

I. Intro

A. Last week we began framing Advent through some of the prophecies of Isaiah – who was one of the major prophets.

1. Advent is the season at the beginning of the church year set aside to look back at Christ's first arrival (the incarnation) and to look ahead to his promised return.
2. The prophets are those who stand between God and the people and speak for God to his people. As opposed to the priests who stand between God and the people representing the people to God.
3. The major prophets are those who said the most – who wrote the longest books. There were four:
 - a) Jeremiah – who gets called the weeping prophet. He wrote both Jeremiah and Lamentations.
 - b) Ezekiel, who started in Jerusalem but then got taken to Babylon – and brought a message of hope to the people there.
 - c) Daniel: who also served in the Babylonian court.
 - d) And Isaiah - who is our focus. And who is generally regarded as the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

B. So, we are spending this Advent looking at four prophetic passages from the book of Isaiah, paying particular attention to some of the passages in which Isaiah peered around the corner to tell us what was headed our way.

1. For the record, in spite of what some think, the big part of a prophet's job was not to foretell the future it was to forth-tell the truth. It involved telling the people (us) to do the right thing: to keep their covenant promises; to love God, serve others, care for the poor; to attend to the needs of the widow, orphan and alien. For the most part, the prophets spent their time forth-telling.

C. But they also spend a bit of time foretelling – telling people what was coming. They did this principally to validate the rest of what they were saying.

D. Part of the way those speaking for God proved that they were speaking for God was by proving it – by being right.

1. Starting in January of next year I will be teaching a Lakelight class on CS Lewis. It's been 25 years since I did a deeper dive into CS Lewis scholarship. A lot has happened. And one of my surprises has been the attention now being given to *The Abolition of Man*.
2. He got it right.

E. After all, those hearing the message of the prophets were not fundamentally in a different position than we are. They were hearing different people – who all claimed that they were right - saying different things:

1. You should turn left. No, you should turn right. You should vote for ABC. No, you should vote for XYZ. You should put your time here. No, you should put more time here.
2. The people living three thousand years ago were trying to figure out who to listen to – who was telling the truth, who understood what was really going on. They were trying to figure out which talking heads were savvy and sane.

3. Mercifully – they had a lot fewer people talking at them. The volume and velocity of the news was less than it is today. But, they did need to figure out who to believe.

F. One of the ways prophets got people's attention was by talking about things they couldn't know without God's insight.

II. Why bring this up? Well, because in this series we have two things going on. I am trying to walk and chew gum at the same time, which may be beyond me.

A. A big part of what I am trying to do is encourage those of you who have already put your weight down. Who believe. But who could use some encouragement.

1. We are having a moment. There is lots of distressing stuff going on out there.

2. Alongside an expansionist Russia, a nuclear North Korea and an almost-nuclear Iran, we have Israel at war, China looking at Taiwan. And that's just what is going on internationally. That doesn't even factor in things like debt, loneliness, AI, polarization, declining birth rates, moral confusion in higher ed and many other things.

3. Some of you here need to be reminded of the promises made by a promise keeping God. This ends well. His kingdom comes. His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The one who came as a baby will return as a king.

4. So, part of the reason for this series is to look at the promises and be encouraged. To rehearse the promises of God because Eternity changes everything. God's kingdom will be worth it.

B. A second thing going on is I am trying to get the attention of those of you who have yet to land – at least in any serious way. Many of you have yet to pick a lane. I want to highlight the story and how it holds together.

1. As noted earlier, this is a confusing moment. And there is lots of tension and chaos, in part because there are lots of narratives and metanarratives.

2. We still have some of the classics:

a) The Greeks – most notably Plato – said that our key problem is our human weakness and the way to fix it is to return to the classical virtues.

b) Marx claimed that the big problem is capitalism and he and Engels advocated a totalitarian state to oversee the redistribution of wealth.

c) Freud said our problem was repressed desires and so he wanted to promote the unrepressed expression of desires.

3. There are some newer ones – not new:

a) Postmodern thinking of Foucault or Derrida.

b) Nietzsche.

C. As noted, there are lots of stories out there – and so what a lot of people do is weave all around the highway. And I want to yell, “pick a lane.”

D. Part of what the prophecies do is to advertise the truthfulness of The Book.

1. Full disclosure – I am trying to get you to go all in with Jesus.

2. As it turned out, one of the subsets of the prophecies the prophets gave, revolved around the coming of the Messiah.

- a) The first prophecy is found in Genesis 3, where we have the statement about the virgin birth. But there are a bunch of others. Later in Genesis we are told that he will be from the tribe of Judah.
 - b) In Micah 5:2 we are told that he would be born in Bethlehem. In other verses we hear that: he will travel to Egypt, be crucified, ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, be buried in a rich man's tomb.
3. Now, I think we come at these prophecies through too much Enlightenment rationalism and end up missing the poetry and nuance.
- a) We turn these passages into story problems.
 - (1) He's male – 1 in 2; be tribe of Judah – 1/12; born in Bethlehem – 1,000. (Hope, Arkansas)
 - (2) The math is stunning. It slaps us upside the head and takes our breath away.
 - b) I get that, but have become more impressed with all the ways Jesus floods the categories.
 - (1) In the Old Testament, Israel is directed by three offices: prophets, priests and kings. Jesus perfectly fulfills all of these offices.
 - (2) In the Old Testament, much is made about development of a sacrificial system. Jesus overwhelms the category. He is the ultimate sacrifice.
 - (3) In the book of Exodus we have stories about bread (mana) and water – and then we see Jesus as the living water and heavenly bread.

E. Well, in this series we are looking at the way Jesus fulfills four of the prophecies given by Isaiah, who is one of the major prophets.

- 1. Isaiah makes several messianic prophecies. Last week we looked at 9. This week is it chapter 11.

III. As you turn there, let me tell you a bit about chapter 10, where God announces judgement on Israel.

A. After Exodus the Jews cross into the Promised Land and we settled into the era of the Judges – during which time Israel operates as a loose confederacy. During the period when Samuel is prophet, the Jews will demand a king. God gives them what they ask for. Their first king is Saul. That's a dumpster fire. But then they get David.

- 1. He does a much better job - not perfect – but way better. He unites Israel, defeats her enemies, expands her borders and fills the coffers. When he dies, his son Solomon takes over. After Solomon dies, the kingdom splits into two groups – the Northern ten tribes (which go by the name Israel) make a break for it. They reject God and have a series of bad kings before they are overrun by... the Assyrians.
- 2. The southern two tribes – which go by the name Judah – survive the Assyrians.

B. I share all this because... it is at this moment that Isaiah is speaking. Our text comes right here. In chapter 10 of Isaiah, God says that he is going to use the Assyrians as an ax to chop them down.

1. It reads: **Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.**

2. V3: **What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain.**

C. Through Isaiah, God tells the Jews living in the northern ten tribes that they are going to be judged for their arrogance and oppression. They are a forest and God is going to use the Assyrians as lumberjacks to chop them down.

D. Ch 10 ends with a picture of death and destruction – complete deforestation. No birds. No squirrels. It's all darkness and stumps. Which is what happened!

IV. Then, Isaiah 11:1-9

A. **A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;** (I think the picture you see on the screen does a great job of capturing that image).

1. Jesse is the father of King David. You'd think he would have said David, but this speaks of humility. David was a king. Jesus will not initially present himself as royalty.

2. But, note that in saying – 700 years before Jesus is born – that the Messiah was going to come from the stump of Jesse, he is re-affirming that the Messiah will be from the tribe of Judah (which was first made in Genesis 49).

B. from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

1. Fruit is life and health and a future. New life is coming from what appeared to be dead.

C. V2: **The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – he is talking here about Jesus - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.**

1. So, this child:

a) this shoot that is born in the blood line of King David, during a period in which it appears all is going wrong.

b) this child born in humble circumstances, who doesn't initially appear to be the remedy to all that is wrong in the world. Who does not appear to be the solution to sin and death.

2. This child is not ordinary.

a) The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.

b) This child will be unique. Isaiah is writing this before Jesus is born. He is full of the Holy Spirit and his desire is to defeat evil.

3. The Bible will try in various ways to help us understand who this child is – the logos, the promised one, fully God and

D. V3: **And he will delight in the fear of the Lord.**

1. Once again I will note, we think fear is a bad thing. The Bible does not. The Bible wants us to fear the right things and not fear the wrong things. And that can basically be summarized by fearing God.

2. To the extent that we can rightly order our loves and fears, life is easy.

E. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

1. The hero is a holy judge – morally perfect and altogether unique. This is a judge who will rule perfectly without ever calling a witness or needing to review a law book.

2. He will be perfect by the power of his word. This hero is Jesus.

F. V5: Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

What will he do? He doesn't tell us. He gives us pictures. He allows our imagination to shape things. V6: **The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat,**

the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

1. A couple weeks ago I was talking with a friend – an older man (he is in his 80s) who is new to faith. And he said, “You” – and he was talking about me – “you have heaven on earth. Would you agree. You have peace of mind and peace of heart and heaven on earth.”

2. And I said, “No. Slow down.

a) First of all, you think way too highly of me. To the extent that you are focused on me and not Jesus we are both in trouble.

3. More importantly, this is NOT heaven. This is a very broken world. This is the land of the dying. This is a land full of despair and death and cancer and war.

4. Do I have peace? Yes, by God's grace, I am able – most days – to be pretty settled. To be at peace. But it doesn't come from looking around, it comes from looking ahead.

G. We do get a description of heaven. It's very cryptic.

H. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

1. The prophet is talking about a world to come after Christ's return. What is being described here is reminiscent of Eden before sin and death entered the world. The small child can play in perfect safety around the cobra. There is no evil that can enter the environment. The devil has been permanently removed, along with all other beings that reject the glory and blessedness of God. This is the new heavens and earth.

I. V11: They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

V. I'm not sure if you showed up looking for encouragement or if you needed to be told to pick a lane, but wow is this a rich and challenging passage.