

# **ADVENT 2017 (ISAIAH)**

*Part 3: “God Sends a Savior”*

*Isaiah 9:2-7 & 53:3-6*

Sunday December 17, 2017

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*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:2–7, ESV).*

*“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:3–6, ESV).*

This is God’s word. Thanks be to God.

*Lord, stir up your power and with great might come among us; and, because we need you, let your bountiful grace and mercy help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, to whom, with you, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.<sup>1</sup>*

## **I. Introduction**

In this Advent season, we have been taking a high altitude view of the major themes within the long, beautiful, and intricately complex prophecy of the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

The Prophet Isaiah proclaims God’s word to the people of Judah in a time of political, economic, and spiritual decline. As a chosen people, Judah has failed to serve God faithfully, and they are about to suffer the judgment of being conquered by foreign nations. As we saw last week, Isaiah the Prophet is

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

sent by God to confront his people of their sin, but also to prophesy that God has not forsaken his people. He will soon send a great and unexpected salvation. In fact, Isaiah's very name means "*God is salvation.*"

The two passages we read this morning are about two major images of that salvation that occur over and over again in the book of Isaiah: the first image (seen here in chapter 9) is that of the *Conquering King*, and the second (in chapter 53) is that of the *Suffering Servant*.

According to the ancient Jews, the Conquering King of chapter 9, was going to be a mighty warrior. He was going to be a prophet that was more powerful than Moses, and a king that was greater than King David. This Conquering King was God's promised anointed one, also known as the Messiah. He would use his might and power to defeat Israel and Judah's enemies and usher in an age of peace.

The Suffering Servant of chapter 53, on the other hand, was originally interpreted to be a personification of the nation of Judah who would suffer tremendously at the hands of evil, but would ultimately be vindicated by God. God's chosen people, they thought, were going to righteously tough-out the suffering that was upon them, so that in turn God would usher in their salvation.

These interpretations of Isaiah 9 and 53 are, in my mind, understandable; but they are both wrong. And you might think, well, who cares? That's no big deal. People have different theological interpretations of the Bible, but things like that don't affect real life.

But I want you to know: bad theology matters. Reading your Bible wrongly matters. Why? Because *bad theology can even make you miss God even when he is right in front of you.* And it can make you look for salvation in the wrong places.

The Jews thought they understood salvation. They thought they knew they knew what their Savior would look like and what he needed to be. But when Jesus Christ stood before their very eyes – when their promised Savior had actually come – the vast majority of God's people missed him. As the Gospel According to John says in the first chapter, "*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him*" (John 1:9–11, ESV).

The original audience of Jews who read and studied Isaiah would have been very familiar with both the images of the Conquering King and the Suffering Servant. However, they would have never imagined that they referred to the same person.

From our historical vantage point, it might be easy for us ask, "How could the Jews miss Jesus when he was right in front of them?" Hindsight, after all, is twenty-twenty. But the better and more humble question might be: "*If God's own chosen people missed Jesus, how might we miss him as well?*"

Often we, like the ancient Jews, hope for a Savior who is merely a devised means to our desired end. We define salvation on our own terms and reverse engineer a view of God that will give us what we thing we want.

But the message of both Advent and of Isaiah is about God breaking into our lives and redefining salvation on his own terms. It is a message about God entering our framework to shatter our

expectations, and to show us that he is so much better than what we think we want. It is a message that shows us that the Savior that we want is not the Savior we need.

## **II. The Text**

The book of the Isaiah is about the true Savior. And, combined together, our texts of Isaiah 9 and 53 show us three realities about the true Savior. They are: **1.) Why We Need a Savior, 2.) Who the Savior Is, and 3.) What the Savior Does.**

### **1. Why We Need a Savior.**

The people of Judah needed a Savior because they were in immediate danger. They were a people who “dwelt in a land of deep darkness” (9:2), and that darkness was on the most basic level the evil nations like Assyria that surrounded them and threatened to conquer and kill them.

In college, I became friends with a fellow student who was one of the “Sudanese lost boys” who fled from genocide in South Sudan. When I found out he was a Christian, I took him to lunch I asked him how the Lord had saved him. But he interpreted my question in a fascinating way. When he heard the word “saved,” he didn’t think I was asking about how he became a Christian. Instead, he told me about how the time he swam without dying across a river into Ethiopia while men who shooting at him from the riverbank. This was one of the times Jesus saved him, he said. For him words like salvation and deliverance are spiritual metaphors; for him those words had a bit more of a tangible meaning than it does to most American Christians. Likewise, when the ancient Jews thought of salvation, they were not thinking in metaphorical terms. Their lives were literally hanging in the balance.

So the vision of Isaiah 9 was a vision of hope for God’s people. God was getting ready defeat their enemies and end their oppression for good. **“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (Isaiah 9:2, ESV).**

But, when we look to Isaiah chapter 53, we see the true nature of our danger and oppression is spiritual at its root. It is the “transgressions,” the “iniquities,” our going “astray,” and our rebellion against God that are the sources of true darkness (53:5-6). Thus, the greatest enemy of Judah was not Assyria or any other political adversary. In a word, their greatest enemy was their own *sin*. And sin is our greatest enemy too.

We need a Savior because, outside of Chrsit, we are enslaved to sin. Without God, we can’t *not sin* (*non posse non peccare*). Sin is our deepest problem. It is the evil beneath all other evils. It is the pervasive tendency within all of humanity in which we worship ourselves instead of our Creator. It is this disease of sin that ultimately leads to the brokenness of murder, rape, war, and poverty. Freedom from this enemy is the deepest need we have, and nothing other than God can give this freedom to us: not a politician, not money, not success.

And freedom is precisely what we have in Jesus. The gospel is an invitation into true spiritual freedom. Jesus the Savior comes to defeat the evil within us by crucifying the power of sin to his cross and giving us new life by the power of his resurrection and Spirit (Rom. 6:6).

*Why do we need a Savior? Because we need one who can end the power of sin without ending us.*

## 2. Who the Savior Is.

Judah was expecting a political king and a military leader to be their Savior. And I think we can see how they could get that out of Isaiah 9: *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this”* (Isaiah 9:6–7, ESV).

Unlike the climate of distress and darkness under King Ahaz, who is ruling Judah at the time of Isaiah 9 is being written, this Conquering King would usher in an era of light and joy and peace.<sup>2</sup> Such a literal conquering king is exactly what the people of Judah wanted. They wanted the heir of David’s throne; the fulfillment of the prophecy of 2 Samuel 7; the one who would usher in wealth and peace. God’s people were tired of being bullied around, and they wanted someone who would mess with the people who were messing with them.

But as Pastor Ray Ortlund of Nashville has said so well, *“[God’s] answer to the bullies swaggering through history is not to become an even bigger bully. His answer is Jesus.”*<sup>3</sup> Instead of a conqueror they got a carpenter who would die to give the world a different kind of kingdom. They a Suffering Servant who had *“...no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him”* (Isaiah 53:2).

This is Jesus – the real Savior. He is a King, but his Kingdom is not like the ones we are used to. His kingdom is “not of this world,” and his kingdom is not like this world (John 18:36). Jesus the Messiah came as a humble servant to endure our rejection and grief: *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted”* (Isaiah 53:3–4, ESV).

This Savior came to give us a salvation we could never achieve for ourselves. This view of Jesus is totally irreconcilable with a view of salvation that says, “It’s up to me to tough it out and white-knuckle my way through life, and if I get in trouble God can be my emergency parachute.”

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<sup>2</sup> Gary V. Smith, [Isaiah 1–39](#), ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 235.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, [Isaiah: God Saves Sinners](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 99.

Too often I am afraid, we want a God who is a means to our comfort and happiness. We want a nice God who will keep his distance and mind his own, yet is available for emergencies. But what God is offering us is a Lord. Jesus came into our broken world not to get you out of a parking ticket or to help you get a date or to give you a raise. He came to defeat your sin and death and to become your Lord.

Do you really know Jesus as Lord, or is he a stepping-stone to what you are really worshipping? We cannot afford to play a game with God, wherein we think if we scratch his back with good works, he must scratch our back with blessing. Such a rendering of the gospel might be initially appealing to the materialism of America, but it is utterly hollow. If that is who our savior is, we are not worshipping him; we are worshipping the stuff we think he will get for us.

Pastor Timothy Keller of New York says it this way: *"If you...believe that God ought to bless you and help you because you have worked so hard to obey Him and be a good person, then Jesus may be your helper, your example, and even your inspiration, but He is not your Savior. You are serving as your own Savior."*<sup>4</sup>

*Who is the Savior? The Savior is the Suffering Servant who has become our King and Lord.*

### **3. What the Savior Does.**

The Savior was the One who would arise to defeat Judah's enemies and usher in an age of peace. The images brought to mind in Isaiah 9 are that of growing families, a plentiful harvest, spoil from battle, a surprise victory over a powerful enemy, and even the end of all war and death: *"You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire"* (Isaiah 9:3-5, ESV).

That reference at the end of verse for to the day of Midian is a reference to the story of Gideon in the book of Judges (Judges 6-8). It is the story of an unlikely hero, miraculous victory, and an age of peace that can only be attributed to an intervening miraculous act of God.<sup>5</sup>

The people of Judah were yearning for such miracle. They were hungry for peace. But in chapter fifty-three we see that while this Savior has indeed purchased our peace, he has done so at a great cost to himself: *"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* (Isaiah 53:5-6, ESV)

In the gracious plan of God, our promised Savior was predestined to become our substitute. It is a sobering thought to realize that our sin is so great that it merited the very death of Christ. But it is

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<sup>4</sup> Keller, Timothy. *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. (New York: Dutton, 2008), 38.

<sup>5</sup> Ortlund 98.

overwhelming to know that the love of Christ is so great this price was willingly paid for you! When you feel and believe this love, nothing can shake you.

*How does the Savior save? The Savior saves us by dying in our place.*

*This is the real Savior. The vision of Isaiah 9 is one of a not only a powerful king but a good king; not only one who so mighty that he could rule, but one who is so just and gentle that he should rule. How wonderful it is that the government, the authority, the lordship over all the cosmos belongs to One who is worthy of the job. But Isaiah 53 takes things even further. For this Conquering King will not begin his reign through military might, but rather by becoming the Suffering Servant – the one ends the power of evil by taking upon himself the punishment and pain and death that our sin merits. For the only shoulder that is worthy to bear the government in power is the shoulder that first bore the cross in love.*

The first verse of chapter fifty-three admits how unbelievable this message really is: “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1). It is hard to believe that the glorious Creator God could become part of his creation, only to be rejected and despised. It is hard to believe that the most righteous being in the universe would take upon himself the guilt of his enemies. It is hard to believe that the great King of all Cosmos would come to die. But this is precisely the gospel of Jesus.

And doesn't this gospel give us a hope when life hurts? We may know that not only does our God understand suffering and grieve with us, but he has experienced the worst that the world has to offer himself. But better yet, he has overcome it. And one day he will ultimately defeat suffering.

As Pastor John Piper once wrote: *“We need a suffering Savior. We need a Savior who has tasted the cup of horror we are being forced to drink. And that is how he came. He knew what this world needed. Not a comedian. Not a sports hero. Not a movie star. Not a political genius. Not a doctor. Not even a pastor. The world needed what no mere man could be. The world needed a suffering Sovereign. Mere suffering would not do. Mere sovereignty would not do. The one is not strong enough to save; the other is not weak enough to sympathize. So he came as who he was: the compassionate King. The crushed Conqueror. The lamb-like Lion. The suffering Sovereign.”*<sup>6</sup>

### **III. Conclusion**

This is the hope of Isaiah and the hope of Advent.

My prayer for us Redeemer Christian Church is that we would be a people who take these truths deep into our hearts this Advent season: that we would know real salvation from the real Savior!

May we people who are open to knowing a God that is greater than our greatest desires or expectations! May we be a people who do not form for ourselves the Savior that we want, but rather are formed and transformed by the true Savior and all that he is!

AMEN.

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<sup>6</sup> John Piper. “How does Jesus Come to Newtown?” Entry posted December 14, 2012. <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/how-does-jesus-come-to-newtown>. (Accessed December 15, 2012).

## Community Group Questions

1. *Isaiah 9 and 53 were both interpreted wrongly by the ancient Jews. They thought Isaiah 9 was about a powerful political leader that would save God's people, and they thought Isaiah 53 was about their own suffering. Their expectations of the Savior were so set in stone that they missed the savior – Jesus – when he was right in front of them (see Jn. 1:11). In what ways are you tempted to put wrong expectations on God?*
2. *Like the people of ancient Judah, are there ways that you are tempted to look to God as a means to your desired end?*
3. *What are the aspects of your life that you honestly can say, "I can't save myself; only God to save me"?*
4. *In what way is God challenging and deepening what salvation means to you in this Advent season?*