

Isaiah 2:1-5

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[0 : 00] I invite you to pray with me as we stand. Father, I pray for all of us here and listening today.

! Well, if you look at the front of the bulletin this morning, it says, A Thrill of Hope.

That is our theme this year for Advent and Christmas. And I imagine it sounds vaguely familiar. It's from the carol, O Holy Night.

And I wonder, does anyone know the line right after A Thrill of Hope? What do we sing after that? A Thrill of Hope. The Weary World Rejoices.

Which could have been another theme for Advent. Maybe next year. Our world is weary, isn't it? Maybe you're weary.

[1 : 16] I'm a bit weary. There isn't a huge amount of hope in our world today. It's a scarce commodity. A survey came out in September that found two out of five Canadians express feeling hopeless regularly.

And so to deal with our hopelessness, we pursue happiness. We think, well, there's nothing to live for in my future, so I might as well pursue pleasure in the present.

I read a book this month called Dopamine Nation that defines our time as the age of indulgence. It's written by a doctor, Dr. Anna Lembke, and she writes, quote, We've transformed our world from a place of scarcity to a place of overwhelming abundance.

Drugs, food, news, gambling, shopping, gaming, texting, sexting, Facebooking, Instagramming, YouTubing, tweeting. The increased numbers, variety, and potency of highly rewarding stimuli today is staggering.

And now this line. The smartphone is the modern-day hypodermic needle delivering dopamine 24-7 for a wired generation.

[2 : 33] That's on the first page of the book. I read the rest of the book, but in case you proof text me. So it works like this. Life is hard, and many of us feel hopeless.

And so we crave something that will bring us immediate pleasure. It could be chocolate. It could be scrolling on social media. It could be a vacation or the buzz we get from alcohol.

It could be shopping. It could be video games. It could be romance novels or pornography.

Whatever. We crave something, and so we indulge in it, and we get that hit of dopamine in our brain.

We feel pleasure. But the feeling is fleeting. And when it fades, we're left feeling worse than when we started. And so the craving returns, even stronger than before.

This is why none of us here ever only eat one piece of chocolate. This is why Hallmark this year has released not one, but 24 holiday movies.

[3 : 37] Many live without hope, and so we seek happiness wherever we can find it. But paradoxically, our overindulgence in pursuing pleasure in the present produces pain.

We aren't happier despite our age of abundance and indulgence. In the same study, 46% of Canadians report experiencing mild to extreme depression.

So we enter Advent this year as a weary world, with nearly 50% of our country feeling unhappy in the present, and another 50% feeling hopeless about the future.

God knows this. God knows this. And so this morning, he speaks to us to give a thrill of hope. See, happiness is a fleeting emotion.

You give me an ice cream, I'm happy. I stub my toe, I'm unhappy. Hope, on the other hand, has the ability to transform our present, no matter our circumstance or struggle, as it anticipates a more glorious future.

[4 : 47] So hope, true hope, births joy, which is a state of being that can endure despite difficulty. See, God this morning brings us hope, which is so much better than happiness.

The secular holidays we've just entered are about happiness. Merry Christmas, happy holidays. We seek cheap thrills through parties and presents and shopping and shows and family and food. But the Christian season of Christmas is not about these things. Christmas is about true hope and peace and joy, as it reveals God and his love.

It's so much better. Don't settle for the secular holidays when you can receive Christmas. Isaiah chapter 2 gives us a thrill of hope.

So let's unwrap it together. It's on page 11 in your bulletin. Or if you like opening the Bible, it is on page 567. Look at how it begins.

[5 : 58] Verse 1. The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw. Isaiah saw the word of God.

God's word this morning is a vision. It's an unveiling of a future reality that we are invited to behold. It's like unwrapping a present.

It's a thrill of hope. Continue. Verse 2. 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.

In the ancient world where these words come to us, people believed that the gods lived above us physically in the heavens.

And so humans tried to come up with clever ways to reach heaven. If heaven's up there and I'm down here, how do I get to God? And the best way was by climbing a mountain.

[7 : 01] Mountains, the ancients believed, are where heaven and earth came together. And so ancient religions built their temples and shrines on mountain peaks. And if you were unlucky enough to live in a flat area like the Nile in Egypt or the plains of Persia, then you'd build a man-made mountain.

Pyramid, a ziggurat. So that humans could ascend up to heaven to reach the divine. You know, even churches like this one are shaped like a mountain.

This is the place, figuratively through the architecture, where heaven and earth meet. Of course, church buildings have a peak, and on the peak normally, there's a cross.

Jesus is the nexus. He's the locus where heaven meets earth. So back to our passage. What Isaiah sees in chapter 2 is that the religion of Israel, which was centered on the temple on the mountain Jerusalem, will become the highest mountain in the world.

Isaiah sees that the religion of the Bible will become established as the true religion that truly brings heaven and earth together. He sees that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who reveals himself in Scripture, is the true God.

[8 : 20] That's what Isaiah sees as he receives God's word. All the other religions fall short of bringing you to God. All the other paths are dead ends.

All the old temples and shrines today are in ruins, abandoned with no believers. But this faith, this mountain, is the highest.

It's the only way to God. And what Isaiah sees is that in the last days, all the nations of the world will know this. Look at the end of verse 2.

All the nations shall flow to it, verse 3, 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.

The vision Isaiah sees is that people will come from all the nations to God. And we're told they come for one reason.

[9 : 18] Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. Why? That he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. The world will come to God because the world will want to know God's word.

That's what Isaiah sees. People from all the nations are going to want to come and learn God's ways. They're going to want to come and walk in his paths.

And as our passage progresses, we see that two things will happen when the nations flock to God to hear his word. The first is at the end of verse 3. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

See, people will flock to God to hear his word and God will give it to them. And not just to them, but God's word shall go out from them, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

God is not hiding. If you're looking for God this morning, he is not hiding from you because he is not silent. He wants you to know him.

[10 : 24] And so he reveals himself. And the way he does that is he speaks. He gives his word to the whole world that we may know who he is and where the world is heading and how we should live so that we might have hope.

God's word is what attracts people to come to him. And God's word, we're told, will now go out to the whole world. All nations will come to hear God's word and then they will go out sharing God's word.

That's the first thing Isaiah sees. The second thing that he sees is described in verse 4. He, God, shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples.

To judge here means to establish justice. The laws of heaven, the law of God, will be enacted and enforced on the earth. As God's word goes out and as people come in to hear it and live by it, the kingdom of heaven will be mirrored on earth.

The kingdom of heaven will come to earth. The rule and the reign of God will be known on earth as it is in heaven. So far, Isaiah sees that in the last days, the world will recognize that the biblical faith is the true religion and that the God of the Bible, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the true God.

[11 : 48] He is the Lord God Almighty. People will come from every nation hungry for God's word and they will receive it and then they'll be sent out to share it. And God will bring his rule and his reign and his justice over all the earth.

Isaiah sees God's word and God's rule come from heaven to earth and now listen to what happens in verse 4. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore. I went to New York in 2008 and I went to the United Nations and there's a garden around the UN building where countries have given gifts and there's statues and sculptures.

And there's a statue of this verse. This verse is written on the bottom of the statue in stone. I think it's in brass, actually. And it's a man who is incredibly muscular, who is holding a hammer over his head, not wearing any clothes, smashing a hammer or a sword which has become a plow underneath him.

It's very powerful. It was a gift from the Soviet Union to the United Nations in 1959. I feel like they didn't know this verse very well, maybe.

[13 : 13] God sends out his word and God will establish justice and peace will define our existence. And we're told because God will be judge, all war will end.

This future vision is a thrill of hope. It's peace on earth. It's joy to the world. It's God with us. It's almost too good to be true, isn't it?

I excuse your skepticism if you're sitting there thinking, this sounds great, but how do we know any of this is actually going to happen? I want you to go back to verse 1.

And notice it begins by saying, in the latter days. God's word that Isaiah sees is a vision of the latter days, the last days of this age of sin and death on earth.

It's the final moments of this current age of darkness, of sorrow and suffering, when God will inaugurate this new age where heaven and earth will be won and all evil will be defeated together.

[14 : 22] 700 years after these words, Jesus shows up. Jesus is born, Christmas story. And when he begins his earthly ministry, the first thing he says in Mark's gospel is this, the time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of heaven has arrived. Repent and believe the good news. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand.

The last days of the age of death have begun. This new age of God's kingdom on earth is here.

Isaiah's vision of the age of the kingdom of heaven has begun and the future has begun.

Shockingly, after Jesus' announcement, he's crucified, died, he's buried. But then even more shockingly, three days later, he rose from the dead, proving the truth of his words, proving that in him death is defeated.

And he ascended into heaven. And in the book of Acts in the New Testament, we hear what happens next. And what we see is a further fulfillment now of Isaiah chapter two.

[15 : 37] We're told that representatives from all the known nations have gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. This is a Jewish religious festival when they remember that God gave his word, his law to people on a mountain, Mount Sinai.

And Jesus' followers are there in Jerusalem, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection. And we're told they receive God's Holy Spirit. And what do they start to do? They start to proclaim the word of God to

the whole world that's gathered in Jerusalem.

The world has come to Jerusalem to hear the word of God. And through Jesus' disciples, the word of God now goes out from Jerusalem. And on that day, Peter stands up and he gives a sermon. And in it, he begins by quoting the prophet Joel. This is Acts 2, verse 17. Peter begins, Joel has said, In the last days it shall be that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, declares the Lord. Peter tells us at Pentecost that the last days are here. God has poured out his spirit on all people. Jesus has risen from the dead.

[16 : 45] He's proven that this faith is real. It's true religion. The world has come to Jerusalem to receive God's word. And now God's word has been sent out from Jerusalem.

The last days have arrived. And if the latter days have arrived at Pentecost, 2,000 years ago, it means we are living in those latter days now.

The future reality that God revealed to Isaiah 2,700 years ago is our reality. Think about it.

Christianity, the faith birthed out of the Hebrew scriptures, is today the largest religion on earth. If every religion is a mountain, then this is the highest of the mountains.

We see today that in almost every nation, all sorts of people are coming to God, thirsty for his word. I mean, look around this room.

[17 : 45] We probably have every continent represented here. And I imagine some of you have done a cruise to Antarctica. There are people here from all over the world.

And you have all come to hear God's word, to be taught how to live. There's a hunger for the word of God that is palpable in this place.

We love God's word. We relish in it. We rejoice by it. We study it deeply and we're transformed by it. Every week, new people visit our church from all over the world.

And they are hungry to hear the words of God and learn from him how they ought to live. Maybe that's why you're here today. You didn't even know it until now. God has drawn you here because he has created you and created in you a hunger for his word, a thirst for righteousness, a desire to know hope and peace and joy by knowing God.

God's word gives us a vision whereby biblical faith will eclipse human religion and the world will flock to God. And we are living in these days.

[19 : 06] We see something that starts at Pentecost and it stretches through today that is a fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 2. But we must concede it's a partial fulfillment, isn't it?

We're not fully there yet. Wars haven't ceased. Not everyone's interested in God's word. But what we do see is that this passage is fulfilled perfectly when we look to Jesus.

Jesus is God's word personified. His best friend on earth called him the word. Jesus is God's word on display. Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

He is with God and he is God. Listen to the beginning of the letter to Hebrews. This is a Christian letter written to Jewish believers that's in our scripture.

It begins long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his son. Jesus is the word of God.

[20 : 15] He fulfills everything we are promised in Isaiah chapter 2. In Jesus the last days have begun. Through Jesus the world gathers to hear God's word.

Jesus is the prince of peace who brings heaven to earth and he will come to be our judge to establish God's justice and God's rule on earth.

This passage is an explosion of hope. A thrill of hope that is so much better than your grandmother's favorite Christmas cookies or a pair of socks you bought on sale yesterday.

And a passage ends with the invitation of how we ought to respond. This is in verse 5 on page 12 of your bulletin. It's a simple invitation.

O house of Jacob O children of God O people who have heard God speak and are responding in faith come let us walk in the light of the Lord.

[21 : 18] The invitation for all of us whoever you are whatever you're walking in here from is to leave the darkness of the world to depart from the way of the world that is leading you to depravity and death to turn around and to now walk full of hope in the light of the Lord as we hear his word.

This passage illuminates the way to God. You know God through hearing his word through hearing and understanding and believing his promises.

And God's word points you to Jesus who is God's son and our savior. And the passage encourages us invites us to respond by now walking towards him.

Walk towards God this Advent. Seek him in his word. Seek him in his son.

Our church offers many ways for any of you to walk in the light of the Lord. Listening to his word and receiving his promises. Over the next month the main way you can walk in the light of the Lord with us is through our special seasonal services like this one.

[22 : 39] Come to all of them. We'd love to have you. The services are all listed in the back of your bulletin. They're also on this postcard at the back. They're on our website. Send them to friends. My 10 year old son at public school a buddy came up to him at recess last week and said is your church doing that Christmas Eve thing?

I want to come so badly. Send me the information. It's amazing. If you want to continue to walk in the light of the Lord in January I lead three evening sessions called Come and See.

And it's intended for anyone from any background to come open God's word together in a safe welcoming space and to see what God offers us.

You can sign up online you can talk to me you can come and learn about who God is and how to walk in his light. Friends this morning we receive a thrill of hope.

Do not settle for cheap happiness that is fleeting when you could know the everlasting living hope that God offers you today.

[23 : 48] Amen.