

ADVENT 2017 (ISAIAH)

Part 4: “God Makes All Things New”

Isaiah 11:1-10

Sunday December 24, 2017 (Morning Services)

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“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. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. 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” (Isaiah 11:1–10, ESV).

Almighty God, we ask you to purify our hearts and minds. By your Spirit, encounter us this day and everyday of our lives, so that when your Son comes again he may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; we pray this through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit – one God – now and for ever. Amen.¹

I. Introduction

Before Kate and I had kids, one of our favorite things to do was to go watch midnight premieres at the movie theater. There would always be these big anticipated films that would come out, and we would take students from our college ministry and experience stories being told on the big screen in a crowded and excited room.

Now, as a parent of little kids, just the thought of going to a midnight premiere makes me tired. Suffice it to say; when Kate and I get to go to the movies now, it’s a big deal. So we have to make it worth our while.

One time a few years ago, we had the opportunity to go see a movie for the first time in a long time. And we had a few choices before us. One of those choices was the movie *Lincoln*, which was about the

¹ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007), 160.

presidency of Abraham Lincoln. Apparently it was a deep and dramatic movie that would make you think. Supposedly actor Daniel Day-Lewis was superb in his performance. The reviews were amazing, and the film was even up for a bunch of Oscars. But at the end of the day, I told Kate, “I just don’t want to spend my one movie day to see this one.” She asked me “Why?” I told her, “Well, the thing is, I’m pretty sure it’s going to have a sad ending.”

Now I won’t ruin it for you, but my US History classes had given me a pretty big spoiler about *Lincoln*. And my fear was by knowing the sad end of the story, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy the rest of the story. Because, here’s the thing, *knowing the end of the story changes the way you experience the story*.

Now, knowing the end of the Christian story is different than knowing the end of Lincoln. The end of the Christian story should not be a sad or scary topic where the focus is on the anti-Christ, wars of Armageddon, and predicting the date of the end of the world. No, the end of the Christian story is a profoundly hopeful and happy ending known in the Bible as “New Creation.”

What is New Creation? It is the good news that God has not abandoned his good creation to death, decay, and destruction, but that by the power of his might he plans to make all things new. It is a vision of ultimate justice, harmony, and great joy. In the rest of Scripture, this concept is referred to as the age to come, the resurrection, or simply the kingdom of God. It is the final accomplishment of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate hope of the entirety of Scripture. It is the big finale to the story of redemption. God is making all things new! This is the end of the Christian story.

And it is not just a hope that appears in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. When you read the New Testament you get the idea that how first century Christians couldn’t wait for the good end to come. Here are just a few quick examples:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:19-21).

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13).

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev. 22:17).

Now the question I have in this sermon is not whether or not Isaiah had this hope, or whether or not the writers of the New Testament had this hope, because it is overwhelmingly obvious that they did. It

is obvious that the hope of the return of Jesus and New Creation dominated their hearts and minds. The question I have is: *do we hope this way?*

If the spirit of the Bride says “come Lord Jesus,” what are *you* yearning for? If you are honest is the driving hope in your life the coming of Jesus, or is it the coming of something else? In our very wealthy very comfortable American setting, many of us are not saying “Come Lord Jesus.” We are more often yearning and saying, “Come approval. Come significance. Come promotion. Come money. Come romance. Come success.”

My prayer for our time together this morning is that we would let God the Holy Spirit breathe his words of Scripture into our hearts that we might be filled with a greater hope than these lesser hopes of the world. As the great Oxford professor C.S. Lewis once said, *“Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*²

II. The Text

Before us in Isaiah chapter 11, I believe we have a faint glimpse of that “holiday at sea.” And I want to spend the rest of our time unfolding the nature of this hope that our hearts might be stirred to set our desire on something more than what our culture has to offer us. Our text shows us *The hope of New Creation in three ways: 1.) The Hope of the Power of God, 2.) The Hope of the Peace of God, and 3.) The Hope of the Presence of God.*

1. The Hope of the Power of God.

Isaiah’s vision of New Creation is a vision of radical change and renewal. It is a change that comes about because there has been a change in regime. It something that can only be accomplished by the miraculous power of God as exerted through God’s chosen King.

Look for a moment at verses one and ten of chapter eleven. They are the two verses that frame our Scripture reading today with a prophetic glimpse of this promise King: *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit...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” (Isaiah 11:1, 10, ESV).*

“The stump of Jesse” refers to the royal line of King David that has failed. It is a dead tree that has been chopped down to the ground. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah will fall. But the promise is that from the place of death new life will come. A shoot shall come forth from this dead stump. It will grow into a mighty tree and bear fruit. And this mighty tree will stand as a signal to call to the peoples of every tribe and nation unto salvation.

² C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory*. (New York: HarperOne, 1949, 1976, 1980), 26.

We learn from the New Testament that Jesus is this descendant of David. He is the shoot that came from the stump of Jesse. He is the power of new life that has come out of death and decay. He is the powerful king destined to bring about the peace of New Creation. And today his cross stands as a universally recognized symbol and signal that summons all to salvation. It stands as the true and better tree of life, because the curse of the fall has been broken, and the blessing of a greater Eden has dawned.

The text of Isaiah 11 continues in verse 2 to illustrate why Jesus alone is worthy not just to be a king, but the king above all kings: *“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. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins”* Isaiah (11:2-5).

These words are written in a time when the nation of Judah was used to very weak and selfish rulers who were powerless to bring about any real change. But the king that is coming is a good king and a powerful king. He will bring about what no man could ever hope to accomplish. The High King, above all other kings, is coming. The Creator is reclaiming his creation! As Pastor Ray Ortlund of Nashville has commented on this passage: *“Unlike every other human leader in the sorry length of our history, Jesus is literally qualified to rule the world. We have nothing to fear from him. We are foolish to resist him. We can never be too loyal to him.”*³

This is really good news, but it has really humbling ramifications on our pride. We cannot fix our selves or our world. At the end of the day, it our hope is not in chasing the significance, the salary, the sex, or the success that we think will make our world okay. To hope in the power of God is to let go of any hope that we have in ourselves to be our own saviors by our own self-effort. But O how glorious it is to give up this fool’s errand! How freeing it is to let go of the worry, let go of the control, let go of the bitterness that shackles us when we think that we are our ultimate hope.

The vision of the gospel is a vision of hope that is gloriously outside and beyond us; a hope in a true and better Savior King who is mighty and has the powerful to save.

This is the hope of the power of God.

2. The Hope of the Peace of God.

The vision of New Creation is a vision of the end of violence, war, and sickness. It is a vision of the death of death. But we are so accustomed to the brokenness of creation that such a renewed world seems unimaginable. Here Scripture intentionally sounds impossible and absurd. Yet these are the words of Scripture: *“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze;*

³ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 114.

*their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain..." (Isaiah 11:6-9a).*

Now in prophetic writing, these images children and animals are not meant to convey literal realities. Rather, they are working on a metaphorical level that the people of Judah would have easily understood. Specifically, these images of predatory animals living in harmony with weaker animals and children are likely representative of peace between specific nations of the world, and overall peace and harmony within creation itself. The big idea is that New Creation is a time when God will renew his good creation, forever remove the stain of sin and evil, and he will right all wrongs. Toward the end of Isaiah's book, the prophet even proclaims, *"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
and the cry of distress" (65:17-19).*

Now this is profound because even in the midst of profound suffering and profound pain we can have a hope of true peace and true justice. The hope of the gospel is that one-day the world will be put to rights, and creation will become what it should be.

And you cannot have this hope without the Kingdom of God. This is a hope that secular materialism knows nothing of. If this is all matter in motion, at the end of the day the universe is coldly indifferent to pain and suffering. Evil is an arbitrary term.

But if this is not just matter in motion, if there is a Creator who stands independent from his creation and has initiated a rescue of it, then we have a real hope. We have hope that though our suffering is real, there is a good ending to this story. There will be a day when all wrongs are made right, and, in the words of J.R.R. Tolkien, *"all sad things become untrue."*

This is hope of the peace of God.

3. The Presence of God.

The biblical vision of New Creation is profoundly spiritual *and* material. It is not a picture of the church going up into a disembodied heaven. But rather as Revelation 21 tells us, it is a picture of heaven coming down and God making his dwelling with man. The hope of New Creation is that God will be present with us!

And why is this possible? It is possible because, *"...the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD*

as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9b). There will no be a square inch of this world where God is not fully known as the Sovereign Savior.

For the Christian, this means that our greatest final hope is that we will one day fully know the One we have worshipped all these years: *“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known”* (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV).

My wife Kate and I had a long distance relationship when we were dating. She was living in Ohio, and I was in the great state of Texas. When we knew that we were in love and that we were going to get married it was a time of happiness, but also a time of tension. It was a joy to know that soon we were going to be together and live with one another and be married, but during that season all we had were emails and letters and phone conversations and a few moments we could spend with one another while visiting each other. And don't get me wrong. I treasured our letters. I've still saved all the letters Kate wrote to me in that time. And the highlight of my day was when I could hear her voice over the phone. I really loved the moments we shared in one another's presence when we got to visit each other, but I wanted more. I wanted to never have to leave her again. I wanted to live with her, and I would have sacrificed *anything* for that desire to come true. So when our wedding day came, it was a joy because I knew that I was now going to get to spend the rest of my life with the bride God had given me.

In the same way, we don't have the fullness of Jesus with us yet. But we have his words that we can treasure. We have his Spirit that will speak to us. And we even have those special moments when we feel his presence among us. But there is more. One day, for those who are redeemed, we will see him face to face. And the Bible says no fear or pain or suffering—not matter how severe—is even worthy of being compared to the glorious joy that will be revealed in our lives on that day (Rom. 8:18).

And the only reason we can hope in that day is because there was One who was willing to sacrifice anything to be united with us. If his love is so powerful that it would go through death and back again, can you imagine the joy that you would experience in His presence? Can you imagine the peace and validation and fulfillment you would feel? Let me just tell you: you can't imagine it. Your wildest imaginations fall short of the capacity to envision the joy of the total presence of Almighty God. But the good news is, if you are saved in Christ Jesus, one day you won't have to imagine. It will be your reality. It is a hope that will not put us to shame (Rom 5:5). The deepest desire you have is to be fully known and fully loved. If you are a Christian, this desire will be realized when you finally see Jesus face to face.

This is the hope of the presence of God.

III. Conclusion

God promised his people that he would send the messiah, and we celebrate Christmas because he kept that promise. That same God has also promised that the messiah is coming again. He has promised to make all things new. We have every reason to hope and believe he will keep this promise too.

This is the end of our story. And there is power in knowing the end of the story.

May we be a people who ever live in the wakeful hope of this great God who will soon make all things new! *AMEN.*

