



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

2023

WEEK ONE

*MESSIAH OF PROMISE*

ISAIAH

## INTRODUCTION



This year's Advent journey will take us through sections of the book of Isaiah. Many of you remember that we spent some time in Isaiah on Sunday mornings in December 2022. This little devotional will remind us of some of the themes but will go in a different direction as we see the beauty of our Messiah in the book of Isaiah. Largely we will focus on the person of Jesus and who Isaiah prophesies that He will be; the roles He will fulfill, the promises He will keep, the work He will do, and the beauty of his person. The book of Isaiah can be intimidating because of its length (66 chapters- wow). However, there is so much beauty and grace that can be found within this important, but heavy, book. I'd really love for you to read it.

So, for the next three weeks we will mostly focus on Jesus, but we will set our study of him within the context of Isaiah, the author of the largest book of prophecy in the Bible. You probably noticed that I said three weeks. Usually, Advent is four weeks. However, the way the calendar lines up in 2023 results in a short Advent season this year. Here's how it works: Advent always starts four Sundays before Christmas Day. That typically means there are four weeks of preparation. But this year with Christmas on a Monday, it means there are three weeks plus one day of preparation. I don't know about you, but I love anticipating Christmas. So, I hope that we can all anticipate it all that much more this year and not let the short time sneak by us. I hope this little devotional guide will help you.

The purpose of this guide is not to be an in-depth study of either the person of Jesus or the book of Isaiah. The goal here is just to get you to think about Jesus; to reflect on all He is, all He has done for the world, and especially for you. Join me as we anticipate Jesus together...



## ***Isaiah 1:27***

Relationships expose our needs. I'm REALLY good at losing things. I cannot tell you how many conversations Jess and I have had about the need to just establish a place for my keys, wallet, and various other items. Every time one of those things is lost, we agree that if I just left them in a designated spot every day, we would know where they are. The problem is... that designated spot has been established and changed many times now. Why? Because I'm good at losing things, which means I'm bad at putting things where they go. I never really knew I was bad at this until I married Jess. I thought everybody lost things. It turns out, I'm worse off than I thought. She exposed my need. And, honestly, that's not the only need she exposed. It's good for us to know where we fall short and therefore have our needs exposed.

Isaiah chapter 1 does just that. Isaiah 1 prepares us for all that is to come by reminding us of who we are and who God is. It's important to note that the book of Isaiah was primarily written for the nation of Israel. We must always recognize details like that when we study the Bible. However, the problem of Israel is the same as the problem with us: sin, rebellion, selfishness, and a tendency to forget God. So, whereas Isaiah 1 was first exposing all those flaws in Israel, we read it as exposing the same flaws in us. Let's look a little deeper at what I mean. It'd be helpful to pull out your Bible and look at Isaiah chapter 1 as I walk us through it.

After introducing himself in verse 1, Isaiah describes in verses 2-4 how God's people are like wayward children who were raised to do one thing (follow God) and have chosen to do the opposite (rebel). This rebellion is a sickness (1:5-6) that has resulted in judgment (1:7-9). So, the point of these first 9 verses is simple: you have a problem (sin) and you're currently dealing with the negative effects of your mistakes.

Next, verses 10-20 tell the nation (and us) that something has to be done about our sin! Sacrifices aren't the answer (1:10-11) because sacrifices are always followed up by more sins and

injustice (1:12-17). No, the only answer is God's solution. And God's solution will result in total purity; pure as snow (1:18-20). But how does that happen?

In verse 24, we see that eventually God will break in. Do you see that? The solution is not so much the people changing and turning back, the solution is God doing something new! He literally takes wicked people and makes them righteous (1:26). But this new thing coming does require something of the rebellious people; repentance (1:27). Look at Isaiah 1:27--it's the most important part of this chapter. The great God of justice will redeem His people, but that redemption comes along with their repentance. So, in a sense, now that Isaiah has exposed us to who we are earlier in the chapter, he calls us to do something about it: repent. I think if we know ourselves well, we all ultimately come to the conclusion that there is something in us that is broken. God's word makes that clear. We need to repent and we need a redeemer. Isaiah hasn't yet shown us how redemption happens, but as we keep reading in the days ahead, it becomes clear that redemption centers around a particular person who is coming. But for now, let's just call Him our Redeemer.

Can you imagine what it would be like to live without repentance and forgiveness? What if there was nowhere to go with your mistakes, shame, and guilt? What if you could never find forgiveness or redemption? Close your time with Jesus today by praising Him for being your Redeemer. Search your heart again for any rebellion or selfishness that pulls you away from Him. Praise Him for coming to purchase (redeem) you for His Kingdom!



## ***Isaiah 7:11***

Do you remember those crazy days of 2020? The days of uncertainty, Zoom, staying at home, virtual school, and, more than anything, distance? In our tech-driven society, those days taught us something really essential about ourselves and humanity. Those days reassured us of the power of being WITH somebody. For most of us, a livestream never felt like we were with somebody else, and a Zoom call wasn't a replacement for physical presence. Now, in one sense, I'm grateful to God for some of the technological developments that allowed us to connect with people over great distances. But we all know, there is something powerful about being WITH somebody else. Today, we look at one of my favorite concepts from the coming of Jesus: God is WITH us. Look up Isaiah 7:10-16.

At this point in Isaiah, the story intersects with the whole story of Israel, and the story of us. In chapter 7, Isaiah wrote about Israel's longing for restoration. They remembered the stories they had heard since childhood about the God, who was with his people in power. The burning bush, the pillar of cloud and fire, the Tabernacle, and the temple all showed that God wanted to be WITH His people. But these people hadn't experienced any of that presence.

Here, we see that God really does want to be with his people again. Isaiah 7 opens up with the realization that God's people are desperate. Their enemies had formed a coalition against them their hearts were shaking like trees in the wind (7:2). But, God had a plan. God spoke through Isaiah to King Ahaz, and said "ask for a sign, I'll give you a sign of your redemption" (7:11). Ahaz was too afraid to even know what to ask for, so God gave his own sign: a child, born of a virgin, who would be the latest manifestation of God WITH His people. We'll leave the craziness of God coming as a child through a virgin for another day. The central message is that none of those previous manifestations of God's presence are good enough to preserve and protect the people from their own sin. So, the Old Testament closes with this promise that Israel will be restored when God comes to be with them in the form of a person. That

story is picked up in John 1, “the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us“ (John 1). When God dwells with man, redemption comes. And once He comes in redemption to you, He remains with you (John 15).

This whole story hits on something that is deeply true about us: the human heart gets lonely. We long for community, the presence of other people, and mostly, the presence of someone who loves us unconditionally. We long for the presence of someone with whom we can be fully ourselves. Because God came to be with us and sacrificed himself on our behalf, the problem of sin that kept God’s people out of his promise has been dealt with. For now, we feel the pains of loneliness as we wait for an even fuller manifestation of being with the God whom we love and who loves us. And yet, the human heart can embrace the “withness” of God at a real level. Will you pray for God’s presence to fill you in a greater sense today? When you long for the presence of someone you love, will you use that as a reminder to thank God for coming to be with you and ask him to make his presence known to you at a greater level?

He may still seem far off, but He really is there.

He really will come near; will you draw near to him as He draws near to you?

**Isaiah 9:6**

*Note: In last year's Advent devotional, I spent three days reflecting on the three powerful titles given to Jesus in Isaiah 9:6: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. If you'd like further reflection on those titles, they can be accessed on our website ([fellowshipdalton.com](http://fellowshipdalton.com)) under our "Media" tab. For this year, I'll keep my comments on this passage focused on two other descriptions given for Jesus in this power-packed verse: (1) He is a child, and (2) He is a son.*

Nothing in life prepares you for bringing home a baby. In my family, even bringing home a baby didn't prepare us for bringing home a baby. If you don't know our story, before we had Eden, we lost two twin boys who we never got to take home. One passed immediately after birth, and the other lived in the NICU for three days before passing. So, when Eden was born one year later, to say we were anxious would be an understatement. Then, Eden was born sick, and that made everything harder. She had to stay in the NICU for the first two weeks of her life, and for some of those days, we were worried we were going to lose her as well. However, when Karis was born, we recognized that there was actually a benefit in the way Eden's first 14 days went for us: sleep. Even when we finally got to take Eden home, she was on a schedule. If you've ever been a parent, you know how important that is. She slept and ate on a schedule that we didn't teach her; the nurses did that while we slept. Now let's talk about Karis. We brought her home on day two of her life, and we were fully responsible for the schedule. We thought Eden was hard because we didn't see the benefit of the way the doctors and nurses had trained her to expect food at certain times. Karis came home as a blank slate for our shaping, so the nights were just a bit (or a lot) rougher. I loved holding my newborn, but 3 a.m. is a stressful time to do it. I remember how badly we longed to have Eden at home those first two weeks and yet five years later, we would've gladly accepted an NICU nurse offering to feed Karis at 3 a.m. We faced many sleepless nights along the way because babies aren't very good at taking care of themselves.



If the fact that the mighty God, the righteous King, came as a child makes sense to you, it's only because you've become comfortable with the Christmas story. Think about it. If you had never heard the story of the Bible before, and you wanted to craft a heroic story about God coming to save all of humanity from themselves, would you send a baby? More than that, would you send an unborn baby? I think it's easy to forget the craziness of the story. Jesus didn't just come as a human; He came as an unborn fetus in the womb of a virgin. Not only is it an impressive miracle, it's a bizarre way to save humanity. Why not send a wise sage to counsel the world? Why not send a brilliant, military tactical leader to conquer the enemy? Why not send the kind of charismatic leader that everyone could get behind? God sends a humble servant into an intentionally lowly estate. For unto us, a child is born (Isaiah 9:6).

When God took on human flesh, He became a human who couldn't feed Himself, who woke up His mother, hungry, at 3 a.m., and who relied on other people for basic needs. But that is such a beautiful part of the story. God coming as a child is a beautiful picture of humility, but also restraint. He could have come in power. He could have come to conquer. But if He came to conquer, He would have conquered all sinners in judgment. Rather, coming as a child gives us a picture of His heart.

As Isaiah will later tell us, He came as a servant and as a sufferer. He didn't come in strength to destroy sinners; He came in weak flesh that could be destroyed for the sake of sinners. But the real show of strength came when that destroyed flesh was resurrected, showing that He had come for destruction. But His sights were not set on sinners, His sights were set on sin, its power, and the Adversary who tempts sinners. So, the innocent child became an innocent man who was destroyed so that death, sin, the Adversary could be destroyed and we might have life.

So, as we sing the songs of the season and reflect on all of those humble stories we know about the stable, manger, and the lowliness of the story. Remember God made His coming humble for your sake. Will you thank Him for His humility, restraint, and victory today?

**Isaiah 9:6**

One day after Sunday worship, a man in our church came up to me and said, “I heard you talking in the lobby, but your body was shorter and your hair was whiter.” Huh? Any guesses as to what he meant? He was talking about my dad. This man that I had known for a number of years heard my voice, turned, and saw a different person with the same voice. He was surprised. I’ve never noticed it myself, but apparently, I sound a lot like my dad. Do you remember a few years ago when there was this new app that made you older? All you had to do was upload a picture of yourself and it would show you what you will look like when you are older and grayer. You know what happened when I uploaded a picture of myself? It turned me into my dad. I never knew how much I looked like him, until the progression software aged me 30 years and I saw him in me.

That’s how family resemblance works sometimes. You see the father in the son. And you hear the father’s voice in the son’s voice. This is why it is so amazing to hear in Isaiah 9:6 that God has a Son!

*Isaiah 9:6 (ESV) For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

God having a Son has incredible implications. Will He look like His Father? Will He sound like His Father? Will He act like His Father? One powerful passage that helps us answer these questions is the opening to Hebrews.

*Hebrews 1:1–3 (ESV) 1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

So, let's look quickly at what this section says about the Son and the Father:

God speaks through the Son (2).

The Son is the heir of all things (2).

The Son is the creator of all (2).

The Son is the radiance of the glory of God (3).

The Son is the exact imprint of His nature (3).

The Son upholds the universe by the word of his power (3).

The Son made purification for sins (3).

Now the Son is sitting at the right hand of God the Father (3).

So, does He look like His Father? Yes (3). Does He sound like His Father? Yes (2). In fact, when Jesus Himself was asked by one of his disciples to show them the Father, Jesus replied "if you have seen me you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus even chided his followers for wanting to see the Father outside the Son.

For Isaiah and his audience, this must have been confusing.

This figure that was coming was shrouded in mystery. How would He help them gain victory over their enemies and reconcile with God? How would they relate to Him?

We know the answers. If you are longing to connect with God in a deeper way today, the path is given to us. God Himself has come near, so now He is not asking you to follow a far off God who is disengaged from our lives. He is inviting you to come near to His Son who has walked this earth, faced temptation, suffered on your behalf, and left us a pattern by which to live. God's Old Covenant people struggled to follow the Law, because all the Law did was expose their disobedience. But we've been called to follow a person. A person who prayed, communed with God, studied the Scriptures, served people, taught others to follow, exposed hypocrisy, and lifted up the broken. Those Laws that define God's character still stand, but now we have a better pattern to follow. Today, praise Him for what He has done in bringing the radiance of the glory of God to us, and then reflect on the practices of Jesus; what practice can you embrace in your life today?



## ***Isaiah 11:1-5***

Our home is surrounded by approximately 7 million trees. That might be a little bit of an exaggeration, but it feels like that many sometimes. Every couple of years we hire a tree service to come and cut down a few more, but there are always plenty left standing. I'm not against trees, I do like oxygen and shade, but roots, falling limbs, and leaves can get annoying. If you've ever cut down a tree, you know what happens if you just leave a stump. Number 1, it's in the way, and, number 2, little trees shoot up out of it. The tree may be cut down but there is still some life in that stump. That picture is a picture of Advent and a picture of the Messiah.

In Isaiah 7-12, Isaiah gives a picture of how judgment comes to nations while Israel receives little glimmers of hope from the promised important figure we've already seen in chapters 7 and 9. In chapter 11, we learn more about the restoration of what has been destroyed in Israel. Take a minute to open your Bible and read Isaiah 11:1-5.

In Isaiah 6, God told Isaiah that the nation would be destroyed and cut down like a mighty tree. We know that the lumberjacks of judgment are the Assyrians and Babylonians. But in the prediction of destruction God also gives a promise of hope. Though the nation has been felled, the "stump remains when it is felled [and] the holy seed is its stump" (Is 6:13). So, the mighty Oak of Israel is cut down, but the holy seed remains in the stump, which means it's still alive (you should read Genesis 3:15 to hear more about the holy seed). Isaiah 11:1 tells us how that stump comes alive again.

A shoot springs up from the stump, and we learn that the stump is identified particularly with Jesse. There is a lot here to reflect on so for today, we will just talk about what it means to see the shoot come specifically from Jesse. Then, next week we'll talk more about the fruit bearing branch. Do you remember the story of the wise men? These men come from far away to visit the new king born in Israel. They have read

about him in prophecies and saw a star that was a sign of his coming, but they do not know where to go. So, they visit the current king Herod (who's really only sort of a king), and they ask him. Eventually, they find out that the new king is to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Why Bethlehem? In Herod's day it was not a large town; it was not well known or notable. It was a humble town. But this humble town had a rich history; Bethlehem is the city of David. We think of David as the greatest king in Israel's history. David is the type of king that everyone after was compared to. But it wasn't always that way for David. God sent the prophet Samuel to David's father, Jesse, to anoint one of Jesse's boys as king (1 Samuel 16). So, Jesse presents his seven sons in order to Samuel and God tells Samuel one-by-one that none of the boys presented are to be king. Then there's a revelation: Jesse left one of his sons out. The youngest was busy watching the sheep. Someone had to do it, so Jesse just assumed that Samuel won't notice the omission. Why would he pick the little one?

But God chooses Samuel and says, "For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). This is the story of David and the story of Jesus. God chose what looked foolish to the world to shame the wise (Colossians 1:27). Israel's first great king and last great king would come from the same underappreciated setting and family.

Think about Jesse. Even he didn't believe that his youngest son could be king. This tells us something about the stump and shoot. Jesus is the shoot; the stump is the nation that is like Jesse. David rose up to be a great king by God's power despite Jesse's unbelief. So much more will Jesus rise out of the unbelieving stump of Jesse to be the ultimate eternal King over not just Israel but every nation, tongue, and tribe (Revelation 7:9).

Do you believe this plan? No, really. Do you believe that the One you worship will one day rule over everything in a clear and decisive way? I am sure that most of us believe so in our heads. But do you live your life like it is true each day? Does the story of the King who came in humility but reigns for eternity capture your heart with fascination, awe, wonder, and enchantment? How do you live today in response to this eternal King and in preparation for His eternal Kingdom?

WEEK TWO

*MESSIAH ON MISSION*

ISAIAH

**Isaiah 11:1-5**

Have you ever watched the show The Great Christmas Light Fight? If you haven't heard of it, you can guess what it's about. Contestants compete to see who can organize the best light display, and they go BIG. Contestants pull out all the stops, spare no expense, and use all of their creativity in hopes of having the biggest and brightest display. Can you imagine going to all of that work and forgetting to plug in the cord? For some of you, the thought brings Clark Griswold to mind. In Christmas Vacation, he assembles thousands of lights, checks all the cords, and yet doesn't realize that his main power source is controlled by a switch in the basement. Where there is no power, there is no light. Take a minute to open your Bible and read all of Isaiah 11.

You just read some amazing things about what is accomplished through the coming of Jesus, the Branch. He delights in the Lord (3), judges the earth (4-5), defeats the wicked (4), brings peace (6-9), restores God's people (10-16), and brings the knowledge of God to the whole earth (9)! Isaiah's listeners must have been excited, but some Christians may skip over a passage like this because it seems confusing. Did this already occur? Are we still waiting for some of these for some of these events? How do we know the difference between what occurred and what didn't? We're not going to answer those questions today other than to say some of it has happened and some hasn't happened yet. In Biblical prophecy, one event can trigger other events that follow, even when not all of those events happen at the same time. It helps me to think of the prophets as looking at mountain ranges. The mountains are key events. When you look at a mountain range, you see one mountain behind another, but you cannot see the space in between. That's how it works with the prophets. Jesus's eternal kingdom comes after his coming as a man, but Isaiah doesn't see the space (years) in between so he speaks of it as one picture.

Our main goal today is to see that these beautiful effects of Jesus's life required that He stay connected to God in a unique way. Look closely at verse 2, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall

rest upon him (the Branch), the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” Jesus, God Himself, had to be led by the Spirit! Jesus had to stay connected to the power source. And if He needs to stay connected to God through the power source (the Holy Spirit), how much more do you and I need to stay connected?

One of the things I love about this passage is that Isaiah gives us an amazingly clear picture of the way of the Spirit (the life connected to the power source). There are six characteristics:

*Wisdom* - practical skills associated with understanding and living a successful life

*Understanding* - seeing beyond the details and knowing what to do

*Counsel* - advice based on a greater perspective; God sees what we don't

*Might* - strength beyond human capability

*Knowledge* - experiential knowledge of who God is

*Fear of the Lord* - awe and reverence; awareness that things go poorly when God is not at the center of a life

Are you following the Way of the Spirit? Take some time today and ask God to lead you in a more tangible way in these areas. Maybe go one-by-one down the list and ask God to bring that aspect of the Spirit's work into your life to a greater degree.



***Isaiah 11:10 & 5:26***

Did you know your ability to hear high frequencies changes with age? It's not just that the volume one can hear changes and you need to turn the sound up, there are literally certain frequencies that you cannot hear at all as you get older. As an example, someone in their 30s, like me, can typically hear frequencies of 15,000 Hz but not much higher than that. From the highly sophisticated research I did on YouTube, I learned that my hearing drops between 15,000 and 16,000 Hz making me... average for my age (I was really hoping to be above average). A dog whistle's frequency is usually above 23,000 Hz, which means I'm nowhere close to being able to hear that. That is why dog whistles are such effective tools. They signal dogs without bothering people. Think about it, there are sounds around us that we can't hear.

Today we pick up on another key description of Jesus from Isaiah 11:10, "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." This verse echoes a phrase that Isaiah already used in 5:26. The reasons for signaling the nations in today's passage are very different from those in 5:26, but both reasons would be offensive to Israel in different ways. In 5:26, God is signaling the nations to come from far off to destroy Israel. He is using other nations to judge His people. But in 11:10, He is signaling for nations to come not as instruments of justice, but as recipients of salvation. One of the problems in the nation of Judah that Isaiah has to address is the problem of pride. God's people haven't just rejected worship of God for worship of false gods. They've done it while assuming that God will keep His end of the covenant as they break theirs. They think God will eventually step in and judge the nations and restore them without judgment.

Jonah is an example of one of the implications of this problem. They didn't want the nations they didn't like to be saved. They wanted God on their side, protecting them and judging others. These two examples of God signaling foreign nations show

His plans are different. First, he doesn't always defend Israel in battle; sometimes He signals other nations to come and discipline His wayward people (5:26). And second, He doesn't just save Israel; the plan is unfolding for the ultimate gathering of all peoples into Christ's eternal kingdom. He's telling everyone to meet in Jerusalem (11:10). Take a minute to read Isaiah 2:2-3 which tells us the same thing.

This is an important theme in Isaiah (I hope your interest in Isaiah is growing; it really is a fascinating book). This theme that Isaiah writes about more than most Old Testament writers is, well, us - the nations. We're focusing on Isaiah because he says so much about who the Messiah will be. Along the way, he tells us that the Messiah is coming not just for Israel but for the nations! Jesus comes for people outside of the covenant with Abraham. Of course, that was always God's plan. In Genesis 3, He says He is bringing a seed from the woman, and in Genesis 12 he says the offspring of Abraham will bring blessing to the nations. That seed and offspring is Immanuel, the child, the son, the root from Jesse's stump, the branch, and the Messiah who signals to the nations that salvation has come to them!

Salvation can only come through Jesus. The covenant sacrifices never fully removed sin from Israel; they needed the Messiah. You and I also need the Messiah. We've also rebelled against God. The offer is the same. Embrace the Messiah of Israel, who is signaling out to people from all nations, even now, that it is time to come to Him in faith. Then, one day, we will all be gathered together to enter into His eternal kingdom. This would be a great day to praise Him for saving you from your sin and signaling to you. You can also take this time to pray for the nations. Pray for a nation who is in the news right now that is in turmoil. Pray for a place where you know a missionary working. Pray for a place where you don't know a missionary. Pray that God would send someone new. Reflect on what that day will be like when believers from all nations are called together.



## ***Isaiah 8:14***

Almost two-thirds of adults (65%) agree that “people being too easily offended” is a significant problem in the U.S. More than half (53%) agree that “people saying offensive things to others” is a significant problem in the U.S. These insights are from a July 2021 study by the Pew Research Center. If you read those numbers carefully, you concluded that some people agreed that both were problems. In fact, 37% of people in the U.S. believe both above statements are true and significant problems today. And you’ve probably noticed the trend. We live in both an offended and offensive age. It seems that some people are offended by too little and others are taking extra steps to be offensive in response. The pressure of trying not to offend in certain circumstances may have affected you, or you may have been affected by seeing someone in either public or private say something offensive about what you believe or how you live. Whether it’s being offensive or offended, we live in an age of offense.

Jesus was offensive. Isaiah says it, and both Paul and Peter quote Isaiah to reemphasize the idea. Jesus was “a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling” (Isaiah 8:14, 1 Peter 2:8, Romans 9:33). But wasn’t Jesus supposed to save? Why did He cause offense? Why did He cause people to stumble? The context here is really important. In chapter 8, Isaiah is warning of the coming invasion of Assyria (one of the nations God is signaling as judgment on His people). But God comes to Isaiah and tells him not to fear Assyria like the people do. God says (my paraphrase): “If you fear me, I will be a sanctuary, a place of refuge, for you. But if you don’t fear me, I will be a rock that causes you to trip and fall over” (8:14). The choice is clear. Fear Assyria or fear God. Find refuge in God or trip and fall short of salvation.

What’s interesting here is that even though Isaiah talks about the Messiah more than anyone else in the Old Testament, this statement about the stone of offense is connected to God Himself and not the One He sends. But Peter connects this

stone of offense with another stone that Isaiah talks about; the Cornerstone. In Isaiah 28:16, God promises to lay a new foundation in Zion (the Temple Mount in Jerusalem) with a brand-new cornerstone. This means that a new covenant is being established in the picture of a new temple being built. God's relationship with people will change with the coming of the cornerstone. Here's another crazy thing to know: if you read Isaiah 28, it is not clear that the cornerstone is a "he;" the cornerstone sounds like an "it." But Peter connects the dots (the fancy word is theological exegesis). Dot 1: God is a stone of offense for unbelieving Israel. Dot 2: God is establishing a new way to relate with Him via a new cornerstone. Dot 3: Jesus is the new thing God is doing. Dot 4: Jesus Himself identified with the cornerstone (Matt 21:41). So, the finished line that Peter draws looks like this: Jesus has come as both a stone of offense for unbelieving Israel and a cornerstone of a New Covenant for those who believe.

I hope you think this is cool, but do you see what it means? Paul adds that the reason Israel stumbled over Jesus was that they pursued righteousness by works and not faith. The problem was that Israel was not ready for a new cornerstone that would provide righteousness as a gift by faith, they were too accustomed to pursuing it by works. This amazing gift of a refuge (Is. 8:14), sure foundation (28:16), and precious value (1 Peter 2:7) was not accepted by a people who preferred their own way.

But what about you? Is this gift offensive? For some people, it seems that way. Over 150 years ago, Karl Marx called religion "an opiate for the masses." He meant that truly enlightened people had no need for the comforts of religion; only simpletons and weak people believed in God. In modern society, the sentiment has only grown. They say, "weak people believe in God, strong people make their own way in life." Or for others, "belief in a judgmental God is harmful and regressive; truly modern people choose love apart from God." But what about you? Does the gospel offend you? It should. The idea that a perfect God who created everything would actually die for you, and that all you have to do is repent and believe sounds like nonsense. Jesus came as both stumbling stone and cornerstone.

As we close today, praise God for being your sure foundation. Also, spend some time in prayer for those who have stumbled. You probably have a loved one who has rejected Jesus. Spend some time in prayer for him or her. Call someone and ask them to pray with you for this person, or text someone and ask them to pray for you. As you do, ask about who in their lives you could pray for. Pray for people to embrace the sure foundation over which they once stumbled.

**Isaiah 12:6**

Are there any Bible verses that remind you of particularly good memories? Today, we'll look at a verse that brings back fond memories for me, and that's kind of the point of the whole verse. When Eden was little, she struggled to memorize verses for Awana Cubbies, so I came up with little tunes or chants to help. Little did I know that the tunes would stay with me long after she forgot them. Two years after Eden went through Cubbies, it was time for Jericho to work on the exact same verses. So, I sang the same tunes. Then, the next year, it was Karis's turn, so I kept going. The one I remember best is today's verse: "The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation!" I asked my kids and none of them remember these songs, but somehow, I still remember the tune I sang to teach all three of them these beautiful words.

As I was reading through Isaiah, this verse jumped off the page because I couldn't read it without singing (no, I will not sing it for you). There's another reason I found this verse interesting: Isaiah didn't write it. For a couple of hundred years before Isaiah quoted this song, it had been included in Israel's songbook, the Psalms (Psalm 118:14). But the psalmist didn't write it either. A couple of hundred years before the psalmist enshrined it in the songbook, Moses led the nation in worship on the shore of the Red Sea by singing these words for the first time (Exodus 15:2). This was one of the most important songs in all of Israel's history. And God included it in three hugely important periods of the nation's story: the exodus (Ex. 15:2), the time of the kings (Ps. 118:14), and the time of the prophets (Is. 12:6). So why does Isaiah quote this and what does it have to do with the coming of Jesus?

This quote comes in the section that immediately follows the power-packed section of Isaiah 11 that we looked at earlier this week. This long-awaited figure who has already been introduced as Redeemer, God-with-us, the Son of God, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the Root of Jesse, and the Signal for the Nations

establishes salvation and peace for Israel and all nations in Isaiah 11. What do you expect to come next? Think about it this way: when you read the Old Testament what is the historical event talked about the most? I don't have statistics on every phrase in the Bible, but I can tell you that the phrase "brought you out of Egypt" occurs 33 times in the Old Testament. Whether it's through Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, or other prophets, God brings it up with the people a lot. It's like a line on God's resume. He wants them to listen, so He reminds them of what he has already done; that is the biggest event they remember. Their whole national identity is built around being the people supernaturally delivered out of Egypt by the one true God who chose them. So, if the song is written immediately after the greatest act of redemption in the Old Testament, don't you see how wondrously fitting it is to quote it immediately after the next big thing is prophesied? You remember that yesterday we saw that the new Cornerstone (Jesus), replaces the old temple and covenant. The old was a limited picture of the true thing to come. It is the same way with the Red Sea and Exodus. The old story is fascinatingly compelling and awe-inspiring. But the next story? Even better.

In the Exodus, God's strength held back the waters so Israel could pass and then crushed the Egyptians. In Jesus, God's strength holds off the power of sin and Satan so that by Jesus's death they can be fully crushed and God's people can enter His promised destination. In the Exodus, God's people are moved to sing of their new lives and also deliverance from the bondage of slavery. In Jesus, God's people are moved to sing of their new life and deliverance from the bondage of sin. In the Exodus, God's salvation provides physical deliverance and entrance into the promised land. In Jesus, God's salvation provides eternal deliverance and entrance into His promised kingdom. Is that something to sing about or what? So today, you should end in a song of praise. Pick your favorite Christmas song that points to Jesus. Sing it out loud - either by yourself or with your family. I'm serious; sing it out. Maybe even tell a friend about the joy you have in singing praise today because of the great salvation He has brought you!

***Isaiah 40:11***

Have you ever come across a stray dog and tried to lead him somewhere? Maybe he was in the street and you just didn't want him to get hit. Maybe he was in your yard and you wanted him to go away. Or maybe you saw a kid frantically chasing a runaway dog and you tried to help. Dogs without leashes are hard to lead unless you know them. A dog who doesn't know you, or is untrained, requires either a leash or bribery with a treat. But if it's your dog and you've trained her to listen to you and trust you, it's a different story. I imagine that's how shepherding is. Sheep learn the voice of their shepherds and trust their shepherds. The balance of kindness and sternness that the shepherd establishes over time trains the sheep to listen and follow. Shepherds know and care for the good of the sheep, and the sheep follow because they believe it.

Take a few minutes and read Isaiah 40:1-11. If you have read through much of Isaiah over the last two weeks, you probably have hit some rough patches. Isaiah uses way more words on judgment than on salvation; that makes the reading a challenge. But here is a section full of good news. God knows that after all His people have seen and heard, they need comfort. In fact, the majority of Isaiah 13-35 is focused on judgment for various nations. God has plans, not just for Israel and Judah, but for Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, and others as well. But chapter 40 gives the readers a comforting reprieve.

God will not just act in judgment; God will act in comfort. Let's look at what this passage tells us about when Jesus comes. This passage can be organized around four key commands from God, which define the four sections of the song. Comfort! or, be comforted (1). Prepare the way (3)! Cry (6)! Lift up your voice (9)! The first section (1-2) is all about comfort as we learn that God deals tenderly with His people, ends their war, and pardons their sins. The second section (3-5) shows that Jesus' redemption changes everything. Mountains turn to valleys and deserts turn to highways as God smooths the path to find salvation in the Messiah. The third section (6-8)



is an encouragement that the enemies of God's people will fade, but His promises to them will not. The final section (9-11) is the climax as the mighty hand of God comes in gentle salvation. Look carefully at the fascinating juxtaposition of Jesus' redemption. He comes to overcome fears (9). He comes in strength and might (10). He comes to rule (10). But he also comes to shepherd (11). He gathers lambs in His arms, he carries them in His bosom, and gently leads (11).

What do shepherds and rulers have in common? Aside from the fact they both are responsible for the lives of others, not much. Kings are expected to be strong and firm. Shepherds are gentle and patient. Kings command people, shepherds patiently prod sheep. Jesus is both. Jesus is the perfect representation of both leadership styles. He is both the strong commander and the gentle leader. He is both the one enthroned far above His people and the one who humbly lies down with His flock. He is both the one who conquers His people's enemies and the one who sacrifices Himself for the protection of His flock.

Today, He is sitting on His throne "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3) and He is with you in the valley of the shadow of death, comforting you with His rod and staff (Psalm 23). Have you considered the beautiful complexity of Jesus? Worship Him today for all that He is and all He has done!

WEEK THREE

*MESSIAH AS SERVANT*

ISAIAH



## ***Isaiah 42:1***

Feet are disgusting, really disgusting. How disgusting are feet? So disgusting that even though I tried really hard to come up with a good illustration to communicate how disgusting feet are, I never could find one that wouldn't make you stop reading immediately. So, due to the lack of good ideas relating to feet stories, I'm just going to give you the story Jesus gives us. It's about feet. Get ready.

At Jesus' last meal before the crucifixion, he had to illustrate a what it meant to be a servant. Even though His primary role at the dinner party was to be the rabbi leading the Passover supper, He elects to be the one to also take the place of the servant who washes everyone's feet as they enter. If you think 21st-century feet are disgusting, think about what feet must have been like in the first century. There were no closed shoes, lower standards of hygiene, and more occasions for all sorts of bacteria and nastiness to infect the feet. Peter knows Jesus should not be the one to do it, so he questions Him, but Jesus insists. Jesus explains that He is showing the disciples what they are to do: serve one another (John 13:1-17). As He had previously told them, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). That the Messiah would come as a servant is predicted in Isaiah. Take a minute and read Isaiah 42:1-4.

For the rest of this week, we will look at how Jesus came as a servant, and what Isaiah predicts that will mean for his ministry. There are multiple passages of Isaiah that are called "servant songs." These are sections that describe to us the coming servant of the Lord. Some of them can be confusing because sometimes the songs talk about the nation of Israel as God's servants, and other times they focus on a coming servant who we know to be Jesus. The servant songs are found in 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12. Some consider 61:1-3 to be one as well. Today and tomorrow we will focus on just Isaiah 42; the rest of the week on Isaiah 53.

This first section in Isaiah 42 gives us our first four key

characteristics of Jesus' servant ministry. He will bring justice (1). He will come softly (2). He will be gentle (3). He will finish what He starts (4). Justice is probably not one of the characteristics of Jesus that we readily connect with a Christmas story. It's odd to think of the baby in the manger as the one who brings justice to those who have rebelled against God. But that is precisely what He does.

The very nature of His coming rights an injustice in Israel. Think about the way Herod reacts. He is dismayed at the idea of another king being born in Israel. But we know he was an illegitimate king to begin with. He wasn't actually an Israelite. He certainly wasn't from the royal lineage of David. And he didn't really have that much control; he just served under the Roman emperor and governor. Jesus, a true Son of God and son of David comes as a rightful king to correct that injustice and put a righteous ruler on the throne. And what is Herod's response? Another great injustice. As soon as Herod finds out that the wisemen have refused to tell him what they know about the newborn King, Herod murders hundreds of children. The injustice that the people were experiencing was growing by the day. Jesus' coming means He will correct not just that injustice, but, at the end of days, all injustices will be corrected. And those who are in Him will be rewarded, while those who continue to reject Him receive condemnation. No other rulers will stand and He will reign. As Isaiah says, "Kings shall shut their mouths because of Him" (Is. 52:15).

Our world cries for justice. We hear it everywhere. But while no one admits to standing for injustice, the definition of true justice seems so elusive. So many solutions to one injustice bring their own new injustice. This is because it takes a truly righteous judge to define true justice; human solutions can never fully right the wrongs of this fallen world. And the truest solution is the Righteous Servant who suffers on behalf of those oppressed by sin. Today, spend some time in prayer for those facing hardship, and pray about how the Righteous Judge may be calling you to help lift someone up out of their situation. Then spend some time worshipping Jesus for His coming eternal righteous reign.

**Isaiah 42: 1-4**

When it comes time to decorate the tree, we only have a couple of firm rules. The most important is that there are certain things Jericho and Karis cannot touch. I am sure you have faced the same sort of issue in decorating for Christmas at some point in your life. Certain decorations are fragile and delicate. Fragile and delicate things require careful and gentle hands. You may not have met Karis and Jericho, but I can assure you, they are neither careful nor gentle. They are wonderful; you should totally meet them; but words like energy, force, and vigor are far more appropriate to describe them. One of the hard things about getting Karis involved is that usually the fragile ornaments are the lightest ones. So, some decorating is too heavy for her and some requires more gentleness than she can manage. Here's what's interesting: gentleness requires strength. It takes more strength to lift something gently than it does to just lift it. It takes strength to hold onto that which is fragile.

That's what Jesus does. Let's look back at the Servant Song in Isaiah 42:1-4. Yesterday, we saw that Jesus brought justice. Today we will look at the other four characteristics described in this song: He will come softly (2), He will be gentle (3), He will finish what He starts (4). Isaiah predicts that Jesus will be gentle in both voice and approach, but He will also be strong enough to finish. The description in verse 2 seems to be so true of Jesus' life. Jesus never seems to want to draw a crowd to Himself even though crowds seem to so naturally flock toward Him. He sometimes tries to elude crowds or make people promise not to talk about what He's done. Seeing the prediction in Isaiah helps us understand why. Jesus did not come to yell people into following Him. He came to teach and to heal as a servant meeting needs, rather than an influencer building a brand.

Isaiah also predicts He will be gentle enough to not break a bruised reed or faint wick (3). The image here of both the reed and the wick is of something that is near death. The reed is

90% broken, the wick is 90% burnt out. A rough hand would break the reed whether intentional or not. A rough hand would jerk the candle too quickly and blow out the wick. Only a strong and gentle hand can repair and renew life where it is almost choked out. That is the gentleness and strength of our Servant King. Only He can bring life to those whose lives are nearly completely choked out. Jesus renews life no matter how little is left in the subject. Maybe some of you have been there.

Isaiah also makes it clear: this gentle Servant will finish what He starts. In verse 4, this is applied to the task of bringing justice not just to Israel and Judah but to the whole earth. He says that even “the coastlands wait for his law” (4). Now who might the coastlands be? Remember, Isaiah was ministering in Judah on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The word “coastlands” is used to refer to anyone who was unreachable by land but needed to be reached by sea. If you have a study Bible, this would be a great time to check out a map. But don’t go looking for a map from Isaiah’s time, look for Paul’s missionary journeys. Look for the sea and imagine what Isaiah might have meant as “coastlands.” Ephesus? Crete? Athens? Malta? All of these coastal cities where Paul and others delivered the gospel feature in the book of Acts and New Testament letters. But what if we stretch out farther? What about Boston? Or Savannah? Could we be a part of this movement of the Messiah’s ministry to the coastlands? Absolutely! But it goes even farther; there are still coastlands waiting for the ministry of the Servant Messiah Jesus.

Isaiah promises that Jesus will not quit until He is done. We know that Jesus finished strong: He atoned for sin, rose again, and is seated at the right hand of God now. But His ministry continues. In one of the other servant songs, God says to the Servant, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Is 49:6). The light continues to shine now through those who have received it. As we reflect on the coming of the light of the world this Christmas, will you reflect on how God is using you to bring His light to the coastlands? What more might He call you to in the year ahead?



## ***Isaiah 53:3***

While Christmas is certainly a season of hope and joy, for many of us the season brings waves of grief as well. After all, each of us have lost loved ones who will not be present at the Christmas dinner table this year. Whether it's a beloved grandparent, a recently departed spouse, or a child who simply chose not to come home, most of our families are reminded of loss at family gatherings. This is one of the reasons I am grateful for the season of Advent. Advent focuses on waiting, anticipation, preparation, and processing. Advent has space for our grief. Advent is an opportunity to feel the grief, remember the joys that lead to the pain of loss, and then rejoice anew with the Messiah who connects with us in our suffering.

Today is the first of three days we will spend looking at the most famous servant song of Isaiah 53. Take a few minutes and read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and reflect on who this passage portrays the Messiah to be. Verse 3 tells us: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (53:3). Isaiah predicts that the Messiah would not just be a gentle servant, but he would also be a "man of sorrow." Have you ever thought about how much suffering someone would have to endure in order to be known by a title like that? Most English translations translate the phrase the follows the title as "acquainted" or "familiar" with grief. This gives the sense that the Messiah knew grief and suffering well. However, the Hebrew passive participle actually communicates something different. What Isaiah is saying is that the Messiah would be known BY His suffering. Obviously, He would know suffering but more than that, as the "man of sorrows" he would be known as one who suffered greatly. This gives us the sense that Isaiah is anticipating someone of whom His very name and reputation brought to mind great suffering. As in, anytime someone would mention His name in public, a third person would immediately think, "yeah, the one who suffered."

The best example we have of someone like this is Job. What

do you think of when you think of Job? Suffering. Of course that's what you think of; it is what He is known for. Or maybe there is someone in your life who you think of like you think of Job. Do you know someone who has suffered so much that every time you think of that person, there's a tinge of sorrow or sympathy because you think of all that person has suffered and lost? If you have suffered much you know that there is a connection that is created when you meet someone else who has suffered. When Jess and I lost our boys 12 years ago, we didn't know what opportunities for connection we would find in the future with others who had lost children, faced long NICU stays, or experienced loss. There is a bond that is formed when you meet another person who has suffered and grieved as you have.

That is what makes this prediction about Jesus so powerful. Jesus would not just suffer; He would be known by His suffering. He would suffer physically, emotionally, and even spiritually as He felt the separation from His Father. But through it all, He would be "made perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10). This means that in order for Jesus to be the great High Priest who could "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb 4:15), He had to experience suffering and practice obedience for Himself. Not because there was any question of whether He would be obedient and faithful through suffering, but because we needed a sympathetic suffering Savior. Such was the suffering of Jesus that those around Him hid their faces in horror, but those of us who have suffered see the beauty in those scars.

As you reflect on how to respond to the word of God today, consider how you may bring your suffering to Jesus in a deeper way. If you don't know how to pray through your pain, consider journaling your thoughts on what pains you. Then, take those thoughts (and even complaints) to God; He wants to hear your heart. If you are struggling through the grief process, call a friend and ask to talk about how Jesus can carry your suffering alongside you. Or maybe God is stirring you to call someone in pain today.





## ***Isaiah 53:7***

Everyone loves a good kids' Christmas play. We are fortunate here at FBC to be able to keep that tradition going with a new group of kids every year presenting the beautiful story that still grips our hearts. One of the best parts of a play like this is when there are cute kids dressed as cute animals. It's a precious tradition that reminds us that this story is for the littlest and the cutest among us. But here's the thing: when the Bible talks about sheep, the focus is not usually on cuteness. Most of the time when sheep are brought up in the Bible, they're being slaughtered. So isn't it a bit odd, then, to dress up our kids as sheep at Christmas?

Today, we're focusing on the middle of Isaiah 53. Go ahead and read Isaiah 53:4-9. We'll focus specifically on verse 7, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." What is the significance of the Messiah being like a lamb? To answer, let's take a quick fly through the theme of lambs in the Bible...

In Genesis, Abraham introduces us to the idea of a lamb as a sacrifice. As he is walking up to sacrifice Isaac Abraham states confidently (maybe not so confidently) that "God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Gen 22:8). In Exodus, we learn that God wants every family in Israel to kill a lamb, paint its blood on their doorposts, and then eat the lamb as a part of the institution of a new feast that they will celebrate every year from that point on (Exodus 12:1-28). The blood of the lamb protects the people from the final plague that comes to Egypt (Ex 12:29-32). In Leviticus and Numbers, we learn that God wants lambs to be offered as sacrifices for sin offerings as well as several different purification processes. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, we see lambs offered numerous times as God's laws are followed. Finally, Isaiah closes the Old Testament theme of the lamb by saying that sinful people are like sheep who have strayed (53:6) and that the Messiah will come as a silent lamb (53:7).

The New Testament expands on the lamb theme even more. In the first chapter of John, we see John the Baptist greet Jesus as “the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Then John’s gospel closes with Jesus referring to His followers as sheep as He tells Peter to feed them (John 21:15). In Acts, we see the first African follower of Jesus reading Isaiah 53:7 about the slaughtered man, when the Holy Spirit sends Philip to share the good news of Jesus (Acts 8:15). Peter tells us that the purity of Jesus’ blood is like that of a pure and spotless lamb (1 Pet 1:19). Paul sees the connection between the Exodus story, Isaiah 53, and Jesus’ death and refers to Jesus as “our Passover lamb” (1 Cor 5:7).

Finally, the Lamb is the heroic figure of John’s Revelation. The Lamb has been slain (5). He is the only one worthy to open the scroll (5). He is worshipped (5). By His blood, people are cleansed (12). The Lamb conquers (17). The Lamb is united to His bride in a wedding ceremony (19). And, for all time, the Lamb will be the source of light in the eternal kingdom (21).

I’m not sure all the reasons why, but God created the lamb to be a very important creature in His salvation story. The consistent theme throughout both testaments is that sin needs to be paid for with a blood offering, and lambs’ blood is what God directs to be used. But there is another theme that matters too: there is a continual contrast between a spotless lamb and a wandering flock of sheep. This gives us the picture of substitution. We are all sheep. But most of us have gone the wrong direction. There was only one pure exception. Jesus didn’t deserve to be the man of sorrows that we read about yesterday. However, we needed Him to come in our place. So, next time you see a cute kid dressed as a lamb for a Christmas pageant, remember that child is a precious soul for whom Jesus, the spotless Lamb, died. Spend some time today in prayerful reflection on the Lamb of God who has taken away your sin.



***Isaiah 53:11***

As you read this, we are only a few days away from Christmas. The long wait is almost over. I think Christmas is unique in our lives because of the sense of anticipation we experience. Certainly, there's nothing like being a kid at Christmas, but even as adults we retain a bit of the excitement and anticipation (especially if kids are around). The goal of Advent is to remind us that anticipation and waiting are spiritual practices. Our waiting and anticipation are not for presents like kids wait for on Christmas. Our waiting is not for a Messiah like Israel; He has already come. Our waiting is for Christ's return and the full manifestation of His eternal Kingdom. Advent helps us experience the wait by reflecting on who the Messiah is and what we would be like without Him. Advent makes space for the pain of life to be voiced in lament as we wait for a fuller presence of Jesus. Advent points us beyond the kingdoms of this world and toward He who shall reign forever and ever. For now, we have a longing that cannot be satisfied, and yet our Scripture for today tells us that Jesus, our Messiah, has been satisfied. So, what is it that satisfies Jesus?

Take your Bible and read all of the servant song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 again; this time focus on verse 11. "Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities" (53:11). We've already seen in this passage the great suffering that Jesus endured. Today's verse sees Jesus in that place of deep anguish and sees something else as well. Jesus is satisfied by what He has accomplished! This is the feeling of great fulfillment after a long and arduous journey; the ultimate quest has been completed; the ultimate prize has been won! And what is the prize? We are the prize. It is our righteousness that Jesus was striving for.

Do you remember Isaiah's juxtaposition of disobedient sheep and one spotless lamb? Now the impure lambs are made pure by the pure lamb. It doesn't make sense; it doesn't work that

way with anything else. Dirty things make clean things dirty, not the other way around. But in God's plan, that's what Jesus does. His purity makes us clean.

There are two important aspects to this act of being made righteous by Jesus. First, being made righteous has a judicial dimension. We are made innocent where we were once guilty. This means that we may now stand before the judgment seat of God and be declared just despite our rebellion. The second dimension is ethical. As righteous beings, we now have the ability to act righteously. Sometimes, we put so much focus on the reality of being righteous (our justification) that we minimize how we act righteously (our sanctification). Jesus's deep feelings of satisfaction are in both results. Jesus is pleased by making us both positionally righteous and practically righteous. Our positional righteousness means nothing can keep God from accepting us once Christ has died for us. Our practical righteousness means we no longer have to keep failing where we've always fallen short before. You cannot control your anger on your own, but because of Christ you have a new power in your weakness. The Spirit can overcome your anger. The battle with lust or greed that has plagued you for so long is not insurmountable. Jesus conquers our sin for us. We are now invited to walk in His righteousness by living in connection with Him.

Have you ever reflected on this as the great goal of Christmas? Christ's coming was for your righteousness. There is no greater gift you could receive this Christmas, and maybe the greatest gift you can give to those around you is practicing the righteousness you have received by staying close to Jesus and allowing Him to fight for you.

Merry Christmas, indeed.



# EVENTS DURING ADVENT 2023

*SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3RD*

CHRISTMAS CHOIR

FELLOWSHIP KIDS' HOLLY JOLLY PALOOZA  
5:30 PM

LIFTED STUDENTS CHRISTMAS PARTY  
5:30 PM

*SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9TH*

WOMEN'S ADVENT SIMULCAST  
9:30 AM - 1:00 PM

LIFTED STUDENTS OPERATION CHRIST-  
MAS CHILD VOLUNTEER EVENT  
2:00 PM- 10:00 PM

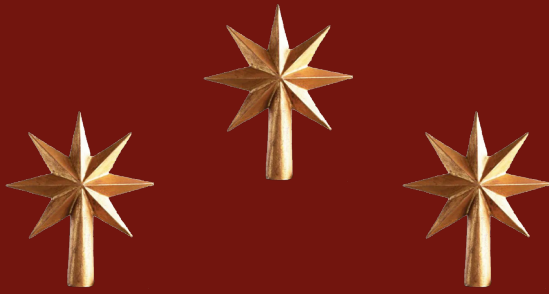
*SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10TH*

FAMILY CHRISTMAS CAROLING NIGHT  
5:30-7:30 PM

*SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17TH*

CHRISTMAS JAIL BAGS ASSEMBLY  
AFTER 10:30 AM SERVICE

FELLOWSHIP KIDS' CHRISTMAS PROGRAM  
6:00 PM



JOIN US

*SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24TH*

MORNING SERVICE  
10:30 AM

CHRISTMAS EVE  
CANDLELIGHT SERVICE  
6:00 PM



**FELLOWSHIP**  
BIBLE CHURCH