

What the Prophets Longed to See
A Sermon on Prophecies Concerning Christ

by

Grayson Gilbert

1. Introduction

2. The Birth of Christ Foretold

- a. “Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken” (Is. 7:14-16).
 - i. This is a well-known and well-loved passage to Christians because we know that it speaks of the birth of our Savior. But there are some things going on behind the scenes that you may or may not be aware of.
 1. The context of this prophecy comes during a time of much societal upheaval for Israel, specifically for the Kingdom of Judah.
 2. Assyria is rising up through the ranks and poses a threat to the nations—Amos has already prophesied against the Northern Kingdom of Israel, telling them that this great superpower will come through the land and destroy them.
 - a. What comes of this is a response—not a response of repentance and faith in the Lord, but a response from the Northern Kingdom to make ready for war. Israel’s king makes an ally of the king of Syria, and they approach king Ahaz of Judah to form a military alliance against Assyria—but Ahaz refuses, so the Northern Kingdom and Syria go to war against Judah.

- b. Yet their goal is not simply to conquer Judah; they plan to install a more pliable king in the place of Ahaz—so what’s at stake here is not merely war and unrest. They would kill Ahaz and all his decedents, and the line of David would be no more.
 - c. So, what’s at stake? The promise of God: that One would come forth from the line of David and be established on his throne forever.
- ii. Isaiah comes to reassure Ahaz that the attack on Judah would not succeed, that soon the Northern Kingdom would not even be a people.
 - 1. Most importantly though, Isaiah reiterates the covenant sworn with David that this promised One would come. He would be born of a virgin, and His name would be called Immanuel.
 - a. Isaiah continues in chapter 8 to speak of a time of judgment that must befall Judah. A day of reckoning is near, and yet the anticipation of their Messiah is made abundantly clear in Is. 9:6-7.
 - b. “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.”
 - 2. The prophet Micah, who is prophesying at the same time as Isaiah, likewise confirms this anticipated Messiah in Micah 5:2-3.

- a. “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Therefore, He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel.”
 - b. Both prophets are speaking of the Christ who is to come, but that He will only come after a long period of darkness and affliction.
 - c. It is only when we come to the book of Matthew and see him speak of Jesus’s birth as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, that we see just how long this period of darkness and affliction truly was.
- b. Isaiah 11 gives even further clarity to the lengthy delay of Christ’s coming yet speaks of all that will be accomplished through His coming.
- i. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” (Is. 11:1).
 - 1. The “stump of Jesse” refers to the once mighty kingdom of David, which has been reduced to almost nothing under the judgment of God—and yet there are signs of life.
 - a. From the roots a Branch rises and will bear fruit.
 - b. This King from David’s line would be empowered by the Spirit and establish perfect righteousness in His reign (vv. 2-5).
 - c. This King from David’s line would establish peace that changes even the nature of animals (vv. 6-9).
 - d. This King from David’s line would not simply be the King of Israel, but all nations will seek Him (v. 10).

- e. In vv. 10-16, we see this King from David's line will gather in the remnant of Israel from the four corners of the earth.
- ii. What I want you to see is how tightly connected all of these promises are as they're being given.
 - 1. Think of the analogy of the mountain earlier; there is one mountain before us and yet as we approach it and see things more and more clearly, one mountain breaks into two peaks.
 - 2. In the span of just a few chapters in Isaiah, we see not only the birth of Christ foretold, but also His second coming.
 - a. This is incredibly important simply because Israel is to pin all of their hope on this child prophesied to come, because He would be the One to set all things right.
 - b. Remember, they're facing judgment—but their hope in the midst of judgment is Christ.

3. The Life of Christ Foretold

- a. "But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them" (Is. 9:1-2).
 - i. The first thing to notice of this section is that it is once again nestled in a context that speaks of the future hope of what Christ will accomplish for His people.
 - 1. Notice in vv. 3-5 that we find a day depicted where Israel will be delivered from their oppressors.

- a. This Messiah would enlarge the nation and increase their joy (v. 3) and the reason for this is shown in v. 4, where Israel is no longer under the burdensome yoke of their oppressors.
 - b. Yet then see in v. 5 that it speaks of a time where every warrior's boot used in battle and every cloak rolled in blood will be destroyed.
2. Beloved, this speaks of a glorious time where war will be a distant memory in the minds of all who live in the presence of their King.
 - a. We see this clearly in vv. 6-7, which we've already touched on—but notice that the coming Messiah is the culmination of all these material and spiritual blessings that God has promised.
 - b. The purpose of His coming is to fully destroy the great enemies of all God's people: sin, Satan, and death—but for this to actually happen, this Savior must be born.
 - ii. What we see from this is that the birth of Christ and the life and ministry of Christ is all tightly connected to this future hope of Israel.
 1. This One, who is to come, is the only One who can bring in the reality of peace under His reign. No earthly king could ever give such assurance.
 2. All of this speaks of a future hope in the Messiah who will bring light and peace to God's people, in stark contrast to their enemies and even Judah's current king.
 - a. The time of gloom and darkness under God's judgment would be followed by a time of joy and delight in His salvation.
 - b. The verbs in this section are all in the perfect tense, which is simply showing that these things to come are so certain that the prophet speaks of them as if they've already happened.

- b. When we come to the New Testament, specifically in Matt. 4:12-17, the apostle quotes from Isaiah 9 to show that Christ has fulfilled this prophecy.
 - i. The context of this section deals with the beginning of Christ's life and ministry.
 - 1. He has just undergone the temptation in the wilderness and then returns to the region of Galilee, where He settles in Capernaum, and this is where Matthew picks up on Isaiah 9.
 - 2. He says, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet," and then he quotes Is. 9:2-3.
 - ii. Undoubtedly, Matthew would have in mind the full context of what Isaiah spoke of.
 - 1. This is particularly why in Matt. 4:17 he introduces Jesus's ministry by saying, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"
 - 2. The core message wrapped up in all of this is that the nearness of the Kingdom is tied to the person and work of this Messiah.
 - a. When Jesus began His ministry, He established His reign, and yet this will not be fully realized until He comes again.
 - b. But it is at this decisive moment in space and time that the necessity of repentance and faith are made clear.
 - c. From this point forward, all events in Jesus's life would lead to His crucifixion and resurrection, which is the third thing the prophets longed to see.

4. The Death and Resurrection of Christ Foretold

- a. Isaiah 53 gives us key insight into what we've been seeing today, namely, that birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ has massive implications in mind for the nation of Israel.

- i. Broadly speaking, Isaiah is prophesying of the judgment to come by the hand of the Assyrians and the Babylonians, which is exactly what we've seen throughout the Minor Prophets as well.
 1. In chapter 52, the prophet is delivering a message of hope and salvation for the Israelites, namely, that just as they went into bondage and exile, the Lord will bring them out of exile and return them to the land.
 - a. The purpose of God's deliverance is found in v. 10 though; God is going to display His power by rescuing His people from their oppressor.
 - b. But notice that the Lord does this so that all the nations of the earth may see the salvation of the Lord, and the implications of this are not merely that Israel needed to be saved from the Assyrians and the Babylonians.
 2. God is ultimately going to deal with the issue of their captivity, but more importantly, we see now that God is going to deal with the primary cause of their captivity, which is sin.
 - a. There is a crucial shift that takes place here in v. 13 that provides a transition from chapter 52 to chapter 53.
 - b. What he's doing here is showing that all of this work is accomplished through the work of this Servant we are now introduced to in v. 13.
- ii. The prophet speaks of this Servant as the One who will prosper; He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.
 1. Isaiah goes on to say in v. 14 that the way He will be exalted is by following in the same course as Israel.

- a. Just as many will be astonished at the suffering and exaltation of Israel, so too would they be astonished at the suffering and exaltation of this Servant that Isaiah speaks of.
 - b. He will suffer in an unimaginable way, more than any person ever has or will—yet His sufferings and exaltation will affect all the world, which is what we now see in v. 15.
- 2. “Thus [that is through His suffering] He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him. [Why?] For what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.
 - a. It is through this unlikely Man’s suffering and exaltation that the nations will see the salvation of the Lord, and kings will be dumbfounded.
 - b. Just think of how backwards this is, how radical this all is.
- b. It is then when we come to Isaiah 53 that we see all of this explained in a rather profound way.
 - i. Isaiah begins by describing Jesus as a tender shoot and a root that grew up out of parched ground.
 - 1. Again, he is drawing from what we’ve already seen in chapters 7, 9, and 11, to show more clearly how this One is *the* One who will fulfill the promises to David; He is the glorious King who will sit on David’s throne forever.
 - 2. And yet in vv. 1-3, Isaiah tells us there was nothing remarkable about Him.
 - 3. He will be despised and forsaken of men; He will be considered cursed by God.
 - ii. Yet the prophet tells us in vv. 4-6, that rather than being cursed by God, this suffering Servant bore our curse and something far more magnificent is in mind.
 - 1. He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our sins; He was punished on our behalf and by His scourging we are healed.

- a. The simple reason all of this takes places is that each of us has gone our own way in our sin—and the Lord caused our sins to fall on Him.
 - b. This Servant, having done no violence, nor having any deceit in His mouth, was crushed. In fact, He was crushed because of us.
2. But unlike Israel, and unlike you and I, we see in vv. 7-9, this innocent, suffering Servant would not defend Himself, nor be guilty of anything deserving of death—and yet according to v. 10, all of this was the deliberate plan of God.
3. The Lord was *pleased* to crush Him and put Him to grief—and then notice the conditional “if” here in v. 10.
 - a. *If* He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.
 - b. The prophet doesn’t explain how all of this will happen; he doesn’t explain how this suffering Servant will die as a guilt offering in the place of the sinner, and yet see His offspring and prolong His days—but there is a reason for this.
4. Again, all of this comes within the context of Israel’s rebellion and God’s promise to save and restore them by dealing with the root cause of their rebellion.
 - a. Isaiah 55: 3 shows how tightly connected even this aspect of Christ’s first coming is to the glories to follow.
 - b. This everlasting covenant is in reference to the new covenant through Christ but notice here how the prophet says this covenant is according to the faithful mercies shown to David.
 - c. The prophet Jeremiah picks up on this same idea in chapter 33.

- d. Despite the failures of Israel, the burning hope of Israel is in this One who is to come and usher in the everlasting covenant, according to the promise given to David.

5. Conclusion

Small Group Questions

1. Why is it important that we understand how tightly connected the promises of Christ's first coming are to His second coming?
2. How has your understanding of the Kingdom of God grown since the series Matt Henry preached, and we've gone through the Minor Prophets?
3. As we come into the Advent season and are reminded once more of the mercies of God, how is your thinking being shaped by the glorious future that awaits us in Christ?