

The Coming of the Savior: The Birth of a King

Our Old Testament Scripture is **Isaiah 11:1-9**. Isaiah spoke in this age of darkness a message of hope, hope that was centered in the birth of a king, Immanuel, who would be the greatest king in Israel's history. In fact, this king would be the anointed Messiah King, far surpassing the Davidic ideal.

Follow as I read

- 11** *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*
- ² *The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*
- ³ *His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;*
- ⁴ *but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*
- ⁵ *Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*
- ⁶ *The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*
- ⁷ *The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*
- ⁸ *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*
- ⁹ *They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*

Israel and Judah, the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, were monarchies that had seen much better days. Since the time of the prophet Samuel, the people of Israel had wanted their own king, if only to be like the surrounding nations. Their motive grieved Samuel, who told them they should have regarded the Lord as their only king. Yet, it was within the plan of God that they should establish a monarchy that would be the line of succession leading to the Messiah King (1 Samuel 8). About a thousand years before Christ, Saul was anointed as Israel's first king, but his rule was marred by his petty jealousy of young David, who had become Israel's military champion, and later was to replace Saul as king. David, though far from sinlessly perfect, nevertheless became Israel's ideal king. His son Solomon reigned over Israel at the height of its power and glory. And following Solomon, because of the foolish immaturity of his son Rehoboam, the kingdom was divided between

Israel to the north, led by Jeroboam I and Judah to the south, ruled by Rehoboam. Both Israel and Judah had successive kings, some good and many bad. And by the time of Isaiah, both the northern and southern kingdoms were facing judgment. God was about to punish Israel with captivity by the Assyrians, and later the Babylonians, who were to defeat the Assyrians, would overthrow Judah, destroy the temple and city, and lead the people into exile.

In the context of the breakdown of the kingship and kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah about the coming of a perfect king and his perfect kingdom, the Kingdom of God, led by Messiah, the ideal David-like king. The people of Isaiah's time were ready to hear a word of hope. The pessimism that hung over Israel in the time of Isaiah is not unlike the pessimism of our day, having gone through the periods of optimistic humanism and scientific idealism. Like ours, Isaiah's age of the 8th Century BC was one of disappointment in kings, rulers and governments. Yet, the people failed to understand that their problem was not one of administrative breakdown in government, but rather one of sin. Israel had forsaken their God. And their kings had failed miserably. Isaiah looked beyond quick fixes for their national and international problems. He saw that their core problems and needs would be finally and fully met through a king, the ideal king, of a character and leadership that would even surpass that of the greatest king they had ever known—King David.

Advent is a celebration of a kingdom, the Kingdom of God. The Messiah King would not only reproduce the Davidic ideal, but would far surpass David in character, reign and influence. The message of the prophet is that Israel's enemy nations will die off, but Israel is representative of God's chosen, everlasting nation. In contrast to the enemy nation, Israel will be like an oak tree. It was to be felled, and then carried into exile, as happened in 722 for Israel and in 587 with Judah. Yet, out of the Davidic line of Jesse, which we see in Matthew's (1:1-17) and Luke's (3:23-37) genealogies, a shoot would come forth, and his kingdom would be Israel's greatest, and he would be Israel's perfect king.

Messiah would be an eternal and anointed king. He would be anointed as David was anointed, yet as the perfect king he would be anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, making him perfect and complete in wisdom, counsel and holiness. And his reign would be one of perfect justice. His reign would be the expression of his character. This ideal ruler we acknowledge as Jesus of Nazareth, born of lowly birth, yet revealed as the eternal Son of God, born of the house and line of David (Luke 2:4).

All of us can think of tyrants in the world today, whose evil character naturally gives rise to tyrannical and ruthless rule. Probably the most efficient form of government known to mankind is an absolute monarchy, where decisions are made quickly and authoritatively by one leader with absolute power. But, in our fallen world, this is a dangerous and usually fatal proposition, as we can see in the situation in North Korea. As is said, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. History is a faithful witness to this, as are current

affairs in nations ruled by tyrants, who refuse to share or relinquish their strangle-hold on nations.

No doubt as the people heard Isaiah's words about the perfect ruler, they wondered about such an unlikely possibility, in the light of their experiences under the thumb of wicked, incompetent King Ahaz. But our King Jesus showed us what is life lived in the fear of the Lord, and with perfect wisdom, understanding, counsel and power (2). Such a king is worthy of the trust and submission of his subjects. Even in a generation distrustful of national and political leadership, you and I can give obeisance to a king like that, knowing he loves us, knows what is eternally best for us, and has the power and authority to bring it about. Our King is the king of suffering love.

Jesus, whose birth we celebrate, is the perfect king with a perfect reign. He reigns with insight, and not merely by sight. People can deceive others about our goodness, and can conceal motives and thoughts behind actions. Yet God looks deep down into the human heart and sees our deception and hidden wickedness (1 Samuel 16:7). Yet the glorious Good News is that the Messiah confers his righteousness to us. His atoning death on the Cross made possible our forgiveness, when we repent and receive him as Lord and Savior. God declares us "in the right" when we submit to him.

A young lady stood before the judge for an auto speeding violation. She was caught and photographed by a radar camera, traveling 50 mph in a 30 mph restricted zone. The evidence is right before her and the judge's eyes and the fine imposed is beyond what she could possibly pay. The judge says the fine, however, must be paid. Then the judge arises from his bench, and walks down beside the girl, reaches into his wallet and takes out the \$ 200.00 required by law, and hands the money to his young lady, who happens to be his beloved, if careless and penniless, daughter.

This is a picture of the undeserved grace of God, who loves us as his children, and yet the penalty is paid for us. Justice is served. And our Father, Judge, and King, is also our Advocate, and our penalty payer. God is both the just one and the justifier of "those who have faith in (King) Jesus" (Romans 3:26, NIV).

Our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, is the sovereign ruler of the universe, who through his cross broke the power of Satan and his strangle-hold upon the world. He is sovereign over our lives and circumstances, including our enemies and The Enemy, Satan himself. As Creator of the entire universe, God could have devised victory through overwhelming power. But he chose to win our hearts through his loving sacrifice and self-giving. And we share in his reign through our submission to a similar way of the cross. And through the cross there is victory and peace, in life and in death.

This Advent, we can and must submit to his reign and joyfully participate in the realm of his kingdom (6-9), a being redeemed and to-be-transformed universe. The kingdom of God is an earthly realm. Jesus came proclaiming the availability of his kingdom to all people, not just to those in a privileged

religious tradition. In Jesus the kingdom of God became present and accessible (Mark 1:14-15). Through faith in Jesus we are delivered from Satan's kingdom into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus. And by our entrance into his kingdom we indeed experience the joy of his kingdom reign, the joy of his presence and his purpose for our lives. And, whatever the circumstances of our lives, we may find his peace and joy in the real world in which we live, the world of everyday people and circumstances, the world of work, family, school and relationships.

Jesus taught us to live, think and pray with the kingdom of God in view. We are to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). And the rest of the Lord's Prayer shows us that to be in the kingdom of God is to know that Jesus cares about the material, and about our living environment, and what kind of social and political decisions are being made. Faith is not just an emotion, but an active following of Jesus in all the areas and decisions of our lives, realizing that Jesus is there too. And all our lives we are in the throes of having to decide, as did Jesus when tempted by Satan with the fallen kingdom of this world, which kingdom we will serve—Satan's or God's.

To pray "Your kingdom come," is to thrust us into the arena of conflict, with King Jesus pitted against this fallen world as Satan's domain. The fallen world is threatened by Jesus' reign, so don't be surprised when you follow Jesus and represent his truth and his values if the world either shuns you or opposes you. Those who are living by heavenly kingdom values of love, mercy and sacrifice are pitted against the kingdom of darkness.

We are part of the heavenly kingdom, yet, ironically, the kingdom of heaven makes a radical difference in the way we live here on earth. And Jesus is keenly interested in the way we live and in what goes on in the every detail of our lives. As is said, "the devil is in the details," and yet Jesus is concerned about those details. The kingdom is a very invasive thing. We like our privacy, and we don't want governments getting too snoopy in our lives, even if some relinquishing of our privacy rights is required for security reasons. But the kingdom of God is invasive and our King gets quite personal with us. He is there beside us, and behind, and even within us. If you want a kingdom that leaves you alone to your ease and privacy and is a kingdom you can activate only in case of emergency, then the kingdom of God isn't for you.

Even in this fallen world, Jesus reigns. He rules in the human heart. But also his kingdom is an extensive realm. His kingdom extends from shore to shore. And his kingdom though coming by way of the "weak power of the cross," transforms lives and even changes human relationships, society and governments. No hall of government can shut out the rule and realm of Christ's influence and lordship.

The picture our text gives us is of a world at peace with itself, totally redeemed and reconciled. And the borders between man and nature, the carnivorous and herbivorous beasts, are all erased. Children, infants, lions, bears, calves and poisonous snakes all "hang out" together in peace. The

kingdom of God even now knows no borders between people and groups, races, and cultural distinctions. Jesus' kingdom is for the poor, the misfits, the unsuccessful of the world.

Even now, those who submit to Jesus' reign experience joy and peace, and become instruments of peace in rectifying an unjust society, and influence the fallen world for the good of the kingdom of God. The direction that God's realm is heading is toward the perfection of his reign on earth, the new heaven and new earth.

Our text tells us that "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (verse 9). God's kingdom is advancing until all his people are gathered in, when there will be representatives of every tribe, language, people and nation, worshiping Jesus around the throne (Revelation 5:9). And you and I, as well as this church, are privileged to be a part of God's work in bringing his kingdom to its full growth, for his glory.

To be part of this kingdom growth is to walk with Jesus in the weak power of the cross, and to let him love and shine through us, as we relate to others and communicate with them the message of God's love. There will be with us in the kingdom's heavenly fellowship many others whom we might now be tempted to shun or simply avoid as suspect or even society's dangerous element. But, believe it or not, King Jesus is drawing such people to himself. We too have come into this strange yet almighty, new kingdom. And we can be involved with God, as we reach out to fellow foreigners, refugees and the weak, powerless, confused, rebellious and lost, with the life-changing message of King Jesus.