

Advent II

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[0 : 00] In Isaiah chapter 55, verses 3 through 5, we heard those words of our Lord, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David.

Indeed, I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you. Over the past few years, there have been growing concerns of anti-Semitism in the Western world, and especially here in this country.

After the horrendous attacks that took place in Israel on October 7, 2023, the retaliation has been severe, as Gaza has become a complete wasteland.

Now, before I go any further, you can all take a sigh of relief, as I'm not going to get into the politics of this conflict, nor am I going to speak about the outrage and protests, which we have witnessed even here in Blacksburg.

[1 : 10] But what we are going to look at on this second Sunday in Advent is the relationship between Israel and the church. In the midst of all the political rhetoric concerning Israel and Palestine, there has been much confusion concerning the modern state of Israel.

And at the heart of this discussion is the very foundation of the person, work and mission of our Lord and the vocation of the church as the body of Christ.

You see, what the church has always taught up until the mid-19th century is that Jesus is the fulfillment to all the promises made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, King David, and yes, the nation of Israel.

We heard in our Old Testament reading about the everlasting covenant with David, who, by the way, was dead at this time, and the promise that one greater than David would come and set up his eternal kingdom.

This greater king would be, according to Isaiah chapter 55, verse 4, a leader and commander for the people, and he would bring into his kingdom people from all nations.

[2 : 33] This is reiterated in our epistle text, where we heard in Romans chapter 15, verse 12. And again, Isaiah says, there shall be a root of Jesse, again speaking of King David's line or succession, and he shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, and in him the Gentiles shall have hope.

So here's what you need to know and what the church has taught throughout history. Israel was God's chosen people. Israel was the instrument, the vessel, to bring his light and to bring his truth to the whole world.

But the repeated pattern in the Old Testament is about how Israel, time and time again, abandoned the Lord and began worshipping other gods.

But the Lord did not break his promise to his people, as he promised to Abraham, going all the way back to Genesis chapter 12, that all nations, that is, all people from all nationalities throughout the world would be blessed from Abraham's line, that is, his lineage.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the long-awaited promise to Abraham. And he is the prophesied king who now sits on the throne of David forever.

[4 : 02] And that is why we confess Jesus is Lord. And all that brings us to our gospel reading this morning. We heard those words that depicted a world in great distress.

In Luke chapter 21, verses 25 and 26, we read, What in the world is this frightening scene that we hear?

What Luke is describing is the impending destruction of the temple and that holy city, Jerusalem. For the Hebrew people, the temple was the place of God's presence. It's where they met God. It was Eden. It was paradise. It was the most holy place on earth.

It was a place where heaven and earth met. And where God visited his people. And Jerusalem represented the place, that city where God would reign and the nations would come to honor their creator and their king.

[5 : 31] But our Lord made it clear that the presence of God would no longer dwell in a city nor in a temple. God's presence is found in the God who has come and taken upon himself human flesh.

The Emmanuel, meaning God with us, has come to rescue and free his people. The eternal has fulfilled the temporal.

Jesus, the God-man, has come to be present and to save us. So what Luke is describing here in Luke chapter 21 is the utter destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, where both temple and the city of Jerusalem would be ransacked and made desolate.

This was the abomination of desolation that we read about in the book of Daniel that was prophesied long ago. Words cannot begin to describe the absolute and utter despair this event caused for the Jewish people.

Their world became unraveled. Their hopes and dreams crushed. It was though the world had ended for them.

[6 : 55] And in some sense, it had. And yet in the midst of this horrific destruction, God was fulfilling his promise made to Abraham, to all the patriarchs, to all the prophets, to all the judges, to all the kings, and especially to King David.

The Lord was fulfilling his promise that all peoples and all nations would be blessed and enjoy his presence forever.

And that's because salvation and redemption is not found in a temple. It's not found in a city and it's not found in any one nation, whether that's Israel or the United States.

It's found in the God who has come in human flesh. Emmanuel, the God who is with us, our Savior and our King.

And this promise was fulfilled in our Lord's impeccable life, in his agony and bloody sweat, in his cross and passion, in his death and burial, and in his resurrection and in his ascension, where he now reigns as King and Lord over all.

[8 : 12] So what does this have to do with Advent? Everything. It has everything to do with Advent. Jesus is the true Israel who takes the light to all nations.

Jesus is the Savior of the world to both Jew and Gentile who now make up the church, the Israel of God. And Jesus is the creator of God and King who will bring human history to its ultimate conclusion as both judge and yet as our loving shepherd.

Jesus is the true Israel of God. Therefore, dear people of God, despite the frightening times in which we live, where we find ourselves staring down the possibility of a national economic collapse, no matter how often we are reminded of fearful threats of terrorism and the ever possibility of a nuclear war.

Our hope is not found in peace. Our hope is not found in treaties and alliances with other nations. It's not found in any political party. It's not found in any national leader.

And when we start putting our hope in that, we, like Israel, start committing idolatry. Our only comfort in life and in death is in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[9 : 38] He is the King. He is true Israel. And we as his bride, as his body, the church, are the Israel of God.

We are heirs to the promise made with Abraham and King David because Jesus is the fulfillment of all things. All things find their yes and amen in him.

And our hope is in his kingdom. And guess what? That kingdom will never fail and it will never end. So, friends, let us fix our eyes upon Jesus.

Let us bow our knees in adoration and worship to our great God and King. And let us get our priorities in order while we still have time in this mortal life by preparing for his coming.

Let us be people of prayer. Let us be people who read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the word of God. Let us discipline our hearts, our minds, our bodies in order to avoid sin.

[10 : 52] And let us love others by supporting and serving his church, his kingdom, his Israel, made up of past, present, and future followers who worship Jesus as Lord.

Jesus is the eternal King who has come so that he may dwell in us and we in him. Heaven and earth are united in him.

Therefore, as his children, let us cast off the works of darkness. Let us put on the armor of light so that the kingdom of God shines forth to the world in hope.
And may that be our vocation and our calling as his body, the Israel of our God. Amen.
In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.