

## **The King is Coming**

(A Sermon Based on Isaiah 40:1-4)<sup>1</sup>

I have a question for you this morning. Now, don't take this in the wrong way, but what did you come here for this morning? I'm not trying to sound rude or unwelcoming. It's great that you are here. I just bet if we could just open up all the minds in this church as they think about that question, there would be a million reasons floating around. One person may be thinking, "I'm here because I come every Sunday. Today is no different." Another may be thinking, "This is my favorite time of year to come to church. We're getting ready for Christmas. The church is beautiful, people are excited, and I just like it." Someone else may think, "This place is my refuge. And with all that's happened in the last year—I need a refuge." You all have your own reasons for coming here.

The reason I ask that question, though, is because Jesus once asked a question similar to mine. "What did you go out into the desert to see?" he asked. You see, during the first ever season of advent, people had been going out in droves to hear the strange preacher who wasn't in a church but was in the desert, the preacher now known as John the Baptist. And Jesus asked them, "Why did you go?" I'm not sure if any people actually responded out loud to Jesus' question. But I think we can figure out why they went out to that desert church. They wanted to see what John was all about because they had heard that had powerful message. And when they went out to that preacher in the desert, they weren't disappointed. John didn't pull any strings. He didn't soften anything, because people needed to get ready for the appearance of Jesus. John told people to repent because the King was coming. He wanted Jesus to be able to come and do what Jesus does best, comfort people. But the people needed to repent first.

And since we're also getting ready for Jesus to come at Christmas, and since we never know when Christ will come again, today I'm preaching the same message that Isaiah and John preached thousands of years ago: The King is coming. He's coming at Christmas, and he's coming again. So be prepared to meet him. Because if you're proud, he'll humble you, but if you're humble, he will comfort you.

You know, preaching this message, sharing this message, is a job that's never done. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, God has sent his messengers to tell people to acknowledge their sinfulness and turn to God for forgiveness. That's what Isaiah, the prophet who wrote the part of scripture that my sermon is all about, was trying to do. He was trying to get his countrymen, the Israelites, to see that they needed God, that they couldn't ignore him for their entire lives and expect everything to always be all right because they offered the right sacrifices and spent some time at the temple. God had flat-out told them, "Burnt offerings and sacrifices, I don't desire. I just want a humble and contrite spirit." God didn't want hypocrites. But the Israelites kept on living whatever way was most expedient and convenient and fun and thinking that as long as they put on a good show, everything would be okay. But everything wasn't okay. And God tried teaching them. He sent prophets. But they ignored the prophets. Some of them even killed the prophets. God sent some difficult things come into their lives: Famines, invading armies. And they turned to him, for a little while. But as soon as the problem was gone, they went back to doing whatever their spirits moved them to do. So, finally, God "forced" that nation to see the results of its sin. If they would not humble themselves, he would do it for them. He did it by letting a bloodthirsty army capture and destroy their entire county, kill most of the people, and drag away from their homes the few that survived. God was trying to teach that nation humility and repentance in any way he could.

But you know, it's amazing; many didn't learn even then. And you see that because John the Baptist and Jesus still had to preach the same message Isaiah had preached hundreds of years earlier. "Repent!" John said, "The axe is already at the root of the tree, and every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire!" But for some reason, even John's and Jesus' powerful preaching didn't work. The blind pride in human beings can be amazing. When people looked at the evil in the world, the disease, the hurt, death, you would think that they might realize that they lived in decaying world. And when they saw the evil in themselves, you would think that they would realize that they shared in that decay. But there were people who, instead of falling to their knees and praying that God would please cleanse them, actually came to Jesus to judge him, to see if he was really worth their time. And Jesus tried so hard to get those people to humble themselves before God forced them to their knees to humble them. But some people would have none of it. I wonder if those Pharisees wish they could go back and change things now.

So be careful. The Bible says, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us." Learn a lesson. Heed the prophet's warning. There is a Pharisee in each of us. It's not necessarily that we would be as bold as the Pharisees and say that we are saved by our own good works. Most of us in this church hear that we're saved by

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotes are taken from: *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

grace way too much to ever actually say or maybe even think that explicitly. But our hearts can still be arrogant and lack humility. Do you ever think that you don't need to study the Bible, go to Bible class or church, because really, you know everything you need to know? The Pharisees thought they knew everything they needed to know too, but when Jesus came they rejected him because he couldn't possibly have been the Messiah. Or, when you find yourself in an argument with that one person who just "refuses to listen to you," and you think, "They're so incredibly stubborn; if they would for once just listen to me we wouldn't have all these fights." Is the little Pharisee inside of you completely blind to the fact that perhaps you are the one who needs to listen more or better. Do we really give God what he desires, "a broken and contrite heart?" Do we really understand that left to ourselves, the sin in us would overwhelm us, and that all by ourselves we would shatter everything in our lives that holds any semblance of beauty and peace? Do we really comprehend that we are so sinful that we could never really confess all our sins, that we could never make right all the wrong that we have done to others and to God?

Well, my rhetorical questions are rhetorical because I know how you must answer them. I know how I must answer them. So let's all listen to Isaiah. Let's listen to John. And let's listen to Jesus. Advent is the season of preparation. So prepare yourself to meet your God. Receive the gift of God's son at Christmas with a heart that realizes that you can't do this thing called life on your own. Repent of your lack of trust. Repent of your sinful use of God's name. Repent of your lack of love for God's Word, your disrespect for your parents, your lust, your coveting... Whatever it is that you need to repent of, repent. Because the next time God comes, he's not going to be a helpless baby anymore. He's coming with power.

But you know, if thinking about your sins bothers you, then Jesus' second coming isn't something that needs to scare you. The Bible tells us that when we see that the world is actually ending we should "Lift up [our] heads, because [our] redemption is drawing nigh." God is coming to humble the proud, yes. But he's also coming to lift up the humble. God only wants a broken and deflated and crushed heart so that he can mend it, fill it, and restore it. "Comfort! Comfort my people," says the LORD. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and tell her that her hard service is over." Isaiah wrote these words to the people who had learned their lesson. For those who look at themselves and just say, "God, I've sinned. I don't deserve to be your child. Have mercy on me." that day when Jesus comes again will be more wonderful than any of us can imagine.

God doesn't want any of us to perish. His heart just isn't in sending people to hell. Yeah, the prophets and Jesus had some harsh words at times. They were all "fire and brimstone" when they spoke to those who refused to humble themselves. But even when they spoke like that, it was only because of love. In love they tried to shake people out of their denial. Remember how Jesus said that he came as a doctor—that he came for sick people. Well, at times he was the doctor saying to the patient, "Unless you change your diet, start exercising, and take this medicine, you're going to die!" Jesus demands repentance because he wants to forgive. Jesus wants empty hearts so that he can fill them with forgiveness, joy, and hope for the future. Jesus came to give the hopeless hope. He was the most compassionate man the world has ever seen. Think of how humbly and gently Jesus lived. Jesus was the man who more than eager to associate himself with the repentant failures of this world. He ate with the liars called tax collectors and the home-wreckers called prostitutes. And finally, he even let himself be arrested and put to death by hypocrites. He lived that life and died that death so that he could give us hope. His entire life was geared around saving those who by God's grace, realized that they couldn't save themselves. He didn't come to condemn the world, but to save the world.

That's what your King is all about. So when you ponder that child who comes at Christmas, remember what he comes for. Remember that he comes to bring nothing but comfort to those who fall before him crushed and broken. Our King comes to fill us with hope till our joy runs over. Even though we continue make messes of our lives, our King forgives us, takes us in his arms and says, "Take heart my child; your sins are forgiven." And then he promises you, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart; I have overcome the world!" This is the King that we ponder along with Mary at Christmas. And that is the King who is coming back one day soon. And then finally, when Jesus comes, the humility will be over. We won't have any more Peter moments where we go into our bedrooms and weep bitterly over our sins, because our King will cure us of our disease of sin once and for all. So we won't have to come before him with empty hearts ever again because we will always be filled with everything good that God has to offer. We will have life, and we will have it to the full.

So, prepare your hearts to meet your King. He comes at Christmas. He will come again one day soon. He comes to take you from your lowly position and move you to a place of honor. He comes to fix you. He comes to comfort you—because that's what he does best. Amen.