

## Away In A Manger

### Week 1: Hope

This advent we are going to look at the coming of Jesus from the **perspectives** of different people who were connected to the story of Jesus' birth.

This morning we are going to come from the perspective of someone who **never technically saw** the birth of Jesus. He lived **700 years** before Jesus' birth. He longed for that day. **God gave him words** about what His plans were for Israel and all creation. He probably had **pictures in his mind** about what the coming of Messiah would be like. His words tell us that **he knew what it would mean**. This man is **Isaiah, the prophet**.

**Hope on the horizon** is one of the themes from Isaiah. His prophecies extended from **739-681 BC** to the people of God primarily living in **Jerusalem**. His prophecies spanned over the reign of four Judean Kings: **Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah**. In this slice of history, the Israelite people find themselves living in **dark times of judgment** because they have **broken their covenant** with God and pursued idolatrous and rebellious lives leading to sin. The judgment of God comes throughout the Book of Isaiah in the form of **foreign nations such as Assyria and Babylon overtaking God's people and eventually leading them into exile**.

I'm going to ask you to do **something that might seem difficult**. I want us to try to think like exiles. In the case of God's people in **Isaiah's time or soon after**, that might look like being **uprooted** and moved to a foreign

country at the hands of invaders. They conquered your land so as a way of making sure their **new conquest is submissive**, they transplant part of the population to a foreign land.

**I guess you could say that someone who isn't where they want to be or feel like they belong, and they are stuck, is an exile.**

As I think about that definition, **maybe it won't be so hard.**

**Maybe you can relate to being stuck somewhere that you don't want to be or where you simply don't think you belong.**

- **Maybe that's your family.** It isn't going the way you think God intended it to be.
- **Maybe it's your marriage.** It wasn't supposed to hurt, it was supposed to heal.
- **Maybe it's your work.** You just don't want to be there, you belong somewhere else.
- **Maybe you're in school** and you just don't want to be there.
- **Maybe it's your life as a whole.** It wasn't supposed to go this way. You belong in another life. It's not supposed to look this way and feel this way.

**OR maybe you feel like an exile trying to live as Jesus did in this screwed up broken world.**

**Whatever the case, maybe Isaiah has a message for you. There is hope for exiles.**

**If in one of those ways you feel like an exile, here's where you can find hope.**

**This first part may seem backwards, even like giving up. Here and now matters.**

**It can't simply be about getting to where they belong or want to be. That's about nostalgia or just pie in the sky.**

- **"Oh, remember how great it was back in Jerusalem when we were abusing our workers, and whoring around with other gods and breaking our covenant?"**

**Or maybe it's remembering when you were young or before life got hard when you had this fanciful dream of what your life should be.**

**There has to be something right now while we wait that gives value and purpose. Life in exile can't simply be about getting off of a sinking ship, or it will be hard to hang on for very long without giving up hope.**

**Exiles can't remain hopeful if they are passive. Is there something that needs to be developed in my character, my abilities, and knowledge now? That stuff**

will help me now, but also when I am released from this exile.

**Is there something that I am taking from or learning from this setting and the struggle?**

Here's the **danger** for people who feel like exiles. **Relationships can be viewed as disposable.** I will **hesitate to make the connections** that give life richness. **In pining away for the past, or dreaming of some great future, an exile can become no earthly good here and now.**

**Think about that list** I gave of where you might be feeling like you aren't where you want to be or even belong.

- Family.
- Marriage.
- Work.
- School.

**The danger is that I will not invest in those areas or simply pull back** because I just don't want to be here any more.

Here's what **another prophet, Jeremiah,** said when God's people were taken to Babylon after being conquered.

<sup>5</sup> "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. <sup>6</sup> Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! <sup>7</sup> And work

for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare." Jeremiah 29:5-7

**Exiles can't do that if they don't trust the one who sent you there, that he hasn't deserted you.**

**Having hope demands trust that God has not deserted you, that you belong to him, that he has adopted you into his family.**

**The people who Isaiah wrote to were God's people. They were to be an example to the people of the world of how to know, love, and be in relationship with the God who created them. We are more than that. We are Jesus' body if we are following him. We are taking the fullness of Jesus to wherever we go.**

**The word for that is incarnate. Which is what Jesus did. He became an exile, taking on flesh and living in this foreign land with people like us.**

**So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. John 1:14**

**Modern day exiles need to know what incarnate means. We are flesh and blood for Jesus in the places where we work, live, and play.**

**This is the ability to see the kingdom of God around you. Demands an understanding of The Kingdom and seeing signs...it is a present reality and a future hope.**

**If God is King, then he is king over the places where I don't want to be and where I don't think I belong.**

**Understanding that we are the body of Christ will allow exiles to have patient hope, because even though I'm not where I want to be or think I belong where I am still matters.**

**Exiles can find hope if they keep... *The conviction that someone is coming.***

**Not just help is coming; it's a person coming who can help. Not just directions to fix something that is broken, but someone in the flesh who can help. When you are an exile you don't need directions, a strategy, a message from a distance. You need someone to come to you, to enter into your dark place and save you from it.**

**We have foundation issues. I don't need directions on how to fix it. I don't even need the right tools to fix it. I don't need a YouTube on how to fix it. I need someone to come and rescue me by fixing what I can't fix.**

**Here's what the exiles heard from Isaiah. *All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').***  
**Isaiah 7:14**

**Messiah is coming and those are the signs to pay attention to. In chapter 61, Isaiah tells you what his coming will mean for the captives. The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be release and prisoners will be freed. Isaiah 61:1**

**Are you able to recognize that this has happened, not just historically, but personally, for you? Are you able to recognize that Messiah has come and he is a person who has entered your exile with you?**

Exiles can find hope by knowing that **here and now** matters; that being said, **someone is coming** and they can find hope in... **The expectation that things will be put right** (Justice).

Listen to these famous words as if you are an exile waiting for the messiah to come. **The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine...For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! Isaiah 9:2 & 6-7**

**Things being put right always begins with whose in charge.**

**When the real king takes the throne after pretenders and frauds have been running things, then stuff can start to be put right. The things that have been out of whack because those who should not be in authority have been, can now be made right.**

**Once the King is on the throne, then He can deal with root causes to all of the things that he needs to put right. There are all of the injustices that happen because of people's sin. Yes he will put those things right. But the real King doesn't simply deal with symptoms. He is going to get right to the disease.**

Listen to what Isaiah says in one of his most famous chapters, 53. I'm only going to give you a little bit of it but you can read the whole thing. **Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!**  
**<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all...<sup>10</sup> But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands.  
<sup>11</sup> When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my**

righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. <sup>12</sup> I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels. Isaiah 53:4-6 & 10-12

**Christmas makes no sense without Easter. There's a sense of exile being between these two events.**

**First**, the legitimate king takes the throne. **Secondly**, he deals with my root cause of exile, which is my sin. **But he will also put right all of the injustices and hurts that I have experienced.** Some are **self-inflicted**, others because of living in a world filled with sin and death. Those things will be put right as the king's loving rule will extend over all things. That is sin and death.

**What are you looking forward to having put right for you?** When the king is fully restored over all things that hurt, injustice will be put right.

Doesn't that thought give you hope? It does for me.

Isaiah's message of hope to exiles of all kinds is that... **It was and still is about Jesus.**

**If Isaiah were somehow brought back into this modern day**, he would continue to talk about Messiah and what **following him could mean** and what **not following him will mean.** He would talk about the covenant that is written on our hearts through Jesus.

Hope arrives some 700 years after Isaiah prophesied this moment, and his name was called Jesus, which means "God saves." If you remember, Isaiah's name means "the salvation of Yahweh," had pointed the people living in darkness to hope on the horizon that finally broke through in glorious light seven centuries later that came straight from Yahweh Himself.

**Interestingly 700 years in the future** from the birth of Jesus during the time known as the Dark Ages, the origins of one of the oldest Christmas Carols were being sung by monks that would become known later in history as "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

Isaiah's words became reality and were **captured in the gospels.** <sup>20</sup> As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."  
**Matthew 1:20-21**

**Do you feel like an exile?** You are in **dark times**, even **wandering** in a dark season. Your life is just not how it's supposed to be. Maybe you feel like you're living someone else's life.

**Is that because you have separated yourself off from the one** who was promised for exiles those living in dark times. **You haven't trusted your life for what it is now and what it could be to Jesus, Messiah, and King.** **My hope** is that you will make this Christmas a real celebration of hope by trusting him.

**Maybe as a Christ follower you feel like these times are so dark that you are an exile simply waiting for Jesus to return. How are you supposed to live faithfully in the in between time?**

**This Jesus cares about you here and now. This Jesus is willing to come into your life just as it is. He has made the trip and will do it again. But remember, when he comes he will have to deal with your sin issue. That's our desire to be our own king. There can only be one king if things are going to be put right in your life. It's got to be all about Jesus. There's hope today for exiles like you and me who are caught in between where we are and where we want to be. That hope can become reality.**