

Victory of the Lamb – Dec 3, 2017 – Pastor Bill Limmer
Isaiah 63:16-17, Isaiah 64:1-8

What the World Needs Now – Hope for the Ugly Christmas Sweater Wearers

Just before Thanksgiving in a meeting that Pastor Ben and I were attending, one of the participants shared a heart tug story. A relative was expecting a baby in just a few months but tests showed that they baby had major kidney problems and likely was not going to survive to full term. And if the baby did survive, the baby would likely live only minutes. A seemingly hopeless situation. Devastating. Merry Christmas, right?

This morning we are beginning our Christmas series entitled What the World Needs Now. For this series we are going to be using the ancient Scripture texts of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus. The New Testament quotes and applies more scriptures from the book of Isaiah than any other Old Testament prophet. Isaiah is often referred to as "The Messianic Prophet", because of his many prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus.

As we look into the Old Testament Scriptures we discover that the story of God's people is like a youtube video that keeps buffering and all you can do is go back and watch the same mistakes over and over again. They had learned their lesson and forgot their lesson. They had leaned in on God and they were running away from him.

But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. This is an intensely personal and intimate prayer of hope. He calls God 'our Father,' and while we may be used to calling God in the 1000 years of the Old Testament, God is only called Father 15 times. This is word of longing trust and hope, dad listen up. You are our Redeemer, our rescuer, our Savior. You are the God who intervenes into human life.

And in the midst of this open and honest prayer of hope, in the middle of this authentic relationship with God, the prophet asks ¹⁷ **Why, LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance.** Why do you let us do these things and go away from you? Our situation is hopeless because our relationship is broken because you let us do the things we wanted to do. This is the prayer of someone who is distraught, looking for a hope in a hopeless time. The prophet is not cataloging facts, but is instead unburdening his heart of its pain. He is also trying to find words that will persuade God to return and help.

Have you ever blamed God for something? Have you ever demanded that he act a different way? Since everything is under your control God: Why didn't I get in the school I wanted? Why didn't I get the job? Why didn't you prevent this from happening to me? Why did you let my marriage fail? Why didn't you keep my child from getting sick? Why is there so much evil in the world? Why do I keep on doing the wrong I don't want to do? This past week in prep for this message, I asked a twenty something this past week what do we blame God for? The answer, "everything."

And the prayer of hope continues: **64 ^bOh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! ³For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you! ⁴Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God**

besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. “O that you would tear the heavens, that you would come down.” Isaiah continues, Dad, we want you to put your power on display. We want you to do that my dad can beat up your dad thing. Come make your name known. Reveal yourself and your power like you did when the plagues on Egypt that forced Pharaoh to let Israel go come to mind, when you parted the Red Sea, when you showered down manna from heaven, when you flattened the walls of Jericho, when you used little David to bring down the giant Goliath. God go ahead and do that kind of thing again now. Let us see your presence in our lives.

Have you ever asked God for a sign? Give me a sign if I should take this job. Give me a sign if I should help this person on the street out. I tell you what, I am so sinful I have stopped asking God for signs because I’m pretty sure he is giving us signs all the time we are just driving by too fast to see them. Isaiah pray shows the wisdom of waiting.

Waiting for the Lord means waiting with hope or expectation. To “wait for” the Lord is to live in faith—to live in the expectation that God’s “compassion doesn’t fail”—that his mercies never come to an end—that his faithfulness is not only great but assured. To “wait for” the Lord is to live in the certainty that the Lord has the power and the will to bless those who are faithful. To “wait for” the Lord is to see beyond one’s present circumstances to a future blessed by the hand of the Lord. Waiting on the Lord to come. Faith in God brings hope because God is hope! **“God is too good to be unkind. He is too wise to be confused. If I cannot trace His hand, I can always trust His heart.”** –C.H. Spurgeon

Isaiah continues: **You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? ⁶All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. ⁷No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to^[a] our sins.** And now Isaiah circles us back with bitter cold honesty with God. You help all who gladly do right . . . oh but all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. All our righteous acts are like filthy rags. Kinda like ugly Christmas Sweaters.

Sometimes we put on the ugly Christmas sweater of self-righteousness. You might have this ugly Christmas sweater on if you think you are better than anyone else. if you have ever thought that you have earned or deserved any of good that you have.

Sometimes we put on the ugly Christmas sweater of materialism/greed. A measly 6.6 billion dollars traded hands on Cyber Monday, the most ever. You might wear this Christmas sweater if you have ever been out Christmas shopping and found something for yourself.

Sometimes we put on the ugly Christmas sweater of comfort. You might have this ugly Christmas sweater on if you sit in your nice warm home on a cold winter’s night without even a care for the homeless.

Sometimes we put on the ugly Christmas sweater of nostalgia right. Memories of the way things were and used to be and the way things out to be again. You might have this ugly Christmas sweater on if you it is not Christmas unless . . . there is snow on the ground, we get a brown bag of candy, there are presents under the tree and the family is all home. All these things are super and I think it would be great if you and I always were able to have these things but snow on the ground is different than God and sinner reconciled.

Some of us wear a mean ugly Christmas sweater of guilt and shame too. You might have this one if you never can do anything right or you are just waiting for something bad to happen.

Most of us have a stack of ugly Christmas Sweaters. We think we are looking good, feel comfortable to us, keep us warm, or at least they are fun or funny. But they are none of these things. Our ugly Christmas sweaters are made up of filthy, polluted, stained, smelly rags. Sin is disgusting. Our sin makes us as useless as a leaf who has lost its grip on the tree and is brittle and carried away by the wind.

In the midst of our ugly Christmas sweater party Isaiah turns us to God who is our sure hope. **Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.** Yet, despite of everything, God is our Father. God sees our self-destructive behavior but God's hope is the hope of a Father, that the child will see the error of his/her ways and return home like in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). And with our ugly Christmas sweaters on, looking completely different than we were made to be, God comes to us through the prophet Isaiah and says, **"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.** When you are down to nothing, God is up to something. Look at the person sitting by you and then God is up to something in your life. God is the God of hope. You may feel like the shepherds, who thought they would be the last ones the God would use but with God we have what we always need – HOPE. And so God responds with hope through the unconditional loving gift of his Son, our Savior and Redeemer born of Mary in Bethlehem. Jesus takes away our ugly Christmas sweater clothes and like a tailor, have you ever been to a tailor? I have only been a couple of times but it sure makes you feel comfortable. And like a tailor he clothes us with tailored just to size Christmas clothes of his righteousness. It is a perfect fit and it is exactly what we need. He is the gift of hope.

Oh and that baby that had kidney problems. We prayed for that child asking God to bring the child to faith in Jesus just as John the Baptist was aware of Jesus in his mother's womb. And that since God you are the one who makes us, if you want to make the Bible healthy and whole you can do that and that would be great. Your will be done. Last week the mom had another doctor's appointment. The doctor's found absolutely nothing wrong with the baby. To that family and to you Merry Christmas through Jesus the hope of the world!