raised road through this transformed desert of verses 6 and 7. And there's two features of that highway in verses 8.

First of all, it's called the way of holiness. It is the place where people are cleansed. That's the thing they have in common. They are cleansed by the Lord Jesus. And this road is set aside for God's purpose.

[21:31] The people on it are. And what we think of when we think of this highway, first of all, is Jesus' words. And I think Jesus was thinking of this when he said this in John 14, 7.

Because Jesus says, I am the highway. I am the truth and I am the life. This is who I am. So that Jesus puts you on the highway of himself.

He has ransomed your bodies and tongues by the forgiveness of sins so that we might joyfully serve him now and what we say and do and think to follow him with all of our life.

That is your purpose. That is what you are set aside for. As our hymn said, Jesus was born to reign in us forever. That is the purpose of those who are on the highway.

That's what makes us different. That's what distinguishes us. People of the hope. People of the highway. So you follow him and you walk with him hearing his voice every step of the way because he is your highway.

[22 : 37] And on that highway, the travelers ask questions. It's full of joyful, active serving. And the questions that are asked are, if God wants everyone to come to the destination of that highway, shouldn't I invite others onto the highway?

If Jesus opens the eyes and ears to see and hear him, shouldn't I speak about the good news if I'm on this highway? If God is perfectly just, can I walk away from injustice?

If God perfectly forgives, can I refuse forgiveness in my life? If he will completely comfort me, should I not comfort those with that comfort?

If he will heal and reconcile, should I not pray for the healing of many kinds of suffering and reconcile people in Jesus through that gospel?

You see, this is what C.S. Lewis was thinking in Mere Christianity when he says, if you read history, you will find that Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most about the next world.

[23 : 47] It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of that other world that they have become so ineffective in this world. You see, the highway means that you live life purposely and actively for Jesus as you travel towards him on this highway and this will bless the world in his name.

And then secondly, besides that highway, being a highway where you are holy, living actively for God, everyone on that highway will reach the destination.

That's the distinction about the highway. The destination is secure. You live life always in the light of the destination, which is the certainty that you will see Jesus and live with him forever.

And so if you look at verse 10, the ransom of the Lord shall return. It will happen and they will come to Zion with singing. Zion is the home of God.

It is God's dwelling place. This is the destination that you will most certainly arrive in. Jesus has opened our eyes and our ears to that salvation.

[25 : 01] And Jesus says, you purify yourself by the certain hope of seeing him, of being in that Zion, being changed like him. In fact, that destination is so secure that there is a strange word here.

it says that even if people are fools on that highway, even if people are fools, they shall not go astray. Verse 8, even if people are prone to wander, they will arrive.

It's a very good promise for us that Isaiah says this to us because we can be fools in our life. But not only that, it is so secure that there are no lions and ravenous beasts there.

In other words, there is nothing evil or fearsome in our life that can take us away from this highway or stop us from reaching the destination to Zion.

So Isaiah is saying, if you are on God's highway, then your hope of reaching Zion is absolutely certain. God sent Jesus as that certainty.

[26 : 08] He promised to prepare a place for you and to come again for us and for our salvation. And that means you, along with every person who has trusted in Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life will one day be changed.

You will experience God's complete renovation in every aspect of your body, mind, and soul. That shining truth is ours when we have anxious hearts, weak hands, and feeble knees.

And it strengthens you. That hope of Jesus is incredibly important because it strengthens us to persevere. That is the nature of hope. I'll give you a little example of that.

If you were offered a job in a factory for a year in terrible working conditions, long hours, and you were offered \$30, you would never take that job.

You wouldn't last a day in it. But if you were offered \$30 million at the end of the year working those bad conditions in that factory, I think you would stick it out for the year.

[27 : 17] You would persevere. You would have the strength to endure it. Well, this is a hope that is beyond treasure, any treasure in this world, that Jesus is our living and certain hope.

No matter what we go through, he will not let us off his highway that has his name on it. And so, because we have that sure treasure, persevere.

Hold tight to the promise of Jesus. He will finish his work in you. You will come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy will be upon your head.

You will obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing will flee away. May God the Holy Spirit strengthen you. So that you hold fast to the hope Jesus has set before you. And may you, in the words of Hebrews 12, lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely to us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. [28 : 23] Looking to Jesus, the founder and the perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and he is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.