

Title: Happily, ever after
Text: Isaiah 9.6-7
Theme: The king and his kingdom
Series: Advent 3 of 3
Prop Stmnt: The beautiful and powerful king will have a beautiful and powerful kingdom.

Classic fairy tales begin with, “once upon a time” and they end with “and they lived happily ever after.” Fairy tales capture the imagination of children and are remembered forever by adults. The idea of living happily ever after is dreamy and comforting to a child, but the harsh realities of a sin-cursed world reveal all-too-soon that it is just a, well, a fairy tale. Or is it? Most of the OT prophets lived and preached in the midst of dark and depressing times. But many of them spoke about a day when God would live with and enjoy his people – forever and what is more, they would live with him, enjoy him and believe him – forever. Together, God and his people – happily ever after. Is it too good to be true? Not according to God. He makes this promise to us even as this promise is for us. And the heart of these promises from God center upon the perfect prophet, perfect priest and perfect king who would come. This is the Messiah. This is the child to come that Isaiah writes about in chapter 9.

Read Text:

The story of the Bible is the story of God reigning over his people by living with them and enjoying them forever. This delighting of God in his people and his people delighting in him and experiencing this joyful satisfaction is called, the kingdom of God. It started in the Garden of Eden where God walked with Adam and Eve every day in the cool of the day. That Paradise was lost, but never forgotten. God set out on a mission to recover this. As a part of his mission, God raised up billboards and other major forms of advertising to make his plan for reestablishing this kingdom, known. God called Abraham and his offspring (people) to be a preview of the people he would call to himself from every tribe, language and nation. He gave them a land (territory) and raised up leaders to be a preview to the world of what he was going to do on a worldwide scale. Even though Israel failed in her mission, God used her as the nation through whom he would bring the king. The prophet Isaiah promised that one day there would come a child, a son who would be the final and ultimate king. In this prophecy Isaiah says that he will stop all war and will increase joy. This child came. His name was Jesus. We celebrate his coming (advent) by remembering at Christmas, his birth and we anticipate his return. On Resurrection Day (what I think is a better name for Easter), we say, “He is risen.” And you say in response, “He is risen indeed.” At Christmas we say, “He is come.” And you say in response, “And is coming again.” The story is not done. This child will carry the government on his shoulder and as the Wonder-Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. Therefore, his government will be astounding. An amazing and beautiful King will have an amazing and beautiful kingdom. This good and necessary for us to know, but difficult for us to grasp. What is so beautiful about it?

1. **This Kingdom will be Stable.**

History is replete with accounts of kings, kingdoms, governments and empires that rise and fall. As Isaiah was writing these words the Assyrian empire was stretching its cruel arms out and it would rule the ANE until it was conquered by the Babylonian empire which ruled until it was conquered by the Medo-Persian empire until it was conquered by Alexander the Great and the Grecian empire, which split into 4 empires that were eventually conquered by the Roman empire. These empires provided the backdrop to most of the prophets and prophecies in the OT. Isaiah was one of those prophets. His book stands, in my opinion, as Mt. Everest in the Old Testament. Isaiah lived in the southern kingdom of Judah during the reign of 4 successive kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah). Great-grandfather to great-grandson. 4 kings and 4 transitions of power without chaos. During that same time, the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was descending into chaos. Israel had 7 different kings, marred by assassinations, civil wars and its eventual ruin by the Assyrian Empire. No one could stop the Assyrians. They were powerful, ruthless and terrifying. Ahaz (king of Judah) tried to buy them off and become an ally of them. He was leading his nation (the people of God) to be servants to a foreign power and to bow before foreign gods. Isaiah the prophet is warning Ahaz and others NOT to trust in your diplomacy, alliances, or in anything other than God. Assyria was big and powerful, for a season, but she eventually became a pile of crumbs swept into the dustbin of history.

By contrast, the kingdom that God is establishing will be stable because it will be invincible. There will be no elections, no succession plan, no monarchy in crisis, no awkward conversations about when the king needs to step aside due to diminished capacities. It will be a government that grows, but it will be growth in goodness. There is no end to the goodness of God. Therefore, our amazing and beautiful king will have an amazing and beautiful kingdom that will never get old. A government that grows does not sound like good news to us because our experience with large governments is not good. But the growth of God's kingdom means that every day it will only get better than the day before. That's a new reality for us. I saw a guy working out in a gym who had a shirt that said, "beat yesterday." I like the attitude, but at my age beating yesterday is no longer the goal. Remembering yesterday is more like it. I'm going to get a shirt that reads, "If I'm ever on life support, try unplugging it and plugging it back in and see if that works."

2. The Kingdom will only get better.

Uzziah was the king in Judah when Isaiah started his ministry as a prophet. Overall, Uzziah was a pretty good king. However, Uzziah's reign did not end well. In fact, when you list the good kings in Judah, that is the general pattern. The good ones tend to start out very good and then fade. This was true of Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah and even David. Even the good ones wore out their welcome and, in most cases, left the nation looking for a better replacement.

This is true in many other situations as well. There are a few of you who have been able to get your dream job. You worked so hard to get to this position and when the pieces finally fell together for you, you thought that you simply could not be happier. How long did it take for the shine to begin to wear off? It happens in relationships. We grew apart. We fell out of love. We

got tired of each other. It happens in churches. I wish it didn't, but it does. The fact that a government will grow and that growth will be better and better is different than anything we have ever witnessed.

What causes governments to grow? War does. Washington D.C. grew exponentially during the Civil War and then again during W.W. II. David Brinkley famously wrote about the latter in his bestselling book, *Washington goes to war*. War demands more resources, more organization, more offices, more training, more meetings, more, more and more. And then when the war is over, it's not like the government shrinks back to what it was before the war. But in the kingdom of God, the size of the government grows not due to war. In fact, the growth of the government is described as a great thing. Why is that? First of all, only the humble and the meek are citizens of the kingdom of God. Jesus said so. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5.3, 5)

Humble people and meek people are not looking to acquire power or rule over others. In fact, they are delighted with seeing others advance and others made much of. The citizens of God's kingdom are made up of people who are humble and meek because our king is the very pinnacle of humility. This is what Christmas is about. God came down to our level. And he loves to be with us. In God's kingdom, he shares his authority. In God's kingdom, we rule and reign with Christ. For the next two Sunday's I am going to do a refresher on the mission and vision of the church so that we are all reminded of what exactly are we called to be and do. The heart of our mission is displaying the glory of God to the nations by being an outpost of his kingdom now. We are to be a preview, that is a taste of what this incredible kingdom of Christ is going to be like after he returns and sets it up. Part of what makes the kingdom coming so attractive and sweet is that in this kingdom, peace will never end. The growth of the government is directly related to the growth of peace. The peace of God is different than peace as we know it.

At the moment, there is peace in Syria. However, between 500,000-600,000 Syrians were killed during the civil war, with 6,000,000 internal refugees being displaced and another 6,000,000 fleeing to other countries, like Turkey. Many of the people agreed on one thing; they hated Assad and his government. But people of Syria are made up of many groups and many of those groups are sworn enemies of the others and are in what is best described as blood feuds. Some of these blood feuds go back for generations. If history is any teacher, it won't be long before these groups will be attacking each other again. If you have ever been in management, then you understand why Moses was such an amazing leader. Moses may have looked awesome, leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. That was the easy part. Keeping 2,000,000 plus people from killing each other while on a 40-year camping trip is by far the greatest miracle. When our world experiences a rare moment of peace, it usually means that we ran out of ammunition and have to make some more. Jesus famously said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14.27a) God's peace is not top down. God's peace is not enforced by a power from without. God's peace is inside out. The peace that we experience with God and with others who are at peace with God has no end.

Some of you may remember Sonny Elliott, a local weather forecaster who used to say that visiting relatives are like fish. After 3 days they begin to stink. Why will eternity not stink? Why will relationships that get strained here, only get better there?

3. The Kingdom will be established and supported by justice and righteousness forever.

This King is going to reign on David's throne. This means that he will be in the line of David and therefore will have the right to rule. When Isaiah wrote this, Ahaz was the king. He was in the line of David physically, but his reign didn't look like David. But this child, this Son, this king will reign forever because it will be established on the bases of justice and will be upheld by righteousness forever. We have often cried, "where's the justice?" Where's the justice when laws are not enforced for one race, but over applied for another? Where's the justice when friends and family of government officials are pardoned while others are left to serve out their terms? Where's the justice when people lie and get away with it, when officials fail to do their job? Where's the justice when police officers, detectives, investigators and other agents do all the heavy-lifting on a case and the prosecutor's office does nothing with it? If you have no understanding in the perfect justice of God, I do not know how you can live sanely in this world. But when you know that there is coming a day when justice and righteousness will establish and uphold the throne, you can live now knowing that one day, all wrongs will be made right.

This king is perfectly just. He is just and he rules justly. Justice refers to policies and practices that are done perfectly. Righteousness refers to character that conforms to what is perfectly right. This creates perfect security and confidence in the entire kingdom. But the other aspect that will be so different is that the citizens of the kingdom will love the King. They will love the justice and righteousness. Justice and righteousness while commendable are threats to people who are unjust and unrighteous. But in this kingdom, the only people who will be part of it will love him and will believe in his love for them.

How many of you struggle with loving God like you should? (we all do) We are all tempted to pursue satisfaction in other affections. And what is more, we also struggle with believing in God's love for us. What more could he do? Is there a greater demonstration of love that God dying for us when we have nothing that he needs? God's love for Israel shows us how much God is capable of loving. He said (Isaiah 65.2), "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people?" When Christ sets up his kingdom, he will be loved perfectly and believed perfectly. That means that one day we will believe perfectly what we struggle to believe now. Isn't this the heart of anxiety? Isn't this the root of much depression? We fear being lost, being alone, being neglected, being overlooked, being out of control, or being caught. We fear that our past will catch up to us, or our secrets will be revealed. One day, that will be over. Justice for our sins has been served by the death of Christ for us. Righteousness is ours because when we trust in Christ alone for our salvation, his righteousness is imputed to us. It is credited to us. We are declared righteous, forever. And what is more...

4. This kingdom is guaranteed by the zeal of the LORD of hosts.

Zeal is a jealous love. Jealousy can be sinful if the one who is jealous is insecure and reacts in a way that hurts the one, he loves. But jealousy can be good if we are jealous for the right reasons. God knows that no one can love you or will love you and provide for you like him. God is jealous for you. He is motivated with an intense desire to arrest your affections and arouse your heart to love him because he is worth it. He orders you to seek first his kingdom because his kingdom is where your greatest joy will be discovered. God orders you to find your treasure in him because he is the greatest treasure. God's plan for your joy will be accomplished because God is the LORD of hosts. That is, all of the angelic beings, the millions of angels who stand and serve as supernatural soldiers are under his authority. His word is ultimate power. His kingdom is guaranteed. He will have his people. He will have his kingdom. This child, this Son will rule from David's throne forever and ever. It will happen. Therefore, we are so right to believe it and orient our lives around it.