

Where is the hope?

Isaiah spoke into a situation where the people of the southern Kingdom of Judah felt powerless and terrified of the Kingdoms to their north. Their enemies ravaged their land and laid siege to Jerusalem. As their enemies only seemed to grow in strength and tighten their grasp, they didn't know if God was for them or against them or if He had simply abandoned them. To make matters worse the King of Judah Ahaz was weak and wicked, and at a time that required strong leadership he provided none. The people's situation was desperate, they were between a rock and a very hard place. Isaiah spoke these words of hope to a people drowning in hopelessness.

Isaiah directed these words of hope for deliverance to the area of Zebulun and Naphtali which roughly corresponds to Galilee of the New Testament. The inhabitants of the region were represented as walking in darkness, because they were far from the capital, and from the temple; they had few religious privileges; they were intermingled with the pagan, and were comparatively crude and uncultivated in their manners and in their language. Isaiah's words of hope start with those the least likely to receive them, those living in ignorance and darkness. In fact, these Galileans were actually part of the northern Kingdom of Israel, one of the nations that were invading and devastating the southern Kingdom of Judah. Yet, these benighted enemies of Judah were to be the first to see God's deliverance, this great light.

Isn't it this just like God? The people of southern Kingdom of Judah wanted delivered from oppressors and wicked leaders, but God said the first to see His promised deliverance were to be their enemies. Why did God do this? Well, Isaiah's words were a promise of God delivering His people from their current enemies, but they were also a promise that God would deliver all people from a far worse oppressor. These words of hope and deliverance from a greater oppression than their current enemies came to fruition some circa 750 years later when in Nazareth, a small town in the Galilean area. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and announces *"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."* The child's name is important as Jesus means, "to deliver, or to rescue". The long-

awaited promised deliverance spoken of by Isaiah was to come in the person of Jesus Christ.

John in his Gospel writes of Jesus, *"In him (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* So, Zebulun and Naphtali were indeed the first to receive the news of the promised deliverance and the light of all mankind, Jesus.

Before we go on to think about Jesus as King let just stop and think about Isaiah's words *"For us a child is born, to us a son is given."* God gave Jesus for us and to us. God sent His Son for us because we needed to be delivered and to be saved . Jesus is a deliverer or saviour to rescue us not from worldly oppressors but a saviour to rescue us from the darkness of our sin, brokenness and shame. Jesus came to save us from a life without hope, without God and deliver us into a life with hope, with God. Jesus came to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Jesus is God's gift of hope to a thankless world. Jesus is, in a way the very first Christmas gift.

Don't the angel Gabriel's words echo those of Isaiah? Gabriel speaks of God giving Jesus the throne of his father, of Jesus reigning and His kingdom never ending. Isaiah speaks of a child being born on whose shoulders the government will rest and His kingdom will also never end.

It is clear that both Isaiah and Gabriel saw this promised child not only as a deliverer and saviour but also as a King born to reign. Both Isaiah and Gabriel referred to David's throne. When it is said that Jesus would sit upon the throne of David, it is not to be taken literally. The uniqueness of the reign of David was, that he reigned over the people of God. To sit upon the throne of David, therefore, means to reign over the people of God; and in this sense Jesus would sit on David's throne because, at least initially He would reign in the hearts of those who called Him Lord, the people of God.

The Jews of Jesus time were aware of Isaiah's words and were in a state of fevered anticipation of this promised and hoped for deliverer, or as he was commonly referred to as the Messiah. They expected this Messiah to free them from the oppression of

Rome, destroy their enemies and put the nation of Israel back on top. They expected their Messiah to be a great general, a master politician, a worker of miracles and all-round superhero. So, when Jesus declared Himself the long hoped for Messiah they were, to put it mildly, disappointed. Several times they tried to force Jesus to live up to their expectations and when He refused, they tried to murder Him.

Jesus wasn't interested in all the trapping of rule that the Jews thought were so important. Jesus didn't have time for the petty politics and violence of earthly Kingdoms. The Kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed was utterly different from the expectations of the Jews of His time. Perhaps the biggest difference was the Jews expected an earthly kingdom whereas Jesus came to establish His Kingdom in the lives of those who call Him Lord. This again left the Jews both perplexed and ever so miffed with Him. Jesus used a special term to describe this unexpected kingdom in the lives of Gods people, He called it the Kingdom of God.

Before we go on to look at the kingdom of God let's take a moment to think about those who Jesus spent most of His time talking about this Kingdom to. As Isaiah's words hope were directed to people who were the enemies of Judah, so Jesus spent most of His time apparently ministering to wrong people, at least in Jewish eyes. They felt that Jesus spent too much time with the sinner, the outcast, the harlot, the socially unacceptable, the exile all those in darkness. To the Jews this self-proclaimed Messiah spent far too much time with the wrong people and ignored the important right people, namely themselves. This, again to put it mildly, vexed them.

Getting back to this Kingdom of God where Jesus reigns let's take a few moments to see what this Kingdom looks like. Jesus describes the kingdom in the Beatitudes which can be found in Matthew 5. Here Jesus describes a kingdom based on righteousness, justice, mercy, peace and most of all blessing. Jesus description of the kingdom of God echoes Isaiah's description of the government of the promised deliverer. How different this kingdom of God is from the broken and corrupt governments of Isaiah's time; how different is this kingdom of God is from the violent and unjust governments of Jesus time; how different is this kingdom of God from the governments of our time with their lies, injustices, hatred and violence. The kingdom of God is a very different kingdom than any other kingdom we have ever seen.

Jesus said that this new kingdom of God had started with Him and that through Him it had broken into our world, the promised light had dawned. Jesus said that to enter this kingdom of God, that is to be delivered out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light was simple. All that anyone need do is to repent, that is turn from the darkness of sin and accept that He had made the way for them to enter His unexpected kingdom. Jesus promises that those who repent and trust Him for their salvation, that they will become citizens of this new kingdom and that kingdom of God will break into their lives. The kingdom of God begins with Jesus then breaks in to the lives of all who call Him Lord and then breaks into the world around them.

This is an important feature of the kingdom of God that both Jesus and Isaiah stress. Isaiah writes, *“Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end”*. Jesus uses the parable of the mustard seed which although tiny grows into a massive tree. The kingdom of God starts small but grows quickly eventually breaking out from the lives of its citizens. It is the nature of the Kingdom of God to grow to breakout in the darkness to bring light where there is only darkness. The kingdom of God is not to be contained or bottled up or denied. The kingdom of God's nature is to challenge the darkness and overcome it.

Where is the hope this Advent? The hope is in the *“Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace Jesus Christ.”* The long-awaited saviour who will save us from the darkness of our sins and deliver us into the glorious kingdom of light, the kingdom of God.

Where is the hope this Advent? Well somewhat surprisingly the hope is within the lives of everyone who call Jesus Lord and Saviour? The hope this Christmas is the kingdom of God that is breaking out from its citizens' lives to bring righteousness, justice, mercy, peace and most of all blessing to all those they encounter. Jesus has called all the citizens of the kingdom of God to be lights shining in the darkness lighting the path to our glorious God and King.

Before you get too concerned about how you are going to make this happen please remember Isaiah's words, *“The zeal of the Lord almighty will accomplish this.”* God

will make a way for you to shine His light this Advent all we have to is be ready take the God given opportunity.