

Sermon  
Walking in the Light  
Isaiah 2-4  
Clay Smith  
February 12, 2017

We looked at the summary of Isaiah last week from chapter 1: God pursues lost sheep. He has clearly laid before us our need of such a Good Shepherd. Our hearts are filled with sin, and we are called to repentance. But where are we going? We see where we are, but where will we be? What moves you in your relationship with him?

**2 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.**

- 2 It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the LORD  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be lifted up above the hills;  
and all the nations shall flow to it,**
- 3 and many peoples shall come, and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion shall go the law,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**
- 4 He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,**

neither shall they learn war anymore.

<sup>5</sup> O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the LORD.

I know I'm going to get some push back here, but I think that the 80's were just great. Paragon of culture. And one of the manifestations of the glories of the 1980's is the *Back to the Future* movie franchise. With all the travel back and forth from the now to the future, the DeLorean, the 1.21 gigawatts, crazy haired Doc, a clock that gets struck by lightning, skateboards, and all the rest. Just spectacular.

But in some ways *Back to the Future* provides for us a deeply biblical message. Hang with me here, I know you are dubious. But here is the message: **what happens in the future affects how we must live now.** That's the whole premise of the movie. Things happen in the future (either for good or ill depending on whether you were a Biff fan) that they must figure out a way to ensure or undo in the present. Let me put it another way that may sound more biblical to our ears: **God's future crashes into the present and shapes how we live as God's people.**

It is SO easy for us to live for now, and forget about the future. All the pressure of getting things done, financial challenges, fears about schools and jobs, terrorist threats. I know it is for me, and perhaps it is for you, that the easiest thing in the world is to have my heart worried over now so much that I can't see what God is doing. But Isaiah calls us *Back to the Future* to force our eyes out of the present onto the world beyond, the world God is establishing. Once we see it clearly, he calls us back to the present to live NOW in light of what is to come then. Isaiah invites us to lift our eyes to see what God is building, what God is doing so that we may live in the present, as Jonathan Edwards said, with "eternity stamped on our eyes."

The “so what” of this section comes in 2:5: **O House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord, or walk in such a way that God’s future crashes into our present and changes how we live TODAY.** So let’s journey Back to the Future together this morning.

### 1. What is the Future? (2:1-4)

Our destination is the glory of the Lord risen upon us, streaming in life for his glory. That is where we are headed. As we study this beautiful future, we are able to see today more clearly. Look at **v. 2. It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.**

The term **latter days**, a wooden translation, “**afterward of these days**” is a reference to seeing the reign of God among his people and Creation. It is a time when God’s glory rests on his people, pointing to seeing God triumph among his people. What does that look like?

**God dwells with his people. V. 2, the mountain of the house of the LORD as the highest of mountains.** In that world, height of mountains pointed to a couple things. First, **dominance**. Power is in the height, the towering peak. Second, **presence**. In that world the highest peak was the place where gods and men communicated. That’s why the pagan cultures built altars on mountain tops. So what God is saying here is that in those days I will be with you, dwelling with you in power and dominance. You will have no need to fear because your Creator and Redeemer is there with you.

**God draws sinners. v. 2, the nations flow, or stream, to the mountain.** Do you get the picture? A great river of people flowing UP! Now I don’t

know about you, but to me this seems a stretch. Most of the time, rivers flow down; they use gravity. But God is saying in his power, his miracle working power, the nations rush like flowing waters UP to him. He does the miraculous work of turning sinners, rebels, into children. Over and over again.

Let's push pause on the picture for a moment, and remember the "so what" of the passage in v. 5, [come let us walk in the light of the Lord](#), or the Clay Smith Living Translation, let's go **back to the future**. This future is crashing into the present and changing how we walk and live TODAY.

The latter days are NOW, commencing with Christ coming. The stream began to flow when Jesus took on flesh and God dwelled among us, and was broadened when he ascended as King following his resurrection. The river deepened at Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out and drew all these different kinds of people unto himself. It is NOW. In every conversion, in every revival, in every person who trusts Christ, the miracle happens again, and again and again! It has happened in me; has it happened in you?

The Kingdom of Christ proclaims victory over the kingdoms of death. This is our time, as the gospel goes forth all around the world, through Randy and our mission teams taking the gospel all over the world, in Kenya, and Iraq, and Cuba. It is happening down the street in the county jail. Sinners are being called and drawn to a Jesus who saves. Through Young Life in our junior high and high schools.

It can also happen in our neighborhoods through **your** patient testimony of what Christ has done in your life. It happens NOW in us and through us. The Glory of the Lord is manifest. In Central, now!

And it will increase, Isaiah suggests. **That future crashes into this present!** The gospel of Christ will continue turning societies upside down until the very last day when he returns again and every tribe and tongue and people and nation will be part of that river, by his miraculous lifegiving power being drawn to his family.

And these many nations and diverse peoples with Christ in their midst  **dwell in peace. V. 4. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.**

Think of how different this is from our world. We so easily jump at the opportunity to fight, to war over defending myself and my interests, especially with people who may not look like me. Naturally, we decide disputes in OUR favor, right? At times we will harm others to gain advantage for ourselves. But what God promises here is to have the glory and presence of God so pronounced that we have the fragrance of peace. No need for weapons of war and conflict that destroys.

As beautiful a picture as that is, again, remember, this is not just the future. We have to get in the Delorean and let Doc take us from the Future to the Present. This truth of who we are becoming crashes into how we live now! **Let us walk in this light...**let our lives begin to reflect this glorious reign and work of God NOW!

What if we were in a place where old wounds were set aside? Ways we've hurt one another, sinned against one another were not held as grudges, but set aside for the sake of peace? Because our vision was so taken with God in us? What if the world saw us at peace like that?

What if rather than talk about one another behind the other's back, we sought to be agents of peace in our relationships and neighborhoods? What if the **swords of our words we use to cut one another were beaten into plowshares to cultivate relationships of humility?**

What if the racial hostilities in our city were increasingly diminished through the respectful and humble dialoge of relationships that WE build in this neighborhood for God's glory? Instead of our efforts being **spears of judgment and accusation that pierce and kill through self-protection and insisting on MY rights, we spent our lives as pruning hooks that were used to enable flourishing and fruitfulness of someone else's life?**

What if the poor knew they would be treated fairly HERE, of all places in the city, they knew that the people of Central had a God in our midst that enabled and gave us conviction to treat them with justice and compassion—because this is how our God treats us. That they would be cared for and protected HERE! Not in some government agency. But here, where God dwells.

Friends that future can crash into the present when we truly begin to believe that we can stop striving to advance self over against others because the God of peace is alive here and in me. Do you believe that? Do you want that for this church? A place of Holiness and humility? For yourself?

## **2. WHAT ARE HIS MEANS of taking us there?**

### **EMPTYING OUR HANDS**

What does it look like for God to do the work of shaping us into the Future he lays out? **For HIS Future to crash into Our present, he must empty our hands of the things that tell us we don't need him.** The rest of

chapter 2 and 3 lay out what in our pride we lean on so we don't ever feel needy, that tell us the story we can make it on our own.

He will remove the strength of his people and replace it with weakness: taking away good leaders, wealth, armies to protect, elders who care for justice and on and on the list goes in chapter 3.

Just like Judah, the church today, and us as people are filled with the pride of self-sufficiency. We fill our lives with all sorts of comforts and power. We chase after all sorts of things to make ourselves feel important and valuable.

So God is gracious enough and loves us enough to **"take away from his people their support and supply" (3:1) and "take away" their beauty (3:18)?** Why would he **remove the strong leaders from God's people (3:2-17)**. Why? To pry from our hands these idols. Because God wants us to know that self-reliance is a recipe for death.

The WORST thing is NOT a loss of our retirement fund, or the loss of a job. The WORST is not the loss of our hard-earned reputation of competence, and the idolatry of being the dependable and smart one—a pastor's particular idol. The WORST is NOT a loss of health and perplexing and complicated health challenges. At the end of the day, when all these things have been stripped away, we still have the one thing that still gives life. And often we can't see that truth till everything else is gone.

The WORST would be for God to allow his people to persist with the lie that we don't need him, OR that he isn't satisfying! So in order to prevent that loss, our faithful God will deliver to us other losses. **Jesus loves us enough to have us experience our weakness.** The BEST thing for us is to be awakened to the way that our joy is tied to our dependence on his

glory! So that as we look at our lives, we not only are focused on today, but also have our eyes blazened with the future Glory that is to come.

Although his taking away may be hard and severe even, it is a factor of his immense love, his intense desire to completely transform us as his people and his intention to reveal the amazing power of his glory. **What loss might you be experiencing as God's gift to you? Where do you feel weak, that his strength might rise up within you?**

### FILLING OUR HEARTS

To move us along that road of Back to the Future, God will empty our hands, but fill our hearts with the only thing that will satisfy: the Lord Jesus. He proves to us the ONE thing we need the most is what we could never lose: himself!

Once he removes the honor we claim for ourselves, the confidence we place in ourselves, our Father gives us new honor, new confidence and new faithful life that comes through Jesus himself. Look at 4:2. **In that day, v. 2**, again the time of the Messiah, Jesus who has come, what happens? Those, **v. 3, left in Zion**, i.e. part of the covenant family, part of the church we might say, will be **called holy**. When?, **v. 4 when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.**

He will wash away our filth and cleanse the stains of sin, **v. 4, by a spirit of judgment and of burning.** Do you hear what the Lord is saying to us here? We don't find life and fruitfulness in avoiding judgment. That sounds counter-intuitive. We don't want to get caught; we don't want to be seen; we don't want anyone to know who we are on the inside because we know we don't measure up to a standard of goodness and



holiness, when honest. Life doesn't come, however, from avoiding judgment, but by going through it!

But here's how: The one going through judgment for you is Jesus, the Branch, v. 2, a term for the long promised Messiah. Jesus came to give his life on the cross, to be judged as one joined to me, to you, that my judgment fell on him, and we are washed clean by his blood! He is the Vine, the Branch that gives our dead existence new life! On the great day of Judgment, the End of Days, when my life is laid bare Jesus will stand beside me and announce, *"This one is mine, for although his sin is real, I have already paid the blood price for him."* Let that Future crash into your present! There is no need to hide, for Jesus has washed us clean. And His Spirit purifies us, as if we were a piece of gold or silver being made pure, beautiful and radiant through the refiner's fire.

What's more, not only does he **cleanse** us, but he **dwells with us now** as he promised in the vision of the future. Verse 5 uses an image the people of Judah would recognize as a clear sense when EVERYBODY could see God was among them was in the Exodus, when as they wandered the desert, a cloud covered them by day and a pillar of fire by night. If you were afraid and alone and wondered if God was there, O Israelite, look! See. God is with us.

For you, friend, the promise not simply a pillar and cloud, but You are united to, joined to indwelled by that Branch, that new life in Jesus, who promises you will never be alone again! When you feel weary and exposed, he will be like a cloud of shade for you. When you feel dark and afraid, not being able to see ahead, He shall be like a pillar of fire to guide you.

Even more beautifully, v. 5 says, His glory will be as a canopy covering you. That word for canopy describes the marriage chamber, where

husband and wife become one. What a beautiful intimate moment. Jesus says I will dwell so close to you the best way to describe it is the place where husband and wife are joined together. That is where I meet you! I will rest over you in my grace and glory, and there NO ONE and NO THING will snatch you from my love.

See, he loves us enough to empty our hands of that which can never satisfy--power, prestige, sex, money, even at times grasping to relationships, so that he can fill us up with so much better: Himself.

If you are drowning today, in circumstances, in sorrows, in worries, go Back to the Future. If you want this church to heal, to be a habitation of holiness and humility, go Back to the Future. If you want to see Jesus and his kingdom exalted in our city, go Back to the Future he promises, because he died to bring it about.