



Isaiah 55:1-7
The Real Gifts of Christmas
“Love”

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This morning we continue in our Advent series where we are looking at not only the four Advent themes of hope, joy, love, and peace, but also looking at some passages in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah is the second most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament, with the Psalms being first. As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, Isaiah is written during a dark time in the nation of Israel. The northern portion of the country has been overtaken by the Assyrians, and the economic, governmental, cultural, and religious leaders of the nation and their families, have been exiled from Israel and taken to various Assyrian cities, while Assyrian leadership would come in their place. So, Israel is exiled, and there's a sense of being scattered and dispersed, as well. It's a dark season, that gets only darker with the southern kingdom eventually conquered as well.

Now, as you may know, Biblical prophecy is not all about future doom and gloom. In fact, the prophet's hope is that the doom and gloom *doesn't* happen, because the people would heed the word of the prophets and get back to who God has called them to be. **Much of Biblical prophecy is a call to repentance, to returning to God and his ways, so that the prophesied events actually would not happen.**

But in the event that they don't repent, and don't get back to walking with God, the various prophets, and Isaiah specifically as we see this morning, not only give them a warning of what will happen, but there is also a word of hope that on the other side of exile that there will eventually be a way forward. They may suffer through exile and a really difficult season, but that doesn't mean there's no hope for them. There is, even if it comes to fruition a few generations down the line.

And Isaiah 49-55 is a section that is about that future hope, this good news. What we see is that it is rooted in what God is going to do, because of God's love for Israel. So, today's reading is from chapter 55, but it's the last chapter in a seven chapter stretch that is all about how God is going to eventually redeem his people, and for this redemption to extend to the world.

And what we see in these chapters is that the redemption of Israel and other is going to be God's doing, through his anointed servant, through a person who will be filled by God's Spirit. It's very similar to the Messianic king written of in chapters 7-11 earlier on, who is called Emmanuel ("God With Us") as well as Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and other titles. We read about some of those a couple weeks ago.

Then we get more about this coming person whom God will provide, who God will give, in chapter 49-55. For instance in 49:6, we read, [The Lord says...]

**"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob [Israel]
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.**

**I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).**

So, this is the scope of the mission for this servant: for salvation, or redemption we could call it...bringing people into relationship with God...for that salvation to extend not just to Israel, but to the ends of the earth. That's a big mission. That was Israel's mission previously, to be a light to the nations, but they failed at it. That's a big reason they end up in exile: they wandered off from the call that was upon their lives. So, here, God is saying that their part, their role of being a light to the nations, is going to be taken care of by this servant whom he is giving.

But Isaiah also says that the way this will be accomplished is through the death of this servant. Here's what we read in Isaiah 53, for instance, and remember, don't get thrown by the verb tense; Biblical prophecy is frequently in the past tense, even though it's about a future event; it's a reminder that it is sure and certain to happen: **Sermon Title Slide**

³ 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.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ 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.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished

⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

¹¹ After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Spoiler alert: Jesus fulfills this! But this is written more than 700 years before he was born. With that time-gap in mind, all of this is stunning...and perhaps verses 10 and 11 are especially so: **“Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin...After he has suffered, he will see the light of life....” (Isaiah 53:10-11)**. The death and resurrection of Jesus is foretold of right here. Making his life an offering for sin is speaking of his death. Sin offerings meant the death of an animal as a sacrifice. That’s what this servant of the Lord is going to fulfill. Verse 12 reiterates it, saying that his life was poured out unto death, bearing the sins of many. But verse 11 then says he will see the light of life. There’s going to be something more...new life.

So, why does God do this? Why would God send a servant, anointed by and filled with the Holy Spirit, to die in order to redeem his people who have been so wayward, and to be a light to the nations, the light of the world, to bring people into relationship with God when they have abandoned and rejected him? Why would God do this? We get the answer in 54:10, **“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,’ says the Lord, who has compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:10)**.

God’s love is the answer, and his love is unfailing. It’s unshakable. And his love is most centered on the part of creation that is created in his image: people, including you and me. Notice it says “my covenant of peace” will not be removed. See, the Israelites had failed in their part of the covenant. You and I drop the ball in our walk with God all the time, much as the Israelites did. But God persists with this covenant. And what we see in all these verses is that in the end, he even fulfills our part of it, because we simply cannot. Israel keeps falling short. We keep falling short. God covers over our shortcomings, by fulfilling both sides of the covenant. (We’ll come back to this covenant thing in a few minutes, so hold onto that.)

That brings us to chapter 55, and today's actual Scripture passage. We're finally getting to it after a 15-minute introduction to the sermon, meaning the rest of the sermon will take us up until the Seahawks kicks off tomorrow night. ☺ So, let's read **Isaiah 55:1-7** and we will wrap this all up in just a few minutes.

So, the invitation here in the first couple verses is to come and be satisfied with food that doesn't cost anything – even those with no money can get it. **God is an equal opportunity giver of his love and his salvation, and you can partake of what he has to offer no matter who you are.** In fact, if we try and quench our thirst through financial means or any other way, it only leaves us wanting more. It doesn't satisfy. Why spend money on what is not bread and labor for what does not satisfy? In other words, God gives us what satisfies, what we really need deep down inside, and anything else is a fake and a fraud that won't satisfy whatsoever.

Then we read in verse 3 that the fulfillment of this covenant through the giving of this messiah and savior is going to be in the lineage of David, and God's love is for him. Again, we see this theme of love crop up. David was Israel's second king (250+ years earlier, which might confuse us why he's mentioned here), and all the kings who came after were in his lineage. The coming Messiah, this savior king spoken of here, was to be in David's lineage as well. This is part of the reason that by the time you get to Jesus' day, they envisioned the Messiah as an earthly ruler who would set Israel free in an earthly way, because of this connection to King David.

But "David" is used here in sort of a symbolic way here as well, to speak of the people under this coming person's kingship and lordship. The love promised to David that's spoken of here in verse 3 is therefore also a love for all people under David's kingship, and under the kingship of those kings who follow after him...all the way down to this coming Messiah King this passage speaks of. God's love is for them, and therefore now us; God's covenant is with them, and now us. This one whom God will give because of his love, is given as a light to the nations, not just Israel. He is given to draw all people into relationship with God their creator.

And then today's passage ends with one of two possible responses to God's activity: that people will come running to this savior. The other response – not given here, but is elsewhere – is that some people don't. They continue in ways of sin such as injustice, greed, pride, and more. But many will turn from their sin and come running to him. What he offers is so satisfying, that it attracts people far and wide – not just from Israel, but from the rest of the world.

And: What we see in the life of Jesus is that he fulfills the prophetic words here in Isaiah about this one who would be given by God.

Everything written that we've looked at today, let alone other things written about him in other parts of Isaiah or the rest of the Old Testament, are fulfilled in him. He is in the lineage of David; he is the bread we hunger for, he is the water we thirst for, he didn't open his mouth in defense of himself but went to the cross obediently, he is the once for all sacrifice whose body was broken, his side was pierced, he had a grave among the wicked – among sinners – but also with the rich (Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, Mt. 27:57), and he was raised back to see the light of life. And it all happened because of God's love.

So, one of the things we celebrate in Advent is the love that God has for us. As I thought about this, this week, it occurred to me that the other three things we celebrate in Advent are quite different than love. **Hope, joy, and peace are what *we have*, because of Jesus: we have hope (for the future/eternity), we have joy (in the present), and we have peace (with God). But love is what God has for you and me. *You are loved.*** Your creator loves you. He loves you so much that he gave his one and only son, Jesus, to fulfill our side of the covenant that he wants to make with each of us. (Yes, we are to love as well – God, and our neighbor – but that, too, stems from being first loved by God.)

Question (don't raise your hand or answer out loud): For those of you who are married (or maybe some other relationship where this might apply), do any of you buy your own gifts, then give them to your spouse to wrap and put under the tree? In my men's Bible study group this last Friday, four out of six

of us were there, and all four of us admitted that happened in our marriages. In particular, our wives buy their own gifts (maybe not all of them, but a couple), and give them to us to wrap and put under the tree, or in their stockings. We might laugh...but it's Godly! ☺ They are fulfilling both sides of the Christmas gift covenant. God does the same thing with us.

God has taken care of the effects of our waywardness, our sin, by giving Jesus – not just in his birth, but in his death – and fulfilling everything needed for us to be in right relationship with him. **That gift becomes ours when we turn from sin and trust in Jesus.** And then the call upon our lives is to live for him each day. It's not in obligation to fulfilling a covenant, but out of gratitude for what God has done on our behalf. We are called to live as disciples of Jesus where we live, work, and play, so that others might see him in us...so we might stand out – positively – from the world because of the Spirit that lives in us through faith in Jesus...so the light of the world would shine through us. That's our response.

And God has done this and made this possible because of his great love for you and me. As we noted from the passage earlier, this gift that God gives can't be purchased by any of us. We live in a culture that's used to buying our way out of problems. No amount of money can spiritually save us, however. You can't buy a right relationship with God. God makes that relationship possible by giving his one and only son, Jesus. And there's one motivating factor for why he's done this: He. Loves. You. You are loved by God your heavenly father and creator. I hope this Christmas you will receive that love, this gift that he gives, because Jesus is the true bread and true wine from heaven, and the only gift that truly satisfies. Let's pray...Amen.