

## Above All

### Part 2 - Prepare

#### Intro

*The Most Wonderful Time of the Year* is not always the most wonderful time of the year for many people, including us. Instead, it's the most stressful time of the year; the most painful, the most chaotic, the most lonely time of the year.

In the midst of the hype of the holiday season, Advent invites us to take a different approach, a renewed perspective. It's a time when we remember the anticipation of the first coming of Jesus Christ into the world. We are reminded of the thousands of years preceding his birth and the countless stories foretold of His coming.

#### Preparation

Waiting on a promise to be fulfilled is difficult. It's why kids have such a hard time waiting for Christmas morning. They know that something good is coming, but they do not have the patience to wait for it. We all love the promise, but none of us likes the anticipation and the waiting. We all want the promise fulfilled tomorrow. We are just not a patient people. This has been true of mankind since the very beginning.

Last week we saw the people of God in dark despair, as they were surrounded by their enemies with no hope of salvation. In the midst of their darkness God declared a promise – that He would send a King, a Rescuer, who would come and save the people from their oppression. He would come as a child, but would be the *Light of the World* – the light in their deepest darkness.

As the people anticipated this King, they remained in darkness and despair – even though light [hope] was promised. The arrival of this child took longer than anyone had expected. The people grew [increasingly] impatient and many simply went on their way – forgetting [or not believing] that He would ever appear.

To help His people with the waiting and anticipation, God sent prophets throughout the course of time. Some of these prophets would tell of the Messiah's coming – some in general terms, others in more detail. The goal of the prophets was to prepare the people's hearts to receive this coming King.

Unfortunately, the prophets regularly encountered a people who had turned from the hope of the promise and chased after other nations and kings to provide for them. It's where we find the people of God once again. In Isaiah 9, the people had turned to the nation of Assyria for help. When it seemed as though the promised King would never appear, they trusted in another king.

#### Isaiah 39

We find the Israelite people, years later, once again pledging their allegiance to yet another nation. This time, one of their *good* kings [Hezekiah] saw that the people of Babylon were growing in strength. He hoped that they might be able to overthrow the Assyrians who had oppressed the Israelites for years. Instead of preparing for the *light in the darkness* [promised years before] watch what He does instead.

### **39:1-2**

**At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. And Hezekiah welcomed them gladly. And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.**

Hezekiah, the man who had stood faithfully against Assyria, now melts at the seduction of the Babylonians. And boy did he fall hard. Not only did he invite them, he showed them EVERYTHING! You and I have been in that place as well, haven't we?!? We get tired of waiting, tired of hoping, and we fall victim to the flattery of the next best thing. It might be waiting for a relationship, waiting faithfully in the same job for 20 years, standing firm in our convictions and remaining alone...but we are tempted to quit waiting, convincing ourselves that God has forgotten or that He would approve. We forget the voice of the prophets, the promise of God, and the truth of His Word.

### **39:3**

**Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?"**

Isaiah, the true voice from God, sees the inherent danger of Hezekiah's decision.

### **39:3**

**Hezekiah said, "They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon."**

*Can you believe THEY came to see me? Can you believe anyone came to see me? I was sick, I was hurting, I was lonely, and THEY [of all people, the powerful, strong Babylonians] came to see me...the came to see ME. Isaiah, can you believe it? They traveled SO far, just to see me.*

Finally, for Hezekiah, someone sees him. He had gone largely unnoticed on the world stage. He was tired of waiting for his moment. Someone noticed and he was overcome with infatuation.

### **39:4**

**He said, "What have they seen in your house?" Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them."**

Though God had promised to visit His people [coming from afar], Hezekiah was tired of waiting. He gave his heart [the allegiance of the people of God] to a foreign entity.

And, in this moment, we have all been there. *He/she finally noticed me, someone finally noticed my work, finally someone sees me for me, finally a man appreciates me.* And we become fixated [crushin'] on something that was never meant to capture our attention.

### Next Best Thing

The problem was that the Babylonians, while physically strong and impressively powerful, were the symbol of all things opposed to God. He was tired of waiting on God and found the next best thing. However, sometimes the next best thing is still the wrong thing. Unfortunately, Hezekiah fails to see the error of his newfound allegiance.

### 39:5-7 [paraphrase]

Isaiah then tries to speak through Hezekiah's fog of fixation. He attempts to speak truth to the king – stating that the day is coming when Hezekiah's house and all that was stored up in it [including some of his sons] would be taken off to Babylon. And instead of hearing the *truth*, Hezekiah hears what he wants to hear.

### 39:8

**Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”**

Instead of hearing the truth that he had wandered from the promise of God, Hezekiah hears that his legacy would be wrapped up in Babylonian rule and lore – that he was getting what he wanted, not what God had promised. Hezekiah was unwilling to wait on God and listen to the voice of the prophet. His decision led the people of God into captivity once again.

But God, again not satisfied with His people's despair and darkness, began preparing the way for the savior to come. As the people were living in Babylon – under their control, the prophet [voice for God] cries out in the midst of darkness and despair.

### 40:3-5

**A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”**

This voice cries out in the wilderness that *light* is coming, *hope* is appearing. God would move mountains and valleys in preparation of the coming King. And this was not just the voice of a prophet speaking, it was a pronouncement [a promise] directly from the ***mouth of the Lord***.

### John 1

Hundreds of years later, this promise came true. After centuries of waiting, all of the preparations were finally complete, and the *light* [promised before] was finally coming to the world.

### 1:1-5

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

This light that had come to the world was not just *light*, but He was also the *voice* of God as well. He had been with God from the very beginning and was actually God Himself.

### **1:14**

**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Just as the prophets acted as a voice for God to the people, Jesus came into the world not simply as a voice *for* God but as the Word *of* God Himself. The voice of God that had come through the prophets for centuries was actually living and bringing and walking about His people.

At this point, you would expect the people to be excited and ready to listen to anything He had to say. They had been under oppression by Assyria when the promise of Isaiah 9 was issued and under control of Babylon when the pronouncement was made in Isaiah 40. They had currently been under the control of the Roman government.

But many did not receive Jesus as the Voice [Word] of God. Like Hezekiah, they did not like what they heard and wanted a different answer so they walked away.

***When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.***

***John 6:60-61 & 66***

Many walked away because His truth was too difficult. It wasn't what they wanted to hear, what they had hoped for.

### ***What Are You Hoping to Hear?***

This Christmas, what are you hoping to hear? What are you listening for? Are you too easily eager to listen to the voices that promise happiness but only leave you empty? Like Hezekiah, are you quick to hear what you want, in spite of the truth being spoken so clearly?

What is it that your ears and your heart are hoping to hear? Are you tired of waiting for a solution to appear? Do you already have a pre-conceived idea on what you want to take place, and you will do/listen to whatever voice matches your desire? Or are you willing to listen to truth – the voice [Word] of God?