

Advent Week 1: Walking In The Light Of The Lord

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KBF Sermon

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Good Morning KBF,

Welcome to Church on this first Sunday in... December! This of course means that all of the Thankfulness Dinners are now complete!

This is probably more appropriate for during the announcements, but I am afraid that if I make you wait that long then you might not listen to the sermon.

So, ladies and gentlemen, the grand reveal! Here are the results of the tower challenge. Ranked last to first.....

Congratulations to the

While it is all fun and games, this whole thankfulness dinner thing, the whole reason we did this is to get people together with others who they may not usually meet up with. The whole purpose of which is to encourage you to see and to remember how wonderful are the people here in this community. I hope that you expressed gratitude to one another and in turn expressed gratitude to God for the people he has brought together in this Church. KBF, we are comprised by wonderful people and regardless of whether you went to a dinner, regardless of whether you won the tower challenge, I hope you can see freshly the beauty in this community.

And, it was no coincidence that this event happened during our prayer series. Remember Paul's words, '*I thank my God every time I remember you...*' I hope that as you enjoyed each other's company, you were encouraged to pray for one another and to encourage each other to persevere in this beautiful faith that God has given to us.

My prayer is that we would continue to engage in deep and healthy fellowship with one another and with visitors so that Christ might be on full display among us. That we would be a vibrant community that is well connected, one that is obviously passionate about the Bible, and encourages health and healing through Christ centered fellowship. Amen?

So as we conclude November and our 30 Days of Prayer theme, let us commit to continuing to pray, for 60 or 80 or 365 days, and let us continue to invite each other into our events, meals and our homes!

Ok. Now that we have done the necessary announcements, let us take a moment and transition to the message. Rather than me pray, as usual, let us take 60 seconds and each one of us express to God our gratitude, adoration, petition, and confession before today's message. Let us all pray.

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

2 In the last days

the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established

as the highest of the mountains;

it will be exalted above the hills,

and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,

so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 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.

5 Come, descendants of Jacob,

let us walk in the light of the Lord.

(Isaiah 2: 1-5)

Being the first week of December, this is of course the first Sunday of Advent and so we are in the early stages of preparing for Christmas. Hopefully this is not a surprise to anyone! I hope no-one has to rush off to Ito Yokado after the service to go start their Christmas shopping!

But, we are not here to talk about presents and wrapping paper and all the jobs we need to do. Let us think about the text for this morning, and specifically let us prepare for Christmas by thinking about the call from our Bible reading this week.

Come... Let us walk in the light of the world!

Our text today is from the Book of Isaiah. The book speaks of a righteous ruler who is calling his subjects towards righteousness. If you read the book you will find that it moves between being incredibly confronting and then incredibly inspiring. It is a book that calls out sin and provides glimpses of what judgement may look like but it also has some incredibly beautiful imagery of what a 'restored earth' and a 'restored people' will look like.

It is a book that uncovers wickedness, but also clearly details mercy, and calls the reader's attention to a future, coming hope. Richard Donovan says that it is like the writings of a lover (God) who goes back and forth between disappointment and anticipation with their beloved. It is a vision and therefore presents us with a revolving picture of judgement and reconciliation.

In addition, there are believed to be as many as seven distinct prophecies that point us towards Christ. It is a powerful book to read during the Advent season and as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, let us turn our attention to the first five verses in Chapter 2.

Establishing The Highest Mountain

2 In the last days
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

In the last days. In the book of Acts, Peter famously gets up at Pentecost and recites;

15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people...

In the book of Hebrews 1:2 we can read;

2 but **in these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

The last days. There are other references throughout the New Testament, however many of these references to the last days speak of a time **after** the first coming of Jesus Christ. That is to say, Christians are waiting for Christ to return and the days in which they are waiting are the last days. Isaiah was calling attention to the last days which we now believe are a time after the first coming of Christ. May I be so bold to suggest that this is a time such as this?

And what will happen in the last days?

the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

The Lord's temple is a reference to the temple that was in Jerusalem, the Holy temple that was the place of worship and sacrifice for the Jewish people. Currently, there are remnants of this temple still in Jerusalem, this is what the Wailing Wall is and on the site where the temple used to be, there now stands the Dome of the Rock, which is a mosque. What is most interesting about this line from Isaiah though is the statement that the mountain of the Lord's Temple will be established as the highest mountain. Now Jerusalem is a very hilly city. If you travel there you will spend lots of time walking up and down as you walk

around the city! Mt. Moriah, the Mount of Olives for example are all in walking distance. What is most interesting is that the mountain of the Lord's temple, the mountain where this temple is built, is actually not the highest in the region!

Here are two photos from different sides of the city. You definitely see higher places around the temple! And yet, the mountain will be established as the highest and all nations will stream to it. Two things here; 1) In the last day the temple of the Lord will be established higher, the status will be seen as more important and more prestigious than even the actual highest mountains, and 2) all nations will stream to it.

These are things we can hope for. That the places where God is worshipped, can we call them churches now, they will be seen as the highest and most prominent of places! Also, these will be places where all peoples, all nations, will flow into!

Walking In His Paths

3 Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Even here in the book of Isaiah we get glimpses of the unity that will be built in the last days. This helps us see how profound it is that Jesus offered redemption to both Jews and Gentiles. All nations should stream into this high temple. And, what do they do there?

In the temple of God, 'He will teach us his ways' so that we might walk in his paths. There is something beautiful about this, principally because that is kind of like what we are doing this morning. We, from many different nations, are striving to learn God's ways so that we might walk in his ways. Come! Let us go to the mountain of the Lord!

If you have given God the highest adoration, or considered His mountain the highest, it should be a natural conclusion that you would want to go there and learn about the ways of the one you consider the highest!

What is so lovely about the imagery here is that the call is that, The God of Jacob is going to teach us his ways. We are not invited to a temple where we will be learning from a person. It is not a picture of celebrity where we learn from the pastor, or we learn from a fancy preacher. Here in this picture of the Mountain of the Lord we are going to the temple so that He, God, will teach us his ways.

John 14:15-17

15 "If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world

cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be[a] in you.

Jesus promised that we will have another advocate, the spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit that will live with us and be in us so that we might know God more richly. We might not see God directly, face to face in the form of Jesus, however we can be lead and guided by the Holy Spirit. Teach us your ways!

But, it is not just a teaching for the sake of it. It is not teaching so that we can be filled with confidence that we know more about God than other people. It is teaching for a purpose. So that me might walk in his paths.

Walk in his paths. To walk on paths calls our attention to two things. The first is that there is a choice to make. When hiking in a forest, it is difficult to walk on two paths at the same time. As God shows teaches his ways, Isaiah encourages us to use this teaching as an inspiration for direction.

Matthew 7:14

14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

The choice is not always easy but there is another beautiful thing about paths. A path is formed by people who have carved out a route to a destination. Also, a path is maintained through use. Another also, on a path you might encounter people who are also interested in the same destination.

I would like to ask, are parts of the imagery that Isaiah is speaking about applicable today?

Let God teach us his ways, so that we might walk on his paths. We have all heard about the narrow road, and we have to take this seriously because working out your salvation may be the most difficult journey you embark on in your life. But having said this, I want to encourage you to persevere, to not give up and to not let go of your hope.

Building Peace

4 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.

Verse 4 is my favourite. While I love mountain imagery, it gets me everytime, this verse fills me with the most hope. I also feel like it gives me the most tangible imagery that I can use in my everyday life.

Firstly, I find a lot of encouragement thinking about God being the judge between nations, especially when it says that He will settle disputes for many peoples.

When I examine the news these days I discover lots of attention directed at troubles and tensions. Uncertainty with American foreign policy, tensions between Japan, Korea and China. Constant instability in Hong Kong. Protest and conflict in South America. It seems as if so much of our politics is embroiled in conflict. Conflict from within and then conflict between nations.

The imagery here is powerful. I take hope in thinking about God being the one that judges, especially when he will be the dispute settler. When I think about all of the peace that God has brought into my life, when I think of the kind and firm way that he has disciplined me, I am filled with hope thinking about the peace that he can bring as he settles disputes between many peoples.

In these words there are also instructions. Instructions for individuals and instructions for nations.

For individuals:

**They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.**

The instruments that are used for violence are to be transformed into instruments to be used for peace. Note how it does not simply say; get rid of your swords. Not that would be too easy. Instead, the violent tools used to resolve conflict and enact violence are to be transformed into tools that can be used to tend gardens, cultivate food for the community and to prune vines and branches that do not bear fruit.

Imagine what would happen if individuals united and whole communities did this?

**Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.**

They couldn't take up sword anymore because all the swords are now pruning hooks for the garden! But if God helped to settle disputes what would be the consequence of nations not taking up swords, or guns, or tanks, or fighter planes against one another anymore? Trillions of dollars freed in the budgets for other uses?

Could it be a stretch to say that they could abandon armies altogether. And if it started at a community level, are we getting a picture here of a place that does not require armies. And does it have to stop there? If we are learning the laws of God, if we are walking them out and if we are allowing God to be the judge that settles our disputes, will we need armies or even the police? What about judges, lawyers, or even security guards? What a community that would be!?

I admit, perhaps it is a little unrealistic. But remember, the book of Isaiah is a record of a vision. It details a future time and provides us with glimpses of what a restored kingdom might look like.

As I have been reading and re-reading these words from our reading this morning I can't help but think of the line from Matthew 5:9:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Come Let Us Walk In The Light

Now if you have noticed, I have had a really difficult time with tenses this morning. What I mean by this is that, despite my best efforts, I have moved between talking about this text as a separate historical document and applying the principles to the modern day. I had originally intended to try and stay in the text but I could not help but think about how this vision might be realised today.

The passage we are reading ends with this call:

**Come, descendants of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the Lord.**

As we kick off Advent, the season that is focused on preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, I couldn't help wondering how much of this imagery is available to us Christians now. In John 8:12 Jesus says;

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas this year, we are not just celebrating the birth of a newborn baby. We are not just giving gifts or eating good food, or whatever our traditions might encourage us to do. Through celebration we are reminding ourselves and our communities that we are living in the time that was promised thousands of years ago. Christ, whose birth we celebrate was the light of the world, and we are called to walk in that light.

We could celebrate that alone for the rest of our lives, however, there is more to it! We are reminded that people were given visions of what was possible through this light centuries before it arrived in the flesh.

Not only that we are encouraged to remember that there are incredible opportunities and consequences that come with this gift.

God is worthy of being established as our highest mountain, His paths are trustworthy and we should do everything we can to walk in his ways, and finally let us follow in his footsteps and use all that we have, every tool, to bring about the Kingdom that he is working to establish.

Come Church, Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Benediction

1 Peter 1:3-5

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1	Message Title	Advent Week 1: Walking In The Light Of The Lord
2	Scripture Verses	<i>Isaiah 2:1-5</i>
3	Verse for the Bulletin	<i>Isaiah 2:5</i>
4	Bio	<i>As per previous</i>
5	Sermon Script	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RFO2EilHiJazBXKzziKPfV73XH2B9_GSI/PqLCa_wEL4/edit?usp=sharing
6	Benediction	<i>1 Peter 1:3-5</i>