



SERMON RECAP

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

First Sunday of Advent: Hope

Isaiah 8:5-17

Sunday's service was cancelled due to snow and inclement weather, so this is a recap of a sermon that was never preached.

The Book of Isaiah is read often in the season of Advent. Some of the “greatest hits” and most quotable passages of the season come from Isaiah, but there is a problem with reading the prophet that we tend to ignore. Isaiah wasn’t talking about Jesus. At least, not in the way that we often think. Many times people read Isaiah through the lens of Jesus, but it would be a more faithful thing to read Jesus through the lens of Isaiah. In other words, it makes more sense to think of Jesus’ life, ministry, teaching, suffering, death, and resurrection as pointing back to Isaiah than it does to think of Isaiah pointing forward to Jesus.

Isaiah was a prophet - and this does not mean he was a fortune-teller predicting the future or talking in code about Jesus. He was a prophet because he was speaking truth to power. There is an element of warning in prophetic literature, but Isaiah lived as a prophet in a specific time and place. He has a historic context that shapes his writing.

At this time, Judah and Israel were separate kingdoms. They had split shortly after Solomon’s death, and been independent for centuries. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) capital was Samaria. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) capital was Jerusalem. These were two relatively small kingdoms in a very strategic location between important world superpowers. Assyria to the north was a rising empire while Egypt to the south was waning.

While there was no great Egypt-Assyrian war, there were smaller scale skirmishes between vassal smaller kingdoms in the area. Israel, fearing Assyria’s aggression, made an alliance with Ephraim. King Ahaz, fearing invasion from Israel, decided to make an alliance with the powerful Assyrian Empire to protect Judah from northern aggression.

Enter Isaiah, who warned against such an alliance. What we read in Isaiah 7 and 8 is the prophet telling Ahaz to resist making an alliance with Assyria. He knows it would be an unholy alliance that, while immediately prudent, would prove disastrous.

Instead of this alliance, Ahaz is told to simply trust in God to deliver Judah. “Wait for the LORD...Hope in God” (Isaiah 8:17). Isaiah wants Ahaz to not put his trust in Assyrian might, but to trust that the LORD will protect him from Israel’s aggression.

This is confusing, I know, but remember that Judah and Israel are rivals. In much of the Hebrew Bible, Israel is an enemy of Judah. In time, Israel, with its capital of Samaria, will become known simply as “Samaria” and by the time of Jesus, the Judahites (Jews) and Samaritans are mortal enemies.



So why the history lesson? What does this have to do with Jesus? What does this have to do with Hope? What does this have to do with Christmas? These are all fair questions.

Jesus points back to Isaiah. Isaiah wasn’t telling Ahaz to wait for Jesus, but when we know Jesus we can read these texts and see similarities.

When we want to put our trust in something that we think will solve our problems we can remember Isaiah’s warnings.

Do not trust Assyria. Do not trust status, or a job, or a substance that might help you dull the pain. Wait on the LORD. Put your hope in something real, not an easy out or an unholy alliance.

Our hope in Advent is that God is making things new - nothing else. Nothing else is going to get us where we want to go. The joy of Christmas is that God came. God intervened and showed us the way, so we Hope for Christ. We hope for God, not an Assyrian promise or a false king or an easy out. Wait on the LORD. Hope in Christ.