

January 15th, 2012

Mount Zion: My Dwelling Place

Isaiah 18:1-7

Ryan Habbena

Sovereign Lord, we come before You confessing You as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the true and living God. You have made Yourself known, You have delivered to humanity Your terms and we see these things delivered once and for all through Your Son, our King. Lord we thank You that You have taken us out of this dark world and we are now citizens in Your Kingdom, constituents of the New Jerusalem and we have a hope that will never fade, but one that is sure and steadfast. And Lord we thank You that You have granted to us these precious means that we can know You. We thank You for Your Word, we thank You for prayer, we thank You for fellowship. Lord help us avail of these things as we see the return of Your Son drawing ever near. And Lord as we peer into the words into Your prophet Isaiah, may we learn Father, we may be wounded where we need to be wounded, may we be healed where we may be healed, and ultimately that we may be made whole in order to be a people to be zealous for good deeds and ready to do every good work to honor Your name. We thank you for saving us, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Now if you were to tour the world, you would find that there are many famous mountains throughout the earth. We know of Everest as the highest mountain, we know of Fugi, we know of Kilimanjaro, we know of all the famous mountains scattered throughout the earth, and they are noted and world renown for both their size and splendor. But there is a particular mountain that is inconspicuous in comparison to what we see in the world in comparison to your Everest, in your Fugi, in your Kilimanjaro. It's inconspicuous because it is so small. But it has an enormity of significance that these mountains do not have because this mountain has the name of the Lord upon it, and that mountain is Mount Zion. And this mountain, this very small mountain nestled in the heart of the land of Israel, within the city limits of Jerusalem is destined to become the highest and most glorious mountain.

If you have your Bibles please turn with me to Isaiah 2. Now we have already looked at this in Isaiah, but I want to stir us up by way of remembrance. And we see in Isaiah 2 that, “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, it shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:1-3 ESV)

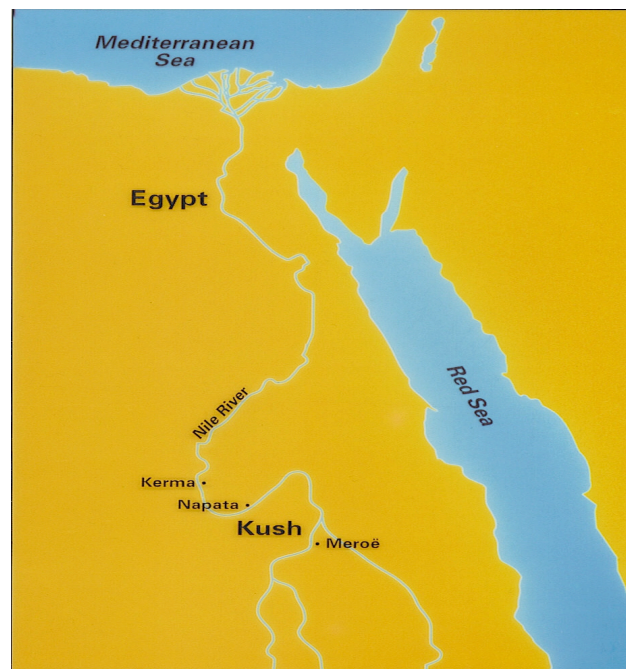
So there is a time coming when the nations are going to flock to Mount Zion, which the Lord is going to rise up and make it the highest and most glorious of all the mountains in the world. And today we are going to explore in the Book of Isaiah some prophecies given by the Lord regarding His purposes for the future of Zion, of Mount Zion. Now right now the earthly Zion is a fallen tent, it is one under-going the discipline of the Lord. But there are still purposes that resound throughout the pages of Scriptures regarding God’s purposes for this land, for this people, and for this place. And we are going to look at some of these prophecies today as Isaiah gives a word to the people of Cush.

Now let’s remind ourselves where we have been. We are in the midst in the Book of Isaiah, really a tour of Biblical prophecy. Now around the land of Israel there were enemies that surrounded them. And the Lord with Isaiah as His mouth-piece, has been given prophecies in regards as to the people and nations that surround Israel. Now he does this for a couple of reasons. Now first off we see that he gives forth these prophecies to warn the nations that surround them because the Lord has placed His seal upon the people of Israel and upon this land to attack, is to go up against the Lord Himself, and the Lord will deal decisively who do such.

But even more so these were given to the ears of the children of Israel to know that they are to trust in the Lord and not pursue security through alliances with other nations. The Lord wanted Israel to see Himself and Himself alone as their hope, as their anchor, and as their security. So prophecies given first off to those who come to attack Jerusalem; Babylon, Assyria. Now these are told to be tools for the Almighty to bring discipline in, but they are going to be dealt with as well because they are opposed to His purposes. We have seen prophecies go out to Philistia

which is to the west, Moab which is to the east, and now we are going to see a prophecy in regards to the people of Cush.

Now where is Cush? Now if you take a look at the map here, you will see that Cush is to the south, Israel is up to the north, and you can see that little strip of water off the Mediterranean Sea that is the Dead Sea, so Jerusalem would be just to the west. So you go south here and you see the land of Kush here down by the Red Sea.



So this is a prophecy extending far south to this land, which would have been in southern Egypt and possibly extending into Ethiopia. Now if you do a study of Cush throughout your Scriptures you are going to see that there are many expressions of “Cush” because Cush was one of the sons of Ham. So you need to pay particular attention to the context to see which “Cush” is being spoken of. But in this text it is very clear, given the indicators in the text, that this is the Cush that lies to the south of Israel.

And so today we are going to look at this prophecy. And this prophecy and although given within the context at the time of Isaiah is one that has ramifications for matters that have not occurred yet on the scene of human history. We are going to look at some previews of such, but it has not come to pass. So let's proceed and read this prophecy regarding Cush.

Now we see it beginning in Isaiah 18:1-2, “Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush, which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.” (Isaiah 18:1-2 ESV)

So first we see “Ah, the land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush”, now what’s going on here. Because it was in the midst of a river and many rivers there were, the land was teeming with insects and it was known for such. Therefore this was called “the land of whirring wings”, you would hear buzzing because of the insects that were teeming around the rivers. So the land of whirring wings that is beyond of the rivers of Cush, so this is a far away land, and this land is sending ambassadors by the sea. Now that would have been up the sea, up the Red Sea. It sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters. So these ambassadors are coming to the land of Israel. Now what is probably going on here because they are ambassadors, they are coming to see if they can form an alliance with Israel. Because of the invading nations Assyria and Babylon, alliances were seen as great things because you would fortify your numbers and be more powerful. So this land that sends ambassadors by the sea in vessels going up the Red Sea are coming to implicitly here see if they can form an alliance with the people of Israel.

Now what’s interesting here is there is a subtle but noticeable shift here because the ambassadors are coming and there is a command to go, in a sense go back, “go you swift messengers back”. And now Cush was a nation tall and smooth, which is speaking of mighty in stature, the people were feared near and far. So they were a fearful nation, a nation mighty and conquering. So this was a mighty nation, that if you were going to form an alliance with someone this is who you would want to do it with. They’re feared near and far, mighty and conquering. But by the Word of the Lord these ambassadors are told to “go back”, go back to a nation. And you see the message that is delivered here. And the message is that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Mighty Warrior of Israel needs no assistance from other nations to fulfill His plans and purposes. So that is the message that is going to be going back to Cush, and let’s explore that now.

So the messengers came up the Red Sea and they are told to go back, the ambassadors are told to go back to this land. And here’s this the message, “All you inhabitants of the world, you

who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear!” (Isaiah 18:3 ESV)

So yes this was initially delivered to Cush but this is used as a spring board, as a message to all the inhabitants of the world. “All the inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear!” So a signal is raised on the mountains is a sign of war, of advancing. And a trumpet that is blown is a sound of battle. So thus these are elements of war, a signal something you would see, a trumpet something that you would hear, and the “look and hear” here is a command to pay attention. Because there is a coming day when the Lord of Hosts is going to arise and fight against all of those who oppose His plans and purposes. Thus this mighty nation feared near and far, Cush, is receiving this message as its implications echo to every single nation in existence. There is a coming day when the Lord is going to raise a signal and the trumpet is going to sound and He is going to go to war. And what is going to be the outcome of these things.

Well we see as we progress that the Lord of Hosts is mighty in battle. Starting with verse 4, “For thus the LORD said to me: “I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.” For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, He cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches He lops off and clears away. They shall all of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.” (Isaiah 18:4-6 ESV)

So remember we have the call to battle here, the Lord is going to call His armies to battle. He is going to raise a signal and He is going to sound the trumpet. The nations are to pay attention because this is to be the outcome for those oppose to the Lord. First we see that the Lord, “will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.” So the Lord is going to come, He really is going to be at ease. He is in His dwelling, He is untouchable, there is no-one like Him.

And then we get to images, which should automatically, if you are familiar with some of the dynamics in our Bibles ring true to us, they should resonate with us. Because first we have this imagery of a winepress, of a harvest; “cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the

spreading branches He lops off and clears away”. So the Lord is going to go through His vineyard and cut off the shoots with pruning hooks. And this imagery is built upon as we go throughout the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testament that He is going to stamp out the winepress of God Almighty.

And we have another image here that of the birds of prey. And this would be one that those associated with military battle would be very familiar with, because in the wake of a mighty and brutal and bloody battle, what is there, bodies, bodies strewn. And we see here that the birds of prey on the mountains and the beasts of the earth will summer and winter on them, they will be feeding on them for a long time. Thus an indicator of great destruction that comes from the hand of the Lord. So again we have these two images, grapes, the birds of prey, and beasts, and they speak of utter defeat.

And if you go to the latter portion of the last book of the Bible (the Book of Revelation), you will see these images used by John, in speaking of the mighty day of God when He comes to tread the winepress and to defeat the nations and call the birds of prey to get ready, to call to supper of the great day of God. So we see here that the Lord is mighty in battle and this is remembering this message going back to Cush. It really is a warning but it is also a definitive statement regarding the power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His purposes will stand, and His people need to trust Him and Him alone.

So then we see this very interesting culmination. Now this is a very short chapter, but we see that at that time in verse 7, “At that time tribute will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts.” (Isaiah 18:7 ESV)

So first we see here “at that time” and whenever this is given we need to pay particular attention to the context and to the content to what is spoken. The content here is the destruction of all the nations. Has this occurred? No, it is something we know is coming, it is something that is prophesied throughout the Old and New Testament but it is something that is being delayed right now as the Gospel goes forth to all the nations. But at that time once the nations are defeated, and I want us to remember what we read in Isaiah 2, recall the Lord is

going to raise up Mount Zion, it is going to be the tallest of all the mountains in the world, and people will flock to Mount Zion, “let us go onto the House of the Lord”.

And we see in Isaiah 18, that this people that were looking to form an alliance with Israel, instead they are going to come and pay homage to the King of Israel who needs no help. And we see this people tall and smooth, people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering whose land the rivers divide, they will come. They will be one those nations that come and flock to Jerusalem, to Mount Zion, to pay tribute. Now tribute is a demonstration of honor and submission. So there is going to come a time that yes this mighty nation feared near and far is going to come and pay tribute to the Lord. And notice that is the place of the Name of the Lord of Hosts. The Lord has placed His Name upon that place.

And as I said that region, that sphere of the world is fallen. It is not a place where the Lord dwells in a sense that His special presence dwells. That day is coming but the City of God, the Mountain of God is under-going discipline right now and it is an awesome experience to go stand on Mount Zion. I've had the blessed privilege of being in Jerusalem twice and knowing that you are standing on the most significant land, not only in Israel, not only in the world, but the most significant piece of land in the universe is humbling. And we see that here, this is the place of the name of the Lord of Hosts and He has plans for this place. And a time is coming when He is going to purge it, He is going to renew it, He is going to set up His King to reign from there. He is going to raise it, and all the nations are going to flock and this is going to be His dwelling place. This is going to be our dwelling place.

Remember the promises that we read echo throughout both Old New Testaments, “they will be my people and I will be their God and I will dwell with them” (Exodus 29:45, Jeremiah 31:33, Jeremiah 32:36, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Hebrews 8:10, Revelation 21:3) So we see a powerful declaration from the voice of the Lord. Number one, He needs no help. Number two, there is a time coming where he is going to purge this earth and set-up His city, raising up Mount Zion and His King will reign from there, His people will dwell there, and the nations will flock there.

So there are three things, three matters of applications I want us to consider as we reflect on this text. First, know that nothing is too hard for the Lord. If you will, I want you to step back and imagine yourself in the situation, in the context of our text back in Israel when Israel is

surrounded by hostile nations. And there are people, mighty, the Assyrians, the Babylonians that have a mighty army.

And the Lord declares, “Jerusalem, the people of God, trust in Him to fight for you”. I’m reminded of back in Isaiah 7 when Ahaz was looking to, because the Assyrians were coming down and he was told “you need to stand in faith” (Isaiah 7:9b). And we need to remember the power of our God. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, nothing is too hard for Him. So if He says “I will defend this city if you place faith if you place your trust in Me”, He will do it, it’s not too hard for Him. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all there is. And we’ll see as prophesied in Revelation 19 when all of the world is gathered in this valley of Armageddon, all the world, all the nations gather. The Lord appears and it is just by His Word that the armies are defeated. (Revelation 19:11-21)

Now we are talking about large national movements here and but they were called to live by faith. But we see also in the smaller, personal matters, nothing is too hard for the Lord. Let’s be reminded of the life of Abraham. They were promised a son and the Lord declared that Sarah was promised to conceive. In Genesis 18:12-14, “So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” (Genesis 18:12-14 ESV)

So brothers and sisters we may look around us and we be may shaken by what is going on around us. We may have figurative armies surrounding us or we may see some situation saying how can anything good come out of this. Brothers and sisters we are called to walk by faith. Walk by faith. Faith is the evidence of things unseen, the substance of things unseen. We know what the Word of the Lord has declared. Thus brothers and sisters I want you to step back and think of areas in your life where you need to stop trusting in the world and rather trust in the King. Is anything to hard for Him? No, let’s remember His might, His power, and His Word and walk in faith, trusting that He is going to fulfill His word. And entrusting our lives for we know the one who trusted Him will never be disappointed. Now things may not go the way we think they should, but where were we when the Lord laid the foundations of the earth. The Lord does what He wills and we are called to trust in Him. And we read in Romans 8 that God

causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

So whatever comes your way, stand in faith knowing the Lord is control and nothing is too hard for Him and you will see His glory manifested in your life.

Secondly, we are called in assembling the citizens of Mount Zion. We read of this coming time when Zion is going to be this city is going to be raised up and nations will flock. And we read in Revelation that this city is called the “New Jerusalem” (Revelation 3:11-13, Revelation 21:1-3, Revelation 21:9-27). And we have been given the privilege of not only becoming citizens but also participating in the assembly of the citizens of Mount Zion.

And I want to look at an instance in the Book of Acts which is very interesting and related to what we read in Isaiah 18. Now there is this fascinating story regarding with Phillip who is really called by the Holy Spirit to go to this Ethiopian eunuch. Now the Greek word for Ethiopian is interesting, it simply means “black face”, it means someone who is dark in color. So there was this Ethiopian eunuch who was a man of fairly high stature as he was going in a carriage, in a chariot and he was reading the Book of Isaiah and the Lord brought Phillip to him and explained these things. Now it’s interesting, as this person and often times this word could even be translated as a “Cushite” not only a Ethiopian, but a “Cushite”. This is someone from the south, from the region that we were reading about in Isaiah 18. And so this Ethiopian eunuch was in Jerusalem. In a sense coming to pay tribute, but something even greater than that happened to this Ethiopian eunuch because the Gospel was delivered to this Ethiopian eunuch. And he wasn’t one not only to come and pay tribute, this Ethiopian eunuch became a citizen of God’s city, a citizen of Mount Zion.

Let’s read in Acts the glorious consummation of this story, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:35-39 ESV)

So we see here Phillip delivered the Good News beginning with Isaiah and Isaiah spoke of this servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53), who had no deceit in His mouth. This is speaking of Jesus of Nazareth, true God and true man, He had no deceit in this mouth, He was sinless. And this servant of the Lord was one that came and was going to suffer, but we see it was to suffer to intercede, to intercede for the transgressors and it pleased the Lord to crush Him. And thus Phillip told him the Good News that this Messiah, true God and true man, Jesus of Nazareth died for sins, was buried and three days later was raised forever more. And now Phillip was given this privilege of going forth and assembling the citizens of Mount Zion.

The one who repents and believes is forgiven of their sins, they inherit eternal life, and they become a citizen of Mount Zion, of the city of the great King. He was called to repent and believe and the Ethiopian eunuch heard it and baptism was a sign of repentance and belief. So we see just the sovereign orchestration of the Lord here, beautifully bringing another citizen into His Kingdom. And we see the eunuch “saw him now more and he went on his way on his way rejoicing”, knowing the message of the King and surely carrying that message to the citizens of Cush. So he had the privilege to participate and if you have not repented and believed in this Jesus, the call has reached you to repent and believe and you will receive the inheritance which we can scarcely contemplate right now. But we know that you inherit eternal life, you inherit Jesus as your King and your intercessor forever. You inherit the fact that the Father is committed to demonstrating His grace and glory in your life not only now but in the ages to come.

So if you have not repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus the call has reached you, repent and believe the Good News. And brothers and sisters those of us who have this testimony living in us, know that we have this incomparable privilege. Like Phillip we can go forth and share the message and participate in assembling the citizens of Mount Zion, when one day all of us by the power en-handed to the King will be gathered together in His presence. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, Mary, John, we will recline fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. That is the Good News and the Lord has the power to draw His people.

Finally, brothers and sisters, it is our calling, it is our privilege to set Zion as our joy. Set Zion as your joy. Now what is Zion? Well the word “Zion” just simply means a fortress or a fortification,

that's a very simple word, that's what the word means. Now it initially referred to a particular mount just south of the Temple Mount. But as the term developed, it developed into really encapsulating the whole of the City of Jerusalem. And we see in Psalms, and in Psalm 48, and in other Psalms, but in here we see the joy of Zion. The reason why Zion is so joyful is this is the place, this is the city, where we are destined to dwell.

And we see that promise from Genesis to Revelation. And in Psalm 48:1-3 we read, "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress." (Psalm 48:1-3 ESV) Zion is the fortress.

Set Zion as your joy because brothers and sisters, we have in one sense come to Mount Zion and we are going to read that in Hebrews in a moment. But we have come in a sense that our citizenship is secure, it is irrevocable. We have been called out of the domain of darkness and now we are full standing citizens in the Kingdom of God's beloved Son. Therefore do you see why we should set Zion as our joy. We should set Zion as our joy because this is the realm where we will be with our precious beloved King forever. He is going to dwell with us. And I don't know about you, but I cannot wait to see with my own eyes the nail scarred hands pointing to the purchase that bought all of us, and secured us to be in the presence of the Lord forever more.

Now we see in the book of Hebrews that this is already reality, but you, Hebrews 12:22-24, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in Heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." (Hebrews 12:22-24 ESV)

In Hebrews here we see this promise and God is going to bring it pass. So what is our calling brothers and sisters? Believe it, live by faith in this promise. He is going to bring it to pass. We have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, we are citizens. Now we don't see it with our eyes but it is coming and He is going to bring it to pass, therefore we need to live by it.

And brothers and sisters we are called to set Zion as our joy, that coming city of which we are already constituents.

Now it is spoken here as the Heavenly Jerusalem, it is already a reality. We don't see it because what do we read in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 21:10) the New Jerusalem comes down. What did our Lord tell us, "I go to prepare a place for you so that where I am you will be also" (John 14:3). And that is the best news, that we will be with our King. That we will sit at His nail scarred feet to hear Him teach us, to bring us in further to the glories of God.

So brothers and sisters as Paul would say "Rejoice, I say it again rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Have joy that you are citizen of this Kingdom because of the shed blood of Jesus of Nazareth. Rejoice because that day is coming when He is going to come and rescue us, purge this world, raise up His Mountain, and descend His City upon the top of that Mountain. And the nations will flee and we will be with Him forever more. Brothers and sisters let us rejoice. Set Zion as your joy because it's King is returning and His reward is with Him. Therefore as the early church announced, this should be our song as well, Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus.

Let's pray. Oh Father we come before You with hearts of gratitude. We thank you that just throughout the pages of Scripture, we see the promises of our inheritance in You. Lord we thank you that like the Ethiopian eunuch that same Good News reached us and we can go forth rejoicing as he did knowing that our sins are forgiven, knowing that we have been granted this inheritance, knowing that we are Yours forever more. Lord we thank you most of all for your Son. He is our treasure. Lord help us live like He is our treasure. Lord we pray that You would work within us what is pleasing in Your sight. Father we want to be an assembly, a fellowship that pleases Your Son. Help us walk in a way that is pleasing to You. Help us serve one another. Help us love one another, considering others better than ourselves as we see Your day drawing near. Lord we are eagerly awaiting the day when your Son returns. And Lord we thank you for taking such wretches as we and turning us into Your children. And Lord help us reflect Your glories, help us carry the banner of your Gospel high, and not take Your name in vain as we see it as our ambition to be pleasing to You.

Father, we love you. We thank You for Your Spirit and we thank You for Your Son, and we confess Him as Lord. And Lord we anxiously await when You give word to send Him back to gather us to be with You forever. In Jesus precious name we pray, Amen!

Sermon By

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Delivered On

January 15th, 2012

Delivered At

Conquering King Fellowship

Black Hawk Middle School

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Service

Sundays, 10:00am CST

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