

ISAIAH 64:1-9 AND Mark 13:27-37

“IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES. IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES...IT WAS THE SEASON OF LIGHT, IT WAS THE SEASON OF DARKNESS.”

THIS EXCERPT FROM THE OPENING LINES OF DICKEN’S NOVEL, “A TALE OF TWO CITIES”, CAN ALSO BE APPLIED TO THE CURRENT ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SEASONS.

IN THE WORLD MOST OF US GREW UP IN- THANKSGIVING WAS THE DOORWAY TO THE CHRISTMAS SEASON IN THE SECULAR TRADITION, ALTHOUGH THAT NOW HAS CHANGED.

BUT WHAT REMAINS THE SAME IS THAT IN THE CHURCH ADVENT IS THE DOORWAY TO THE REMEMBRANCE AND CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST OUR LORD.

WE OPEN THIS DOOR ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT TO SEE A HALLWAY WITH FIVE LIGHTS.

TWO ARE ON EACH SIDE OF HALLWAY AND ONE IS AT THE END. THESE LIGHTS ARE THE CANDLES OF ADVENT AND OF CHRISTMAS.

THEY STAND IN CONTRAST TO THE GROWING DARKNESS AS THE SUN CONTINUES TO PHYSICALLY MOVE FARTHER AWAY FROM THE EARTH.

BUT, UNLIKE IN ANCIENT TIMES, PEOPLE TODAY HAVE NO FEAR THE SUN WILL NOT RETURN.

NEITHER SHOULD WE AS CHRISTIANS FEAR GOD HAS ABANDONED THE WORLD, FOR LIKE THE SUN IN THE UNIVERSE, JESUS, THE SON OF GOD, WILL RETURN.

ADVENT REMINDS US JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, WHO CAME INTO THE WORLD FOR OUR SAKES.

IT CALLS US TO REFLECT ON AND CELEBRATE THE PAST, WHILE LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE WITH HOPE.

THE FIRST CANDLE ON OUR ADVENT WREATH IS THE LIGHT OF HOPE. IT CALLS US TO TRUST IN THE LORD NO MATTER HOW INTENSE OR LONG LASTING THE DARKNESS SEEMS.

THIS YEAR, ESPECIALLY, WE NEED THIS LIGHT TO SHINE ALL AROUND THE WORLD.

IF ANY YEAR IN OUR LIFETIMES MIGHT BE CHARACTERIZED BY THE METAPHOR: “THE LIGHT AT THE END OF A TUNNEL IS AN ON-COMING TRAIN”, 2020 WOULD BE THAT YEAR.

THERE IS THE PANDEMIC, ALONG WITH THE USUAL WEATHER RELATED TRAGEDIES AND DANGERS.

WE HAVE ALSO HAD DEVASTATING FIRES IN AUSTRALIA AND THE U.S.

THEN THERE IS THE NEWS THAT AN INSECT CALLED “MURDER” HORNETS HAVE ALSO INVADDED PARTS OF OUR COUNTRY.

FINALLY, WE HAVE ENDURED SOCIAL UNREST AND POLITICAL DISTRESS-DUE TO OUR DIVIDED NATION. AND THESE ARE JUST SOME EXAMPLES.

THE LIGHT BEING A TRAIN METAPHOR HOWEVER DESCRIBES A CYNICAL VIEW OF THINGS.

BUT THE BIBLE CALLS US TO A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE. SCRIPTURE CALLS US TO FAITH AND HOPE IN GOD.

THIS HOPE, WE SHOULD NOTE, IS NOT A DENIAL OF HOW BAD THINGS ARE FOR MANY.

IT DOES NOT EVEN DENY THINGS MAY GET WORSE BEFORE THEY GET BETTER.

NOR DOES BIBLICAL HOPE PROMISE EVERYTHING WILL BE ALRIGHT IN WAYS WE EXPECT.

INSTEAD, TRUE HOPE, AS ONE ADVENT DEVOTION SAYS: “IS MORE THAN JUST WISHFUL THINKING. TRUE HOPE RESTS IN THE BELIEF THAT GOD LOVES US...”

IT IS THE CONFIDENCE THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL AND CAPABLE, AND THAT HE WILL NEVER LEAVE US OR FORSAKE US.”

THUS, HOPE BORN OUT OF FAITH IN GOD, AND TRUST IN HIS PROMISES, IS DEEPER AND GREATER THAN WORLDLY HOPE.

THE LATTER IS A THE LESSER FORM OF HOPE. IT COULD BE COMPARED TO A GRASSHOPPER WE MIGHT KICK UP WALKING IN TALL GRASS.

WE DISTURB IT AND IT FLIES SEVERAL YARDS AWAY TO SETTLE AGAIN WITHIN SIGHT, BUT NOT ALWAYS WITHIN REACH.

SEEKING TO CAPTURE GRASSHOPPER-HOPE IS, OFTEN A FUTILE ENDEAVOR. BUT BIBLICAL HOPE IS DIFFERENT

IT LOOKS NOT AT THE GRASSHOPPER BUT THE ONE WHO CREATED IT AND US, THE LORD OUR GOD.

THE HOPE THE BIBLE PRESENTS IS EXPRESSED IN PLACES LIKE THE PRAYER FOUND ISAIAH 64:1 AND 8:

“O THAT YOU WOULD TEAR OPEN THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN...O LORD, YOU ARE OUR FATHER; WE ARE THE CLAY YOU ARE OUR POTTER; WE ARE ALL THE WORK OF YOUR HAND.”

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT GOD DOING JUST THAT THROUGH THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF HIS SON, JESUS, OUR SAVIOR.

OUR CELEBRATION OF CHRIST’S BIRTH IS ALSO ABOUT CELEBRATING HOW GOD, IN CHRIST MOVED TO REPAIR THE BROKEN CLAY POT THAT IS HUMANITY.

OUR SINFULNESS MAKES OUR LIVES AND THE WORLD FULL OF CRACKS- SO THAT WE ARE IMPERFECT VESSELS.

BUT JESUS WAS BORN AND REMAINS THE PERFECT VESSEL BOTH HUMAN AND DIVINE, SO THAT THROUGH HIM GOD IS HEALING US AND THE WORLD.

ADVENT LOOKS BACKWARD AT NOT ONLY CHRIST’S BIRTH, BUT REMEMBERS THE REASON WE CELEBRATE THE EVENT IS- BECAUSE OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

BUT ADVENT, AS THE NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE SUGGESTS, IS ALSO ABOUT HOPEFUL AND ACTIVE WATCHING, SINCE IT POINTS US FORWARD TO CHRIST’S SECOND COMING.

IT IS AFTER THE EVENTS OF CHRIST’S RETURN WHEN GOD’S REPAIR WORK WILL FINALLY BE DONE, AND HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL BE AS ONE.

AS WAS MENTIONED BEFORE, THIS IS NOT WISHFUL THINKING ON OUR PART, ANYMORE THAN IT WAS FOR PEOPLE THE BIBLE.

BUT RATHER, WATCHING, WAITING, PRAYING, AND WORKING FOR JESUS IS A WAY WE MAY LIVE OUT OUR TRUST IN GOD, WHO HAS PROVEN TO BE TRUSTWORTHY.

LOOKING BACK AT THE PASSAGE FROM ISAIAH- WE NOTICE HE DOES NOT GLOSS OVER THE FEAR AND DESPAIR FELT BY GOD’S PEOPLE.

INSTEAD HE RECOGNIZES THE REALITY OF THE DIFFICULTIES AND ACKNOWLEDGES THE CONDITION OF SIN AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE.

YES, THE PROPHET KNOWS OF HIS OWN BROKENNESS AND THAT OF THE REST OF THE GOD’S PEOPLE.

AND YET IN ADMITTING WHAT IS, IT OPENS THE DOOR FOR WHAT GOD CAN DO, ESPECIALLY WHEN HE SEES THE REPENTANCE OF HIS PEOPLE.

ISAIAH KNOWS GOD HAS THE POWER TO INTERVENE, AND PRAYS FOR GOD’S WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE THEM AND DELIVER THEM.

HIS PRAYER WAS EVENTUALLY ANSWERED ON ONE LEVEL WITH THE RETURN FROM EXILE AND REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE.

IT WAS ANSWERED IN A GREATER WAY BY THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

AND FURTHER ANSWERED IN A WAY EVEN ISAIAH WAS NOT GIFTED WITH THE VISION TO FULLY FORESEE, BY THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN OUR CRUCIFIED AND RISEN SAVIOR PROVIDES

YES, JESUS CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN TO ABIDE AMONG SINNERS.

AND RATHER THAN SIN HIDING THE FACE OF OUR SAVIOR FROM US, IT DRAWS HIM NEARER TO US, THROUGH OUR REPENTANCE.

THUS THE BIBLE TEACHES HOPE IN GOD INVOLVES OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LORD. IT INVOLVES GOD'S GRACE THROUGH CHRIST, AND OUR FAITH.

IN A REFLECTION ON THE PASSAGE FROM ISAIAH, HOPE HAS BEEN BEAUTIFULLY DESCRIBED IN THIS WAY: "HOPE COMES FROM A BROKEN HEART WILLING TO BE MENDED."

INDEED CHRISTIAN HOPE BEGINS WITH ACKNOWLEDGING OUR NEED FOR GOD'S INTERVENTION, AND OUR WILLINGNESS TO SEEK AND ACCEPT IT.

THE WORLD IS NOT AS IT SHOULD BE. IT IS NOT AS GOD PLANNED, NOR AS WE LONG FOR IT TO BE.

THUS MANY PEOPLE TODAY, PRAY FOR GOD'S POWERFUL INTERVENTION IN THE WORLD AND THEIR LIVES.

ADVENT CALLS US TO RECOGNIZE THIS PRESENT REALITY, BUT IT ALSO INVITES US HOLD ON TO FAITH THAT GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW THROUGH JESUS, HIS SON.

AND SO, ADVENT INVITES US TO LOOK AT THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, AS WELL AS TOWARDS THE FUTURE, BY FIRST LOOKING BACK AT WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US.

INDEED, ADVENT IS BASED ON AN AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST'S FIRST COMING INTO THE WORLD.

WE ARE PREPARING TO CELEBRATE ON CHRISTMAS, NOT ONLY HIS BIRTH, BUT ALSO HOW WE ARE GIVEN A NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH HIM.

THE ADVENT HYMN "LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, YE MIGHTY GATES" -EXPRESSES THIS HOPE, SAYING: "THE KING OF KINGS IS DRAWING NEAR, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD IS HERE.

FLING WIDE THE PORTALS OF YOUR HEART, MAKE IT A TEMPLE SET APART, FROM EARTHLY USE FOR HEAVENS EMPLOY, ADORNED WITH PRAYER AND LOVE AND JOY."

THIS SEASON REMINDS US THAT REAL JOY IS FOUND IN THE FACT GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD JESUS WAS BORN.

AND THE HEAVENS WERE TORN OPEN AT HIS BIRTH, SO THAT HE MIGHT BRING FORGIVENESS AND NEW LIFE TO ALL WHO OPEN THEIR HEARTS TO HIM.

YES, WE ARE IN THE SEASON OF BOTH WAITING FOR, AND CELEBRATING THE HOPE EMBODIED IN THE BIRTH OF JESUS, WHO CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS.

THIS MEANS WE LOOK AHEAD-BOTH TOWARDS CHRISTMAS DAY, AND BEYOND IT- TO THE HOPE OF CHRIST'S RETURN TO EARTH IN ALL POWER AND GLORY.

BUT LET US ALSO REMEMBER TO CELEBRATE THE PROMISE JESUS MADE TO REMAIN WITH US ALWAYS, MEANING HE IS WITH US TODAY, RIGHT NOW.

WE CAN THEREFORE HAVE HOPE IN PRESENCE OF CHRIST WITHIN US, AND ALL WHO ARE SAVED BY HIM.

THIS HOPE INCLUDES NOT JUST GOD'S INTERVENTION IN THE WORLD, AND BUT ALSO OUR LIVES.

IT IS A HOPE THAT GOD'S SPIRIT WILL TOUCH US ANEW THIS SEASON SO WE CAN EXPERIENCE MORE POWERFULLY THE PEACE, JOY, AND LOVE JESUS PROVIDES.

LET US SEEK TO BE OPEN TO THE LIGHT OF HOPE, WHICH IS ALSO THE LIGHT OF CHRIST BOTH WITHIN AND AROUND US.

THIS LIGHT, IS NEEDED TO PIERCE THE DARKNESS IN LIFE,  
ESPECIALLY IN THE PRESENT YEAR OF SO MUCH TRAGEDY  
AND DIFFICULTY ALL AROUND THE WORLD.

ADVENT IS HERE TO REMIND US ABOUT THE BLESSING OF  
GOD'S LIGHT, AND TO ENCOURAGE US TO BE BEARERS OF HIS  
LIGHT.

THIS IS ANOTHER WAY WE CAN BECOME THE DOORKEEPERS  
IN THE PARABLE, IN WHICH JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES TO BE  
WATCHFUL FOR HIS RETURN.

WE CAN HOLD UP THE LIGHT OF HOPE NOT ONLY FOR  
OURSELVES, BUT ALSO SO THAT OTHERS MIGHT BE DRAWN  
TO IT AND THUS TO THE SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.

WE CAN ALSO LIVE THE LIGHT OF HOPE BY CARING FOR AND  
ENCOURAGING OTHERS AS GOD GIVES US- THE WORDS, THE  
RESOURCES, AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO.

LET US PRAY:

LORD OF DARKNESS AND OF LIGHT, COME TO US THIS DAY IN  
THE MIDST OF OUR GROWING DARKNESS BRINGING THE  
LIGHT OF HOPE TO OUR LIVES.

BREAK THROUGH THE CLUTTER AND THE DARKNESS OF OUR  
SOULS. SHINE YOUR LIGHT ON OUR PATH.

CALM OUR SPIRITS, AND KEEP OUR HEARTS AND MINDS  
ALERT TO YOUR PRESENCE AND TO THE WAYS YOU ENRICH  
OUR LIVES.

HELP US, WE PRAY, TO WAIT IN FAITH, AND TO SHARE THE  
GOOD NEWS OF ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS,  
AND THE REASON WE CELEBRATE HIS BIRTHDAY.

MAY YOUR PRESENCE WITHIN US ENCIRCLE OUR HEARTS AND  
MINDS, SO THE LIGHT OF CHRIST MAY BURN EVER BRIGHTER  
THROUGH US, AS WE COUNT DOWN THE DAYS UNTIL  
CHRISTMAS AND BEYOND.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS, OUR SAVIOR WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY- ISAIAH 64:1-9 AND Mark 13:27-37

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