

SERMON TITLE: "The Mountain Of God"

TEXT: Isaiah 2:1-5

PREACHED AT: Neighbourhood Church

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As we have stepped into our study of Isaiah several people have asked how they should go about reading Isaiah. This is a real challenge because it is a long and complicated book but as I thought about it I came up with 3 suggestions-

#1. Focus your reading on the first 6 chapters to begin with. Many of the themes that will repeat themselves over and over again in Isaiah are contained here.

#2. Don't bog down in the history but try to keep in mind what was happening in Isaiah's world while he was writing. He is writing during a 60 year period and the reigns of 4 kings.

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Isaiah 1:1

The names of the OT kings are overwhelming- but they are there to place us into a real world.

The other reality of that world was that- like ours- even though there were massive storm clouds hanging over them- life was for the most part very good for the average person Isaiah was writing to. This is a very important point to remember.

#3. Find ways to listen to it. Here is a website that does a good audio that allows you to listen to a good reading.

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>

As I continued to think through how to tackle this book it occurred to me that tackling it from a theme point of view might be the most helpful- especially those themes that are picked up by Jesus and the NT writers. Isaiah, like most of the prophets uses imagery to drive his points home. In the case of Isaiah, as one of the first of the writing prophets- this imagery was picked up and used by generations of writers that were to follow.

Some of those images are-

- God's vineyard
- God's remnant
- the Day of the Lord
- lifeless manmade idols
- the King's highway
- the Branch of the Lord

So today we are going to pick up an image from Isaiah 2- the "Mountain of the Lord." Let's first listen to it together-

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He

will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD. Isaiah 2:1-5

The image that Isaiah uses here is that of the mountain of the Lord. This picture recurs throughout Isaiah and the rest of the Scriptures. So today we are first going to look at what this means in the Bible and then what Isaiah does with the picture. Understanding the “mountain” language helps us understand much of what Jesus talks about later.

Biblical “Mountain” Language

The Bible talks about the mountain of God from the beginning. In fact even the very first Biblical reference to a mountain of any kind is important. That first mountain is Mount Ararat- the mountain on which Noah’s ark came to rest after the Great Flood.

. . . on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. Genesis 8:4

This was the place where stability and a new future came to Noah and his family. It was where they waited for the rest of the waters to recede, for the land to become habitable again and it was where Noah and his family offered a sacrifice to God and where God made His covenant with people symbolized by the rainbow.

In some ways Ararat was just the mountain where the ark happened to land but it represented-

1. The Mountain Of Stability

The next notable mountain is named however-

So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Genesis 22:14

This is the mountain [Moriah] that God sent Abraham to with the command to sacrifice his son. It is a terrible story at one level but in the end it symbolizes so much of what is to follow- it is the mountain where Abraham meets God, specifically. Now it is specifically called “the mountain of the LORD.”

And what is it?

2. The Mountain Of Testing And Victory

The testing of Abraham is what took place here on the mountain. He was taken to the most extreme place of faith- not only the letting go of his son but of the meaning of his entire life.

This was an awful place to be and when we read the story we are supposed to be horrified. But life has a way of putting horrifying challenges in our path. There is no end to their variety.

But Abraham’s epitaph was about God’s deliverance through the horror of the choices he had to make. God provided and He did so- in this case on this mountain.

This mountain called Moriah, is now the site of the Dome of the Rock- the great Muslim temple in Jerusalem sits on this site. It was probably the site of the ancient temple of Solomon. It was obviously an important place.

The next big mountain in the Bible comes with Moses-

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of

God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Exodus 3:1

This is now some 500 years after Abraham and a man named Moses is herding sheep at the base of a mountain called Horeb, the mountain of God and he meets God.

This encounter changes Moses from just another shepherd, running from the law- to a leader that led God's from captivity to the promised land.

3. The Mountain Of Meeting God

Years later this would be the mountain where Moses would take the people he was leading. Again he met God on the mountain and up on that mountain God delivered the Law. And that is what this mountain came to symbolize. It was renamed Sinai and it became-

4. The Mountain Of The Law

It was this mountain, before which the people camped while Moses went up, spoke with God, and then came down with the stone tablets on which He had written the 10 Commandments. The Law came down from the mountain. It was not a Law of human invention- it was the Law of God.

It was from this mountain that the people went to the land to which God was leading them- taking the Law with them.

When they came to this land, there at the heart of it, God brought them to another mountain of God.

This time it had a new name- Mount Zion the City of David-

Then Solomon summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David. 2 Chronicles 5:2

This picture of Zion as the mountain of God filled the hearts of the nation of Israel.

This is what the LORD says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain. Zechariah 8:3

And this became the symbol of everything that God wanted to do for His people. This was where Solomon would build his magnificent temple. This would be where the people of God gathered.

It turns out that this was also the place where Abraham had taken his son and met God.

Zion Is All Of God's Mountains In One Place

And so when Isaiah talks about the mountain of the Lord- he assumes that those who hear him know about the Zion mountain of God. This is the mountain of God. It was this mountain that God raised up to be there in the middle of His chosen people.

But for Isaiah, there is a very big problem with Zion -

The Mountain Of God Has Been Neglected And Rejected

And along side of this- along with the magnificent picture of what the mountain of the Lord represents is another deeply troubling reality. While God had established Zion as His mountain- filled with all the meaning that we discussed- His people did not respond. In fact for all of God's calling out to His people the mountain of God had become a place of empty worship. The mountain of the Lord had been neglected. This

was a terrible state of affairs.

Considering all that this mountain represents- rejecting it has serious consequences- calamity was the inevitable result.

And of course this is the summary of the Scriptures- God reaches out to people and people don't respond the way they should. It is no wonder that there is language of extreme exasperation in Isaiah and the rest of God's messengers.

There is a very big irony in Isaiah's message. As his contemporaries heard him go on and on- they would have been looking at the beautiful temple in front of them and saying "What is Isaiah talking about? Here is the temple. It is beautiful and we bring our offerings to it regularly."

But Isaiah saw the rot. The mountain of God was not about going through all kinds of ceremonies- even if they are beautiful and meaningful. The mountain of God was about giving the strength of God to His people.

It was this that was being neglected. Like children who see the purpose of their parents only in getting an allowance- that attitude had gradually changed the relationship into something that it never was intended to be.

Like a parent God wants to bless His children but the purpose of that blessing is the family.

This is what Isaiah saw and seeing it he knew that even though everything looked superficially OK the structure could not stand and would inevitably collapse.

And hence the irony- while the religious structure still seems to be there- Isaiah talks about it as if it had already fallen down and was lying in ruins.

So what is Isaiah's message about the mountain of God?

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Isaiah 2:2

#1. God Will Reestablish His Mountain Again

In spite of all this- God is not done with people. He remains the God of hope and blessing.

I think that the imagery is both powerful and beautiful. It is the image of a mountain rising out of the ground again- taking its place above the high peaks that surround God's people.

Even though God's mountain has been neglected and fallen into ruins- even though, as Isaiah foretold, the degeneration of Zion would continue far beyond what the people saw at that moment- God promised that He would once again raise up His mountain- and all the nations would stream to it.

Isaiah continues-

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. Isaiah 2:3

Again the mountain of God will be the solid ground that it was for Noah, when he bumped up against Ararat during the Great Flood- the place of solid ground when everything was shifting.

Again the mountain of God will be the place of deliverance from testing that it was for Abraham when he brought his son there and then God provided.

Again the mountain of God will be the place where God meets His people as He met Moses in the burning bush.

Again the mountain of God will be the place from which God's laws will go out as they did from Mt Sinai.

And when that happens

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Isaiah 2:4

#2. The Mountain Of God Is The Mountain Of Hope

When people once again begin to stream towards the mountain of the Lord- then hope comes to the earth.

This is the text that is engraved in stone at the site of the UN. It is the great hope of everyone who has ever seen the suffering that fills our world- especially the suffering that is caused by the things we say and do to other people.

With all those who have seen the suffering we humans cause each other- there is a deep pain that fills the heart and a longing for it to stop.

Isaiah was written 2600 years ago but this type of pain is not getting any less. The world continues to be a place where war and conflict spring up without warning.

And what is Isaiah's vision? Even in the moments when the darkness is only getting darker- God still has a message of deep hope.

There is a saying- that it is darkest just before dawn. So true and in those darkest moments we know that dawn is coming. But Isaiah was not writing during the darkest moment in Israel's existence- he was writing just as evening was beginning. And he knew a long dark night was on its way.

Seeing the dawn at that time- represents real hope. That is the hope of Isaiah.

And what does he say?

Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD. Isaiah 2:5

And what is the word of God, through Isaiah to us?

#3. Come To The Mountain Of God

Isaiah paints this amazing picture of the mountain of God so that people will realize what it means to serve God. Dark days come- but no matter where you are in the cycle of the day- the message is the same- walk in the light of the Lord. Walk towards His holy mountain.

This begs an important question for us. Israel had Zion- what is the mountain of God for those who don't live near Zion? Where would the mountain of God be when Zion would be wiped out?

And where is that mountain?

The NT continues to talk about the mountain of God but at one point Jesus addressed the matter of the mountain directly. He was talking to "the woman at the well."

She had seen more than her share of suffering. In fact she met Jesus at the well- probably because she was an outcast from regular society.

Jesus spoke to her about "living water" something that may actually have been an allusion to Isaiah-

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isaiah 12:3

And when He spoke to the woman she asked Him-

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." John 4:19-20

There's the picture of the mountain again. And the woman's question is right on the money. The world is full of mountains. People do meet God and them- but which mountain do I go to?

Jesus' answer is very direct and simple-

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . John 4:21

The answer is direct- it is no longer about going to this mountain or that mountain. I came to show a new way to the mountain of God.

And what is Jesus' new way?

You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:22-24

With Jesus the mountain of God has come to earth in a way that had not been there before.

Jesus Is Now The Way To God's Mountain

With Jesus Zion as THE mountain of God is no more but Jesus comes with something better. No longer is the mountain of God a place- now God offers to each of us what the mountain of God gave to His people-

Now Jesus is the mountain of God will be the solid ground that it was for Noah, when he bumped up against Ararat during the Great Flood- the place of solid ground when everything was shifting.

Now Jesus is the mountain of God will be the place of deliverance from testing that it was for Abraham when he brought his son there and then God provided.

Now Jesus is the mountain of God will be the place where God meets His people as He met Moses in the burning bush.

Now Jesus is the mountain of God will be the place from which God's laws will go out as they did from Mt Sinai.

Extra For The Readers :)

18You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that

those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." [c] 21The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." 22But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel Hebrews 12:18-24