

The Prophetic Hope

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[0 : 00] Our reading is from Isaiah chapter 11, a prophetic oracle that we'll be looking at. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hands on the others then.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. 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.

[1 : 39] In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time, to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Paphros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off.

Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east.

They shall put out their hands against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the river with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels.

And he will lead people across in sandals. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

[2 : 53] Now, Watermark is a great church, but sometimes it feels a bit unusual, because many people are wealthy and successful.

In many countries, and many times in history, the church looks very different. It was made up of the poor, the marginalized, slaves, women, who have always been a big part of the church.

Why? Because the Bible is about hope. The Bible story is about hope, that God will make everything right. But hope is only appealing for the hopeless, the desperate, those without power, while those with a good life are often not very open.

Maybe some of you know that, because that's how you came to faith. It was some kind of crisis. Maybe you lost someone or something, and something happened, and you faced hopelessness. And that is when the gospel came to life. Sometimes even on a national level, like the revival in Korea. So, the church has grown so much, but a lot of that had to do with the Japanese occupation, and the Korean War.

[4 : 03] And so today, as we're looking at the prophetic books of the Bible, especially we'll look at hope, because if you were here last week, Israel needed it.

And the story of the Bible is how God will make the world right. It was perfect, but then we sinned, and everything fell apart. But God made promises to Israel, and slowly over the past few weeks, which, well, we covered hundreds of years, they were almost there. They almost reached the fulfillment under Solomon. It was so wonderful. But then, as we heard last week, Solomon sinned, and everything fell apart. His kingdom split in two. And then 200 years later, the north went into exile by the Assyrians, and then 130 years later, the south went into exile by the Babylonians. And you can imagine the hopelessness of the people. We were so close, but now everything's falling apart. God, what are you doing? God, what is happening? Most people are gone, and a lot are dead, and the rest are now slaves in a foreign country. [5 : 12] It was the greatest crisis the people had ever faced, and they needed to hear from God. And that is what God did. He spoke to them. He sent prophets. Now, before we look at them, just a little introduction, so we know about prophets and how to read them.

First, today we're going into a very different section of the Bible. So far, we've mainly looked just at the history, and the first few books of the Bible is basically one continuous history, all the way from Genesis to Nehemiah.

But today, we're not looking at history. We're looking at the prophets. And we divide the Old Testament usually into four sections, the law, history, wisdom, and prophets. But it's not like this came after the history. Actually, it came at the same time. It's not sequential. It's the same time as, yeah, like two kings, basically. These incredibly significant events we talked about, the exile of Israel, the exile of Judah, and then 70 years later, they returned to the land. And these were major disasters when people needed God's words.

[6 : 22] And so the prophets, they span about 300 years, maybe from 740 BC Amos to 440 BC Malachi, something like that. At the same time, it is a new stage in God's plan.

That's why we're talking about it. Not just in one book, but across all the prophets, God reveals a new stage of his plan. And so, yeah, today, in a way, I'm covering about 25% of the Old Testament. It's quite a lot. So we will look at multiple books. But what do prophets do? In some way, they're heralds. They're spokesmen from God, right? They say, Thus says the Lord, and this is God's message.

But what do they say? Often people think prophets, they foretell the future. They predict the future. I mean, they talk about future events, but that's not really what they are doing.

What do prophets do? They explain the covenant. Some people call them covenant watchdogs, or covenant enforcement mediators, or something like that.

[7 : 26] But to do with the covenant, they remind people of the covenant. People are struggling. What is happening? And they say, Well, remember the law of Moses. Remember the covenant.

So, you know, there's an Assyrian army outside Jerusalem, and the people are wondering what's going to happen. And, well, the prophets, they say, Well, you've broken the covenant.

God should be at the center of your life. And if you don't do that, you face his curse. And, well, you've been worshipping idols. You've broken the covenant. That's why there's Assyrians. And if you don't repent, they are going to destroy the city and take all your stuff.

That's basically what they say. So, it's not like they've had a vision of the future. They're just explaining the covenant in very creative ways. But that's basically what they do. I mean, silly illustration.

What happens if I let something go? If I hold it and I let go, well, you probably will tell me, well, it's going to fall to the ground. Now, have you just predicted the future?

[8 : 29] Well, yeah, you have. But that's not really what you do, right? You haven't had a vision of that thing falling. It's just you're explaining gravity. What prophets, they do, they explain the covenant.

They explain God's word and apply it to their situation. Which I think is interesting for the New Testament, right? The gift of prophecy is that about foretelling the future? Or is it more about applying God's words?

We will not go there now. But basically, they provide commentary on what is happening. Which is why it's good to know the history. Because you can read the prophets in context.

And what is the main thing they're saying? And they explain the covenant. Well, what is the current situation? As you've heard last week, Israel was sinning.

They were turning away. They were worshipping idols. And so generally, they just announce judgment. And things are falling apart. And the prophets say, well, it's getting worse. You're getting judged.

[9:25] Sin has consequences. And you've rejected God. And so you face judgment. Now, it depends a little bit on when the prophets spoke. Especially as they are approaching the exile.

Lots of sin and judgment. So Jeremiah or Ezekiel, the first half of the book, is just hopeless judgment. While, for example, after they're back from exile, it's slightly different.

But I'm not going to go into the judgment. Because it doesn't really develop the story. No, the prophets also remind the people of other covenants. Particularly the one with David.

As they are facing disaster and judgment, the prophets remind them, well, hey, God promised that you would dwell in the land. That you would have peace forever. Under a king from David's family. And so, most oracles, they have to deal with David's family. And that's what you see even in what we read. Isaiah 1. So Isaiah 11, verse 1.

[10:23] There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse. It's how it started. Now, Jesse was David's father. So someone from David's family. Right? And almost every prophet does that.

They link the future to the Davidic king. And yet it's not the same. Yet God starts to reveal his full plan. It's like there's a room and it's been a bit dim and we can't really see it.

And now God turns on the light and he shows the full extent of his plan. That's why the prophets are part of this storyline. Unlike, for example, the wisdom literature. Right? Because slowly God is now going to build up a picture of the full scale of what he's doing.

And I'm going to cover it quite comprehensively. A lot of detail. Not because this is a lecture. But just seeing the scale of God's plan is mind-blowing. Breathtaking.

Right? And the detail makes that out. I mean, if you... Someone says, Okay, I've got a new phone. It's the best phone ever. How do you work that out? Well, you look at the specs and one by one, Oh yeah, this really is the best phone ever.

[11:27] And I think the prophets, they say three big things. There's the what, the how, and the who of God's plan. Okay.

So first the what. And that is a full reversal of the full. God is doing a full reversal of the full. He said before he will restore the kingdom.

But now it's explicit we're going all the way to the Garden of Eden and further. I mean, let's build up a picture. First, of course, I mean, the people are in exile, so they need rescue.

So there's a return from exile promised. So in Isaiah 11, verse 11, In that day, the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people from Assyria, from Egypt, from Baphros, from Cush, etc.

Verse 12, He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel. And so he will bring the people back. And it's like a second exodus, right?

[12:27] You heard a second time. Look at verse 16. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

So, yeah, there's a return from exile which is like another exodus with a big rescue by God. But this one is so much bigger.

You remember back then they walked through the Red Sea, right? God blew winds and there was this path through the sea. But now look at verse 15.

And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt and will wave his hands over the river with his scorching breath. It's like God will just, he will just dry up the Red Sea completely.

This is like a complete final rescue to bring them back to the land. So it's much bigger. Peace, right? Their big promise was that they would have peace and no more disturbing.

[13:27] Which is why a lot of the prophets, they have judgments against foreign nations that their enemies are gone, right? The main problem for them was often these other nations that attacked them. And so, if God says I'm going to get rid of all the foreign nations, that's in a way wonderful, right?

It's safety. And yet, this peace is so much greater. I mean, look at verse 6. It's, you know, the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat and the calf and the lion

and the fattened calf together and a little child shall lead them.

Right? This is not just foreign armies. This is animals have peace. Right? And, you know, wolves and leopards, they don't make political alliances, right?

They don't sign peace treaties. They, you know, they're naturally predators. And yet, they're going to be fully transformed. So, it's really like the Garden of Eden. Verse 9.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. It's going to be a complete transformation. The whole world will know God and no one will fight anymore, not even animals.

[14:38] Isaiah, he talks elsewhere about a new creation. I create new heavens and a new earth. So, this is a worldwide transformation. It's not just, yeah, sometimes people ping the prophets, they talk about a physical return of Israel as a nation, but this is far greater, actually, if you read it, right?

It's a new creation. And, of course, there's blessing like never before. The mountains will drip sweet wine and the hills will flow with milk and the sower will overtake the reaper.

There's so much harvest that, yeah, they're still reaping but in the sowing time again. One of the most amazing things is that there's going to be no more death. I mean, that was always the ultimate curse, right?

How did Genesis 2 start? Well, if you sin, the day you eat of it, you will die. Death is always the ultimate thing and even under Solomon, the people still died, right?

But look at Isaiah 25, 6 to 8, it's in the bulletin. Isaiah 25, look at what God promises here.

[15:44] Isaiah 25, verse 6, On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

It's not a poor existence, right? An incredible wedding banquet. But then verse 7, And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

He will swallow up death forever. And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, right?

People will live, there will be no more death. People will live forever.

And not just that people won't die anymore. 26, 19, Isaiah, it says, Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in it, dust awake.

So even people who are currently dead will come back to life. Right? That is what God is saying. So it's really a full reversal of the fall. A new creation. No more death.

[16:46] A full, complete, final rescue. all the consequences are solved. So, you know, their promises, yeah, it goes up and up and up again beyond the Garden of Eden.

And again, that's so much grace, right? I mean, who is this spoken to? People in exile for their idolatry and sins. People who deserve nothing and God promises them everything.

How would you feel, right? No more, yeah, transformed world. No more death. No more losing loved ones. In fact, your loved ones are going to come back from the dead.

This is such a wonderful thing. At the same time, it can feel so big that it's kind of hard to believe. Right? Israel is not doing well.

Everything's falling apart. And then, yeah, not just everything, God's plan seems to be falling apart, right? God's kingdom. And now God is saying he's going to do something so big.

[17:43] I mean, it's like, it's completely the opposite of their experience. You know, it's quite hard to believe, right? Remember, two weeks ago, I said, yeah, it's like a scale model of a big building to give you a preview.

But imagine someone shows you a scale model and it's falling apart, right? It's wobbly and then it crashes and then they tell you, yeah, please invest in the big thing I'm doing. You wouldn't have any confidence.

How can God do this when his current plan seems to not work? What will guarantee it? And that is the how. It's because sin will be fully dealt with.

Yeah, the second big thing God reveals, yeah, it goes together. Sin will be fully solved. The cause of the fall. And if the cause is fully solved, so can the consequences be.

And it's really comprehensive. First of all, there will be a perfect divine king. We've seen already, it is a king who's going to help with sin.

[18:43] Except that so far, yeah, all the kings have failed because they were human and they are sinful themselves. But look at this king, this shoot from the stump of Jesse. Isaiah 11 verse 2.

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor. Yeah?

So here's a king who has wisdom from the Holy Spirit that no human king has ever had. And so he can rule perfectly. He will bring perfect justice. Right?

This oracle is linked with Isaiah 9 which we always read with Christmas. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Basically, God himself will be the king.

[19 : 41] Alright? There's no good human king and so God says, I will be the king. God is perfect in power and love and justice and everlasting.

And so, he is the perfect king. He can deal with sin. But not just the king. There will be a new covenant. That's also in Isaiah but the most famous passage is in Jeremiah 31.

So Jeremiah 31, verse 31. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out to the land of Egypt. So a new covenant different from the one when I came out of Egypt. My covenant that they broke though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

What was the problem with the old covenant? It could be broken and they broke it. I mean, that's why the people are in exile. So the problem is they have a covenant that's conditional, that involves law keeping and that's the problem.

[20 : 47] So instead, this is the covenant I will make. I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God. They shall meet my people. They will all know me for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

And here is a new covenant based on forgiveness where God will no longer act on sin. Right? And that's so wonderful because sin was the problem.

Right? But the covenant, well the covenant was good but it was a problem for sinners because it brought judgment. But that will be different. It's like when you have a job you can be on probation and after your probation you're on a permanent contract.

And so in theory you then shouldn't get fired anymore. Except, of course, you still get fired. But you know what I mean, right? On probation versus permanent. And that's so great because when you're on probation you need to perform and if you don't perform you will lose the job.

And so a permanent contract is wonderful news. But that's what God is offering. I'm going to make a permanent contract with these people. The only thing is normally you get a permanent contract because you've been good.

[21 : 54] and now God says well I'm giving you a permanent contract because you've been terrible and I don't want to have to fire you again and that's why you're getting a permanent contract. It's grace.

It's wonderful. But yeah, the judgment will be dealt with because there's no more law keeping with punishment. But how will they have the law on their hearts so deep inside?

Well they will have new hearts by the Spirit. That's a big thing in Ezekiel 36 verse 26. The problem as we saw the past weeks is our heart.

The human heart is just full of idols and sin so we need new hearts and that's what God says.

Ezekiel 36 26 And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

He's going to give them a new heart by putting the spirit inside them. To be honest this is quite humbling right? God has to you know how sinful are we really?

[23 : 08] Well the only way that God can think of to stop us sinning is that he comes and lives inside us and forces us to obey him. That's basically what God is saying. That's how sinful we are.

Sin runs so deep God has to come and live inside you to make you stop sinning. That's how bad things are but wonderfully that's what he promises he's going to give the spirit and so not only will we have an unbreakable covenant by the spirit people will no longer sin.

Right? So it is really everything about sin is going to be dealt with. There's going to be a perfect sacrifice all through the Old Testament there's sacrifices they make atonement and so there's going

to be a perfect sacrifice Isaiah 53 I'm not going to go into it because the next three weeks as we approach the cross we're going to look at that but yeah a perfect sacrifice and for completion Satan will be destroyed.

Right? That's how things went wrong in Genesis 3 remember Satan tempting did you remember Job from last year and Leviathan well Isaiah 27 God says he will punish Leviathan he will slay the dragon in the sea right?

He will deal with Satan but you get the picture right? God will completely and fully deal with sin the thing that has always got in the way will be sorted and the thing is God himself will do it no more human kings he will be the king no more us fighting sin he will be inside us fighting sin right?

[24 : 40] no more our obedience he will meet the demands everything is God doing it by his grace you know so far we couldn't make the world right God said I'll make the world right as long as you obey me and we can't even do that so God says I will just do everything I'll deal with the consequences and the cause I'll do it all and isn't that what we need so much right?

such good news for Judah suffering in exile never again will sin be a problem that's so wonderful so amazing the only question is well for whom if God does everything and we nothing well who is it for what qualifies you and that is I think the third thing that the prophets talk about the third big change who is it for well partly everyone everyone it's kind of what you expect right I mean if God's going to make the whole world right it should be for the whole world right you can't make a new creation in a little corner it should involve the whole world and it does it's not just Judah first of all the northern kingdom is going to come back and we saw that in Isaiah because Ephraim is another name for the northern kingdom and it says Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah and Judah shall not harass Ephraim they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the

Philistines in the west and together they shall plunder the people of the east so north and south are going to be back together again and that was the first start of the downfall when the kingdom split and that's going to be undone north and south will be back together but also the nations coming in it's in Isaiah 11 but you heard it especially in Isaiah 25 right who is this banquet for?

for all peoples and death will be swallowed up well the veil that is cast over all nations right it's for all nations for Jews and Gentiles it was always the plan back with Abraham but in the prophets it becomes very clear they are fully included they're not just on the side watching him they're fully included which is why our church is here right because I don't think any of us are Jews we're all Gentiles and yet we're fully included in God's people so in some way it's everyone but does it mean everyone is just saved?

every human being ever? no actually there is a change especially you see that with Judah because so far God has dealt with the nation right they came out of Egypt as a nation they were blessed under Solomon as a nation they went to the exile as a nation but in the prophets God makes clear I'm going to do it differently I'm going to deal with individuals there's going to be a division you don't wonder well who are the people God will save and you might expect him to say well it's the most righteous people right everyone who meets the standard but yeah you've seen the history of Israel there are no righteous people instead it's everyone who is repentant everyone who is repentant just listen to what God's people say in Isaiah 64 starting at verse 5 you meet him who joyfully works righteousness those who remember you in your ways behold you were angry and we sinned in our sins we have been a long time and shall we be saved we have all become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment we all fade like a leaf and our iniquities like the wind take us away verse 8 but now oh lord you are our father we are the clay and you are our potter we are all the work of your hand be not so terribly angry oh lord and remember not iniquity forever behold please look we are all your people yeah you can hear it they're not Pharisees they are humble and contrite they know they've sinned they know they don't deserve anything but they they just appeal to God's mercy and that's the kind of people that

[28 : 48] God says yeah these are the people I esteem the people I welcome on the other hand there's other people and they they continue to refuse God so next chapter Isaiah 65 verse 2 I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good following their own devices a people who provoke me to my face continually sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks who eat pigs flesh verse 5 who say keep to yourself do not come near me for I am too holy for you these are the smoke in my nostrils a fire that burns all the day and they're gonna get judged even worse judgment than the exile people who have no interest in God people who continue to ignore him and live their own way so there's two groups of sinners basically

but the difference is repentance one group repents and they're accepted and rescued another group keeps rejecting God and they won't share in the hope which kind of makes sense right because we've seen

God will take care of our sin drastically but it's only those who know they need that who get it but those who don't want God to do it either out of pride or rebellion they're not gonna benefit right so that's kind of yeah that's the third big change so yeah I altogether I hope you see these three big things and they're a massive change right a full reversal of the fall sin will be fully dealt with for everyone who repents now what do we do with this for I guess it's all clear right I hope you recognize this is the gospel this is basically the good news of Jesus that God saves us from our sin and we just need to repent that's basically right this is just exactly the gospel I mean I hope today has really just warmed your heart seeing how much God promises how complete is his solution to sin so amazing such good news right everything is taken care of law sin judgment

Satan everything is taken care of right we often just think gospel is just Jesus died for my sins but I hope you see the gospel is far greater far more comprehensive than that and so this is really really going to work right it's worth giving your whole life to and also I hope it gives you confidence right the bible is really one book the gospel is not just in the new testament it's not just new when Jesus comes it's announced in the old testament when Peter and Paul when they went around preaching they preached from the prophets to be honest I think the new testament adds very little that you can't just find in the prophets already it's all here and so yeah the whole the prophets are all about the gospel and actually not just the prophets right I hope in a way you see how everything before the prophets was just preparation now last week we covered 400 years of history of Israel suffering under the law and ending up in exile but I hope you see well they needed that right because hope as we started hope is for the hopeless and so God in a way he got them to realize their hopelessness he made them realize their sin that they couldn't solve it that's why they were in that situation so that they would see their need for Jesus their need for God to do it just as he often does for us he brings us to the end of ourselves so that we turn to him so it's a very simple question for us right what is our hope in us and our efforts

I hope you will see that fails right Israel tried to save themselves for 900 years and they couldn't we can't save ourselves and God says I'll do it for you I will take care of everything you just need to admit your needs your sin I want to rescue you it's like when you're drowning and God says here take my hand right the right thing to do is to grab that hand so God will pull you out if you refuse to grab the hand because you are not interested in being saved or because you think you can save yourself yeah you will not be rescued you need to grab God's hand so will we do that right as we have this great hope will we confess our sin will we turn away from ourselves to God will we say please only you can save us and let him do everything because that is how we should respond that is the people God esteems people who know yeah they don't deserve it who know they can't save themselves that's how we respond to the wonderful work of

God to the gospel why don't we pray father thank you so much for the incredible love seen here and your great promises this new covenant with everything taken care of a full reversal of the fall with sin fully dealt with father help us to want that help us to know we need it and to know that we need you to do it help us to turn away from ourselves turn away from other things to seek our only hope in you to keep holding on to you to keep trusting you to keep confessing our sins and holding on to you because only you can save if we see this so clearly please you know our hearts are deceptive please keep transforming us please keeping us close that we might walk with you and live for you in this great city showing that you are the only savior in Jesus name we pray amen ■■■■■ you you you