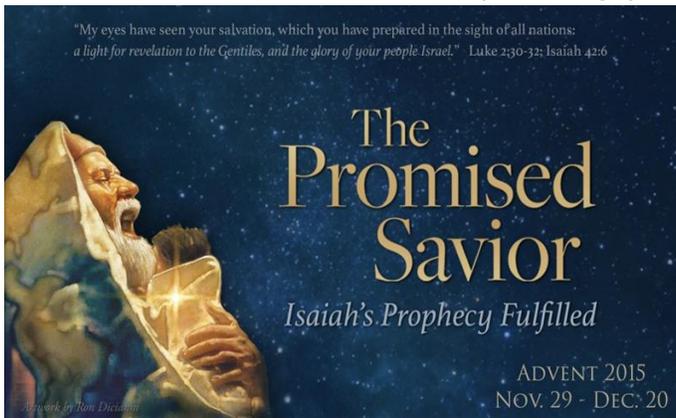


The Hope of a Promised Savior

Advent Sermon Series – Isaiah’s Promise Fulfilled
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
November 29, 2015

TEXTS: Luke 2:25-32 and Isaiah 42:1-9

This morning we begin a new sermon series as we begin the season of Advent. Advent marks the four weeks leading up to the celebration of Christmas, and these four weeks are themed around the ideas of Christmas: hope, love, joy, and peace for all who trust in Jesus Christ. This



Advent season at Kenwood Baptist Church we are going to focus our attention on the promise that God made to His people through the prophet Isaiah. One of the most riveting scenes of the very first Christmas is a scene of an elderly believer, a man named Simeon, whom we meet in the temple courts of Jerusalem. It is this scene of Simeon holding up the infant child Jesus that we want to follow this morning, for Simeon’s burst of praise rests upon an

ancient promise of God. I want to direct your attention to Luke 2 first as we begin this Advent season with the ending in view.

Luke tells us that in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. Simeon was the most popular name at that time. This man, we read, was righteous; he was devout, and Luke emphasizes for us that Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was waiting for something very specific, and we want to tune our hearts this Advent season to this very consolation, this comfort that God had promised to His people. Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon, and that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. God had promised to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Other translations render this *the Lord's Messiah*. We see that Simeon's expectation was for the consolation, the comfort that would come to God's people and that this comfort, this consolation, was inextricably connected to the promise of the Lord’s Christ, or Savior, who was to come into the world. What is the consolation of Israel? What is the promise of a Messiah, a Savior? This promise of comfort comes to us within the great narrative of Scripture. We need the whole counsel of Scripture to understand Christmas. Pastor Scott drew us last Sunday toward the ending of the Book of Leviticus, and the ending of Leviticus looked forward. It predicted that God's people would come into the land, that their life in the land would be characterized by disobedience, and that God would vindicate His holiness, His righteousness, by bringing judgment on His own beloved people, and that He would take them from the land and bring them into exile. The land would receive rest for all of the Jubilee years, all the Sabbath years that had not been kept. We serve a God who chose to reveal Himself in ancient Israel, a God

who is much greater, much larger, than our sinfulness.

The biblical narrative does not end with the sinfulness of humanity. The Bible would be a very short book if it did. It would end in Genesis 3. It would end again in Genesis 6. It would end again with enslavement in Egypt. Note that God is a God who redeems and saves. Though our disobedience is in full view, even from the very beginning before God's people even make it into the land, God promises that will not be the ending. Even in Leviticus 26 the Lord promises that the end, when all of these things come about, when they come into the land, when disobedience reigns and God vindicates His holiness by bringing judgment and the people are taken out of the land into exile, that will not be the ending. From the place of exile, Leviticus 26 envisions the time when God's people will confess their sin, when their sinfulness will be atoned for, and God says: "I will remember My covenant; I will remember My promise. I will not abandon them; I will remember them. I will not abhor them to utterly destroy them, for I am the Lord their God, and I will remember the covenant with their forefathers whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, that I might be their God." God envisions this time of exile, and then God promises that the exile will resolve in God's saving action again. Some of you may feel close to God this morning; others may be thinking the season of Christmas is beginning and I'm not ready for it. I barely made it out of Thanksgiving; I'm not ready. I don't have any shopping done. I haven't even thought about telling people what I want. I don't know who's going where. I don't know the schedule. It already seems overloaded. Whatever is filling your mind, God graciously gives us four weeks of Advent to prepare our hearts. This morning, you can begin from square one, as it were, and begin to build your expectations. God's fills expectations in Scripture, and the specific expectation that He builds is that He will act again to bring comfort and consolation, and this message of comfort, of consolation, is announced triumphantly and most clearly in the words of the prophet Isaiah. Consolation is announced beginning in Isaiah 40:1, when the Lord speaks and says:

"Comfort, comfort My people, says your God."

It is an announcement of consolation. It is an announcement that there is hope beyond our sinfulness. Isaiah 40:2 then spells this out with greater detail. The Lord says:

"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."

The Hebrew expression *to speak tenderly* is a beautiful one. It says literally: "Speak unto the heart of Jerusalem. Speak unto Jerusalem's heart and tell her these things: tell her that her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned, the resolution of exile will be that the war is over—the war between Israel and her God, the separation that sin produces, and tell her that her iniquity is pardoned. These are the great themes of comfort and hope.

Handel's oratorio the *Messiah* begins with this scene. The overture of Handel's *Messiah* is the most famous oratorio ever written. The libretto was written by Charles Jennens, and there are 53 passages of Scripture in Handel's *Messiah*. This story part one is labeled: "The Prophecy and Realization of God's Plan to Redeem Humanity by the Coming of the Messiah." What a great scene. The first songs of Handel's *Messiah* begin from Isaiah 40, this announcement of comfort. Prior to the first song is the overture of this great work, and the somber opening chords of

Handel's *Messiah* place us in the darkness of exile, away from our roots, bereft of our identity, with no hope for the present or future. But, the somber chords in this opening overture finally yield themselves to the bright chords of brilliant hope that shine forth in lively faith. The music works its way into a crescendo before resolving again in sustained confidence that God will act again. The God of the Bible is bigger than our disobedience. The God of the Bible has a plan to save humanity, and that plan has its focus in the coming of a Savior. This plan is promised from ancient times, and it is carried out in the Person and work of Jesus.

When we meet Simeon in the temple courts, we meet a righteous man, a devout man who knows the Scriptures, and he is waiting for the consolation of Israel. This is the very specific hope that God stirs in the hearts of His people: that exile is not the end of the story; that He will act again. He will act again in a way that will bring provision for forgiveness of sins when He will return with His own glorious presence and resolve the exile. This will come about in Isaiah's prophetic vision through the instrumentality of the Servant of the Lord. The Servant of the Lord becomes a focus in the second part of Isaiah. There are four poems. These are the most moving poems in the Hebrew Bible, and they describe the identity of a coming Servant, an anointed One who will accomplish God's very purposes. He will be the instrument to carry out the consolation of Jerusalem. He will be the instrument by which sin is forgiven. The Servant of the Lord will carry the destiny of the nation to fulfill God's promises, and this is why Christmas has its roots in Scripture. Christmas has its roots in God's promise. Christmas is saturated with the joy of God's promise fulfilled. Christmas is not a man-made event. Christmas is not about human traditions. Christmas is about the realization of God's promise and the fulfillment of that promise in His one and only Son.

This morning, we look at the first of the Servant Songs, the first poem describing the work of the Servant. Isaiah is prophesying 700 years before Simeon will hold the Child Jesus in his arms. Listen to the task and identity of the servant in Isaiah 42:1a. The Lord says:

"Behold My servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom My soul delights;"

Literally it says: *in whom My soul takes pleasure*. God has selected the Servant of the Lord and singled Him out for a very specific mission in the world. The Servant is the light of the Father. The Servant is the object of the Father's sustaining love. The Servant is the recipient of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah continues, and the Lord speaks in Isaiah 42:1b:

"I have put my Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."

The task of the Servant of the Lord will be to bring forth justice to the nations. The Servant of the Lord will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and He will have the sacred responsibility of bringing forth God's righteousness, God's justice, to all the world. The Servant's mission is global in its extent. In Isaiah 42:2, we read about the Servant of the Lord:

"He will not cry aloud or lift up His voice, or make it heard in the street;"

The Servant comes with humility. The Servant carries out His office with great compassion and tenderness. We read in Isaiah 42:3:

"A bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench; He will faithfully bring forth justice."

He will accomplish His mission: He will faithfully bring forth God's righteousness in all the earth. The Servant will carry out His mission successfully though He faces great opposition. In Isaiah 42:4, we read:

“He will not grow faint or be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for His law.”

God in His saving purpose has singled out the Servant of the Lord as the instrument to resolve the exile, to bring comfort to Jerusalem, and to bring God's righteousness and justice in all the earth. It is a global task. We read that the nations of the world, the coastlands, wait for His Law. I love this scene. It is as though God personifies the earth for just a moment. The Hebrew text literally says that it is the islands who were waiting for Him. The islands closest to my heart are the Greek islands. It's a subjective opinion, but I think that the Greek islands are the most beautiful islands of the world. Imagine the scale of the Greek islands, if you will. Greece has about 2000 islands. You could spend your whole life, every summer, visiting 30 islands a summer, and never come close to touching them all. But the Lord personifies the islands here. He says the islands themselves, as it were, are on their tiptoes waiting. Isaiah's vision is majestic. It is a vision that God will act again, on the other side of our disobedience, to save. The exile will not be the end of the story, but God will bring salvation for Zion, salvation for Jerusalem, and to the uttermost limits of the earth. Even the coastlands, even the islands, are awaiting Him.

God's saving purpose is the sending of His one and only Son into the world. God is Creator and He is Redeemer. Thus says the Lord God in Isaiah 42:5, that He is the God:

*“. . . who created the heavens and stretched them out,
. . . who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
. . . who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.”*

All of us in this sanctuary, every living human being, owe our existence to God as Creator. Not only is He our Creator, He is our Redeemer and Savior. In Isaiah 42:6, the Lord speaks again of this of the Servant's mission to save:

“I am the LORD; I have called You [a servant] in righteousness; I will take You by the hand and keep You; I will give You as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.”

Here is God the Father, speaking, as it were, to God the Son. He says: “I will hold You by the hand until the moment is ready, and I will give You as a covenant for the people.” The Servant of the Lord will Himself be the instrument by which we are drawn into a covenant relationship with Almighty God. The Servant will be a covenant for the people, and not only a covenant for the people, He will be a light for the nations. The Servant's coming into the world will have these dramatic effects: He will open the eyes of the blind. In the prophetic imagery of Isaiah, the blind are those who are worshiping idols and can no longer see and recognize the true and living God. The Servant comes to renew our vision of God, to open eyes that have become blind. The Servant comes also to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and in Isaiah's prophetic imagery, the prisoners, those who are bound, are those who are trapped in sin, and the Servant's coming comes to rescue. Some of us this morning are trapped in patterns of living, in patterns of thinking that we long to escape from. The Servant of the Lord's mission is

to bring the prisoners out from the dungeon, to rescue those seated in darkness.

The saving mission of the Servant of the Lord is the saving mission of God Himself. "I am the Lord: that is My name, My glory, I give to no other." The Lord of the Bible, the God of Scripture, announces His saving intention. He says Isaiah 42:9:

"Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

God is able to predict the future, because He is the Agent who brings the future about. It is not simply that God just happens to know what will be, it is that God has purposed and planned it, and He is the One who will carry it out. The Lord says: "Before these things happen, I tell you of them." For all who believe in Jesus Christ, this is the Scriptural narrative that takes us to the celebration of Christmas. The first candle of the Advent wreath is a candle of the prophets, it is the candle of hope, the hope of Israel, a unique hope. It is a hope that is not shared by any ancient people, but a hope that has become fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The prophetic expectations of Isaiah and the rest of the prophets form the basis for our Christmas celebration. It is the expectation of a coming Savior that caused Charles Wesley to write the words:

"Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart."

The expectation of the coming Savior, the Servant of the Lord, draws us into the great mystery of Christmas. It brings us back to that scene of Simeon in the temple courts when Jesus came with Mary and Joseph into the temple. Jesus had been circumcised and named, and His parents observed the customs of Leviticus for purification. They came into the temple courts, and here this elderly saint saw the Infant Child Jesus. He saw Him, and he took Jesus into his arms and he blessed God. He lifted his eyes to heaven and he said in Luke 2:29-30:

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation."

Jesus is God's salvation. The name *Jesus* means *Yahweh is salvation*. This is God's salvation. It is a salvation that God Himself has prepared in the sight of all peoples. Christmas is not a divine improvisation. It is an eternal purpose that God has prepared. It is a story that makes sense in light of the earlier portions of the story. Might I be so bold as to say that you can't appreciate Christmas without Leviticus? This might be the only church in Cincinnati where I can say that, but it is true. It is really true because you don't know what Jesus has come to do and resolve without the narrative, without God's promise to deal with our sinfulness. Christmas is not just about a child. Christmas is about a Child who was born in the end to die; a child who was born to die for your sins and mine. The cross looms large over that first manger scene. Jesus is the Savior prepared, God's purpose from of old, and when Simeon looks at the Infant Jesus and

praises God, he looks at the Infant Jesus and says in Luke 2:32:

“[This Child is] *a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.*”

Simeon knows the Scriptures. He knows the narrative that Jesus comes to resolve. Simeon's words are, in fact, a quotation from Isaiah 42. Jesus is a light for the nations because this is the task of the Servant of the Lord. Jesus is the glory of God's people Israel. It is Israel's highest honor to birth the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Christmas is about the fulfillment of God's purpose. The answer to a promise made long ago has fueled Christian hymns and songs for millennia. It is a good thing this morning to sing a couple of thousand-year-old songs. We live in a culture that is intoxicated with youth. Youth is good for certain things, especially sports or physical beauty, but actually the older things often are the most valuable. Certain things increase in value with age, and so it is with God's Word and God's promise. The promise God made to us, that He would act again and send a Savior, was made millennia ago through the prophets. It has fueled the songs of Christmas. Some of our most beloved songs are old ones. The song *Of the Father's Love Begotten* is a staggering 1600 years old. That's an old song, and yet it is so beautiful and moving:

“Of the Father's love begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega —
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see
evermore and evermore.

O that birth forever blessed,
when a virgin, blest with grace,
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,
bore the Savior of our race;
and the babe, the world's Redeemer,
first revealed his sacred face,
evermore and evermore.

This is he whom seers in old time
chanted of with one accord,
whom the voices of the prophets
promised in their faithful word;
now he shines, the long-expected;
let creation praise its Lord
evermore and evermore.”

Somewhat of a newcomer in the Christmas scene of music is *Oh, Come, Oh, Come Emmanuel*. It is just 1400 years old:

“Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,

That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!"

Those who wrote these lyrics understood the Scriptures—that God's promise to come again would be realized through the mission and vocation and identity of the Servant of the Lord. This is God's intention from of old, the holy expectations that surround Christmas. How does the promise of Isaiah fulfilled in Jesus Christ apply for us this morning?

Number one: It means that **the God of the Bible is utterly trustworthy**, and this is something of which we need a weekly reminder. The God of the Bible keeps every one of His promises. The New Testament tells us that all of God's promises are 'yes' and 'amen' in Jesus Christ. The God of the Bible is utterly trustworthy. That means for you and for me that the best decision in the world is to place our trust in Him. It is rightly placed in Him. The God of the Bible keeps His Word.

Number two: It means that **the God of the Bible has a plan for the salvation of the world**. That means that if God has a plan for the salvation of the world, then our lives are of a very small scale inside a God who has plans for the salvation of the world. That means that this Advent season, this holiday season, we can be free from the human-generated anxiety that often surrounds the holidays. The God of the Bible has a plan that is global, that is universal in its scope and vision. That means that God has a secure grip on your life and mine. It would be like looking at a 747 being constructed in time lapse photography—from the blueprint drawings to the execution, to all the avionics installed—and then approaching the 747 and wondering, as we enter the plane, if the cabin lights work. Our lives are small in light of God's great plan. If He has the whole securely in hand, that means the details of our lives are not to be worried about. The God of the Bible is utterly trustworthy. His saving plan guards us from anxiety.

Number three: It means that **we have a covenant relationship with God**. The vision of Isaiah's Servant announces that the exile is over, that sin is atoned for, and that we have a Covenant relationship with God through the Servant. That means that God claims you and me in Jesus Christ, and that means that you and I are in a Covenant relationship with Him. The other covenants in the Bible are described, like marriage: the vows are exchanged and the relationship is secure. It cannot be broken. So whatever is threatening to knock you off the rails of hope and joy as Advent begins, hear the promise of God—He is utterly trustworthy. The details of our lives fit within His secure and saving plan that He has declared in advance. If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord, then you are in a Covenant relationship with God, utterly, completely secure in Him. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we begin the Advent season with our eyes looking to You. We look to You, Lord Jesus, and we begin by meditating this morning on the promise that You have made, Lord God, that You would act again, that the exile would not be the end of the story, but that You would send the Servant to accomplish Your mission to bring justice to the nations. Father, I pray for us that You would begin to kindle our affections anew as we anticipate a celebration of Your birth.

Lord, these are the things we must remember. Help us to approach Christmas with the hope of the prophets fulfilled. We give You thanks, Lord God Almighty, that You are trustworthy. I pray for those this morning who need a reminder of Your reliability. Help us, Father, to imitate You in keeping the promises that we have made. I pray, Father, that You would guard our hearts from anxiety, and that we would rest in the certainty of your saving plan. I pray, Father, for those who feel on the outside of Your story, that they would place their trust in Jesus Christ and know that in Him and Him alone, that they are in right Covenant relationship with the Lord God Almighty. Lord, fuel our hearts with the hope of Christmas this morning. We give you our praise and thanks.

In Jesus' name, Amen.