

IN PREPARATION FOR ADVENT

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Scripture: Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2, Jeremiah 23:5

We stand on the threshold of Advent, and those four weeks in which we try to slow down and emphasize on the word (try, because sometimes it never happens). We try to slow down, breathe in, and prepare our hearts to celebrate the first Advent that happened with the coming of Jesus.

But Advent is not just a time to remember; it's really an invitation. It invites us to look back at all of God's promises that were fulfilled in Jesus, and then to look forward to all the promises that are still to be fulfilled in your life, and to have hope.

So, before there was a manger in Bethlehem, before the angelic host came and sang, and before the wise men came, there were prophets – prophets who stood between God and His people and declared that a Savior is coming. They lived in different centuries, under different kings, and in unique historical and cultural contexts. Yet, with one unified voice, they proclaimed hope and redemption and rescue and restoration.

So today, I want us to look at some of the prophets who prophesied that the Messiah was coming, and then try and glean from them what they were prophesying about Jesus. And then to look at all those things and ask the question: Everything that Jesus brought into His Messiahship, are they evident in our lives?

So, let's look at the prophets from the beginning. We can go back to the Garden of Eden and the fall of Adam and Eve. In Genesis 3:15, we read that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. God's first promise that evil will one day be defeated, that evil will not reign forever, that a Redeemer will be born of a woman. And though the serpent would wound him, the Redeemer would ultimately destroy the power of sin, of Satan and death, pointing forward to the victory fulfilled in Christ.

So, long before Bethlehem, God had already begun to speak hope into a broken world. And even though that broken world was many years ago, we know that we live in a broken world today. We see that brokenness, not only around us but within us as well. So many of us carry the broken pieces that we've kept of some part of our lives hidden away in our hearts.

Through the centuries, God raised up prophets to keep that hope alive. They spoke of moments of national crisis. They spoke into those moments. They spoke into moments of political collapse and spiritual compromise, exile, despair. And yet, in every warning, there was a whisper of grace. In every judgment, there was a promise of salvation. And in every place of darkness, there was a dawn of light. Grace, salvation, and light kept being spoken through the years, right up to the time of Jesus' birth.

So, let's look at four or five prophetic voices through the years and see what they have to say.

ISAIAH

No prophet paints the portrait of Christ more clearly than Isaiah. What does he say?

- **He talks about a king born of a virgin.**
Isaiah 7:14 *"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel."*

Isaiah prophesied at a time of deep fear and instability in Judah. The nation was shaken by the rising threat of the Assyrians on the outside and corroded in a sense by the idolatry that was an unfaithfulness that was inside of them.

And it was into this atmosphere of fear and corruption, where peace had long gone and political turmoil was rife, that Isaiah proclaimed God's surprising promise of a coming king who would bring justice, peace, and salvation. And God's answer to this situation was not a kind of military alliance or a display of earthly power, but a child, Immanuel, God with us. The Messiah would step into human history, not clothed in force, but in humility and vulnerability.

- **He talks about a light shining in the darkness.**

Isaiah 9:2-7, and I paraphrase: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. For unto us a child is born and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Everlasting Father." Isaiah promises a king unlike any other. And in a world that was filled with darkness, He promises that light would be shone.

How often we look at our own lives and some of the areas that we have and wish it wasn't as dark as it is. We wish that that darkness can be dispelled by light. Isaiah says that darkness can be dispelled by the Messiah.

- **He talks about a servant who suffers and saves.**

Isaiah 53 reveals the Messiah as the suffering servant as we have come to know Him. He was wounded for our transgressions and bore our iniquities. His suffering was not for His own sin, but for our sin. He took the penalty that we deserved, stepping into our place and carrying the full weight of our guilt so that we could be forgiven and made whole. His suffering carried the judgment that should have fallen on you and me.

But He removed the barrier that sin created between humanity and God. How many pictures we've seen of humanity and God, and the cross spanning the gap. It's a very vivid picture of what Jesus did through His life and His death.

MICAH

The prophet Micah tucked away among all the 12 books at the end. **He talks about the Messiah's humble birthplace.** Micah ministered during a time when the rich were getting richer. They were exploiting the poor. Prophets were speaking only because they were paid to speak in a particular way. People were taking advantage of the poor people. And the nation was marked by corrupt leaders and dishonest business practices. There was bribery in the courts and there was a cry for justice and compassion. And all of this comes to a head.

Isaiah pinpoints a prophecy, pinpoints it in Micah 5:2 *"But you, O Bethlehem, Bethlehem, from you shall come forth for Me, one to be ruler in Israel."*

So the Messiah would not come from Jerusalem's palace, but from Bethlehem's simplicity, reminding us that greatness often grows in quiet, hidden places.

JEREMIAH

- **Jeremiah talks about the Messiah as a righteous branch and as a shepherd.**

Jeremiah lived in the final days before the destruction of Jerusalem, where hope seemed impossible. In fact, he was an eyewitness to all the devastation that happened when the Babylonians came and took the Israelites into captivity. The lamentations that he wrote is an eyewitness account of all that happened during that time.

But Jeremiah spoke of a coming King who would do what Israel's kings had failed to do. Jeremiah 23:5 says, *"I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a king who will rule and reign wisely. And this branch would embody everything Israel's failed kings were not – holy, just, and utterly committed to God's ways, which they were not"*

In part of my devotions, I've been going through Chronicles. It saddens one as you look at read through about the number of times the phrase appears, "but he forsook the ways of God." Every king rose up, "but he kept the high places." "He wouldn't destroy the high places." "He did even worse than his fathers had done." So sad to see that! But this king that is promised by Jeremiah will be a righteous one.

He will be a shepherd who gathers His people with a new covenant. "Behold, He says," in Ch. 31, "the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will put My law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."

And Jesus fulfills that new covenant perfectly. At the Last Supper, He plainly says, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood," showing that His sacrificial death inaugurates exactly what Jeremiah promised, that through His Spirit, He would write God's law upon our hearts, transforming believers from the inside out, changing our desire, shaping our character and empowering our obedience.

And he becomes our good Shepherd who gathers and restores, seeks the lost, leaves the ninety-nine, goes out to find the one, healing the broken-hearted and the sick, and bringing His people into a true and living relationship with the Father.

- Through His atoning work, He provides complete and final forgiveness of sins. As He said, "I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." If you read through Hebrews chs. 8 & 10, they connect this New Covenant promise to Christ's finished work.

DANIEL

Daniel talks about the Messiah as the coming Son of man. Daniel prophesied during the exile in Babylon; everything familiar had been stripped away. Yet, God revealed a sweeping vision of the future.

Daniel 7:13-14 says, "One like the Son of man and His kingdom shall never be destroyed." Jesus Himself used the title 'Son of man' more than any other title for Himself.

In Daniel's prophecy, the Messiah is portrayed as the One who is given everlasting dominion – that is a rule that never ends. While earthly kingdoms rise, fall and fade into history, His kingdom is eternal, unshakeable and supreme over every power. So, Bethlehem leads to Calvary, and Calvary leads to a throne that will never fade, a kingdom that will outlast every nation and endure for all time.

We've been studying the book of Revelation, and how often we've seen the picture of the throne. And the Lamb who sits there in glorious splendor being worshipped. God is still on the throne, beloved. In every situation, every circumstance, every trial that you're facing, and you think that you're alone, God is still in charge.

HOSEA

Hosea talks about the Messiah as God's unfailing love. Hosea's whole story is really a picture of God's unfailing love, a love that keeps pursuing, keeps restoring and keeps calling His people back even when they wander. The book of Hosea tugs at your heartstrings, to see what he's going through. His faithfulness and his wife's unfaithfulness.

That's the picture of God and us. God speaks like a loving father, reminding people to come. "Out of Egypt I will bring somebody, a Son." "For God so loved the world that He gave." We see God's loving nature and that nature continues to love and love and love.

As we prayed before the service, we all just felt the kind of love of God and His presence. We were just talking about how God loves each one of us so much. I was looking at my life and saying, "I'm so thankful for the number of people who have touched my life in so many ways that have helped me in my journey. But, when you think about it, it's God who touched them to touch me. It's God's love for you and me that enables that person to say, "Hey, I just want to say a word to you," or "here's something that I want to share with you." Or just come alongside your life for a period that helps you to grow. I've had those expressions of love. "Love came down at Christmas," is what we sing. And in such beautiful, wonderful ways, God continues His unfailing love to each one of us.

I think we should take time, maybe later today, just take a pen and paper and write down the names of people who have touched your life. and then thank God for them. Because God initiated it. They were obedient, but God initialed it. his loving kindness.

WHAT DID THE PROPHETS TEACH US ABOUT CHRIST?

These prophetic voices form a lovey kind of mosaic.

- Isaiah gives us the King and the Suffering Servant. He shows us a Messiah who holds all authority, yet chooses the path of suffering, so that through His wounds, we find healing and salvation.
- Micah points us to humility and Bethlehem's cradle. He reminds us that God often begins His greatest work through humble settings.
- Jeremiah gives us a picture of a Righteous Shepherd and a New Covenant – introduces a Savior who leads with compassion and writes God's laws upon our heart, transforming us from within through them.
- Daniel reveals the King with everlasting dominion. His reign will never end. A kingdom that rises above every earthly power.
- Hosea shows us God's persistent, pursuing love that is embodied in Christ.

Together, they give us a few things that we can then begin to incorporate into our lives.

- 1) A reminder that God keeps His promises.
I don't know whether some of you here are holding on to promises that God made. And sometimes, we get weary of holding, weary of trusting and saying, "Lord, when?" And yet,

this promise of the Messiah was told all the way back to Abraham. And God kept His promise. He's a promise-keeping God.

2) God is not a God who stays far away.

He's a God who comes near. The incarnation was never an afterthought. It was not in response to the sin. It was scripted into history way before anything happened. It wasn't a knew-jerk reaction to our sin. God had planned a Redeemer before all of that.

God comes near. I remember talking to somebody and saying, "There's nothing more real than incarnational relationship. God didn't sit in heaven and say, 'Okay, let Me see what I can do for My people.'" No! Jesus came, went through everything that He went through, made it real for us, that when we look at verses that say: 'Be perfect as I am perfect', we look to Jesus and say: He did it. he's never asked us to do anything that He didn't do while He sojourned here on earth. He comes near; doesn't stand far away. He's near to you. Even if you feel a distance from Him, it's you who moved, not Him

3) He feels and knows our deepest need.

Very often, the deepest needs that we have, we never share. You never hear anybody say: I want you to pray for me because I'm addicted to pornography. The prayer request might be: Help me to get through the day.

Yet, it's the deepest needs, the deepest things in our hearts that keep us from walking a righteous path behind the Savior. It is the deepest things which we keep hidden, and it helps the evil one. anything that is hidden, he knows there is no input that's going to come in here. So he has you in his hand. Every time you try to do something for the Lord, he'll say, "But how are you doing that for the Lord? You're this kind of a person, aren't you?" And you stop it.

Satan can't take away the salvation that Jesus gave you, but what he can do is mess with your sanctification – the path from the time you met Jesus to the time that we will enter heaven and be glorified, that path when we are supposed to be molded and shaped by the Holy Spirit. That path is the one that Satan messes with in terms of attacking believers. Jesus said, "Nobody can pluck you out from My hand." And he can't. But he can mess with your life every day because of hidden things.

And Jesus knows those things. Why? Because He knows light needs to come into darkness. He knows that peace in our situations is what we need. Peace needs to come into warfare. Forgiveness needs to come in for sins. And hope needs to come in where there is despair.

So, as we prepare our hearts for Advent, what does it look like to prepare for Jesus? And you may quickly respond by saying, "But I already have Jesus." We've already embraced the first Advent. But the question I have for us today is this: In light of what we have learned about who the Messiah is, is that working in your life?

Do you have hope that is still fresh and beautiful in your life? Or has hope begun to die? Has hope died in your life?

Are you still listening to God's voice, or has His voice got dull?

Are you embracing the humility that must be part of who we are as Christians? Not proud people?

Are we living righteously? Are we living in a right manner?

These are questions that we need to ask ourselves.

Are we worshipping well? How is your worship? The King of kings needs to be worshipped. We worship Him because He is our King. Maybe we've lost the ability to worship. Maybe you've allowed your heart to get callous. Maybe you sing just out of rote. Sometimes we look at our worship as a buffet table. I like this song so I'll take this one and get involved. But I don't know the other.

Yet, every song that is curated, that is put into the worship list, has been prayed through, that it would lead us from where we are to where God is. That's what worship leaders do – take us to the throne room. Because it's in that place of proximity that God begins to do things in your life and mine.

Beloved, it could be today that you're sitting here with a heavy load, with a heavy heart. it could be that a relationship that you're trying to hold on to is just so fragile. It could be that you're just going through something that you never thought you would even face in your life. And I wonder whether Jesus needs to be a little more real to you today than just somebody who came as the Messiah and somebody we worship.

Whether He's near to you, whether you've allowed Him into every area of your heart, whether you've given Him control, whether you're saying, "Lord, I can't do it on my own. Will You please help me? Lord, I'm in this state of confusion. Lord, would you bring clarity? Lord, I need you right now. I'm sinking. I'm going down."

I wonder whether Jesus needs to be birthed anew in those areas of your heart, that you need to say, "Lord, I want to yield this to you. That's a lonely path. I'm so alone in that place; it's filled with fear, despair. The question 'What if?' seems to be the main question in my life. what if this happens?

He stepped down from heaven for you and me. And if we really want to embrace this Advent season and celebrate His coming down, then I think the way that would be most honoring for God would be to see His children say, "I've never experienced You in this way in my life, Lord. I've never given You charge of this place. I've never let go, Lord. I've held on. But today, I want to do that."

And maybe that's the call for you today, that's why you're here in the sanctuary because Jesus is near and wants to touch that part of you that desperately needs Him. And with that may come healing, restoration, reconciliation.

So, as we move into this season of Advent that starts next Sunday, let's prepare room in our lives for Jesus to draw near and to echo the cry that was made many years ago. Even so, come Lord Jesus, come and take Your rightful place in my heart. Amen.

Heavenly Father, we have no words that can ever give You enough thanks for Your love for us. And yet, Lord, we know that we have failed to trust You in so many areas. We've tried to carry on in our own strength. When You give strength in weakness, when You bring power. Lord, when we've tried to handle things on our own. But today, Lord, and through this season, Lord, would You let Your Spirit touch those places in our hearts that need to be emptied first of all things that have kept You out? And then Lord to give You the invitation to come in and sup with us for we hear the knocking on the door.

Let us pray.

Oh, heavenly Father, we turn to You and we ask Lord that You would touch each one of these ones who have said, "It's me, oh Lord, standing in the hour of need." I pray that through Your Spirit, Lord, You would bring light into darkness. That You would resurrect hope where there is despair and that

You would bring Your grace to bear on the situation that they may operate in Your strength and in Your power. And Lord, I pray: pour back into each one of them joy and peace, not from the situations they are in, but from knowing that they are children of the most-high God. The most-high God. We pray this in and through the beautiful name of Jesus.
Amen.