

Week 1 (11/27) - Isaiah 6:1-8a

As we enter the Advent season, we have the chance to refocus our thinking around Christmas. What are you excited about during Advent? Do you have any concerns?

Personal Reflection.

Do you see any significance to the way this passage starts? Why would Isaiah start by telling us the vision happened in the year Uzziah died?

Not only is Isaiah pointing to an exact time in history - a time that can be pinpointed to years later - but he's acknowledging something even greater here. Isaiah is highlighting the fact that earthly rulers will come and go. Kingdoms rise and fall, but God is always seated on His throne. Isaiah is contrasting the rulers on earth to the one in heaven.

As the seraphim are singing the praises of God, you can almost feel them grasping at language, trying to find words that could do our King justice. How would you explain their song in your own words?

Repetition was a linguistic tool in Hebrew used to emphasize something. They start by singing that God is separate, He is greater than everything else you could compare him to! Everything in this world points to the majesty of the Lord. There is not one drop of water or speck of dust that does not answer to the bidding of our God. It is all under His domain and it all reflects the majesty of our King.

Upon seeing the Lord, Isaiah immediately responds by acknowledging his own sinfulness and feeling unworthy to do His will. Have you ever felt unworthy to do the Lord's will? What can we learn from this passage?

Personal Reflection.

Our worth is not determined by us. Our worth is determined by God. Though we are all sinners and undeserving of his love, He has seen fit to love us. God doesn't tell Isaiah, "no worries! You're a good guy!" Instead God steps in for Isaiah and atones for his sins so that he can be in God's presence. This is true of you and me, as well. It was God who made our relationship with Him possible.

Why is it good to know that our God is King over all nations?

They are in his hand, and there is nothing that happens which surprises Him. In this truth, we can find rest and peace in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. God is in control.

Week 2 (12/4) - Isaiah 9:6-7 (What this King will be)

As Americans, it can be hard to relate to the idea of monarchies and the power that a king has in his kingdom. How is a king different than a president?

First and foremost, a King is made through a royal bloodline, not decided upon by voters. A king has absolute authority over the laws. He can decide who lives or dies, who has wealth and who doesn't, who is an ally or an enemy. The king answers to nobody except himself while a president has checks and balances.

What does it mean for the government to rest upon his shoulders?

Our King is not of this world (John 18:36) and through him all things were created. Colossians 1:6 tells us "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." There is not a single thing in heaven or on earth that is not subject to Jesus's rule. All governments, including the heavenly kingdom rest upon his shoulders, because he carries them. Without His will, it wouldn't even exist (Hebrews 1:3).

When you think of Jesus, what image comes to mind? Is he a friend; a servant; a king; a conqueror? Do you gravitate to one image and ignore others?

Personal Reflection.

The key idea here is that in order to see him at all, you have to see him as all. He is all of those things - Father, King, Counselor, etc.

Isaiah foretells us that the Messiah will be a wonderful counselor. What implications can you draw from this phrase, and where do you see that displayed in Jesus' life?

The book of Hebrews lays out a beautiful picture of Christ being our great high priest (Heb 4:14-16). Since Jesus walked as both fully man and fully God, he is able to relate to all of our pain and suffering that we experience. While he never sinned, he knew what it was to feel pain. The shortest verse in the bible is also one of the most beautiful - "Jesus wept." (John 11:35). Jesus is our wonderful counselor because he can relate to us while still giving us the everlasting hope of a future where we will be with him forever. In that place, we will no longer feel pain (Rev 21:4).

We can see Jesus living this out throughout his entire ministry on earth. Whether he is healing the sick, teaching his disciples through parables, or loving the widows and orphans, Jesus displays a great level of empathy for us. He was never consumed with it, though. Jesus always uses opportunities to point people to the truth for salvation.

What do you think God is teaching you through this passage? How are you being challenged or changed?

Personal Reflection.

Week 3 (12/11) - Isaiah 53 (How this King will suffer)

Take some time to either write out, or discuss the imagery used in the passage Isaiah 52:13-53:12. What thoughts and emotions come to mind as you read over these verses?

Personal Reflection

What does Isaiah 53:4-6 tell us about our relationship with Christ?

In just a few short verses, Isaiah lays out a beautiful picture of who we are and what Christ has done for us. He shows us that we are people with grief and sorrows - that we are filled with iniquities - but that Christ has taken them upon himself. For that, he was pierced, crushed, and chastised. It is through his pain and suffering that we are made whole again. Though we have gone astray like sheep from the righteousness of God, though we did nothing to deserve it, Jesus bore the wrath that was supposed to be for us.

Why must God the Father put Jesus, His Son, to death?

This question comes up often. Why did God need to put Jesus to death to forgive our sins? It doesn't seem fair, and (spoiler alert) - it's not fair. You don't want fairness when it comes to sin.

We learn from the very beginning of the bible, in the Garden of Eden, that the wages of sin are death (Rom. 6:23) and that through one man, Adam, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). In other words - we all deserve the death penalty. The bible also tells us that it is God's character to always be just and righteous (Deut 32:4). If God does not punish sin - if he just winks at the sin as though it's not a big deal to disobey his law - he would cease to be just and righteous.

Here is where God's justice and mercy come together. Since sin needs to be paid for, and God desires to be in a relationship with sinners, someone has to take the punishment for the sins. The only one who could take our place was the Son. Since Jesus was perfect and without sin, he trades places with us on the cross. He took our sin upon himself so that we could become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus paid your debt and now you are seen as sinless in God's eyes. It's not fair - it's merciful.

Does your life reflect the King you serve? Are you striving for honor, power, or influence, or are you sacrificing for others?

Personal reflection.

If you could ask Isaiah anything at this point in the series, what would you ask him, and why?

Personal Reflection.

Week 4 (12/18) - Isaiah 61:1-4 (How this King will conquer)

In Luke 4, Jesus launches his public ministry with a sermon on this passage. He tells them that what God promised in Isaiah is now being fulfilled in Him. Why do you think he did that? How did they respond? How should we respond?

What do you imagine Heaven and eternal life to look like?

Personal reflection. See 1 Corinthians 2:9.

As you read through these four verses, which traits do you most relate to? Are you the broken hearted who needs binding? The captive who needs liberty? The mourner who needs comfort?

Personal Reflection.

How should the truth about resurrection affect our attitude toward difficulties in life?

While we still mourn difficult times, we can do so with a hope and knowledge that things will be mended in the future. This life, this time, this struggle is fleeting. It does not need to and should not consume us. We will be brought through any difficulty because God has promised us that he will restore all things, including our bodies and relationships, to a perfect state. Christ is our hope and in Him we can find rest.

How has your view of Jesus changed during this Advent season? If your friend asked you, "who is this Jesus you worship?" how would you answer?

Personal Reflection