

Joy to the World

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bibles and to our Bible reading for this morning, which is in the Old Testament in the prophet Isaiah. We're reading Isaiah chapter 11 and 12.

If you have one of our blue church visitors Bibles, I think that's page 575. Bob File is preaching this morning. Bob has been doing a series on and off in these early chapters of Isaiah, and we come to these two well-known but magnificent chapters of this prophecy, chapters 11 and 12, all part of one message that go together.

So we'll read the two chapters, beginning at Isaiah 11 and verse 1. And this comes after a very grim chapter of judgment, as you would have seen if you were here last Sunday morning.

And now a great ray of light. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

[1 : 21] And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the whole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

[2 : 37] In that day, the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

In that day, the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elan, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off.

Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east.

They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the river with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels.

[3 : 59] And he will lead people across in sandals. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

You will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away that you might comfort me.

Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And you will say in that day, Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, and make known his deeds among the peoples. Proclaim that his name is exalted.

Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously. Let this be made known in all the earth. Shout and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in the midst is the Holy One of Israel.

[5 : 14] Amen. May God bless us. This is where... Now, could I ask you please to have your Bibles open at page 575, and we'll have a moment of prayer.

Amen. And God, our Father, I pray that you will take my human words in all their limitations, that you will use them faithfully to unfold the written word, and so lead us to the living word, the Lord Christ himself, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. When I was a small boy, I didn't want to go to heaven.

The reason for that was, I was told going to heaven would be like being in church for all eternity.

And I remember, in one spectacularly boring service, somebody leading prayers and informing the Lord that this is the nearest to heaven we'll be until we actually get there.

That is not how the Bible presents the world to come. That is not how the Bible presents the new creation. And here in this glorious passage, the veil is thrown aside and we are given a glimpse of the open spaces, of the fresh air, of the beauty, of the world that is to come.

[6 : 58] I'm using the phrase new creation. As I increasingly, I have not managed to persuade many people of this, I increasingly tell people not to say we are going to heaven for all eternity.

If you're a Christian and you die before the Lord returns, you will certainly go to heaven. But remember, that's simply the waiting room. Beautiful, magnificent, wonderful waiting room for the new creation, the new heaven and the new earth where all God's people will live forever in the unveiled presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it seems to me this is the kind of vision that Isaiah is giving us here. And you'll notice, first of all, it's a worldwide hope. Chapter 11, verse 11, we'll come back to that.

Don't worry about, more or less, the geographical horizons of that time. If you lived at that time in Jerusalem, these places mentioned would probably be the limit of your geographical horizons.

And then verse 5 of chapter 12, let this be made known in all the earth. So he sang a moment ago, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice.

[8 : 16] The fulfillment of what Isaiah saw in chapter 6. He saw it in the temple. This is going to fill the whole earth. Geographical spread.

Now last week, we looked at that grim passage in chapters 10 and 11, which I call making sense of history. What is God doing in history?

Where is it all going? Amid the mess and the tangle of national, international life, communal and personal life. And this chapter is actually telling us where history is going.

This is the end of history. This is a chapter, as we sang, about joy to the world. We ought to ask ourselves the question, when will this happen?

And the phrase that's used quite a lot in the chapter is in that day. In verse 10, in that day, the root of Jesse.

[9 : 16] And then again, in verse 11, this is chapter 11, in that day. And that is a word that's used by the prophets to refer to the last day, the day of the coming of the kingdom.

As we've seen already in Isaiah, these prophets are also speaking to their own time. And they're speaking to every time. There are partial fulfillments. When God's people return from Babylon to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the city, that is a sign that God is with them, that Emmanuel has returned to his land.

The prophet Ezekiel has a powerful vision of the glory of Yahweh, the God of Israel, leaving the temple and moving to Babylon. And now, in return from exile, the Lord returns to his temple.

It's fulfilled, of course, spectacularly, when Jesus comes the first time. Isaiah talks in later chapters about the Messiah who will open the eyes of the blind, who will make the dumb speak, who will make the lame to walk, and so on.

And that happens. It happens on the day of Pentecost, when people from every nation under heaven hear the wonderful works of God. And it happens, of course, throughout history in the spread of the gospel, as more and more people come into the kingdom.

[10 : 37] But it will finally come on the last day, when that prayer will be fulfilled. Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

We get glimpses, even in this world, sometimes in times of happiness, sometimes amid particularly beautiful scenery, the daily scene is big with the glory of God.

But it's fleeting and temporary. Now, this passage is poetry. So we mustn't interpret it with pedantic literalism. On the other hand, we mustn't imagine it means, far too many people think that poetry means airy-fairy.

Some think it's a fancy way of saying something could just as easily have been said in prose. And since this is God's poetry, clearly it has powerful meanings. Isaiah is a great poet.

It's also like a great musical work. Eugene Peterson, whose translation I referred to earlier, describes Isaiah as, the book of Isaiah, as the symphony of salvation.

[11 : 43] That seems to me a very good way to describe it. This is not a poetry. This is going to happen. And it's going to happen not by our efforts, not by our work.

It's going to happen by the will of God, the king, the new David, great David's greater son. Earlier, we saw the hope of Emmanuel, the child with four names.

And this is going to happen when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. And prophet Habakkuk in a later generation uses this phrase as well.

So, the contrast here between the previous chapter and this chapter, Isaiah, as a great poet, very often uses contrast, the darkness, the gloom, the misery, and then the sudden sunshine.

So what is this king going to do when he comes? And the first thing he's going to do is he will restore Eden, chapter 11, verses 1 to 10.

[12 : 47] More exactly, he will make, he will bring in the new creation, which will be everything Eden was, but far more lasting.

There will be no snake in this paradise. This paradise will not be lost. This Eden will not be destroyed. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit.

Now, if you just glance back at the previous verses of the end of chapter 10, this is described the great Assyrian invasion, the terrifying Assyrian war machine, and the Lord God of hosts will cut them down.

The huge Assyrian forest will be leveled, never to rise again. But here's a tree that is not going to be cut down, a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

Talked about this already the end of chapter 6. The kingdom of David will be destroyed, but there's life in it. The tree will be cut down, but this tree will grow again, and this tree will flourish, and it will be brought about by the Spirit of God.

[14 : 01] And that's taking us right back to the beginning of the Bible. It was the Spirit who brought about the first creation. The Spirit swooped on the chaos and darkness and brought about light and life and all the beauty and all the wonder of creation.

He'll be active in the new creation. And the coming king will rule both wisely and strongly. There have been often in the history of the world strong rulers who have been totally ruthless, totally unregarding of human life, determined to push through their policies.

There have been rulers who have been good and well disposed, didn't have the strength to carry out what they wanted. This ruler has both. He will rule in wisdom and he will rule in power and he will be the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, verse 2, the Spirit of counsel and might.

This is the wonderful counselor, one of the names of the child back in the previous chapter, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. people will not walk in darkness any longer.

They'll walk in the light of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And for this to happen, evil needs to be destroyed. Verse 4, he will strike the earth, the rod of his mouth.

[15 : 23] In Isaiah's time, that was the destruction of the Assyrian army and the rescue of Jerusalem. And throughout history, the fall of godless regimes and individuals, he will love justice, he will love truth.

And verse 5, righteous to the belt of his waist and faithfulness to the belt of his loins. Dress, hear us so often in scripture, a symbol of inner character.

Now, this occasionally happens now in this world. There are glimpses from time to time. There are foreshadowings of the kingdom, but it will only fully happen when the king returns.

So the spirit will bring this about. Then comes this wonderful passage, verses 6 to 9. He will remove the curse from creation.

Eden ended in curse. Thorns, thistles, death, pain, labor. The fall affected the whole of creation. In the animal creation it led to nature, red, and tooth and claw, as Tennyson puts it.

[16:36] But here, this curse is removed. This is one of the many windows. Back in chapter 2, we saw the nations coming to Zion to worship the Lord.

In chapter 25, death is swallowed up in victory, a passage that Paul picks up in 1 Corinthians 15. And then in chapter 35, the desert blossoming like the rose.

I wish the modern translations wouldn't put crocus, because rose is so much more poetic. My love is like a red, red crocus.

I can't imagine that being said. No, it's a wonderful image, and that's also the passage I mentioned already, which talks about the Messiah healing and bringing new life.

And then at the very end of the book, in chapter 65 to 66, the passage that John echoes at the end of Revelation of the new heavens and the new earth.

[17:34] So, look at verses 6 to 9 then. Is this literal? Will this literally happen? Now, the point to notice, it is certainly physical.

As I say, one of the problems that the idea of heaven I was brought up with was that it was disembodied existence in a shadowland, strumming harps and floating on clouds.

Not a particularly attractive way to spend eternity, I wouldn't have thought. Of course, there'll be singing, there'll be joy, there'll be rejoicing as there is now. But this passage is telling us, first of all, the curse will be gone.

The predatory, violent nature of the fallen creation will no longer be there. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb.

The predator and the prey will live together, and a little child shall lead them. Now, whatever else this means, this must be related to the child of chapter 9, the child with four names, the one who will restore creation to its former harmony.

[18:48] There's an interesting little verse in Mark, in Mark chapter 1, where Jesus is being tempted by Satan. Mark doesn't give us a very long account of this, but he does have the interesting phrase, he was with the wild beasts in the desert.

Now, some take that to mean that the wild beasts were an additional threat, an additional discomfort, an additional danger. I don't think it means that at all. I think it means that as the perfect man was in the desert with the beasts, they were tamed to him.

The wildness had gone. In other words, another picture of the new creation. The culmination, as I say, of the imagery of the previous chapters, the child, Emmanuel, who will lead them.

Verse 9, in my holy mountain. Now, the holy mountain, of course, is the mountain of Zion. But, you'll notice the verse continues, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

The holy mountain and the holy city, in other words, are not entities within the new creation. They are the new creation from a different angle. Just as the book of Revelation, John says, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.

[20:14] That means, that's the heavenly city, as well as the new heaven and the new earth, pictures of the same reality. Isaiah is continually moving between the one and the other.

And I think this suggests that in the new creation, there will be both, of course, locality. Because after all, we won't, even in the new creation, won't be everywhere at once.

But there's also unfettered movement. And I think there's great mysteries. I mean, so many questions arise. What age will we be in the new creation?

Interesting, some of the early church fathers said we'd all be in our early 30s, because that is the age at which the risen Lord ascended to glory.

It may not be as silly as it sounds. For some of you, I'm sure, early 30s seems ancient. For me, it seems deliciously young. But we don't know the answer to these questions.

[21:15] What we do know is that the most wonderful, the most beautiful things on earth are giving us some glimpse of what will happen.

Now, if we draw too drastic a distinction between this creation and the creation to come, then I think we're going to be slaved.

One of the things I used to see in the years I taught at Cornhill, said it first of all tongue-in-cheek, but said it with increasing conviction as the years went on, the Bible falls into two parts, but not the two parts you think.

Genesis 1, 1, and the rest. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the rest of the Bible is a long footnote developing that.

In other words, the creation that he made at first, which he called very good, gives us a genuine picture into what the new creation will look like. And obviously, it will be very different in many ways. [22 : 17] There will be no tsunamis, there will be no tidal waves, there will be no earthquakes, there will be no cancer, there will be no illness, and above all, there will be no death. Nevertheless, what God began at the beginning, he will complete.

And a passage like this is telling us that when he created Eden and created humanity to Edenize the world, if I can invent a verb, then that was giving us a glimpse of his eternal purposes. After all, as Paul says about salvation in Philippians, he was begun a good work, will complete it in the day of Jesus Christ, that first creation as well. So the king will restore Eden, but it will go beyond Eden.

And C.S. Lewis said, if that's not true, then something better will be. Secondly, the king will rule over the whole world, chapter 11, verses 11 to 16.

Notice here, he is called the root of Jesse. In verse 1, he's been called the shoot of Jesse. In other words, he comes from Jesse, the father of David, but he is also the originator as well.

[23 : 30] He's both the origin of David and the son of David. And he will do this a second time, and that refers to the exodus.

The first time was the exodus as Moses stretched his hand over the sea, which of course was God stretching his hand over the sea, thee and the people crossed in safety.

So first of all, there's a geographical range. See this verse 11. The names may not mean a lot to us, but as I say, it's the geographical horizons of that day. Assyria, Shinar, and Elam in the east.

It's about as far east as they would know about. The coastlands, this is a word used regularly by Isaiah, looking forward to the time when the gospel is going to move west into the lands of the Mediterranean and eventually into the whole world.

Remember, there's a specific point where that happens in Acts 16 when the man from Macedonia in a vision says to Paul, come over to Macedonia and help us, and begins the great movement that brought the gospel to the west and eventually of course to our shores.

[24 : 41] Cush, Egypt, Cush, Ethiopia in the south, and Hamath in the north. So the whole wide, as the old missionary hymn says, the whole wide world for Jesus.

And the ancient promise to Abraham, all the nations will be blessed. So he'll sing shortly, from earth's wide bounds, from oceans furthest coast, through gates of peril, streams in the countless hosts.

The geographical range, but it also is the advance of the gospel. How is the kingdom advancing? Now the kingdom advances, as the hymn says, soul by soul and silently, shining bounds increase. And on the day of Pentecost, all over the world, people heard and believed in the gospel. And in Romans 15, Paul quotes this passage as being fulfilled as the nations turned to the Davidic king. And climaxes in the book of Revelation, I saw a great multitude whom no one could count, from every tribe, nation, people, and language, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb.

[25 : 57] This vision of the advance of the gospel that knows no national, racial, or any other boundaries. And also the reconciling of the ancient of enemies.

Verse 13, the jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off. Ephraim, the name for the northern kingdom, and Judah in the south.

the old enmity of these peoples will be taken away. And indeed, the old enemies of Egypt and Assyria will be reconciled.

The highway, verse 18, there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant remains of the people. See, it partially is going to be fulfilled as the people return from Babylon to rebuild the temple.

Old enemies reconcile, creation, renewed, harmonious, old enemies reconcile. The king will reign over the whole world.

[26 : 55] Let the earth hear his voice. And thirdly, chapter 12, the appropriate response to this, the king will be praised. You will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away.

And there are two elements. First of all, there is rejoicing in salvation. In chapter 2, sorry, verse 2, your whole God is my salvation.

I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. A deliberate echo of the song of Moses in Exodus 15, the crossing of the sea. And Isaiah began in chapter 1 with people's sin, salvation, and its remedy returning to the Lord. And in chapter 6, the prophet himself is cleansed. And now your anger turned away. Once again, partially fulfilled when the people returned and began to worship God once again in Jerusalem.

[28 : 06] But notice, verse 2 goes further than that. He has become my salvation. Not just that God brings salvation, which is true, but that God is salvation.

I said last week, I think, the gospel isn't just about Christ. The gospel is Christ. The Savior, Emmanuel, one with God, who became one of us. The same way of salvation in both testaments. There aren't two peoples of God. One of the things I was taught when I was young. Two peoples of God, the Jews will inherit the new earth, and the Christians will inherit the new heavens. One people of God who will inherit the kingdom, inherit the new heaven and the new earth. And it's interesting, because of Revelation, the redeemed in heaven sing the song of the Lamb. That's obvious. But they also sing the song of Moses, the servant of God. In other words, that all the people of God from all the ages sing the one song of the one people of God.

[29 : 20] And God provides that by the one who becomes the Savior. And Isaiah is going to develop that powerfully in chapter 53, the chapter of the suffering servant. So there is, the first element in this song is rejoicing in salvation.

And the second element in verses five to six, or a second song if you like, is proclamation to the world. Let the earth hear his voice. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. It's a metaphor of what? This is an exhaustible. This is the living water that Jesus spoke about to the woman at the well in Samaria. This water will never dry. this well will never become empty. And Zion is sharing this with the world. Give thanks to the Lord. Call upon his name. Make known his deeds among the peoples. Proclaim that his name is exalted. Isaiah had this great vision back in chapter 6 of the exalted Lord, the exalted name.

[30 : 25] Now the whole world is going to hear that. And it's interesting that Isaiah uses the phrase in verse 6 the holy one of Israel.

It's Isaiah's favorite name for the Lord. It's used more often in Isaiah than in the rest of the Old Testament put together. Of course it comes from the great vision of chapter 6 holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. And there he says the whole earth is filled with his glory. One day this is going to happen. The whole earth, in other words, is going to be cleansed. This is how big a thing salvation is. It's not just the salvation of individuals which is wonderful and for which we thank God. It's the redemption, the renewal of creation. Seen in some of the sands, the trees they'll feel clapping their hands, the rivers rejoicing, the whole of creation praising the Lord who made it. It's a wonderful, wonderful vision. But at the moment and as I was preparing this inevitably I was thinking of the writer who more than almost than anyone else outside the Bible has talked about the glory of the new creation.

[31 : 41] And I reread the last battle, the last of the Narnia books and I'm going to finish with that. As the Aslan's people reach the new world, when they discover to their absolute amazement and delight that all those they had loved most and best in the old world were there.

That's what Lewis says, all their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before. And that is a gospel for the nations. Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we pray that as we live in this world, that the glory of the world to come, the world which lies around us but is so often hidden from us, will become more real to us. And that we look forward to that day and to that time in the difficult and tough paths of earth. And that we will indeed draw water from the wells of salvation.

[33 : 12] Amen. Amen.