

What Are We Waiting For?

Isaiah 11: 1-10

Advent 2011

Each year at advent we share something with those who have preceded us in faith. I'm thinking particularly of those in the last three millennia who have had an active faith in the God of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebecca. What we have in common with them is that we wait for the advent of the one promised. We wait for God our Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord to appear.

Those who have preceded us in faith three and two millennia ago waited for Christ's advent. He came. One of the definitions for advent is an arrival in this world. For over two millennia we have celebrated Christ's arrival in this world at Christmas though it is several months after the month in which he took on flesh.

We also celebrate what Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection. Each month in communion and every Easter we proclaim his death and resurrection as the central realities of our faith. But we still wait for his advent. A second meaning of the word advent is "coming to his place as sovereign". We wait for Christ's coming to take his rightful place as sovereign in a new heaven and new earth.

The question we ask today is "What are we waiting for? What are we waiting for on this side of his first advent?" To formulate something of an answer to that question we turn to one of the most important books of the Old covenant writings—the book of Isaiah.

I'm going to read for you a short section of Isaiah 11. While I do I would like you to study a painting by Edward Hicks.

Edward Hicks was born in Pennsylvania in 1780. His mother died when he was 18 months old and a close friend raised Hicks as her own child. At the age of 13 Hicks began an apprenticeship in the craft of coach painting. At age 21 he started his own business and would later write of himself that at this age he was "in my own estimation a weak, wayward young man ... exceedingly fond of singing, dancing, vain amusements, and the company of young people, and too often profanely swearing".

Dissatisfied with himself Hicks spent the next decade becoming a Christian through the Society of Friends which we know as the Quakers. To support his growing family he expanded his painting trade even though it upset the plain life beliefs of the Quakers.

Eventually Hicks used his art to express his faith. He painted more than one hundred Peaceable Kingdoms, with 61 variations all on the text of Isaiah 11. In this particular one the background scene shows William Penn's treaty with the Indians, interpreting that Quaker effort as an expression of Isaiah 11—a new era of a peaceable kingdom on earth.

Take in the painting and the faith it represents as you listen to the text:



Isaiah 11: 1-11

Peace at Last

*Like a branch that sprouts from a stump,
Someone from David's family will someday be king.
The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him,
The Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength,
The Spirit that instills knowledge of God and awe.
His greatest joy will be to obey the LORD.*

*This king won't judge by appearances or listen to rumours.
The poor and the needy will be treated with fairness and with justice.*

*His words will bring everyone to awed attention.
A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.*

*Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots,
and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.*

A living knowledge of God

Leopards will lie down with young goats, and wolves will rest with lambs.

Calves and lions will eat together and be cared for by little children.

Cows and bears will share the same pasture; their young will rest side by side.

Lions and oxen will both eat straw.

*Little children will play near snake holes. They will stick their hands into dens of
poisonous snakes and never be hurt.*

Nothing harmful will take place on the LORD's holy mountain.

*Just as water fills the sea, the land will be filled with people who know and
honour the LORD.*

God's People Will Come Back Home

*10 The time is coming when one of David's descendants will be the signal for the
people of all nations to come to him. They will follow his advice, and this place of
rest will be glorious. ¹¹Also on that day, the Master for the second time will reach
out to bring back what's left of his scattered people. He'll bring them back from
Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Sinar, Hamath, and the islands of the
Mediterranean.*

Our advent series, very much in keeping with the meaning of the word Advent, is titled: *What Are We Waiting For?* Even a casual reading of this text informs us that we wait for three things: a King; a Kingdom where adversaries live at peace; and a gathering of people of faith from every tribe and tongue. Three things we wait for at this advent; in our seemingly unstable world—a wise and just leader/sovereign; life without conflict and the flourishing of life that takes place when peace is the norm; a worship celebration that is truly diverse and will never again have ethnic, gender, political, or language homogeneity.

We wait, in faith, for this advent.

Let's look at the text a little more closely.

Isaiah is the greatest of the writing prophets. Along with Deuteronomy, the book of covenant and Genesis, the book of origins, Isaiah completes the trinity of the most important books of the Old covenant canon.

Barry Webb, head of the Old Testament studies at Moore Theological College in Australia says of writings of Isaiah—this is the Romans of the OT.

- *It is here that the big picture of God's purposes for his people and his world. It is here that we see the full dimensions of God's hatred of sin and God's desire to save his people and restore their relationship to him with a true king; a true kingdom; and an ingathering of God's soon to be scattered people.*
- *It is from Isaiah 40: 9-11 [in LXX] that we get the term gospel;*
- *Most importantly it is Isaiah bears witness to Jesus Christ:*
 - *At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Jesus accepted a scroll of Isaiah and read a description of the Messiah, thus accepting Isaiah's vision of the suffering-servant King as his ministry identity.*
- *Webb concludes—if we want to fully understand who Jesus is and what he came to do then reading Isaiah is a must.*

Once we set Isaiah's word in its historical context we can begin to see how powerful God's word through Isaiah was to his own day and to our waiting during this advent season.

Isaiah brought God's word to the southern kingdom of Judah during one of the darkest periods of their history (740-681 BC).

- Unprecedented political, military, economic, and social upheaval—meaning huge displacements of populations and shifts in national boundaries
- An enormous level disregard for the covenant and unfaithfulness

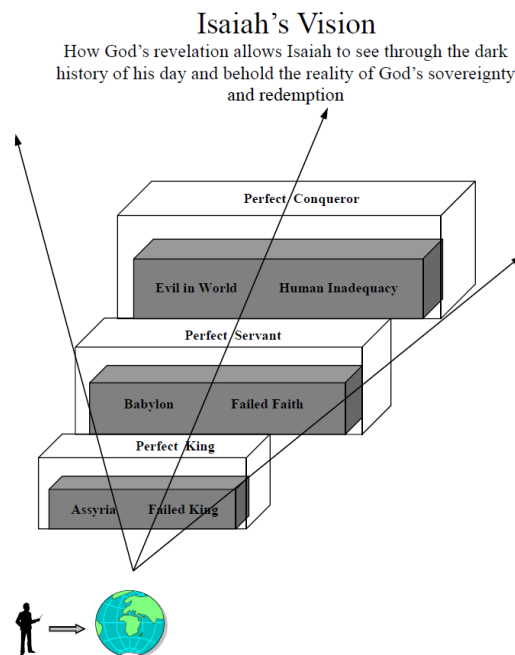
Assyria was the dominant world power at this time conquering ever nation that opposed it. As Assyria advanced to the west the kings of Israel and Syria pressured Judah to form a coalition against Assyria. Isaiah told king Ahaz of Judah that he was not to do this. God's word to him was – trust in God alone, not in coalitions. This time normally faithless King Ahaz listened.

Isaiah was alive when the Assyrians over ran the Northern kingdom of Israel and deported the majority of the ten tribes of Israel to countries which Assyria had defeated and who were in vassal to Assyria. Later when the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem, and things were getting desperate Isaiah gave the same message—trust in the Lord. Suddenly, world events changed and the Assyrians departed in a hurry leaving Jerusalem safe for another 114 years. The Book of Isaiah records this as a miracle of the Lord (Isa 37:36-38).

This wouldn't always be the case. Judah's kings abandoned trust in God and did make alliances and would be overrun by Assyria's replacement—the Babylonians. Part of Isaiah's prophetic word to them was envisioning not only the exile, but also the return allowed by Cyrus, who is mentioned by name in Isaiah, 150 years before he comes on the world stage—an indication that Isaiah was indeed a true prophet.

Before we look at the text of Isaiah 11, two more bits of context:

Here is the vision that God gave to Isaiah:



This is instructive as it gives us a way to wait for the advent we are promised. When the NT says that we have the first fruits of salvation—enough to know that it is real, but that we await the full measure of salvation—it gives us a way to wait in faith that is very

similar to the vision of Isaiah. [Explain seeing God beyond the dark spots]. I don't know if that gives you a way to live through the dark bits of our present age—but it does for me.

Next let's locate Isaiah 11 in the context of the book:

Isaiah 6: vision of Holy God-- Isaiah commissioned to ministry of judgement <i>Isaiah 1-39: The Book of Judgement</i>					Isaiah 40: vision of the Incomparable, Sovereign Creator--Isaiah commissioned to ministry of comfort <i>Isaiah 40-66: The Book of Comfort</i>								
1	12	13	27	28	35	36	39	40:1	51:11	51:12	55:13	56	66
Rebuke		Judgements		Woes		History		Deliverance		Salvation		Blessing	
<i>poetry</i>					<i>prose</i>			<i>poetry</i>					
The Assyrian Crisis						The Anticipated Babylonian Exile							
Jerusalem, 8th century BC						New Jerusalem, the City of God							

Critical Dates

Judah & Israel-- two separate kingdoms 922
Uzziah 783-740
Tiglath-pileser III, ruler of Assyria 745-727
Isaiah, prophet to Judah 740
Ahaz, king in Judah 735-715

Israel falls under Sargon II of Assyria 722
Hezekiah, king in Judah 715-687/6
Sennacherib invades 701, 688
Manasseh, King of Judah 687/6-642
Isaiah's death 681

Here you see that Isaiah 11 is in the book of judgment at the tail end of the rebukes. Isa 2-12 contains a collection of oracles mainly about Judah and Jerusalem, covering the threat from the Israel/Syria Coalition and the section ends with a psalm of deliverance. We don't have time to go into the particular history at this point, but a couple short sections will give you the flavor:

From Isaiah 1:

*"I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.*

³*The ox knows its master,
the donkey its owner's manger,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand."*

*...They have forsaken the LORD;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him.*

From Isaiah 2:

*You have abandoned your people,
the house of Jacob.
They are full of superstitions from the East;
they practice divination like the Philistines
and clasp hands with pagans.
⁷ Their land is full of silver and gold;
there is no end to their treasures.
Their land is full of horses;
there is no end to their chariots.
⁸ Their land is full of idols;
they bow down to the work of their hands,
to what their fingers have made.*

From Isaiah 10

*Woe to those who make unjust laws,
to those who issue oppressive decrees,
² to deprive the poor of their rights
and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people,
making widows their prey
and robbing the fatherless.*

Here is the judgment part—salvation of a remnant

*Though your people be like the sand by the sea, Israel,
only a remnant will return.*

Here is the deliverance part:

*“My people who live in Zion,
do not be afraid of the Assyrians,
who beat you with a rod
and lift up a club against you, as Egypt did.
²⁵ Very soon my anger against you will end
and my wrath will be directed to their destruction.”*

*³³ See, the Lord, the LORD Almighty,
will lop off the boughs with great power.
The lofty trees will be felled,
the tall ones will be brought low.*

³⁴ He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax;

So chapter 10 ends with the felling of two forests—Assyria and Judah. Assyria is felled never to grow again. Chapter 11 begins with the emergence of a shoot from the stump of Jesse the father of King David who is in the genealogical line of Jesus.

Like a branch that sprouts from a stump,

Someone from David's family will someday be king.

What kind of king would this sprout be? The Davidic dynasty proved to be more and more of a disappointment. As I mentioned earlier—Isaiah’s vision sees past the failures of the Davidic dynasty to a king who is fit to rule. These verses talk about what makes the coming king fit to rule.

*The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him,
The Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength,
The Spirit that instills knowledge of God and awe.
His greatest joy will be to obey the LORD.*

These verses describe what will characterize the coming king’s reign

*This king won't judge by appearances or listen to rumours.
The poor and the needy will be treated with fairness and with justice.
His words will bring everyone to awed attention.
A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.
Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots,
and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.*

This week in my pastoral appointments I tried to get across to those of you I saw that in spite of the dark times you are experiencing—Jesus views you and treats you differently. He does not judge by appearances. He does not listen to rumours about you. He will treat you with fairness and justice, and he will build righteousness and faithfulness into your life as you give him opportunity-- First fruits. That is Jesus first advent to us. We await the next advent for the fullness.

The next section of Isaiah 11 speaks of what will result from the king’s/Jesus rule. The title given by Eugene Peterson to this section in the Message, does say it all. The result of Jesus rule both now and in his next advent is a living knowledge of God—not a theoretical knowledge of God, not a second hand knowledge of God, but a living knowledge. The imagery here has all to do with adversaries in creation living in the presence of God/Jesus applying with he help of the Spirit the revelation or light or knowledge or insight of God:

the picture here is of creation put back into joint; of relationships existing by the peace of Christ which passes understanding; of all things reconciled and working the way God designed and intended for them.

A living knowledge of God

Leopards will lie down with young goats, and wolves will rest with lambs.
Calves and lions will eat together and be cared for by little children.
Cows and bears will share the same pasture; their young will rest side by side.
Lions and oxen will both eat straw.
Little children will play near snake holes. They will stick their hands into dens of poisonous snakes and never be hurt.
Nothing harmful will take place on the LORD's holy mountain.
Just as water fills the sea, the land will be filled with people who know and honour the LORD.

Notice that life flourishes when people know and honour God. No one is someone else's food. No more survival of the aggressive. No more death and destruction. When I read this I can hardly wait. I find this passage increases my longing for this kingdom. I know in my bones this is the way things ought to be. Every experience of the opposite in this world increases my longing for God's kingdom.

Lastly, we come to the envisioned end of time gathering—a vast assembly of people that includes all the inheritors of salvation including -- all the scattered people of God-- believing Jew and believing Gentile. Again Peterson's title for these verses captures the essence: God's people will come home.

God's People Will Come Back Home

10 The time is coming when one of David's descendants will be the signal for the people of all nations to come to him. They will follow his advice, and this place of rest will be glorious. ¹¹Also on that day, the Master for the second time will reach out to bring back what's left of his scattered people. He'll bring them back from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Sinar, Hamath, and the islands of the Mediterranean

This then is the advent for which we wait—a wise and just leader/sovereign; life without harm which flourishes with adversaries living peacefully; and a worship celebration that is

truly diverse and truly universal without and will never again have ethnic, gender, political, or language divisions.

I've noticed that there are different ways of waiting among us for example staring at a clock; sleeping on a bench; waiting for the skytrain. What might be the difference between just waiting and waiting in faith?

Waiting reminds us of our humanity; that there are so many things beyond our control. Waiting in this world we see so many things we can't fix and we are reminded of our need for outside help.

It is easy to wait in frustration and bitterness. There is no faith there. To wait in faith is to be faithful to the covenant—to love our neighbor. To act as if the kingdom is already here. Kudos to the Quakers making peace with the first nations. It doesn't matter that what history calls an experiment failed. They acted as if the coming kingdom was already here. And that is the point to waiting by faith.