

Sermon on Isaiah 2 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Isaiah 2:1-22

What would the perfect world be like for you? Imagine if you will... what a perfect existence, experience would be for you.

My research says these things would be part of the perfect world: Candy with no cavities. Free money every day. No bedtimes. Unlimited screen time... No alarm clocks... No toil... Infinite library with infinite time to read!

But really what would the perfect world be? Enough resources for everyone, more than just stuff but contentment with what it is we have. No deadlines, no due dates, no anxiety over what comes next. Calm, no more arguing over opinions, unity, shared values, shared purpose among humanity. Only beauty, no more storms, quakes or tsunamis. No more violence, no more rivalry, no more theft or coveting.

Just hints at what perfect would look like. I think it really all comes down to peace, what we long for, in all of life, is peace. We may use different words to define it, but we are in a constant struggle to get back to a peace only once experienced in the garden of creation long ago - as if it is encoded on our DNA.

So the question we want to be answered this morning is how do we gain or achieve peace, true, abiding peace?

It is not a new question, from the first brothers in the human story, Cain and Abel, and a murder... peace has been longed for. When Isaiah is prophesying a whole nation is hoping for peace.

Here again, we have a word, vision for Judah and Jerusalem... a nation caught in a tension - some cling to a dangerous entitlement to greatness, others are looking for gain by any means necessary - each attempting their own perfect worlds but falling further away from their destiny.

Chapter 2 gives the long view, “the last days” perspective bringing judgment and an end of the systems and strategies many of us thought might get us there, to the place of peace. This is where we start, with the human pursuit of peace.

1) Peace Pursued

What are the things we look to for peace? How do we pursue it and how did Judah pursue it?

The list of ways in which we go after peace could be long, especially if we are deepening the argument to suggest that every endeavor is really at its core a pursuit of peace.

If we begin with personal peace, we think of our setting, our environment. Can I have a she-shed to hide in when the laundry piles up and the kids are screaming?! We devise ways to get away... Or we see our situation as the defining hinge to peace, so we try to adjust it. If we had more money we could finally have contentment and a removal of some of the chaos.

If we could find a way to shave some years off our age, if we can drink from the fountain of youth vibrancy and peace will be found. If we could have the breakthrough in work and create something worthwhile, our arrival or perceived success (and how others treat us) will bring peace.

If we face anxiety, we remove the sources of it or numb ourselves to never feel it. But it doesn't work, even if we have all the stars in the night sky, its never enough!

Move from the personal to the communal - to the national level. We think of stability and safety as keys to peace. So we begin with an intellectual posture - surely if we talk everything out everyone's goal will be the same and we will all get along.

When that falls through we try to gain peace through strength... we lift up leaders we think will get us closer to our definition of peace. We attempt to eliminate those we see as a threat to it. We find shelter under towers of military prowess. And as the text says we build "fortified walls" to keep out the foreigner or any other menace.

And with each new innovation or new raising of the gates, we still find peace elusive. And we go at it again, looking for a new way to it. In our pride, we think we can get there. We are the center of every attempt. This is Judah in spades.

This vision is a huge dose of humility. Isaiah is no dreamy idealist. He sees human pride as the great impediment to the world as it should be.

And every attempt, all of the great human endeavors toward peace, all of the lofty and proud pronouncements are headed one place, to judgment. All of the schemes of man, the idolatry of every generation will be cast aside. Those that abandoned the path (walking in the Lord's light) or rejected it, to begin with - will be defeated.

The land is full of idols and they worship the work of their own hands... they have everything the world says is necessary, treasure, territory, towers... and on the day of the Lord, it is all going to be proven to be waste. Be made rubble.

"The pride of mankind will be humbled, and human loftiness will be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted on that day". -- **Isaiah 2:11** (CSB)

The people will throw their idols to the rats... where they belong. The things that humanity trusts in for identity, fulfillment, success, and peace, apart from God will be destroyed.

This is not just Judah... this is us. Racking up little idols to solve what lies before us. Strategies to get ahead plans to pursue... not all bad but our death when they become what we rely on above where our foundation is meant to reside.

But all of that will be laid to waste and God alone will be exalted. Zion stands above all...

God exalted not as an megalomaniac who can't stand it when others succeed, but as the only true source of the peace we are coded to long for. This is bringing Judah back to their genesis, the reason they exist. A humble return to the source.

God's glory entails both his own happiness and our happiness. Our egocentric self-exaltation degrades us, but humility before God heaps honor upon us. This is the salvation we don't believe in...

"The problem is that we think that his glory and our joy do not lie together in the depths of his heart. We think we have to compete with his will to fulfill our own potential. That is pride. We think too well of ourselves and too poorly of God to believe that his love for his glory and his love for us are one love, drawing him on to the final day when we will be forever happy with his glory alone. But how could it be otherwise? Human fulfillment is union with God." Ray Ortlund

"Put no more trust in a mere human, who has only the breath in his nostrils. What is he really worth?" -- **Isaiah 2:22** (CSB)

The greatest need of man is to reject man and humbly to live for the glory of God alone. We need a better word, a promise to bring us peace.

2) Perfect Promised

You can imagine being among the masses of Judah, these people claimed by God, disobedient and on thin ice. For some things might look pretty dire, like there will be no answer to the current situation except pain and heartache.

Isaiah 2 is meant to stoke your hope. To give you a vision of something so awesome that it fuels your life, like preparing to go to Disneyland, you wait, you count the days and anticipation builds every step of the way!

"In the last days..." The mountain of the Lord's house will be established as the beacon for all of humanity. The place where God dwells, where he is present will rise above the hills. It will be lifted up.

And many people will come, multitudes of people, saying “let's go up to the Mountain of the Lord, this house of the God of Jacob... and he will teach us about his ways, so we may walk in his paths.

This is a picture of the great flow of humanity coming to Zion, where instruction, teaching, will go out from, as the word of the Lord flows from Jerusalem... And the people, all of humanity bought in, convinced and hungering for what the Lord provides on his holy hill.

And what follows is the City of Peace... disputes are settled, weapons are laid down and converted to tools of harvest, nations will no longer war against each other... there will be peace. Since Abel blood has always been shed... and here is the perfect promise, peace flowing from God to the nations from Zion.

Zion, where God is near to his people, the place from which the people expected hope, the source of deliverance and salvation... something beyond the experience of life at the moment, pointing forward to a future Zion and upward to a heavenly Zion.

But the place of God's reign, his rule of peace, is not beyond our experience today, and this is the gob-smacked good news. While Judah is left to look forward, this promise carries for us the same anticipation but also arrival. This perfect which is promised is expected and experienced in Jesus. This is realized in Christ.

Zion, the place in which God dwells, the word of God, the One lifted up above all things... this Jesus.

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” -- **Colossians 1:19-20** (CSB)

This promise then is for us as well, and it is NOW and NEXT. Because of the work of Christ for us, because of the work of the Holy Spirit among us, we taste the goodness of what is coming, even now.

“You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, 23 to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel.” -- **Hebrews 12:22-24** (CSB)

Wisdom given, his ways taught. The true Zion, God himself raised high above all things. Justice coming from Jesus to the nations, to all people. The Savior of the world, exalted, victorious.

Christian, this is who you believe in. This is who you worship. What good news for us, to expect the eventual arrival on the shores of this city of peace. And we experience it now in the ongoing work of Jesus for and in us. What joy!

Real peace is expected and experienced only in Christ.

This is the promise of our lives, that we get to own this reality and expose it to others.

3) Personalized & Proclaimed

“Left to ourselves, we are defenseless before the buffetings of life. That is when Christ comes to us. Through him, our loses can become pathways to hope. For us privileged people in the Western world, the supreme privilege of life is when we find that God himself is all we really need.” RO

This is the invitation to Zion, the invitation to Christ “Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.” Forgiveness is there, identity is there, purpose is there, eternity is there... The glory of God is there and it is for you.

“God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received with the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that he might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory.” Jonathan Edwards

All of this work is God’s... he does the bringing of peace, he renders the idols we have clung to dead. Jesus has taken on our mistaken dreams and given us real hope. He invites us to give all the rest over to him, that we would experience his presence, his glory with joy, now.

Because Jesus has done it and is doing it, we can now live in the power of that future... Those headed to this home - those found in Christ, experiencing peace now and bringing peace to the nations.

As a faithful presence in our cities, bringing peace wherever we are, a prophetic presence in our generation as the nations can see their own most deeply desired future in our life together. Even in a little church like ours! That diverse people, from a multitude of background and lineages, can come together and live for something better than what even the most ideal plan of humanity can come up with.

And we become the city that goes... We no longer wait for the nations to come to Jerusalem, but in these “last days” we go out to evangelize, proclaiming the good news - that “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations,” -- **Luke 24:47** (CSB)

This is why we exist as a church. For the equipping for ministry those experiencing the peace of Christ. That together we would invite the nations to come. That we would invite our neighbors, our families, and our enemies to meet on the holy hill that is Jesus. To hear of his ways... his peace.

Real peace is expected and experienced only in Christ.

What now?

Surrender - Give over those things you have been looking to for peace and a future to Jesus.

“Idols are precious. They are always our hard-won silver and gold. That’s why we prize them... Tolkien portrayed this in *The Lord of the Rings*... Everyone who wears the gold ring of power morphs into something weirdly subhuman, like Gollum, who cherishes it as “My Precious.” So for middle-earth to be saved, the ring must be thrown in the fire of Mount Doom and destroyed forever. Tolkien understood that the key to life is not only what we lay hold of but what we throw away...

Paul wrote, “I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8)

What golden idols do we cherish as essential to our happiness? What must we throw away, to possess the one treasure we really cannot live without - Christ?”
See Jesus for who he is, the One that lived in your place and took on death for you that you could have peace. Give up the lesser things.

Come... enjoy the ride, you are secure, taken care of and headed home to Christ.

“The last two chapters of the Bible describe the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven at the end of the age.

- It is adorned like a bride for her husband.
- In it every tear is wiped away, there is no more death, or crying or pain.
- Its radiance is like a rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.
- There is no temple in the city because the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and Jesus Christ the Lamb.
- There is no sun or moon to shine, because the glory of God himself is its light and the lamp is the Lamb.
- At the center of the city is the throne of God and flowing out from the throne is a river of the water of life.
- And on either side of the river is the tree of life that bears fruit forever.
- And behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people and he will be their God and their light and their joy, and they shall reign

forever and ever.

"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Revelation 22:17). "To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment." (21:6). COME!" As you come, bring someone with you...

Real peace is expected and experienced only in Christ.

"For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come. 15 Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name." -- **Hebrews 13:14-15** (CSB)

Headed to a harbor of conciliation,
Where weapons and wars end in every nation,
Where humanity is humbled,
By the surrender of dusty riches,
And the Lord exalted.
Experienced now through a flood,
Of peace, and righteousness found only in the blood.
May we sing of his grace and goodness,
His perfect path and magnificence,
As we invite others to this City of peace,
Where fears and striving cease.