

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5 NIV

Subject: Isaiah's vision of the establishment of God's Kingdom, God's rule and God's peace upon earth.

Theme: *There will only be peace on earth when we accept God's sacrifice of peace in our hearts: Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who makes peace between God and us!*

Introduction

"Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me" we sing. We mean it, but there is a melancholy feeling as we sing because peace in our world seems an illusory dream. We can't help but think of what the angels announced to the shepherds:

... "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and **on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!**" (Luke 2:9-14 ESV)

Maybe there is no peace on earth, because God isn't pleased with us? Ever think about that? And of course, it is true: we live in a world of war and bloodshed and envy and hate because we rebelled against God, and we decided to do our "own thing." God is never pleased with pride or sin, which is in fact rebellion against God. Scripture reminds us, in fact that we have ALL rebelled, all sinned against God. Romans 3:23 says: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Romans 3:23 NIV) but we need to go on to the next verse as well: "... and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24 NIV). So, no, God isn't pleased with us, but He loved us enough to send His Son to earth to die for us, that we might in fact obtain this peace of which the angels sang.

Isaiah was given a vision of peace, a vision of God enthroned, a vision of the future, and reading it, it still seems so distant and future and 'unreal.' Can there be peace on earth; will there be? Just what did Isaiah see in this vision?

1. Isaiah saw the establishment of God's Kingdom

"*This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days...*" (2:1-2a). Last week, I mentioned that Isaiah uses the phrase "in that day" 42 times, and while this term is related, it is quite different. It is obviously a term looking ahead, but how far?

The Bible teaches that this is the era following Christ's resurrection, the Church age, the last era of time before Christ's return. The book of Acts which records the beginning of the Church age opens with the disciples huddled together waiting for God to send His Spirit, and this he did on Pentecost. Peter then preached the very first Christian sermon, and he quoted the prophet Joel who said, "*In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...*" (Acts 2:17), and so Peter was clearly indicating that 'those days', *the last days*, had come in fulfillment of the prophets' word.

Then in Hebrews we read: “*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...*” (Heb 1:1-2). These are the last days according to what our Bible tells us. And what does Isaiah foresee happening in these ‘last days’?

“*In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills...*” (2:2). Some interpret this as some apocalyptic event where perhaps the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. But we must put our minds into the mind of the Jew who heard this in his time. What would he perceive?

In Isaiah’s day the chief mountain was not Mount Moriah, or as we know it, Mount Zion, it was Sinai, for it was Sinai where Moses went up and met with God amidst the thunder and smoke, and received the Law. But here’s the thing: geographically speaking, Mount Zion is not much of a mountain. It is a *hill* among some other taller hills that could be called mountains. One commentator put it this way: “*Zion... which in Isaiah’s day was by no means a great and imposing mountain, would in the latter days take first rank among all mountains.*”¹

Mountains played an important role in the religions of those times. It was on the mountain that heaven and earth came together in the primitive mind. It was thought that the gods could be reached on mountain tops. That’s why altars and temples are built on mountain tops.

What Isaiah saw was “the mountain of the Lord’s temple” become more prominent, more *important* than all other places of worship. Why? How? Says one writer: “...the majestic glory of God comes to dwell on his throne,”² and so Yahweh becomes the focal point of everyone’s attention in the world. Does the mountain literally rise? No, but it becomes chief among the mountains because God is enthroned there.

“...and all nations will stream to it” (v. 2). Here we find another oxymoron: a stream that runs uphill! This is the picture the prophet paints for us: people from every tribe and nation will flow in a never-ending stream to where Yahweh is. They will be joined into one throng of people, a people of God. When will this happen? Or has it happened already?

Who was gathered that day when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in Jerusalem? “*Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia...*” (Acts 2:9). That’s a good chunk of the known world. They were there to celebrate the Passover, having come from all parts of the world, and they witnessed the shift from Sinai to Zion as the Mountain because Jesus came to Zion, and taught in Zion, and died for us in Zion! And because of that, Mount Zion is now the chief, the most important of all mountains. But again, that was only the beginning, a foretaste of that day when *literally* the whole world shall flock to Zion to worship Him in truth. What did Isaiah see?

1 Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 1, Chapters 1-18* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 101.

2 E. Ray Clendenen, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39* (B & H Publishing Group, 2007), p. 130.

2. Isaiah saw a world-wide pilgrimage

“Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob” (2:3).

What is it about Mount Zion that was so radically different from Mount Sinai? Why would people stream to Zion? Hebrews tells us:

“You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words, so that those who heard it begged no further words be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: ‘If even an animal touches the mountain it must be stoned.’ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I am trembling with fear’” (12:18-21).

This was Mount Sinai, the unapproachable, untouchable mountain where God was, where the Law was given. But whatever you do, don’t touch the mountain, don’t even go near! While God was there only Moses could go up and talk to God. God’s glory was there, but instead of drawing people, it frightened them away! But that has all changed! Again, Hebrews:

“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb. 12:22-24).

This is what has changed and *this is what Isaiah saw*. Coming to the Mountain of the LORD is no longer something to be feared or avoided. We are no longer repelled by His awesome power and might, but rather drawn to the tender picture of His love for us in Christ, and we now can come to God without fear. Does He not bid us come?

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28 NIV)

... He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Mark 10:14 NIV)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (John 6:37 NIV)

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths” (2:3). One commentator writes:

It is the opportunity to attend the best and latest seminar that anyone can imagine! The God of Israel will be the main speaker and he will teach those who accept his ways and follow his truth. Isaiah does not reveal the detailed contents of what God will say, but part of his instruction will be to explain his “law...” (*tôrâ*). This Hebrew root points to God’s will for mankind ...³

The world will be drawn to God’s presence, but then something flows out from His mountain as well: *“The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (2:3).* I cannot help but think of the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in power to proclaim the Gospel in unknown languages. And all those who were saved and changed went back to their countries and told others of Jesus. And now, as then, we are commanded and

3 E. Ray Clendenen, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39* (B & H Publishing Group, 2007), p. 130.

empowered to do the same: "... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In a spiritual sense, God has brought us all near to Him (Eph. 2:12-14), and having received His Spirit he commands that we go and teach the world of His love and sacrifice. This is how it starts; it begins with us, one soul at a time, one life at a time reconciled to God. And every time we gather together as His Body we look forward to the future, to the day when He returns and literally fulfills Isaiah's vision. As John writes:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (Revelation 21:1-3 NIV)

John saw what Isaiah saw, the glory of the LORD in the presence of his people.

3. Isaiah saw universal Peace

What did Isaiah see? He saw that in these last days the Word of God would go forth and produce real peace. "*He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore*" (2:4).

Some Christian interpreters take this to describe the effect on the nations as their citizens and leaders submit to the rule of Christ; others understand this to point forward to an earthly reign of Christ in the millennium (see note on Rev. 20:1-6); still others see it as a prediction of Christ's reign in the new heavens and new earth. In any case, people of all ages have taken these words to express their longings for freedom from war, when the nations seek to follow the "ways" of "the God of Jacob" (Isa. 2:3) and when no mere human authority but the Lord Jesus himself shall judge **between the nations**.⁴

Christ has already begun the process of making peace between the nations. These words are both "now" and "not yet," just as our salvation is "now" but "not yet." Today people from virtually every tribe and tongue, even those who are sworn enemies gather at the foot of the cross to worship Jesus, but the final fulfillment, the ultimate reality of the whole world submitting to His law and worshipping Him in Zion awaits a future day.

Isaiah's vision of universal peace can only become a reality when the nations are willing to submit to the Word of God, but this will happen one soul at a time. And so the words "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me..." contain the truth of it. Isaiah foreshadowed what Jesus taught:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (Jn 14:27). "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

⁴ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), p. 1244.

These are the latter days, and His peace has come; but not all is yet at peace. *We can have peace with God through Christ*, but as of yet, the world as a whole does not know that peace that only Christ and His Gospel can give. That is why we are commanded and empowered to tell the world of what He has done, that we can be at peace with God and each other:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, (Ephesians 2:13–14 NIV)

Edward Young writes:

The peace herein described is not one which can be obtained by ... pacifism, nor, for that matter, by any human efforts. Man unaided cannot establish on this earth a condition of peace. Only God can bring peace. The fulfillment of [this] prophecy began with the angels' "peace on earth," and more specifically with the ...preaching of the gospel. ...what is [being] described is the "blessed result" of the preaching of the gospel, peace on earth through the common faith in God the Lord.⁵

Conclusion⁶

Peace is not an end to trouble. Peace is not a treaty that politicians hammer out at the point of a gun. Peace is not a good feeling because your little world is "perfect". Peace is this:

"... since we have been justified through faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**, through whom we have gained access by faith into this **grace** in which we now stand. And we rejoice in **the hope of the glory of God**. ... And **hope does not disappoint us**, because God has **poured out his love** into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom 5:1-5).

Two hundred thousand spears and chariots faced the walls of Jerusalem. But Isaiah knew peace. Cancer can ravage your body, but you can *know* peace. You can be wracked with pain, overwhelmed by disappointment, and yet *know* this peace. You can sit up at night and worry about your children or your finances or your future...or you can know "the peace that passes understanding" (Php 4:7) that can only come from a relationship with Jesus Christ.

This is what Isaiah saw; this is his vision of Mount Zion. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Isaiah. And although it is only begun now, one day it will be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus; violence and bloodshed will be gone. No one will train for war anymore. The entire world will know peace, and the Prince of Peace will rule sovereignly over all. But it all starts *here*, and *now*. Isaiah foretold it, and saw it, but only you can receive it and live it and share it.

Is there peace in your heart? Have you accepted what Christ has done for you? Or are you still 'at war' with God? Is there peace in your life? Are you holding on to things, attitudes, lack of forgiveness that are preventing you from *knowing* peace? Let's give Jesus the last word:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27 NIV)

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33 NIV)

5 Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 1, Chapters 1-18* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 108.

6 Based on a sermon by Darryl Klassen. See http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=114095