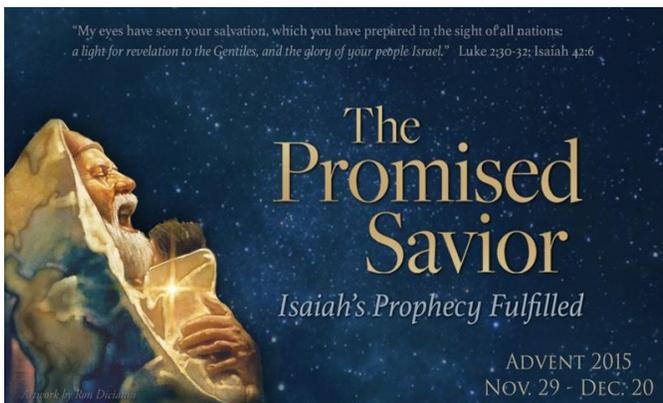


The Promised Savior Prepared in Love
Advent Sermon Series on Isaiah's Servant Songs
Luke 2:25-32; Isaiah 49:1-6
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
December 6, 2015

TEXTS: Luke 2:25-32 and Isaiah 49:1-6

We continue this morning in our series of Advent. This Advent season we are drawing our attention to the Word of God spoken through Isaiah the prophet: a great promise fulfilled in



Christ that tells us the meaning of Christmas and the invitation which we all receive through the Gospel. This week I was looking at Christmas songs. I am sure you've noticed as you have gone around town that the musical background of our daily existence has shifted. It shifts regularly at this time of year. Some people love Christmas songs. Other people grow tired of them. It seems

over the last few years that the selection of Christmas songs being played in various stores has narrowed a little bit, so I found myself checking what the most popular Christmas songs are these days. Both on iTunes this week and the #1 Billboard Holiday Top 100 were the same: a Mariah Carey song, "All I want for Christmas Is You."

"I don't want a lot for Christmas
There is just one thing I need
I don't care about the presents
Underneath the Christmas tree

I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
All I want for Christmas is you, yeah."

I found myself thinking something is missing. I listened on thinking maybe I was missing something toward the end of the song. I came to the end of the lyrics:

"Oh, I don't want a lot for Christmas
This is all I'm asking for
I just want to see my baby

Standing right outside my door
Oh, I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
Baby, all I want for Christmas is you
All I want for Christmas is you, baby.”

Christmas prompts thoughts of love in our hearts, and yet the love that Christmas is about is something much, much grander than the love of a boyfriend, girlfriend, the love between a man and woman. The love of God is on display in Christmas, and this longing for love we find in the actual Christmas story. I want to draw your attention this morning to counsel that we received from someone older and wiser than the Billboard Top 100, and that older, wiser counsel comes to us in this riveting scene in the Gospel narrative, that riveting scene of Simeon. Many of us long for someone older and wiser in our lives to show us what is really important, and Simeon functions in that way in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

Luke introduces the character of Simeon as a man who is righteous and devout and that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel, which is a crucial line in this text. He was waiting for something specific: the resolution of the story that God had begun in Scripture and was fulfilling in His own time. The Holy Spirit was upon him. The Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ or the Lord's Messiah, the promised Savior. This is the promised Savior from the prophet Isaiah. The prophets of the Old Testament Scriptures pointed forward to the coming of God's great saving action in the world, and so our Advent series is about this promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ. There are many other prophetic words, but we have chosen to focus our attention on the ministry of Isaiah, specifically in the figure of the Servant of the Lord who looms large in the second half of Isaiah's prophetic writings: the Servant of the Lord who comes in fulfillment of God's promise to bring light to the nations and salvation to the ends of the earth. Isaiah's ministry lasted during the reigns of several kings in Israel. The last king was King Hezekiah who made big news on Wednesday of this week. Let me show you why. Hezekiah, king of Judah, was revealed in a bulla, which is a clay imprint from a signet seal. In the inside of the signet seal, in the *paleo-Hebrew*, or classical Hebrew letters, it says across the top that this signet seal belonged to Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judah. It is the first naming of a king of Judah, the king under whom Isaiah's ministry was carried out. It is just one of 10,000 small pieces of evidence that the Bible story is rooted in



history.

When we come to Christmas, we don't come for a sappy love story. We come to Christmas for reality; we come to Christmas for the saving actions of a God who said: "I will do this," and He carries it out. Small artifacts such as these just provide further confirmation to us that the Bible is not a myth. The Bible is a true account of the world, of God's saving purposes. Little pieces of clay like this are important. This is the first named Judahite King to emerge in an inscription within the context of a scientifically run excavation, and it was headline news on Wednesday. Isaiah's message in the days of Hezekiah was a message of comfort, that the God who had brought judgment on His people for their disobedience in exile would return with the message of comfort and consolation, and this is the very specific consolation that Simeon is awaiting in Luke 2. Isaiah 40:1 begins the great second half of his prophetic writing with the announcement of comfort and consolation:

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

The comfort is a very specific comfort in Isaiah 40. Isaiah 40:2 goes on to say:

"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."

She has received a full recompense for her sins. The biblical story, of which this message of comfort and consolation enters in, is a story of God who is the Creator of all humanity; God who is the Redeemer and Savior; God who builds a nation by promise and faith and brings them out of the land of Egypt into the land of promise. The people of God in the land of promise live in a way that is characterized by disobedience, and so, just as God drove our ancestors out from the garden of Eden, God drives His people out from the land of Israel. This is the biblical story that exile happens as a result of God's judgment, but as we mentioned last week, the exile is not the end of the Bible story. We worship a God who is bigger than our disobedience. There is no sin, no wrongdoing, that you or I can ever do that is beyond the scope of God's redemption. God is a saving God, and the message of consolation was predicted early in Scripture, back in Leviticus 26 and other passages such as the end of Deuteronomy, that foresees this disobedience, foresees this time of exile, and yet promises that God will act again. How will He act? Specifically, Isaiah's vision is that He will act by sending this figure whom Isaiah calls the Servant of the Lord.

We met the Servant last Sunday in Isaiah 42. The Servant is God's chosen one. The Servant is the one in whom God's soul delights. The Servant is filled with the Holy Spirit. He comes to carry out His office with humility, with compassion and tenderness. We discover in Isaiah 42 that all the world is waiting for Him and that God has sent Him as a Covenant for the people, to open eyes that are blind, to release the prisoners from the dungeon—those who sit in darkness.

We saw last Sunday that the God of Scripture promises these things before they come to pass, and this is crucial for biblical faith. There is one thing I want you to know about the God of the Bible: not only does He know the future; He is the one who brings the future into reality. Last Sunday we applied the truths, the bedrock foundation of this, that the God of Scripture makes promises that He accomplishes. He can be trusted.

We now turn our attention to the second Servant song, the second passage where the Servant of the Lord is brought before our eyes: Isaiah 49. In Isaiah 49:1-6, the Lord again draws our attention to the figure of the Servant of the Lord. This passage begins in verse 1a with a summons for a global audience:

“Listen to Me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar.”

We discover that God’s saving purpose cannot be confined to one geographical location. The ministry mission of the Servant is addressed to the globe. This is centuries before satellite communication; this is centuries before various platforms for instant communication, and yet the God of the Bible addresses all: “Give attention, you peoples from afar.” Now, the Servant speaks in Isaiah 49:1b and says:

“The LORD called Me from the womb, from the body of My mother He named My name.”

The Bible’s vision of life is that life is in the womb. Persons are real in the womb. The Servant speaks: “From the body of My mother He named My name.” The Servant speaks more fully about His mission in Isaiah 49:2:

“He made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He hid Me; He made me a polished arrow; in His quiver He hid Me away.”

The image is of a sword made ready, polished and prepared, and it is as though the hand of Almighty God is resting on top of the sword waiting for the moment. The Servant said God made Him like a polished arrow, prepared to sail true. Yet, at this moment in history, in the days of Hezekiah, the Servant is as yet hidden in the quiver of Almighty God. The Servant is prepared and waiting for just the right time when the hand of the Lord God Almighty will unsheathe Him, as it were, from the sword; when the hand of Almighty God will reach into the quiver and pull Him out as the time draws near. The Servant speaks of His identity in Isaiah 49:3:

“And He said to Me, ‘You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’”

At this scene, we reach a decisive interpretive decision. The Servant is speaking with the voice of an individual, and yet this individual seems to represent the whole nation. The Lord speaks to the Servant: “You (singular) are My Servant. You, (singular) this individual, will stand, as it were, for Israel in whom I will be glorified.” The Servant speaks on behalf of the nation, on behalf of

His own mission in Isaiah 49:4a when He says:

“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; . . .”

His mission will be difficult; it will even appear to have failed. The Servant says: “I have labored in vain and spent My strength for nothing and for vanity.” Strong language is used here. It is as though the instrument that God prepared to bring salvation to the nations itself has become broken. Israel languishes in exile. The Servant's mission seems in jeopardy.

This is one of the great themes for us to understand the coherence of the Bible's great narrative story. Remember God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12. God called to Abraham and said: “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” God, who is a missionary God, has a saving purpose that He summons early in the Bible. He says that Abraham and his descendants will be the instrument through which salvation, through which blessing, will be carried to the ends of the earth, and now, Israel, the means of salvation itself, seems to be languishing in exile. That which is to bring salvation, blessing, itself seems broken. It is as though a person is dying of sickness and there is a single vial of medicine to save his life. But, as the medicine is being carried, the bearer of that medicine stumbles and falls and the medicine is spills out.

The Bible story of a God who brings salvation to the world, to the ends of the earth, through this chosen line, it seems to have come to a halt as Israel languishes in exile. “I have labored in vain; my strength for nothing, for vanity.” Yet, the Servant who now stands for the nation says in Isaiah 49:4b:

“Yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.”

God announces that His purposes cannot be thwarted by our disobedience, and we will see why as the Servant's mission unfolds. The Servant resumes the narrative and says in Isaiah 49:5:

“And now the LORD says, He who formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob back to Him; and that Israel might be gathered to Him for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength.”

The Servant's mission will not fail even as the nation seems to have, and the Servant announces in Isaiah 49:6 this towering implication of his mission:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; . . .”

The Servant's mission will be not only to restore Israel now to God's favor and blessing, but that He would become a light for the nations, that God salvation would reach to the ends of the earth. The Servant takes up the mission of Israel and carries it on His own shoulders. The tribes of Jacob, the nation, is restored, and light and blessing then radiate out from there to the ends

of the earth. This is God's saving purpose, the mission of the Servant announced 700 years before the scene in Luke 2. God's saving intention was to send a Savior into the world, to pick up the disobedience of the nation, and, as we'll see, carry it on His own shoulders that His purposes might be accomplished. The hope of Israel is that Israel would be restored and that the mission of God to the ends of the earth would be accomplished.

We return now to the scene in the temple courts. When Simeon sees Joseph and Mary and the Infant Jesus coming into the temple, he speaks to the Lord 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."

This is the salvation that God has prepared, just like that sharpened sword, just like the polished arrow, salvation prepared in the presence of all peoples, and Simeon bursts into praise and says in Luke 2:32 that this Child will be:

". . . a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel."

The Servant of the Lord accomplishes the saving mission of God. The story of Christmas is rooted in history; it is rooted in a promise that is fulfilled uniquely, triumphantly, in the birth of Christ. How does this lead us to action this morning? Let me suggest three ways.

First: If it is true that Christmas means that the light for revelation to the nations has come, that means that ***we need to enlarge our view of Christmas and recognize that Christmas fulfills the story of a missionary God.*** It means that you and I are called to be involved in that mission. God said, "I will make you a light unto the nations." Isaiah spoke of this Isaiah 2:2 when he said:

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, . . .and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.'"

The prophetic vision of the Bible is that the nations streamed in to know the true and living God. We read in Isaiah 11:1-2; 10:

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. . . In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples--of Him shall the nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious."

Christmas fulfills the mission of God to bring a light to the nations, and if this is true, that means that everyone who knows Christ, who believes in the true story of Christmas, should be

compelled to join God's mission for the world. How can we do this today? We can do this here at Kenwood in a very easy way this season. You can invite a friend or colleague, someone that may be trapped inside that Billboard Holiday Top 100 list where the true story of Christmas is not being announced, and you can invite them to hear the glorious Good News of Christmas with us here this Christmas season. Other ways you can be involved in missions is by getting involved with local community outreach through the church, through tutoring in Deer Park. You can host a book club in January to coincide with our sermon series. A whole group from our church this morning is on their way back from Operation Christmas Child packing center. We sent hundreds of boxes to be added to thousands of boxes from other communities around the country. Those boxes are being sent out in mission, another easy way to be involved. We had 25 people come last week for an information meeting for a mission trip to Mexico being planned for next year. There are all kinds of ways to be involved in God's mission, and Christmas. If you understand it, it compels your involvement in God's mission. Christopher Wright wrote:

“Missionary commitment is not some kind of optional extra for the extra-enthusiastic. Nor was it just a new idea invented by Jesus to give his disciples something to do with the rest of their lives. Still less was it a merely modern movement of the church that coincided with colonial expansionism. Mission lies at the very heart of all God’s historical action in the Bible. Mission to his fallen, suffering, sinful human creation, and indeed ultimately to his whole creation as well. . . . There is one Servant people, one Servant King, one Servant mission.”

Christmas is about God's missionary purpose moved forward.

Second: If it is true that the light for revelation to the nations has come and Christmas is rooted in a promise that is fulfilled uniquely, triumphantly, in the birth of Christ, how does this lead us to action this morning? It means that **we must tell and announce the biblical story faithfully. *The story of Christmas cannot be domesticated; it cannot be nationalized; it cannot be culture-bound.*** The story of Christmas to be told well has to be told in fulfillment of God's promise in Scripture. That is why we need the whole of the Scripture. In Isaiah 46:13, the Lord says:

“I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory.”

Jesus says in John 4:22:

“. . . for salvation is from the Jews.”

Paul never stopped seeking to reach his own people. In Romans 1:16, he says:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The story of Christmas is the true story of God's saving mission in the world, and it is a story that flows from all of Scripture. It is a story that we get grafted into through faith in Jesus Christ. It means that evangelism is for everyone. It means that evangelism must be to all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike. Again, Christopher Wright says:

“To the Jew first was not only a matter of missionary strategy. It is a theological conviction. Jesus is the Savior of the world because he is the Messiah of Israel.”

Some people today, some scholars, some in popular media, argue that evangelism to Jews is inappropriate and culturally offensive, and yet, this is untrue. The Gospel is Good News for Israel and Good News for the nations. If evangelism to Jews is disallowed, it cuts off the nerve of all other evangelism. The Gospel has to be Good News for Israel if it is to be Good News for anyone else. If it is Good News, then to fail to share it is the worst form of anti-Semitism. To fail to share the Gospel with one ethnic group, with one people of religious conviction, is actually the worst form of racism and hatred. I am really challenged by this, and I want you to be. To keep the Gospel to yourself and not share it with your neighbor or your friend, or to say this group does not need this, actually, according to the Bible, is a way of hating that person. Too often we are afraid to share the Gospel because we fear that someone might hate us. Yet, if we don't share the Good News of Christmas, the Good News of the Gospel, it is a manifestation of our hatred of others, nothing less. Christmas is about God's missionary purpose accomplished. We need to get involved in God's mission. Christmas is about a promise fulfilled, Good News announced in personal evangelism for all.

Third: If it is true that the light for revelation to the nations has come and that Christmas is rooted in a promise that is fulfilled uniquely, triumphantly, in the birth of Christ, then we want to come back at last to the song with which we started: “All I want for Christmas Is You.”

“Oh, I don't want a lot for Christmas

This is all I'm asking for

I just want to see my baby

Standing right outside my door.

Oh, I just want you for my own

More than you could ever know

Make my wish come true

Baby, all I want for Christmas is you

All I want for Christmas is you, baby.”

This diffused, slightly misdirected song is pointing half in the right direction. It has just got the wrong baby! You see, the joy of Christmas isn't that the love of my life is standing outside the door. The true story of Christmas is that God, who loves you more than you have dared

imagine, is knocking at the door, has left His throne in Glory and come to seek and save each one of us. ***This is the love of Christmas, and we find it in a Baby:***

- a Baby born in Bethlehem, though, and a Child who calls each of us to believe;
- a Child fulfilling God's promise spoken through the prophets;
- a Child who would grow into adulthood, who would Himself described His mission in the language of the Servant of the Lord promised in Isaiah;
- a Child who would grow into maturity and at the end of His public ministry would meet with His disciples in an upper room and speak to them: "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me";
- a Child who would grow and speak to His disciples in the upper room: "This cup is the cup of the New Covenant in My blood poured out for you."

Isaiah's promise is fulfilled in Christ. The Baby that we long to love has come. Would you pray with me?

Dear Lord Jesus, We give You our praise this morning, and we worship You, Child of promise, Servant of the Lord, light to the nations, glory for Israel. We worship You. Lord, we ask that You would prepare our hearts now to partake together of Your broken body shed blood. Lord, I pray that You would open this table for all who believe.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.