

12/03/23 - Isaiah 2:1-5 - "Hope on the Horizon"

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Date: 03 December 2023

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[0 : 00] Our scripture reading comes from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 2. We'll be reading the first five verses. The word that Isaiah, the son of Amos, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

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, and all the nations shall flow to it, 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. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come. Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

[1 : 33] This is God's word. Thanks be to God. We have quite a series to go through over the next several weeks.

And we're diving into chapter 2. And if you're a teenager or following along in notes, we do have notes available at steelvalleychurch.com/slash/notes.

And you can get all of the sermon notes even back to earlier in January of where we were at. And so, looking at the passage today brings to mind a couple different things.

Especially in history over the past hundred years. Because political leaders have latched on to the passage today. They've seen that this would be a good political campaign.

Establish world peace. Get rid of those swords. Smash them into plowshares. Spears into plowshares.

[2 : 41] Enter into pruning hooks. All of that. Nixon, he swore into office in 63. And then his second term in 73. Or 69 and 73. And he was sworn into office with Isaiah 2 opened up.

He put his hand on there. And swore into office. On that chapter and verse. Even going back into 1959 with the Soviet Union.

The former Soviet Union. They gave a bronze sculpture to the UN in New York City. And it had inscribed on it, Let us beat our swords into plowshares.

And years later, Israel did the same with the Monument of Peace in 67. And that was donated in Jerusalem with that same inscription on it. Seems like a pretty good political campaign, doesn't it? But is that what Isaiah had in mind? It is quite easy to desire a peaceful end.

[3 : 48] And disregard the contextual means of which peace is actually achieved. How does God establish peace? How does He do that? I mean, to rip a verse from the Bible and blindly contextualize it to our world today.

Is a great danger. We find ourselves possibly manipulating God and His Word. Now fortunately for us, this isn't a sermon on world peace that you may have expected.

We'll dive into Isaiah in a short passage, but contextually with the neighboring verses informing our passage today. Because Isaiah is a book of judgment and restoration.

A problem and a solution. And back and forth. Literally, verse 1 of chapter 2 begins this long discourse leading all the way to chapter 3, which is intermixed in a pattern of exposing sin and giving hope.

Exposing sin and giving hope. And this is the first of two passages in that long discourse that give that hope. And this passage is unique because it is almost word for word in Micah 4.

[5 : 06] You will find Isaiah 2, 1 through 5, almost word for word in Micah 4. And I would imagine that that would be important.

This passage would find itself very, very important here. What is God revealing in a historical time period that He needed to repeat Himself?

Oh, I got kids. They know what it means when I have to repeat myself. What is a responsible application?

Is it a political campaign? What is God saying? Is that what Isaiah had in mind? Today, the passage is giving an invitation to walk in the light of the Lord, Yahweh.

Today, fixing our eyes upon the messianic hope on the horizon. And so today, we're going to unpack this in three sections.

[6 : 21] And this will help us to strive this Christmas, not in a season of wandering, just trying to figure it out, but solely and securely focused upon something on the horizon that God's people have to look forward to.

So the sermon titled is that, Hope on the Horizon. And so I hope to dive into this, but I want to pray before I do that God's word may be received, heralded responsibly to His church.

So let's pray. Father, thank you for your word and speaking to us today. Father, may your word come alive in this church.

May your spirit help our hearts to be softened to receive the seed that your word has for us. And may you bring about growth in our lives that exceed any sense of logic or reason at times.

We just know that you got our hearts and you are molding and shaping us. Let that be so in this church. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

[7 : 50] Amen. Amen. So the first point is that God makes hope visible and reachable. God makes hope visible and reachable.

The passage, which was just read, serves as an inspired heading. Our ESV Bible, it has many different headings that are extra, you know, just to help us readers.

But you got to appreciate when the Lord inspires a heading to keep us on track, to say what the passage is about. And that's what we have here. The word that Isaiah, the son of Amos, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

What's this passage about? Well, that's a good start of what the context is. See, this passage is a prophecy concerning a specific historical point in time.

In Hebrew, prophecy is a good or bad divine message that relates to the past, the present, or the future. And usually in Hebrew prophecy, there's an emphasis on a change that needs to occur, whether it's a major or minor prophecy.

[9 : 08] And so this prophecy begins with a few helpful contexts. In verse 2, there's a future nation of Judah and its primary city, Jerusalem.

And that is known as the capital of God's presence. The temple's there. So he says, So the Lord had a time frame in mind, as he repeated here, and also Micah 4.

And this is a moment when the height of God's standing and establishment on earth will become superior to all around.

Higher than any hill, a mountain will rise. All the nations, all the hills, all the lands and valleys surrounding will be inferior to this mountain.

Do you see that in your mind? The image here is speaking about latter days. And now I would argue, we can have a cup of coffee after church service and argue it, but I don't think that this is talking about apocalyptic latter days.

[10 : 40] It wasn't common in Old Testament prophecy to be concerned like that in a worldview from the New Testament, like the New Testament was concerned. Now you might argue the book of Daniel, and so we can talk about that after church.

You see, we can't get lost in those weeds, can we? Have our little arguments that we're like, Well, hey, buddy, this is about the USA. Rise on the mountains, right?

Don't get lost in the weeds. It's just referring to a certainty in the future. There is a certainty in the future.

So what is that certainty in the future? God will be exalted. That is certain. I love that picture on the horizon.

It reminded me all week of taking fishing trips and charters with my son up on Lake Erie. And obviously, the horizon is a little bit, you know, broken up by buildings.

[11 : 51] But you ever see on the horizon, you just see that one object that is higher than everything else. It's almost like a landmark when you're out at sea.

And it stands tall. Everything around it, you can see the sky lines around. But that one object is higher and bigger than all around.

You see, in this latter time, this time in the future, which is certain, God's exaltation is the mountain God's people will see on the horizon.

They will see that reaching the heights on the horizon. And not only that, God's people will be moving towards it.

Can you imagine this phenomenon? Have you ever seen water go up a hill? This is a phenomenon.

[12:58] Streams of nations are flowing up to this mountaintop, defying every natural law.

And might I just inform you, nations, Jew and Gentile. All nations.

To the nation of all nations. Now, obviously, the neighboring verses of this passage indicate that it's not all about sailing that ship on the nice waters and fishing and catching that walleye.

It's a little choppy, actually. The neighboring verses indicate that there's a lot of sin. In chapter 1, you see a lot of sin. In chapter 2, verse 6, it goes into the day of the Lord.

There's a lot of sin. There's a lot of guilt in Judah. Even chapter 5 refers to this nation as a dead vineyard.

[14:09] So, might this be an invitation of hope for all people on the horizon? You see, God invites all to have hope.

Everyone to have hope. And He reveals it to the world. What else can bring hope to a hopeless and sinful world? Only God.

Only God. God's people have always anticipated hope on the horizon. Even though God was speaking to a specific time period, the Bible has multiple expressions of this hope on the horizon from the days of Ezra and recovering the scroll.

Or even at Pentecost. Remember Luke 24, verse 46. Jesus says, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.

And that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations. Beginning in Jerusalem.

[15:18] You are witnesses of these. This has been a transcendent expression of God's people being forced to look on the horizon to the exalted name of God.

And for us, the source of your hope is essential to the journey through your life. In Isaiah's day, the hope of this nation was far off.

They were a little bit messed up. But indeed, it was certain. Beyond a doubt. And Christmas is a season to reflect on that certainty.

Don't place your hope in dead things this year. The gospel calls us to a hope greater than anything in our lives.

Whether it being trial, pain, or circumstances, or uncertainty. You want certainty? Look on the horizon, church. Do you have an exalted mountain peeking ahead on the horizon of your life?

[16:29] Do you see that mountain in your mind? Maybe you're not in Christ today and you're just wandering through life trying to figure it out, trying to figure out how you can be saved.

Well, guess what? Fix your eyes on the exalted God incarnate who came in flesh in a baby's crib. And he suffered the penalty that you deserve on the cross. He died in your place for your sin and mine.

For sinners saved by grace and the grave didn't hold him. He was risen from the dead and ascended to the Father's right side.

You want certainty? Uncertainty? That's certain. In a world full of uncertainty. Come to Jesus Christ. How, you might say, how do I have forgiveness?

[17:32] How do I receive this gift? Do I have to take two pieces of bread and maybe I'll take that whole tray and I'll just feast on it? Is that how we're saved? No.

By faith alone you can be saved. If that is you today come by faith. There's no mistake why you're here today at all.

Come alive this Christmas season to an invitation of hope. That is visible and reachable. Reach for it today. The second point that I have today is hope on the horizon.

God's truth changing God's people. And so, as we zoom in on this phenomenon defying all logic and all natural law, you see the streams flowing up the mountain.

God wants us to listen. Isaiah wanted his audience to lend their ear to the chatter among the people.

[18 : 42] What are they saying? Come, come, in verse 3, 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.

Isaiah indicates some geographical information that solidifies an interpretation of that mountain and the house of the Lord. This is the Jerusalem temple.

And now, if we can lay aside all of our New Testament preconceived notions about the temple in the New Testament era, we can understand that in the Old Testament, the temple was the center of all religious life, all religious activity.

In the Old Testament, where can you find God? In Jerusalem, in the temple. This is a place, naturally, for sacrifice, for instruction.

And you see, in this future time now, in the latter days, God's people will be encouraging one another to go and worship God with a desire to learn, a desire to walk in His ways.

[20 : 05] Why, though? Why would God teach these people so that they can win theological debates, smash their opponents, to get big theological heads or swell up in pride?

No. The verse answers that question of why. It says, for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Go tell it on the mountain. What motivates God's people to journey? Desire to be changed, to gather and encourage one another.

Let's go to the house of the Lord to be changed, to be poured into, to be taught His ways, and to pour out, to walk in His ways.

And Jesus Christ said to His disciples, Go and make disciples of all nations. And He ends, Behold, I will be with you to the end of the age.

[21 : 19] And Christmas seems to be a time when some attend church who have not found it necessary since Easter. And that's not to shame anybody.

That's the reality. Some people go to church twice a year. And this isn't to shame you because even weekly attendees can lose their way just as easy.

The journey to God's place is exciting. It's a means to an end. Out of Zion shall flow forth the law. And so the problem is when assembling within the presence of God among the people is the end and not a means to the end, we use God in our lives as the checkbox.

In the latter time, God's people will desirously assemble in His presence. The only people that will desire to be in God's presence is guess what?

[22 : 30] Regenerate people. People who are saved will desire that. This is a regenerate crowd assembling.

And as we journey toward the horizon of hope, we ought to see the quality of our journey and of delightfulness, not drudgery, as we make that journey pilgrimage in our lives.

So don't make Christmas just another check on your list. This assembly is a battle at times. Trust me.

Our family knows. And it feels like just to get in this chair here is the finish line. like, whew, I made it. This is not the finish line.

Flowing up to the presence of God in His temple with His people is the starting point. You're on your commute to begin.

[23 : 39] This is the beginning here and now. God desires His glory to be our striving and carry it through the world.

And maybe you're here today and have forgotten that entire purpose. Maybe this past year, maybe you're a member of this church in this past year, you're just like, man, I made it.

Well, good. Welcome to the starting line. It's time to get to work. Have you forgotten that purpose? Maybe someone here today has lost that spark that you once had on that journey.

Maybe someone here today has been numb for quite a while towards anything of God. No desire to read His Word, no desire to sing in the service, really no desire to do anything or maybe hopeless.

Well, if that's you, God has a plan for you upon leaving here today to hold high truth, to take His Word and share it with the world.

[24 : 54] But not only that, our departure ought to look forward to the horizon of hope when God judges this world, ushering in a perfect judgment.

And we get to point three, the hope on the horizon, perfect justice and perfect peace. And verse four says, He shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples.

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

The ways of man since the fall of Adam and Eve began with a rock in the hand. His name was Cain, who felt like a victim of injustice and appointed himself to be judge and executioner and to serve his own justice against Abel.

You see, the moment we as humanity become more concerned with assuming the role of judge to liberate our own expressions of justice, that is the epitome of wandering from the invitation of this entire passage.

[26 : 32] When we go out and serve our own justice, you see, this future day, this certain day in the future, will be a time when there is no reason to fight because perfect justice prevails.

Hope on the horizon. Now, that's quite a good campaign slogan, Nixon thought. Good verse to put his hand on.

Good verse to be inscribed in a sculpture for the UN, the Soviet Union. Good monument of peace from Israel. Well, I don't know if you've seen the news lately.

Look around, and you got to ask yourself, how's that going? Justice and peace will not come by political plans of man, but only by the sovereign will of God at a certain time in history, a latter day. Maybe then the best verse to swear yourself into office maybe would come from 2 Corinthians 5, 21, which reads, he who knew no sin became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[28 : 01] Now that's a campaign slogan. You see, Jesus Christ is central to the certainty of peace, not politics, not policies.

Worldly justice will never last, and regardless of intentions of a utopian enterprise of peace on earth and goodwill towards men and kumbaya and bring your bell-bottom hippie jeans out and we're all just going to get along and love one another.

When we're doing that apart from the centrality of Jesus Christ, we commit idolatry. when peace is being established apart from Jesus Christ.

The world wants peace by disregarding the prince of peace. They want political justice, not biblical justice.

This passage is pointing God's people forward to a day where that mountain on the horizon will break the sky. and it's coming.

[29 : 14] It will come. And so this tension that we feel when we turn on the news and we see all the failings that when the moment that somebody tries to build a utopian enterprise, they find that apart from centrality of Jesus Christ, it fails.

It just brings and spurs on more war. And so we live in this tense day and age. And the obligation that we have here and now is to protect and defend against evil in this tension until it will one day be resolved on the horizon.

And so this passage concludes with that invitation. It says, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Oh, house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

And church, the invitation is offered to us today. We're in the latter days. We've been in the last phase since Jesus Christ said it is finished on the cross.

And if on the horizon of your life, this image of this mountain is in your horizon, it is certain to materialize.

[30 : 44] It will come about at a certain point. And then, what is holding the house of God from walking in the light of the Lord in this period of the already and not yet?

What holds you? Well, there's something important, and it's called context of this passage. If we were to spend the rest of our afternoon continuing into verse 6, we would see that God condemns this nation.

It's not smooth sailing. He condemns them from losing their way, adopting worldliness, being filled with magic, filled with greed, filled with warfare, filled with idolatry.

what needs to happen, church? We need to be saved. We need to be saved from our flesh.

That's why today is an invitation passage to come. Let us walk in the light of the Lord. The hope on the horizon is messianically explicit.

[32 : 01] Christmas! Christmas! It's all about the exaltation of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Messiah.

We need saved. And now, if you're not in Christ, your selfish ways, according to the Bible, not my opinion, can only last for so long.

And God invites you today to see and to know something greater, something superior upon the horizon of your life. It doesn't have to continue the way it has been going.

Might today mark an end of your self-rule and come to faith in Jesus Christ today? The Christians don't look or expect some utopia anytime soon until the second advent of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ establishes that peace by His hands, unity among the nations and all of that utopianism will fool the world.

[33 : 14] It'll serve as a good campaign slogan. It'll make a good trophy for the shelf. But don't fall for those gimmicks, church. We know where to find peace and we know that when peace comes, Jesus Christ will be the center of it, not a political candidate.

Don't turn to the world for something God alone will provide. From the crib to the cross, Isaiah fixes our minds on redemption that comes from God.

where Jesus Christ stepped in between a holy God and sinful man and invites them to come, walk in the light of the Lord.

And the invitation still stands today to walk in the light of the Lord, fixing our eyes upon the messianic hope on the horizon.

Let's pray.