

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

## The New Community in Christ (Isaiah 56)

### I. Historical background

- a. "Isaiah" means "the Lord is salvation" **ישעיהו**
  - i. He lived in Jerusalem and came from a wealthy family. In chapter 6 we see that his calling was in the year King Uzziah died which would have been around 740BC.
- b. In 701BC Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem, many Israelites deported, remnant remained in Jerusalem.
  - i. Later in 606BC, Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar defeated Assyria. In 587BC, final destruction of Jerusalem and the great exile of the Israelites.
- c. It's important for us to understand the chaos and instability of his own day as we hear the words of Isaiah and his vision of what this new community will look like in Christ.

### II. Isaiah's vision for the Messiah

- a. Isaiah is concerned with entire cultural and community transformation and reconciliation.
- b. The forgiveness of our individual sins through Christ is not the end, it's the beginning! It's the beginning of building God's kingdom of reconciliation here on earth.

### III. The return of the eunuch and the reconciliation of the nations.

- a. v. 3, we see this declaration that the eunuch will no longer say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

- i. In the ancient world, it was obviously a big sacrifice, but you could work your way into a position of power within the royal family by being castrated because you could be trusted among all the king's wives and concubines.
- b. But God declares that in his coming kingdom, with the advent of Christ, those who because of worldly decisions had cut themselves off from having a family and from entering into worship could now be redeemed and included in his blessing.

## IV. Acts 8:26-40: Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch

- a. Luke included this story for the sake of helping believers understand the fulfillment of Christ's work on this earth.
- b. The story is about a eunuch who has traveled all the way from Ethiopia which was an incredible distance and also very dangerous in that day.
- c. Isaiah saw that those once excluded from the community of faith are now welcomed in. And it is not just the eunuchs, but it is all peoples from all nations.

## V. Paul's vision in Galatians 3:27-29; Eph. 2:14-22

- a. In 56:6 Isaiah goes on and sees a vision where all foreigners, all who are on the outside, will be welcomed into the house of the Lord.
- b. Paul would later catch this same vision as he said to the church in Galatia: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
  - i. Neither Jew nor Greek: no more ethnic barriers in the new community.
  - ii. Neither slave nor free: no more economic barriers in the new community.
  - iii. Male or female: no more social or gender barriers in the new community

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

- c. Because all are now found in Christ! We have been reconciled with God and one another! And this is what Isaiah sees as true celebration for Christmas and the coming of the Messiah.
- d. **Eph. 2:14-22** Paul also shares this same message with the believers in Ephesus.
  - i. People interpret the “dividing wall” as many different things, but in this context, Paul is referring to the ethnic and racial divisions between Jew and Gentile.
  - ii. Today we face the same divisions. (Look at recent wars, Kosovo, Genocide in Rwanda, Riots in France, Rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, etc.)
- e. **Revelation 7:9** we see John's vision of people from every tribe and tongue worshipping together.
  - i. John had a view of the final days and the culmination of God's final salvation for his people.
  - ii. John's vision of the future was not some pie in the sky ideal, but something he saw the church working toward in Christ here and now on earth through the reconciliation that the Cross brings.

## VI. Summary

- a. So we can see through this text of Is. 56, Isaiah had a vision for the advent of the Messiah as far more than just personal forgiveness.
  - i. It was that, but it was also the formation of a new community where the all the walls that our sinful natures create would be brought down.
  - ii. And that body would include men and women from all nationalities, all ethnicities, all economic backgrounds and there would be a peace among them unlike the world had ever seen.
- b. And that is what Isaiah saw as a result of Christ's suffering for the sake of our sins. Not just so we could be forgiven, but so we could begin building God's kingdom, his heaven here on earth.

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

## The Redemption of our Culture: Isaiah 54, 60

### I. The Redemption of Culture

- a. One of the prevailing attitudes in mainstream evangelicalism is that our American culture is in decay.
  - i. But rather than trying to renew our culture, many Christians have created a Christian sub-culture.
- b. What was Isaiah's vision of cultural renewal?
- c. We're called to actively engage and redeem our own culture as part of our responsibility in bringing God's kingdom here on earth.
- d. Three concepts of culture:
  - i. We need to recognize the goodness of the cultures that God has created.
  - ii. We need to see the brokenness inherent in every culture.
  - iii. And we need to see how, through Christ, we can break through the physical and spiritual bondage of our culture so that we can begin to redeem it.

### II. Goodness of culture

- a. If we start with the end in mind and look to John's vision in Rev. 21 we see that the new Jerusalem, the new city of God, will be a physical city.
  - i. It is a return to what began in the physical creation in Genesis where God created all that was good and heaven and earth were inseparable.

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

- ii. So we can see Genesis and Rev. as the bookends of the biblical narrative and in each there is a clear affirmation of the goodness of our physical world.
  
- b. Even Jesus, after the resurrection, was raised in a new body that could both eat and drink. And this is the same type of body that we look forward to.
  
- c. Because there will be a material world, cultural activity will continue.
  
- d. Culture provides the beauty we need to engage in as human beings. Those things which are True, Good and Beautiful.
  
- e. What we begin to realize when we see the goodness in culture is that God is source of it all.
  
- f. Tim Keller's view: in Genesis God gave us raw materials of creation and made us gardeners.
  - i. He gave us the opportunity to plant and tend and grow out of the raw materials of the earth.
  
- g. In our Judeo-Christian religion we see that the material world is good and needs to be redeemed.
  - i. This is very unlike a Buddhist culture where the material world is just an illusion, or the Greek philosophy that material is dirty and only secondary to the mind or spirit.
  
- h. Vrs. 1-9, Isaiah sees the wealth of all the nations coming to bring glory and honor to God.
  - i. The light of Christ and his glory will draw all nations to him and to this holy city that Isaiah sees.
  - ii. Isaiah envisions this glorious city or society will be full of peace, beauty and praise. V. 18, no more violence, God's glory dwelling with us.
  
- i. But did this kind of city/society come because of Christ?

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

## III. Brokenness of culture

- a. It's not difficult to see brokenness in all aspects of our culture.
  - i. The arts, business, politics, education, racism, pornography, drugs, etc.
- b. Our challenge as Christians is not just to moan about it, but to see the goodness and redeem it just as God did.
- c. As we look back on the event of Pentecost, God didn't condemn culture, but he redeemed it.
  - i. The curse of Gen. 11 and the tower of Babel.
  - ii. But on Pentecost God comes in the power of his holy spirit and doesn't simply speak in one tongue, but many.
- d. Every culture has its downfalls, but every one also has its positives. God wants to redeem what goodness is in each one.
  - i. Think about the body of Christ as the whole of creation—all the nations. Each culture then has their own gifts, their own function in the whole body of Christ.
- e. This is not a simply creating a cultural homogeneity, but it is bringing Christ to different cultures so that they might be renewed in Christ.
  - i. i.e. Christianity in South Korea, Africa, etc.
- f. V. 4—the light of God shines and all cultures are attracted to it. They stream in from all over the world to be healed and renewed.
  - i. Isaiah saw the glory of God, John later tells us that the light that came into the world was the light of Christ (John 1:4-5)

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

- g. So Isaiah has a vision of all the nations coming together to not only worship, but live out a new kind of culture that thrives and blossoms under the Lordship of Christ.

## IV. Redemption of culture and our image in Christ.

- a. So how do we redeem the culture that we live in? How do we transform it into this vision that Isaiah has that will come as a result of God's return through Jesus?
- b. Gardener image:
  - i. If you are gardening with raw materials, whatever the seeds or materials are, you still have to plant them, tend them, prune, etc.
  - ii. Ex. You work for a large firm and in your control are a certain amount of assets. God is calling you to use those assets in a way that brings him glory.
  - iii. Commerce will clearly be a part of this new kingdom in Isaiah's view. The question is not about making money, it's about how you do it and what you do with it?

## V. Isaiah 54:1-5: The reversal of cultural shame in the barren woman.

- a. What was significance of childbearing in the ancient world?
- b. The depth of the family influence in the ancient culture is profoundly different than our society today.
- c. Childbirth is a natural part of our culture, but, as can often happen, we take what is good and make it the preeminent thing, and it becomes an idol.
  - i. Rachel says, "give me children or I'll die." After Leah bore Jacob sons Genesis 30:1

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

- d. But God says, "Sing barren women." He's calling women to an emotional freedom from shame, and freedom from external pressures.
    - i. God is saying your value is beyond what the culture tells you and is found in his love for us. He says "your maker is your husband."
  - e. Brennan Manning: helping people understand that they are Abba's child.
    - i. God delights in you because you are his child!
  - f. God delivers us from slavery and transforms our image of ourselves and who we are in Him. Then we can become agents of cultural change.
- VI. Isaiah envisioned a new city in Christ and those who were forgiven and redeemed by his sacrifice would be set free from cultural bondage to become agents of cultural change.

## Isaiah 24-27, 11

### I. The Redemption of the Earth in Christ

- a. With the coming of Christ we find that there is an impending judgment not only on the inhabitants of the earth, but on the earth itself.
- b. The question is why should the earth suffer for our iniquities and what does that mean in terms of our connection to the earth? And why does Isaiah spend an entire chapter discussing the judgment and destruction of the earth and city?
- c. The cause of the judgment is found in 24:5
  - i. The earth is part of God's creation and part of the covenant with Israel.

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

- ii. If Israel lives and abides within the covenant, the earth rejoices and celebrates (25:6-8).
- d. The cause of the breakdown in the earth also relates back to Gen. 3:17-18.
  - i. Because we are so tied to the earth, mankind's sin also reaped consequences for the creation.
  - ii. Because of our refusal to follow God's path, the earth has paid the consequence.
- e. If Isaiah saw the intimate union between the human race and the earth through this covenant between God and the Israelites, how then are we to respond as Christians to the earth and to the redemption that comes to the earth through Christ?
  - i. What does it mean for us to live in the new covenant of Christ in terms of our relation to the earth?
  - ii. As Christians, in the new covenant, I believe we are responsible for bringing joy to the earth by living lives that are within God's covenant and in Christ.
- f. Paul sees the same vision in Rom. 8:18-25
  - i. We wait for our full redemption, but we also experience that redemption and renewal now.
- g. Isaiah 25:6-8, he sees a time of redemption when the earth will produce joyfully and this is the same thing on John's heart in Revelation 7:16-17
  - i. John sees the redemption of all nations along with the earth later in Rev. 21:1 as a culmination of the work that begins with the advent of Christ and continues now as we serve God faithfully.

# Isaiah's Vision of Christmas

- h. Is. 11:1-9 Isaiah also relates what this reconciliation will look like through the stump of Jesse.
    - i. Messiah will bring reconciliation that will happen on all levels.
    - ii. This is an important image not only because it shows the universal nature of the reconciliation that will come, but also the clear line of redemption from the original creation in Genesis.
  - i. In chapter 25 we move on to a time of hope in v. 7-9 where the earth will once again produce rich food and wine.
    - i. John takes this apocalyptic vision and uses it almost verbatim in Rev. 7:17.
  - j. Are Isaiah and John simply talking about a time to come that we are waiting for? Is it just wishful thinking to think about a time when the cities are built up in righteousness and the earth will rejoice because human beings are actively living in covenant faithfulness with the living God?
  - k. I believe that they weren't simply thinking about the advent of the second coming, but they were describing what can happen through the advent of Christ.
- II. For Isaiah, the advent of Messiah did not only bring reconciliation on a divine level between God and human beings, but brought a universal reconciliation in all of creation.