

Advent II

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[0 : 00] I was listening to an interview with a Jewish comedian the other day who was describing his upbringing being raised in an Orthodox Jewish home.

I'm kind of one of those weird people who could watch documentaries and read biographies for the rest of my life. I'm fascinated with people's stories.

This comedian was lamenting the fact that he was slowly giving up his faith because it had become a cultural practice void of any real meaning.

He was becoming more and more convinced that the concept of God was merely a contingency plan for those whose lives were frustrating and difficult.

I listened intently as this comedian was not joking. He was not joking about giving up his faith at all. He seemed a bit tormented by this development.

[1 : 06] And he said that he could no longer believe in a phantom that people called God. I thought a lot about this candid interview as I was studying, especially our Old Testament text this morning.

Listen as I read a portion of our Old Testament reading here from Isaiah chapter 55, verses 6 through 9. Seek the Lord while he may be found.

Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.

And my thoughts than your thoughts. The backdrop to this reading is that Israel is in captivity. Because the people of God had forsaken their creator, which happened time and time again.

[2 : 22] But these words of promise are words of hope. Words of hope as the Lord is about to restore his people so that they are captives, slaves no longer.

Creation, rebellion, captivity, and restoration are the perpetual themes throughout the Old Covenant.

God creates a people. They rebel. The people then are enslaved to their enemies. God hears their cries and he delivers them so that they are restored once again.

That's the Old Testament in a nutshell. Here in Isaiah chapter 55, the Lord says to his people through the prophet Isaiah that they are to do three things.

Three things here. First of all, they are to seek the Lord. They are to seek the Lord. And then they are to call upon him.

[3 : 26] And finally, they are to forsake their wicked ways. Seek the Lord. Call upon him. Forsake their wickedness or their wicked ways.

And the Lord promises that those who do such things will receive mercy. As a matter of fact, they will receive a full pardon from their sins.

I want to go back to that interview for a minute. I listened to the rest of that interview with that Jewish comedian and realized why this guy was leaving the religion of his youth.

He went on to discuss, or I should say brag, about a lifestyle that was in total contradiction to what his faith taught. I'm not going to get into all the details.

But let's just say he was having fun discussing all of his indiscretions. There are so many so-called Christians who do the exact same thing.

[4 : 34] Many people who identify or have identified as Christian all at once begin having a crisis of faith. The faith is not contrary to our actions.

It's not something separate from what we do. The two go hand in hand. Our belief comes from our actions. And our actions are informed by our belief.

If one is living what they think is their best life, with little or no thought of God, they will certainly fall into unbelief.

That is exactly what Israel did time and time again that landed them in a world of enslavement, a world of bondage.

The Bible calls this hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is saying you believe one thing while acting and doing something altogether different.

[5 : 39] The Christian faith is not a mere list of propositions to check off a list. It is what the early Christians called the way. Why did they call it that?

Because it was not merely assenting to certain intellectual truths. It was walking in the way of our Lord who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The good news for all of us is that our Lord desires to forgive, to pardon, and restore us because all of us tend to go our own way.

We heard at the very beginning of Isaiah chapter 55 those words from our Lord, which says, Listen carefully to me and eat what is good and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

Incline your ear and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David.

[6 : 48] Friends, God is not playing a game of gotcha with us. He desires to feed us. He desires to give our thirsty souls drink.

He wants us to commune with him in his kingdom forever. That's what he desires. But we must come and we must submit ourselves to the way, to his word, seeking to walk according to his way and not ours.

As we prayed in our collect for the second Sunday in Advent, Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them.

That by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast. Ever hold fast. The blessed hope of everlasting life. The Christian faith, again, it's not simply a set of doctrines that we give assent to intellectually.

[8 : 12] It is a life that we are incorporated into that begins in baptism. And that is when we become the body of Christ.

And the word of God now is to be our guide. As we are to cast off the works of darkness, as we say in the first collect or the first Sunday in Advent and throughout Advent, we pray that that collect, that we may cast off the works of darkness.

as we anticipate the coming of our king where we will rise to new life and share in his immortality in his glorious kingdom forever.

Like this Jewish comedian, we all, I'm sure, have doubts from time to time. But the answer to such doubt is not to indulge ourselves in our base desires, casting ourselves further into darkness, further into enslavement.

It is to do an inventory, and that's what Advent is about. Advent is a time for us to prepare. It's to do an inventory of our own lives, to see if we are practicing what we say we believe, or if we're just merely going through the motions.

[9 : 46] It is to do what the theme of Advent is all about. We are to be confessing our sins, to repent of our waywardness, to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the scriptures in order to conform our lives to the way of our Savior.

It is to practice a rule of life and to be people of the way as we prepare for the coming of our great King and our Judge, Jesus the Christ.

Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.