

Isaiah 2:1-5

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Preacher: Rev. Jacob Vandiver

[0 : 00] Let's pray as we stand. Father God, we thank you for your word, and we ask for the grace to hear it and receive it tonight, that we may see more clearly the hope that we have in your son Jesus. Amen. Folks, be seated. If I've not had a chance to meet you, my name is Jacob. I'm one of the ministers here at St. John's. Come say hi afterwards. I'd love to meet you and chat a little bit.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, so Happy New Year, everybody. Thank you. Advent is the four weeks leading up to Christmas, and it's not just about preparing for the holiday, you know, putting up the string lights, buying the Christmas gifts, watching the Christmas movies, which is pretty great.

But no, in the church, Advent intends to draw us up out of ourselves, to take our attention off our circumstances and remind us that we're part of a much bigger story.

Advent tells God's story of how he has broken into a dark and sinful world and shined his light to find his lost people and to return them to himself. It's a story of hope.

Real hope. Real hope. Not hope in the human spirit to lift ourselves up by our bootstraps and make the world a better place. But real hope. The hope that God, our Creator, has not left us alone.

[1 : 43] That he's entered into the darkness of this world because of what he has done, we have a hope for the future. He is redeeming all things for no other reason than he's loving and merciful.

And he loves us. And he wants to redeem us. That's the Christian hope. And so over the next four weeks, what we're going to be doing is getting snapshots of this hope unfolding through the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah will be reminded that God has been unfolding this story of hope for literally thousands of years. And that this hope is ultimately fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So today we're going to look at Isaiah chapter 2, verses 1 to 5. It's on page 567 of the Pew Bible. So if you'll open up there with me, that'll be very helpful to you.

Isaiah chapter 2 is a glorious glimmer of hope shined into a very dark story of Israel's sin and rebellion. And I want to look at this in three steps.

[2 : 53] First, we'll look at the darkness of Israel. And then we'll look at the light of Isaiah's prophecy. And then last, I just want us to see what this means for us today.

What it means for us today as followers of Jesus in his body in the church. So that'll be the structure of the sermon. Let's look at it together.

First, the darkness of Israel. And I should say that Isaiah was a prophet of Israel. And a prophet is someone that spoke the word of God to his people.

Especially when things have gone off track. Isaiah wrote this prophecy about 700 years before Jesus was born, just for context. And Israel is in a very dire situation.

God's people, Israel, were supposed to be unified under God's law, but they were divided against themselves. Israel was supposed to be mediating God's truth to the pagan world so that everybody on earth would have life by his word.

[4 : 05] But instead, they were self-interested. And they didn't even keep God's law themselves. Israel was supposed to be a city of righteousness.

But they were violent and unjust and greedy. They neglected the poor and the vulnerable. And worst of all, they were hypocrites. Because they preached God's law, but they did the opposite.

Isaiah tells us that Israel, in chapter 1, God has turned his face away from them. His righteous anger has risen up against them.

Look with me, chapter 1, verse 13. This is God speaking. He says, Israel, bring no more vain offerings. Your money is empty and meaningless to me.

Incense is an abomination. This was Israel's worship. And God says, it's disgusting to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations.

[5 : 12] I cannot endure iniquity. And your solemn assembly, it means nothing to me. Because you're sinful and you're turned away from me.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates them. They've become a burden to me. And I'm weary of burying them.

When you spread out your hands, I'll hide my eyes from you. And even though you'll make many prayers, I will not listen because your hands are full of blood.

Israel looked holy on the outside, but they hated God in their hearts. That's the darkness of Israel. And that's the darkness that God is shining into right now.

Because Israel was supposed to be shining God's light of his word into the world, but they were snuffing it out. And yet, even still, God promises he won't forsake them.

[6 : 18] He will enter into the situation and do something about this. Look at verse 18. Again, this is God speaking. He says, Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

He's going to purify them. He's going to melt away all that is wicked in Israel. And he's going to reestablish them as a righteous city.

So, even in this darkness, God is shining the hope of redemption. And so, we come to the light of this prophecy of Isaiah.

This is chapter 2. This is our passage for tonight. It's the light of hope that Isaiah saw, and he proclaimed it to Israel. Let's look at it together.

[7 : 16] It's verse 2. It shall come to pass. This is a promise. 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.

Israel has been humiliated because of its wickedness. It has been laid low. But God is going to raise it up. Mountains in the ancient world symbolized the meeting of heaven and earth.

And this was because they're places where the ground gets really high, right? They're places where the ground gets close to the sky. And so, it was thought that gods lived on mountains.

Think about Mount Olympus with all the Greek gods who lived there. And the same is true for Israel and the nations around them. There was pagan worship on the high mountains surrounding Israel.

So, when God says that I'm going to establish Zion as the highest mountain, He's saying Zion, the place where human beings can meet the real living God.

[8 : 40] Zion has been laid low in humiliation. But God is going to raise it up. He's going to make it obvious to everybody that Jerusalem is the one true place where a person can meet the living God.

I'm going to exalt my place of worship above all other false religions. And when God does this, He says at the end of verse 2, look with me, All the nations shall flow to it.

When the dwelling place of the living God is raised up for all to see, it will be magnetic. Because which direction does water flow naturally?

Down. Water flows down. And yet, the beauty and truth of God on His holy mountain will be magnetic.

And it will defy every barrier and every natural draw downward. And it will draw an ocean of humanity up to Himself. Isn't that amazing?

[9 : 55] And it gets better. The nations, that is Israel's enemies, who hated God and hated them, they are going to commiserate with themselves, and they're going to say, Come, let us go up to this mountain.

Not because they're curious, or because they're intrigued, but because they desire to know the living God. Look with me, halfway through verse 3.

They want to learn His ways, and walk in His paths. They want to learn about the living God from Him Himself, so that their lives would be transformed.

Those who hate God get a glimpse of God's truth, and it changes their hearts. They see the futility of wickedness, and they want to know more.

Okay. So what's responsible for this magnetic draw? What's responsible for this miraculous shift in the heart of the nations who hate God?

[11 : 11] What's the end of verse 3? For out of Zion shall go forth the law, the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

The beauty of Zion is God's word. His law, the very speech of the living God, spoken like a broadcast from a high place that calls all nations in the world to return to Him.

It's amazing. Okay. So let's recap. God's people, Israel, they're supposed to bear God's word to all the world, to shine the light into the darkness of all the nations, so that they would return to Him.

But they're totally corrupted. They're hypocritical. They're ineffective at this. And yet God does not reject them. He promises to raise them up.

And He promises to establish His house and His word will go out. Okay. So what's the result when this happens?

[12 : 23] It's peace. It's absolute, universal peace on earth. Because as the nations respond to the word that they hear, as they learn His ways, and as they walk in His paths, God's reigning presence in their hearts brings peace on earth.

Look with me at verse 4. God is going to be the judge between all nations. Not like a judge in a law court where people bring cases to Him to settle a dispute.

But He'll be the law as in a measuring rod by which everything's decided. God's law will be like an internal compass directing every human heart.

And when this happens, of course, wars will cease. There will be peace. The nations will lay down their weapons and willingly reshape them into plowshares and pruning hooks.

These are farming tools. The thought of war and conflict will be a distant memory. All people on the earth will forsake the battlefield and they will return to the garden.

[13 : 51] The place where God intended for us to be from the beginning. The place of fruitfulness and freedom and joy in relationship with Him under His law forever.

And this will be true at every level of human life. Because when the law of God rules in our hearts, every conflict will be resolved with love and with charity.

Every desire of every human being will be in line with God's righteousness. The righteousness that you and I were created for. No more tears.

No more anxiety. No more hatred. No more grief over conflict. Because each of us will love the Lord more than anything and we will finally be able to love each other properly.

This is the peace that Isaiah promises. It's the bright, shining hope that we get a glimpse of in this prophecy. Because Isaiah is pulling back the veil for his people just to give a glimpse of what God's going to do.

[15 : 04] And he tells us that these things will come in the latter days. Those days way beyond the horizon. Those days that Isaiah and his people could only imagine.

And brothers and sisters, the good news for us tonight is that we are living in these latter days. Because Isaiah tells us that all of these things will be fulfilled by the Messiah.

The shoot from the stump of Jesse, the one who will ransom Israel, the one who opens the eyes of the blind, who will cause the deaf to hear, who will cause the mute person to sing with joy, the one who is born of a virgin.

Brothers and sisters, the vision of God's hope has been fulfilled in Christ Jesus, our Lord, whose advent we are hoping for, that we are looking forward to in Christmas.

Because by Christ's death and resurrection, he was lifted up high upon the cross. He was exalted as he rose to life from the dead. And he revealed God's loving kindness and mercy by suffering death for all people so that we never have to taste death again.

[16 : 31] And through his apostles' witness and preaching, the word has gone out from Zion. It has been broadcast from the holy mountain.

And through his people, the church, the nations are returning to God as we proclaim the gospel. And peace is being practiced on earth anywhere that Christ is ruling and reigning over his disciples, you and me.

Friends, we are living in the latter days. And so as I close, what's the application?

What do we do? Well, it's verse 5. Oh, house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord.

It's a command that comes at the end of a prophecy. Live your life in the light of Jesus Christ. John chapter 8, Jesus says, I am the light of the world.

[17 : 41] Whoever follows after me will not walk in darkness, but will live in the light and have the light of life within them. And so friend, if you're here at church tonight feeling hopeless, if you feel like your life is not peaceful, if the wars that continue to ravage this world feel too much to bear, if you're brokenhearted because of the suffering of your friends and family, remember that we do not hope because we're wishful thinkers.

Our hope is grounded in the sure promises of God given through Isaiah, fulfilled in Christ Jesus, witnessed by the apostles and proclaimed in the church.

Your hope is in Christ Jesus. Walk in his light and he will not let you down. Friend, if you're here at church tonight feeling distracted and directionless in your faith, Isaiah's prophecy is also a reminder to us that we have a crucial role to play.

God wants to use you as a light to shine forth his word into the dark world because by that light, he's drawing all nations to himself.

And so we walk in the light of Christ. We follow after his path. We obey his word because like a prism that is brought into the light, we reflect his light out into the darkness of this world because he's building his church as an instrument of peace in this violent world.

[19:32] And you're part of that. So this Advent, let's allow God's story to draw our attention upward so that this hope would shape our lives.

That he might work in us and through us as we place our faith in Christ Jesus anew tonight. Amen.