

Come to the Mountain of God

Scripture Text: Isaiah 2:1–5

Introduction

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and everything was very good. God placed our human ancestors, Adam and Eve, in a garden in order to tend to His creation. All was fine in paradise until along came a serpent, the craftiest of all creatures. This serpent, Satan, tempted Eve to disobey God, and with her husband, broke God's commandment introducing sin into the world. As a result, all of mankind was cursed to die, a consequence of rejecting God. But God made a promise to them:

Genesis 3:15 *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*

This verse has been called the first announcement of the gospel for we see it pointing forward to the defeat of Satan (the serpent) by a future descendant of Eve. We see God's promise to mankind for a Savior here and throughout the Old Testament. God promised Abraham that through his descendant the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3). God also promised David that one of his descendants would lead the world into salvation (Ps. 89:19–37). God promised Israel many times that salvation was coming. But by the time of Isaiah, about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, many of the Israelites no longer trusted in the promises of God and instead aligned themselves with the pagan world. God created the nation of Israel to bring Him glory and to be a light to the nations, but they were oftentimes indistinguishable from the other nations. Because they had rejected God and His promises, Isaiah prophesied judgement.

But what about God's promises? Had God's promises to mankind been defeated by their sin? Is it possible that God's plan can fail because of our sin and disobedience? Isaiah answers that question as he unfolds a hopeful message to God's people that weaves judgement for sin and salvation for the sinner. The whole book of Isaiah portrays God's plan for His people as a story that is headed toward the coming of the Savior who will bring light to the Gentiles. God created the nation of Israel for this very purpose, and it required God's people be purified of those members whose lives destroy that mission. This is true for the church, as well. In order for the mission of the church to succeed, to make disciples of all nations, God needs to purify His Church. God could use any means to redeem His creation for His glory, but He chooses to use us to accomplish it. We catch a glimpse of God's plan in this prophecy of Isaiah.

There is Hope for a Better Day

If this passage from Isaiah sounds familiar, it is. We read the same thing in the prophesy of Micah. Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries and shared the same expectation for God's purpose. This passage is virtually identical to Micah chapter four. We do not really know who received and wrote this prophesy first, but apparently God had the same thing to say to His people from both prophets. Sometimes, God has to tell His people

something multiple times before they hear it. Sometimes, that is true for pastors and their church. What God has to say here in this passage is that there is hope - a hope for a better day. We read this in verse two of the prophecy:

Isaiah 2:2 *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 shall be lifted up above the hills...*

Isaiah prophesied that there would come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of God would be higher than all other mountains. The term “latter days” refers to some time in the future which can mean the time of the Messiah. From Isaiah’s perspective, the crisis of that time was only temporary and God was moving history toward that better day. This better day would be a time when God’s mountain would be higher than all others. In Isaiah’s time, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was considered the mountain of God but the temple was actually located on a lower mountain than other mountains in the area. In the ancient world, pagans worshipped their gods in temples built on the highest place available, so that they would be closer to heaven. These pagans may have thought that Israel’s God was inferior to the gods of their pagan neighbors. They may have thought the Temple Mount was unimpressive.

Gena and I recently took a trip to Western North Carolina, where we travelled on the Blue Ridge Parkway and visited the Linville Caverns and Falls. If you have not seen these natural wonders, you should. We even travelled on an impressive feat of human engineering, the Linn Cove Viaduct, a concrete bridge which snakes around the slopes of Grandfather Mountain, another impressive site. After we spent some time waiting to drive in, we took a leisurely drive up Grandfather Mountain listening to a audio recording describing different aspects of this natural wonder. We even saw a place where Forrest Gump ran. While Grandfather Mountain is not the tallest mountain in North Carolina, it is an impressive place, nevertheless. At the top of one of its peaks is the famous “mile-high swinging bridge”, which does not swing so much now. But from there, you can see up to 100 miles on a clear day, possibly seeing the city skyline of Charlotte.

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem was not all that impressive, but God is not about impressing anyone. Oftentimes it is not the richest, or the prettiest, or the most popular people or things that God uses for His purposes. Was not the Savior of the world, God in the flesh, born in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem? Was it not God’s plan for our Savior, His Son, to die a cruel and humiliating death as a criminal to inaugurate the new covenant with His chosen people? God is not interested in what is popular or the most impressive. He is interested in what brings Him the highest praise and the greatest glory. When Isaiah referred to the mountain of God as the “highest,” it probably meant “most exalted in honor,” not physically the highest. God’s mountain is God’s choice from which He will be glorified and from which His people would see better days. It is not what we think is more impressive, but what God has chosen to use for His glory.

There is Hope for All Nations

On our trek up to the “mile-high swinging bridge” on Grandfather Mountain, Gena and I observed a lot of people who had come that day to view it. People were flocking to that site and walking around the peak. Some of them were sitting in precarious places looking over the side of the mountain. It is amazing the fearlessness (or craziness) some people exhibit on a mountain one mile above sea level. In Isaiah’s prophecy, we read about a phenomenon of people flowing like a river to the mountain of God. Rivers do not naturally flow to the mountains, but from the mountains to the sea. That is not true with God’s mountain, which represents the presence of God. Not only will God’s Temple be the most exalted in the latter days, it will also be attractive to all the nations. Surprisingly, Isaiah does not focus on Israel’s response to God’s glorious presence, but on the nations who will come to Him. All the nations will stream toward the mountain of God. God’s plan includes His desire to reach the whole world, not just the small nation of Israel. Jesus confirmed this in the Gospel According to John:

John 12:32 *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*

Why would the peoples of the world flow to God like a steady stream? What was it that attracted such a mass migration of people? Was it a great speaker? Was it a big building with comfortable seating? Was it material possessions or things that make our lives easier? No! Listen to what God said through Isaiah in this passage:

Isaiah 2:3 *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.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

The reason the nations flowed to God was so He would teach them. Not only will God draw people to Himself, people will come to Him so that He will teach them His ways, and they will walk in His paths. The peoples of the world will be interested in how they should live in a way that is pleasing to God. They will be eager to follow God’s ways. Are we so eager to follow God’s ways? Are we so interested in pleasing God, learning from Him, and doing what matters most to Him, or are we more interested in what we want? Do you see the things God gives to you as things for your own pleasure or do you see them as things to glorify Him and reach others for Jesus Christ? Do you view the resources God has graciously given to the church to be used for ourselves or to reach others for Him? What is your priority? I was going to say, “Show me”, but in reality you need to show God. You need to show Him that He matters most and that things He cares about matters more to you than the things of this world. Show Him.

Have you thought about how the nations will flow to God? How shall they come to Him? Paul addressed this in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 10:14-15 *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”*

God could use any means to draw people to Himself. He chooses to use us, His people, to tell others about the Good News in order that others will hear, and by hearing, have faith, and by faith, trust in Jesus Christ. How can God use you in the coming year to draw more people to Him? What is He telling you to do? I know this - it is not to focus on ourselves. It is not by being inwardly focused, but it is by being more outwardly focused. If you want to see more people come to Jesus Christ, and I hope you do, then you need to be seriously committed to sharing the hope we have in Jesus Christ with people outside the walls of the church. Are you willing to do that?

There is Hope for Peace in the World

The last point of the message is that the result of the people flowing to God and being taught by Him is that there will be peace. The latter days will be marked by peace.

Isaiah 2:4 ...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

In this passage, Isaiah predicted that the latter days will be marked by a peace the world has never known. We see images of the people taking instruments of war and beating them into implements for farming. They will use their resources for productive activities and not for destruction. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, inaugurated this era of peace. The hope God provides to us through His Son Jesus Christ means peace on earth. If you have not known peace or have wished for it, you can have it. There is a peace Jesus provides that is without equal. There will be a time when God wipes away all tears, when pain is thing of the past, and peace is a way of life. You can have that.

Conclusion

In closing, the purpose of Isaiah's prophecy was to declare the good news of God in which He will glorify Himself and attract all nations to an era of peace. This prophecy is one of hope for sinners through the coming Savior, promising a new world where sin and sorrow will be forever forgotten. God wants people to come to Him. He began Isaiah's prophesy with these words:

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

He invites us to come to Him. Verse five of this passage calls people to make a decision to commit themselves to walk in God's ways. The purpose for describing God's future kingdom was to show what God will ultimately do, so that people can choose either to be a part of God's plan or to reject it. Israel and its leaders could go their merry way and continue to be self-absorbed, or they could choose to glorify God and follow His instructions. Knowing the bright future that God had planned for His people, Isaiah called the people of God to live now in the light of this promised future.

Isaiah 2:5 *O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

This is an appeal for people to come to God, to walk with Him, to realize this future of hope, and be a part of it. It is an appeal for people to come out of the darkness of sin that separates them from God and come into the light of His presence and walk with Him. This is an appeal to us, too. We can share in these promises of God. Are you walking with Him right now? Are you trusting in a better day, trusting in the Provider of that better day, in the Savior of mankind? If you do not know this Savior, Jesus Christ, Who God promised so long ago and has so often reaffirmed to His people, then you can today. If you trusted in Jesus some time ago but have gotten off track, maybe turned from Him, self-absorbed in your own desires, walking in your own ways and not in the ways of God, you can come back to Him today. He is waiting for you to come to Him. He wants to reason with you. He wants you to walk with Him today. Will you come?