

Part 1: Longing for Something More

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December 6, 2020

We are starting our Advent Series today at Sovereign Hope, and for those who are unfamiliar with the Advent season, it is traditionally a time where the church has paused to consider the impact the birth of Jesus has on our lives, our hopes and our world.

The word "advent" comes from the Latin word which simply means coming.

Advent is when we examine all that changes with Christ's coming.

Today we are actually going to look at what life looks like between the two advents. Christmas traditionally signified the first advent of Jesus, Jesus' birth as fully God and fully man. But historically part of this advent season was a focus on Jesus' Second Advent: when he would come back to save, to judge, and to establish the New Heavens and the New Earth in all their glory.

I'm not sure how accustomed you are to considering this Second Advent, but the Bible makes it very clear that we as believers are to encourage each other and constantly remind each other of this day. In fact if you're familiar with scripture perhaps know the way in which the author of Hebrews defines faith in **Hebrews 11:1**. Faith is hope in what we don't see. But the author of Hebrews actually defines for us what that hope is five verses later in **Hebrews 11:6**.

Did you see the stunning reality of faith in this text? Faith is not merely believing that God exists. In James 2, the apostle says that even the demons believe in God. Instead faith believes that God exists and, did you catch that, faith also believes that God rewards those who seek him.

Faith is not merely the assurance that God exists but it is the assurance that this God who exists wants to reward those who seek him. Faith is by nature a realization that what this God offers in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest things we could ever imagine. So precious is this reward that it pulls us through the hardest times in this world.

Look at how he continues in **Hebrews 11:13-16**. What endured these men and women of faith? Not the promise of a reward in this life, but the promise of a better eternal future in God's forever city.

Now if you're joining us today and you're not sure about what you believe about all this futuristic gospel stuff, I want you to consider that this year is a year where the whole earth is anxious for advent. We want something to change like we never have before. We are looking forward to the reversal of a disease and the restoration of what we consider to be normal and good.

The truth is we should long for something to change. The question you need to ask yourself is if the change you hope for is actually enough to accomplish the relief you seek? And what assurance do you have that it will ever happen?

Today we are going to look at life between the two advents of Jesus Christ and we are going to answer those questions from the Christian perspective in the book of Isaiah, a passage which looks forward to this reward.

In Isaiah 2 God is writing to his historic people, the Jews, but like us their whole world has been turned upside down. Because they believed in God but forgot that God was their reward, they sinned and chased after false gods. As a result of that, discipline followed. The nation of Israel was split in half, military conflict surrounded them, corruption and lack of love typified their communities and frustration abounded.

But in the midst of pain, confusion and discipline God is going to remind his people of a hope rooted in God himself. A hope that God won't let sin have the last word but that he would complete his plan to restore his people to himself.

What we are going to see today in Isaiah 2 are three simple things: **The season of advent encourages us to look at Christ, to long for heaven and to live in light of both.**

I'm going to read our passage in full this morning and then we will circle back to those three points. **Isaiah 2:1-5.**

So this passage begins by speaking to a nation in ruin and in pain of the promise not only total restoration, but something even better than they can imagine. To this hopeless nation there are three things that would have stood out to them.

The first was the elevation of the mountain of the Lord, Mount Zion. When we used to take our college students to Michigan in the summer we would pass one of Michigan's premier ski lodges. To them it was extraordinary, to us it was Rainbow Hill.

For Jerusalem, Mount Zion was one of their national monuments, but they knew this mountain was pretty small compared to other mountains. But in Ancient Near-East religions, it was thought that the gods lived in the mountains, the bigger the god, the bigger the mountain. So there was probably a bit of shame when Israel looked at Mount Zion, but here God says all other mountains will be small compared to this mountain. God's plan of redemption gives God's people something to hope in.

Secondly, not only would the mountain of God be elevated above the nations, but the same nations which now stood to threaten and oppose Judah, would stream to the mountain of God with a desire to worship him.

And third, this gathering of nations would result in a profound peace as the result of the direct rule of God. But look again at the language that is used here in **Isaiah 2:3-4.**

Did you catch that? It says, "For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, He shall judge between nations and decide disputes for many people."

Who is this "he" that randomly shows up? It would appear to be that it is the word of the Lord. The word becomes a person who actively rules over and interacts with his people.

This is where we see our first point today: **Looking at Christ.**

This is the first Advent, this is what we see in John one that in Mary's womb the eternal word of God became flesh and dwelt among us.

Certainly a piece of this prophecy would be fulfilled when the Jews rebuild the temple after exile, but this Advent season we are reminded of the partial fulfillment where Jesus began the process of raising the mountain of God, drawing the nations to himself and creating a profound peace among his people.

For most of the Old Testament it seemed that God's promise was an ethnic promise. That if you wanted to be on God's good side you had to be a Jew. This is why Jesus' followers in the early stages of their discipleship spoke of God's plan in really nationalistic terms. It's true that God's promise was for the people of Israel, but it was also true that part of God's promise to Abraham was that through this promise to the Jews the nations would be blessed.

We see this blessing prophesied in Isaiah 2, and we see it manifesting itself in Jesus' ministry.

You see in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we see the nations coming to the new mountain of God. Look at this interaction Jesus had with a non-Jewish woman in John 4. In this passage Jesus finds a woman who herself is on the outside of God's people. Not only is her life stained by her sin, but she stands as a Samaritan, not as a Jew.

Because of this she wonders where she should worship if she were even to worship God. Does she worship on the mountain the Samaritans normally worshipped on, or at the temple mount in Jerusalem? And look at how Jesus answers her: **John 4:21-26**.

Jesus was going to become the new location of worship. He is the mountain to which the nations will come not based on ethnicity or on performance for neither our skin nor our service can bring us before God.

If you see the world that Isaiah 2 is beginning to create, here's the wonderful hope of the gospel. Anyone can get in on it. Anyone can climb this mountain, if they come through Jesus.

Each of us has a mountain and at the top of it is the world we think will satisfy us and we will do whatever we can to climb it. But in the gospel Jesus came down the mountain for us because whether you are Jewish or German, you can't climb this mountain on your own. Your sin separates you from God.

In fact in the book of Exodus, God comes down and dwells on a mountain and God gives strict instructions to Moses, "Don't let the people touch the mountain, for if they do, they'll die because they are sinful and I am holy." God is a holy fire and our sin is gasoline.

But when Jesus was born not only was he himself the only one good enough to climb up by his own works the mountain he just came down, but he climbed it in order that he might take the dangerous punishment of our sin in our place if we would only come through faith in him.

Jesus solves the problem with God that you might not have known you even had. And the rule that comes from Jesus is so good that it even helps us manage the conflicts we would have had with each other.

The blood of Jesus takes our swords and makes them into plowshares and our spears and makes them into pruning hoods.

Now I understand we live in Montana, but we also live in Missoula, so for those who don't know this is a good thing! These are turning weapons of war into tools used to cultivate crops for the greater community.

You see the gospel is the good news that Jesus, and Jesus alone, does everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. If we don't get that, if we think it's our work and our social standing then we will always see those around us as tools or threats to our own salvation, whether you think that salvation is in God or in the pleasures of the world.

We treat people who perform in a sphere better than us as threats that we fear or hate. Or if people are struggling around us we view them as tools which allow us to leverage our own success or as nothing more than moral bonus points when we do stop to serve them.

But because it is Jesus and Jesus alone who does all of this, his gospel demilitarizes the church from each other. Look at how Paul puts this in **Ephesians 2:13-17**.

This world is not heaven, and we will talk more about that in a moment, but the church gets to be a real place where we can actually rest together as God's people without hostility because Jesus brings us peace with God and the potential of peace with others even in an imperfect world.

As the church, as this body we have the ability to show our world the futuristic community that will one day be the pervasive reality. In Isaiah 2, God's word rules than nations in peace and In Colossians three Paul calls the church to have the "peace of Christ rule in your hearts."

Now the church is great. But it's not God's kingdom. That's yet to come. But here in this text is real hope for peace in this body that when we have conflicts with one another we get to drag those conflicts to the gospel and we can find real peace there.

Look with me at **Hebrews 9:28**. You see our life as the church has the ability to show glimpses of this wonderful reality to our world because Jesus has borne our sins away. But there is a second time he comes where the salvation is final and full.

The church does the hard work of pursuing gospel peace because we want to be a foretaste of that wonderful world which is to come.

This is our second point today: **Longing for Heaven**.

Look at the picture Isaiah presents of this day: **Isaiah 2:4**.

Even though Jesus has brought peace inside the church, the church isn't always peaceful. We might have thrown down our swords, but we still have some daggers we pull out every now and then.

And even more than that our world certainly doesn't look like Isaiah 2:4, does it?

But it's here I want to pause for moment to say how immensely thankful I am for COVID-19 in the western world.

We have been afforded huge blessings in America. We are the richest nation in the history of the world. We have international cooperation made possible through the internet that streamlines peace talks and provides quick unparalleled crisis relief.

We have technology hardwired to bring us comfort. Food designed to satisfy us not just on a caloric level but an enjoyment level. We have access to cancer killing miracle drugs, heart transplants and artificial knees, self-parking cars, digital support networks for niche interests and struggles, microchips that hold more data than all the libraries in the world, and access to hot, clean water whenever we want.

Brothers and sisters I have a confession to make. While I have never doubted the belief in a New Heavens and New Earth, where Christ restores all things, I have often lived my life as if it's not really needed.

Maybe it would be nice to have better sleep, and not have to work out. But on the whole, this world is pretty good.

But despite all the technological and economic stability our world holds, it has been brought to its knees by a virus we cannot even see.

If COVID has done one thing in our hearts, I pray that it has pressed into our bones the hope that there must be something more than this. The wages of sin and its effect on our world are far more than we can ever imagine which means pictures into this future restoration are greater than we can even think.

There, in this Kingdom, people from every tongue tribe and nation come and worship this king. In this kingdom peace will not be isolated, but pervasive. How pervasive, that not only will there be no sword but they shall not learn war anymore.

This statement is incomprehensible to us, and I mean that. This peace will be so pervasive that we will not learn war anymore. In other words the muscle memory for sin will be finally and fully removed.

You see even in our redemption in this world don't you find times where your heart wants what it had once learned? Where your fists clench where they once learned to fight. Your eyes desire for what they once learned to stare at? Your tongue lunges for it once learned to destroy?

But here, in this world we won't learn it anymore. Gone are the days of sin entirely, were a war to happen we wouldn't even know how to fight. Such a peace is only possible in world where war can never happen, sin can never tempt, and weakness can never corrupt.

This is the world which awaits those who are saved by faith in the King of this Kingdom. Look at this reality in **Isaiah 65:17-25**.

The effects of sin are so natural to us that we cannot, even with the help of words like this, imagine the holistic peace which comes when we are brought finally and fully into the presence of the God who rewards those who seek him.

The song we will sing in a little bit is called: Joy to the World. It's a Christmas song, but it's a Christmas song not looking back at the first advent, but the second. It is a song that describes the immense joy which will cause heaven and earth to sing.

Brothers and sisters this joy is not yet here but this joy is coming, it really is.

How do we know it? Because of what we have seen every day since the first advent was completed and Christ ascended to the throne.

Look at what was spoken of Jesus in **Isaiah 9:6-7**.

If Jesus has come to be this king, then it is already true that the increase of his government and of his peace has already begun.

Now this peace and this increase doesn't look like a physical kingdom. It doesn't look like world peace as our world would deem it. What does it look like?

Look at Jesus' final words to his disciples in **Luke 24:45-48**.

Where does Jesus' government increase every day? Where is peace breaking through even in the pains of COVID-19 and social and economic unrest? Through the progress of the gospel which begun in Jerusalem with a small group of disciples and has since spread and is spreading to the nations.

Do you understand the hope in seeing this? If the God has saved souls across language barriers and political states, across centuries and massacres, if the rule of Jesus even today is increasing in the special grace of salvation to the lost then don't we have all the confidence we need to know that this hope will certainly be ours?

So what do we do in light of this? **Living in the light**.

Look at how Isaiah closes this passage on the future hope: **Isaiah 2:5**.

God is doing a sort of bait and switch with Judah here in this text. Judah is disobeying God and not trusting that God is able to fulfill his promises. So what does he do, he paints a picture of all the nations coming and enjoying the covenant blessing of this God as if to say, "If it will satisfy them, if this peace is enough for them, then don't you also think it will be enough for you? Then walk in my light."

There's judgement all around Isaiah 2, and there will be judgment for anyone who is found on another mountain. But with a God as good as this God, why would we choose anything else. Access to this new world comes by humbling ourselves and repenting of trying to make our own kingdom.

In closing there are two things we can do to live in light of this. The first is that we can pursue holiness and obedience and know we will leave nothing on the table.

Part of life in this broken world is that we often think that walking in obedience to Jesus is giving up joy in this world. That's nonsense. Walking in obedience to Jesus is giving up the joy of this world, but not joy in this world.

1 John 2:17 says the world and its desires are passing away, they won't last. Paul says in Colossians 2:2, "Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory."

If we know God's rule and blessing is increasing every day, then we should want to align our lives with that joy by choosing growth towards Jesus and not sin.

But secondly, the second coming gives us ballast in our highs and in our lows. Sailboats have a ballast which is a weighted piece of material that hangs under the boat so that if the wind blows too far in one way, the ballast will keep the boat from capsizing and even pull the boat back to center.

Life in this world means that we will have lows. We will have seasons of pain and hardship and sorrow. But our ballast reminds us that this world is not the end. Jesus has work left to do and because we've seen his first coming we have hope that one day he will solve all of our other woes in his second coming. Each prick of brokenness reminds us of the hope we have in heaven.

But life in this world also has wonderful highs, family, food, football, and God's creation. But this ballast reminds us that we ought not think that those joys are eternally satisfying joys. The hope of the New Heavens and New Earth lets us enjoy earthly things in their right place instead of trying to make them into the savior which only Jesus can be.

The hope of the Second Advent is that constant reminder that everything which hurts in this world can be healed by Jesus and that everything good in this world reminds us that the best is yet to come. So let us live life in the light of this hope.