

Advent 2021 Part 4

What's The Plan?

We've pointed out over the Sundays of Advent the opportunity it provides to prepare our hearts for Jesus' arrival. We've cleared our vision, we've acknowledged our hunger, we've increased our longing for what has not yet been fulfilled, we've embraced a hopeful longing, understanding who is coming and that we just have to wait for his timing. We've been trying to learn to wait with God, waiting for the fullness of time, waiting for his arrival. We talked last Sunday about what we could do while we were waiting: to remember what God has done in the past, to rejoice in the Lord even in the waiting, to rest in His promises knowing our times are in his hands, and to do our best to redeem the time as we wait. All of that with the knowledge and understanding that he is coming, his advent is certain and soon. So, what's the plan? What does God have in mind for us? What will his arrival mean for us? There is so much we could cover. His arrival means God is with us, we are not alone anymore, his arrival means a Savior is born, hope has arrived, light shines in the darkness. The list can go on and on. But I want to share some thoughts as to what his arrival will ultimately mean taken from Isaiah 9. **"Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan – The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."**

Isaiah 9:1-2

Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the Northern tribes of Israel. They are located in the Galilee. Jesus grew up in Nazareth and Nazareth is located in the tribal territory of Zebulun. Jesus made his home as an adult in Capernaum and Capernaum is in the tribal territory of Naphtali. When Isaiah is prophesying he is warning them of an invasion that will come from Assyria. Eventually, 722 BCE, it happened as Isaiah warned and the first areas and tribes to fall captive and be exiled were Zebulun and Naphtali. They were the first to be "humbled" by the Assyrians, the first to experience the gloom and distress of captivity, but when the Messiah comes, at his arrival, Isaiah says Zebulun and Naphtali will be the first to be honored. The score will be evened. The first to fall into darkness will be the first to experience the light. The first to experience the yoke of bondage will be the first to experience his liberty and freedom. This is why Matthew records in his gospel (Mt. 4) that Jesus began to preach, and "Leaving Nazareth,

he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah” and then he quotes this passage from Isaiah 9.

So what does it all mean for us? What’s the plan? What will his arrival mean? **His arrival means captivity, desolation and gloom are not the final words!** It was the word for those living in the land in Isaiah’s time, but it wasn’t the final word. Jesus arrives and everything changes. Plans change, gloom is lifted, the chains of the captors break, despair gives way to light and peace and possibility. “Arise and shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you” Is. 60 Good news to the poor, freedom to the captive, sight to the blind. Immanuel is coming and he has the final word. His arrival says we have hope, we have a future, in spite of what’s happened. Gloom and despair are not God’s final words for you, your family, your circumstances. Whether in the next few hours or days or weeks or if it takes years, but God intends to bring into the light all those trapped in darkness. God intends to bring you out of captivity, to bring you back, to bring you home, to restore what has been stolen, to redeem what has been lost. He is coming to rule and reign. His arrival means in an ultimate and final sense, he will have the final word.

Right now, it seems sin and evil, injustice, darkness and death are winning. It seems they have the final word. I know. But I’m here to remind you that won’t always be the case. Jesus is here with us now, bringing light, hope, comfort, peace and assurance of another day coming. He is with us now, pointing to that day of his second Advent. Don’t forget. Jesus is coming and he will have the final word. He is coming and Satan and sickness and sin and death will have to bow before him in silence. He is coming and the dead will rise, he is coming and memories will be restored to those with Alzheimers, He is coming and justice will prevail, he is coming and wrongs will be made right, he is coming and he has the final say! Hallelujah! That’s not all.

“You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them...every warrior’s boot used in battle...will be destined for burning.” Isaiah 9:3-5 What’s the plan? What does this mean? **His arrival means a reversal of destiny.**

Isaiah is telling them at the arrival of the Messiah they will go from exile to enlargement, from slavery to freedom. In captivity the borders of their nation shrank; they were diminished as

a people. When Messiah comes and establishes his rule and reign, he reverses their destiny, he restores what had been diminished in the nation and in their lives.

The same is true for us. When we are captive to sin, serving ourselves instead of serving God, we are diminished. We are less than God intended. God's image within us is diminished. But when Jesus comes, his arrival in our lives enlarges our life. He brings hope to us. Whereas before we were destined for destruction, living in darkness, now we are destined for hope, we are on a different path, new potential, new life in him! He enlarges everything about our life. We used to sing "what a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart." The song continues, "I have joy in my soul for which long I had sought." That's what Isaiah says. When Messiah comes and our destiny is reversed, he increases our joy. From sadness to joy! It's what the angels said to the shepherds announcing Jesus' birth. It's good news of GREAT joy. Joy to the world the Lord is come. "It's a boy! Rejoice!" We rejoice and celebrate because Jesus is born. Isaiah gives us two more examples for rejoicing. He says when Messiah comes we will rejoice like people that have just brought in a great harvest and we will rejoice like people that have just won a battle!

I've never been a farmer so I don't know what it's like to overcome all the challenges of farming – too hot, too cold, too wet, too dry, pests, insects, animals, but it is cause for celebration when the crop is harvested and there is money in the bank and food to eat. Paula grows a few things each year and is pretty excited to eat homegrown tomatoes and peppers and strawberries and blackberries. The joy that comes with the arrival of the Messiah is greater than any harvest, greater than any profit you've ever made, greater than anything that has ever brought you a sense of satisfaction, greater than any success.

Isaiah then compares the Messiah's arrival to the joy that comes with victory at the end of a war. There may not be too many left who remember the joy at the end of WWII. I've only seen pictures of the celebration in the streets that the war was finally over. Rejoice! Celebrate! The boys are coming home! Jesus is coming and there is a reversal of our destiny. No longer are we destined for oppression and defeat. The prophet said the oppressor's rod will be broken and the warrior's boots are destined for burning. The oppressor is defeated and we get to divide the plunder! The battle is won through Jesus! Jesus is coming and all the enemies, including death, sickness, disease, suffering and sin, all the weapons of Satan will be swallowed up in Jesus' victory, won for us through his death and resurrection. Jesus has come and through him we have

a new destiny. The knowledge of that turns us into people of hope and joy, people who can already rejoice. “Repeat the sounding joy...the Lord has come.”

His arrival means a change of administration. Jesus is coming to rule and reign. A new king. No longer will we be subject to the rule of the oppressor. The day will come when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. The prince of this world falls to the rule of the Prince of Peace. No longer will we shoulder the responsibilities and burdens alone. Look what the prophet said. **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”** Isaiah 9:6 The government will be on his shoulders! Good news. But’s it not just good news for the future.

Jesus has come to rule and reign in our hearts and in our lives as Savior and Lord, Master and King right now. Allow him to take over the governance of your life. It’s time for a change in administration today. Allow him to lead you and direct your steps because... he is a Wonderful Counselor. It’s not just that he gives good advice, but in a governmental sense, he is a skilled planner, he knows the best way for you to go. If you follow his words and obey his instruction, you will know and experience his peace as you surrender your life to him.

Talk about good governance in his administration. Jesus has come to rule and reign, not as just another politician, not just another man, but he is the incarnate God, the eternally existent Son. The creed says Jesus is “God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God...of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.” The Apostle Paul says of Jesus, **“He is the image of the invisible God...by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.”** Colossians 1:15-17 Isaiah is correct. He is Mighty God, the image of the invisible God, God in the flesh. He is the eternally existent Son but he is also the father of all things in once sense as all things were created by Him and for him. He is the possessor of all things, the possessor of eternity, He is the Beginning and the End and in He holds all things together. Our times are in his hands, remember? He is the one we anticipate, the One who will establish His Lordship and His governance in the earth someday. But today, he is the One who has come to establish his rule and governance in your life, to rule and reign in your heart. It’s good news. If you’ve not surrendered your life to him, it’s time for a change in administration!

He is the Prince of Peace. It is the nature and character of his rule, his administration, his governance, to bring and to give peace. It is his nature, his plan to reconcile and restore, to mend and to heal. He and His peace displace fear and despair. What a relief, to live in and walk in his peace that passes understanding. Do you need that peace today? You find it in a relationship with Jesus, the Prince of Peace. You find it as you surrender your life to him and allow the governing of your life to rest upon his shoulders.

Finally, **His arrival will establish a reign that will never end!** The ancient world saw kingdoms and powers rise and fall over time. The same thing happens today. One side takes power and then the pendulum swings to the other side. Back and forth the power shifts, but a day is coming Isaiah said, when the Messiah arrives, **“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.” Isaiah 9:7**

When Jesus comes He will have the last word, he will change our destiny and fill us with hope and joy, he will establish his rule and reign in our lives and it will never end. You know how I can face today and tomorrow and whatever lies ahead? I surrendered my life to Jesus. He lives in my heart and he isn’t leaving. He isn’t giving up on me nor is he going anywhere. He is my king and I can trust him. Remember Dr. Lockridge and his sermon about my king? He said “That’s my king. His office is manifold, his promise is sure, his life is matchless, his mercy is everlasting, his love never changes, his word is enough, his grace is sufficient, his reign is righteous, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He always has been and he always will be. I’m talking about he had no predecessor and He’ll have no successor. There was nobody before Him and there will be nobody after Him. You can’t impeach Him and He’s not gonna resign. Well...I wish I could describe Him to you...but, He’s indescribable...He’s incomprehensible, He’s invincible, He’s irresistible.” He is our king and he will rule and reign forever. That means we don’t have to fear tomorrow. We can trust him, his power, his promise, his mercy, his all sufficient grace. He is with us now. He will be with us tomorrow. He will still be ruling and reigning when all of this world fails, falls and passes away. Put your trust in him. Choose to surrender to him now and then you can know this permanent relationship. Then you can share in his rule in the age to come! To us a child is born, to us a son is given and to all who receive him, he gives the right to become children of God, to rule with him forever. That’s the plan!