

Isaiah's Audacious Hope
Isaiah 7, 9, 11, 53

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Do you know there are only 4 weeks until Christmas? Some people panic when they hear this but for me it means that I still have three and a half weeks before I have to begin my shopping!

Have you noticed instead of waiting until Thanksgiving to kick off Christmas, we're hearing "*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*" right after Halloween and don't get me started on the Hallmark movie channel.

If this keeps up, Labor Day will be the start of the Christmas rush. How many of you shop on "Black Friday?" Retailers love this day because it helps them get in the "black" financially.

And, against all these sales and advertisements stands the season of Advent. Advent means "coming" and refers to the coronation of a King.

Traditionally it's been a time for prayer, penitence, and preparation to help believers slow down to savor our Savior's birth.

Advent is a spiritual journey that helps us focus on the greatest gift of all so we can worship the Word made flesh with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

As we experience the ancient and future dimension of this time of the year, we can never start too early getting ready for something really big.

While we're not a liturgical church, we do celebrate Advent with an Advent Wreath and with four candles, which some say represent the four centuries of waiting between Malachi and Matthew.

But each week, starting today, through different readings and the lighting of each of these candles, we'll shine light on Advent's four themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

In the midst of all the hassle, these Advent readings keep the Christ of Christmas present in our minds and helps us focus on His first "coming" to this world.

We want His beauty to shine bright in the busyness of our lives, and that can only happen when we slow down.

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Since today's message is about Isaiah, let me make a few points that'll serve as an introduction to this book.

First, Isaiah's name means "*Jehovah saves.*" Which was the message he was trying to get the people to understand, but they wouldn't listen.

He ministered for more than fifty years during the reigns of four different kings. He saw the northern kingdom destroyed and its inhabitants led into captivity.

He even warned the people of Judah that the same would happen to them unless they repented but they wouldn't listen as this was a time of cultural corruption, like our country today.

Second, the book of Isaiah has been called the "fifth gospel" because it's filled with so much good news. Yet, while the book is brimming with glory and good news, it also contains darkness.

Isaiah 60:2, "*See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you.*"

Isaiah was written about 700 years before the time of Christ, a fact that should cause us to wonder and worship as we contemplate how specifically his prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

This book contains some of the most beautiful language ever written and was extensively quoted by Jesus. And, since Isaiah was one of His favorite books, we should consider what it has to say as well.

Isaiah is also called a “major” prophet because his book is one of the longest and his message is extremely meaty.

Some have pointed out that the 66 chapters in Isaiah serve as a “miniature” Bible, since there are also 66 books in the Bible.

The first 39 chapters correspond to the “law” of the Old Testament; while the final 27 correspond to the “liberty” taught in the New Testament.

Three main themes in this amazing book are:

- God is in control.
- The Messiah is coming, and
- God always has a remnant that stays committed to Him.

Even though his opening words begin with a complaint, Isaiah 1:4, *“Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption!”* he continued to offer words of hope throughout the book.

This message is titled, *“Isaiah’s Audacious Hope,”* because the word “audacious” means to be bold and fearless, and Isaiah was bold about his longing for something more.

He dared to believe that something better was coming even though his culture was corrupt and everything around him seemed so dark.

We can summarize Isaiah's audaciousness by looking at what he said in Isaiah 64:1, "*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...*"

He's longing for the Lord to come into his world in order to help him make sense of all the nonsense happening, to bring peace to all the problems, to dispel the darkness, and to extricate evil.

So, today we're going to look at passages out of chapters 7, 9, 11 and 53, and by doing this I hope we'll get a composite picture of Isaiah's Christmas.

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First, let's look at chapter 7. In this chapter we find an evil king named Ahaz on the throne. He had deliberately disobeyed God and, as a result, his kingdom had come under attack from all quarters.

Verse 2b, "*So the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.*"

If you don't know God when trouble comes, you'll be shaken to the very core of your being. But instead of turning to the Lord, Ahaz begins to think about partnering with the evil empire of Assyria.

At this crucial time God, in His great love and mercy toward the house of David, took the initiative and sent Isaiah to help.

When Isaiah arrived, he pointed out to Ahaz, in verse 9b, that "*if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*"

Now, this is really a pun in Hebrew. It's literally translated: "*if there is no belief, you will find no relief.*"

In verse 11, Ahaz was supposed to ask God for a sign that would help him believe everything would be okay, but verse 12 tells us he refused.

This stubbornness lights Isaiah up! Verse 13, *“Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?”*

Which brings us to this remarkable prophetic passage in verse 14: *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*

This verse is important. Notice who’s giving the sign, it’s the Lord Himself. That’s similar to what Abraham said in Genesis 22:8, *“God himself will provide the lamb.”*

This sign was not just for Ahaz. This was a sign given to all of us because the word “you” in verse 14 is plural.

That indicates it wasn’t just a sign to Ahaz but to everyone. Just like the angel made clear in Luke 2:10, *“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”*

Next, the sign was to be a son born to a virgin, *“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son.”*

In the Hebrew, the grammatical interjection *“Behold”* is placed at the beginning of the sentence which would make the verse read, *“Behold, the virgin will be with child...”*

This word *“behold”* was used to arrest attention, to indicate the importance of what was about to be said.

This was no ordinary pregnancy and no ordinary birth. A virgin would be with child and would give birth to a son. This certainly stands out as a miraculous sign.

Lastly, the Son would be God incarnate. The name Immanuel means, *“The strong God with us.”* While this was not Jesus’ proper name, it was a name that belonged to Him as an attribute. That is Who He is.

From the point of this miraculous birth on, God Himself would be present among His people.

In fact, this verse is quoted in Matthew 1:22-23, *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us.’”*

Did Ahaz understand all this? No. Was it fulfilled during his lifetime? No. It was a prophecy, focusing on the future, given to all people so that God would be with all people for all time.

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Isaiah 9:1, *“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.”*

Let me set this text in context. This original birth announcement was made in the midst of grief and gloom. Zebulun and Naphtali are tribes which make up the land of Galilee.

As a result of their sins, the people in this region knew only grief because, since they lived closest to the enemy, they were the first ones to be attacked.

But Isaiah was telling of a time in the future when Galilee’s gloom would be replaced with gladness. Remember, Jesus’ ministry was grounded in Galilee.

Also, Christmas was birthed in the midst of grief. While the angels were proclaiming *“peace on earth,”* Herod was preparing to annihilate infants; while Mary was worshipping, other mothers were weeping for their children.

Verse 2 describes how the birth of Christ would bring brightness to a dark world: *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”*

In referring to Himself in John 8:12, Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

The enemies of Israel had burdened the people with *“bars across their shoulders.”*

So, when the light of life came, the idea of a heavy yoke of slavery was shattered. Jesus said, *“My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Now look at Isaiah 9:6, *“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.”*

The phrase *“to us”* means *“for us”* or *“for our benefit”* and the emphasis was on the child. The baby was given for our benefit.

This verse sets forth the indescribable uniqueness of Jesus. Notice that both His humanity and deity was described. We see both, the attributes of God and the characteristics of man.

“For to us a child is born,” describes His birth as a baby. *“To us a son is given,”* refers to Jesus, God’s Son given as a gift. The child was birthed in Bethlehem and the gift of the eternal Son was given to us.

On top of that, the phrase the *“government will be upon His shoulders”* meant that all the expectations of the throne of King David would be fulfilled in Christ.

That baby bundled in the straw held the universe together. The one nestled on Mary’s shoulders, carried everything on His shoulders. He is Redeemer and Ruler of all.

Part of the reason we’re not amazed by the incarnation and bored with the baby is because we focus only on the infant Jesus.

He’s far more than just an infant. This is seen in his four-fold titles. The phrase, *“and He will be called”* really means *“He will justly bear this name...”*

- He is Profound – *“Wonderful Counselor.”*
- He is Powerful – *“Mighty God.”*
- He is Personal – *“Everlasting Father.”*
- He is Peaceful – *“Prince of Peace.”*

It’s amazing that Isaiah not only knew Immanuel would be born to a virgin as a sure sign; but he also understood that He would be the sent Son.

This should remind us of what Gabriel said to Mary in Luke 1:32: *“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”*

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Next, turn to Isaiah 11:1-2a, *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him...”*

During stormageddon this year, many trees were affected by all the ice and freezing temperatures. Many had to be cut back or down. I wondered how many would make it.

In Isaiah's day it felt hopeless because it seemed like the only thing left were stumps. The northern kingdom had been destroyed and things were looking bleak for the south.

But wait. Isaiah said a shoot would come from the stump of Jesse. Jesse was the father of King David and it's through his line that our Savior would come to the world.

Luke 2:4: *"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David."*

Jesus is described in Revelation 5:5b as *"the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David."* This shoot would become a Branch that would bear fruit from the root of David.

Once again Isaiah uses a play on words. The word "branch" in Hebrew means *"nezer."* What's fascinating about that is that Jesus spent a lot of time in Nazareth.

Notice also that *"the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him."* Isaiah's not only able to catch a vision of the Savior as a shoot, he could see a time when peace would prevail.

This is a preview of the angels' proclamation to the shepherds in Luke 2:14: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

Isaiah fleshes this out in a series of amazing contrasts to show that during His Second Advent, Jesus will usher in a time of protracted peace.

Isaiah 11:6, *"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them."*

We tend to count the shopping days until Christmas; what we should be doing is counting the days until Christ returns in glory and power so that we'll be ready for His return.

Isaiah gave a sure sign, he pointed to the sent Son, he tied the Messiah to David's throne as the shoot from a stump, and finally Isaiah describes Him a suffering Savior.

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Conclusion

There's an amazing number of pinpoint prophecies in Isaiah 53 that describe the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. Verses 3-5 are three of these.

Isaiah 53:3-5, "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Jesus came so, that by suffering and ultimately sacrificing Himself as our substitute, we could be saved from our sins.

This purpose is stated from the very beginning of the Nativity account in Matthew 1:21, *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

A man from China, who was converted to Christianity, told this story: *A man fell into a dark, slimy pit. He tried to climb out of the pit, but he couldn't.*

Confucius came along, saw the man and said, "Poor fellow, had he listened to me, he never would have gotten there," and he went on.

Buddha came along and saw the man in the pit and said, "Poor fellow, if he'll come up here, I'll help him," and he too kept on walking.

Then Jesus Christ came along and said, "Poor fellow." And then he jumped down into the pit and lifted him out.

I've often wondered what Isaiah knew about Immanuel. Ministering seven centuries before Christmas, how could he be so specific?

- Jesus is a sure sign
- Jesus is the sent Son
- Jesus is the shoot from a stump
- Jesus is the suffering Savior

Isaiah wrote about the future, but his words seem to indicate that he saw the Savior with his own eyes. John believed this. John 12:41, *"Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him."*

Jesus came not only to be born in this world but to be born in us. Are you ready to receive the Christ of Christmas?

Isaiah's promises about Christ gives us hope and when they're fulfilled in us, they bring peace. But like a present, Jesus must be received.

I love the words in Isaiah 65:1-2, *"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me...all day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations."*

Let's not let the commercialism of the season cause us to miss the meaning behind Christmas.

Isaiah 1:18b gives a promise that the Christ of Christmas brings to all:
*“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool.”*