

Advent: Prepare the Way – Isaiah 40:3-8

Introduction – Christmas is the glorious celebration of God doing the impossible, something He really enjoys doing. Advent is the season of preparation for God to do the impossible. When God does the impossible, it is a revelation of His glory and a revelation of His glory is a fearful and wonderful thing. Are you ready for God to do the impossible in this world? Are you ready for God to do the impossible in your life?

An Impossible Man – Each of the four gospels records that vv 3-4 were fulfilled in the preaching ministry of John the Baptist, but only Luke 1 tells us about the birth of this preacher. His parents were righteous before God (1:6) yet Elizabeth was barren and beyond the age of child-bearing (v7, 18). Nevertheless, God did “the impossible” and another barren woman gave birth to a son. His father, full of the Holy Spirit at the birth of his son, prophesied concerning him (esp. vv76-79), reflecting the promises of the Isaiah passage.

An Impossible Message – The message is that nothing is going to get in God’s way of accomplishing what He has planned. Every valley, every mountain, every obstacle turns out to be no obstacle at all for God. Christmas is the story of the invasion of humanity by God in the most impossible way: He took the form of a bondservant coming in the likeness of men (Phil 2:7). Jesus became a man so that He could die for men (Phil 2:8). Kings, rulers, and traitors of Jesus, moved by the devil, thought they could stop God’s plans only to find that when they crucified that Man, they accomplished the very plan of God (Acts 4:27-28). Consider the birth of Jesus as well: God is constantly at work through the obedient (like Mary and Joseph) as well as the disobedient (like Caesar Augustus) to accomplish His perfect plan (Christ’s birth in Bethlehem as prophesied).

Prepared for a Revelation of the Glory of God – Isaiah was preaching and John was fulfilling this same message of preparation for something – the revelation of the glory of God. The creation declares the glory of God (Psalm 19), and the mighty acts of God declare His glory (i.e. the flood, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the Shekinah cloud around the tabernacle). But ultimately the revelation of the glory of God was Jesus (John 1:14). Jesus was His name because He would save His people from their sins, and Isaiah 40:5 tells us that the glory of Jesus was that “all flesh” would see this glory/salvation. This is the revelation of the glory of God: the salvation of the world. Just a few passages to add to this: Numb 14:21, Isaiah 42:6 (quoted in Acts 13:47f), Psalm 86:9, Hab 2:14. Glory is salvation. Saving the world is the glory God.

What We Cannot Do/What God Has Done – Preparing a city for the visit of a dignitary does not make the dignitary a dignitary. In the same way we do not prepare to make Jesus Lord, the world was called to prepare to receive Him as Lord. John the Baptist called on Israel to prepare to receive Christ’s ministry, not to grade it for approval. Nothing stops the Word-Spirit work of Jesus and His gospel (Luke 1:51-53). He will have the nations.

Will You Trust His Word/Promise? – Promises are made. First, “*The glory of the Lord shall be revealed.*” Second and related, “*And all flesh shall see it together.*” And then the oath is given: “*For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*” And then a stark contrast is made between man, his words and abilities, and God, His Word, and reliability. Any gospel, any plan of salvation, devised by men is transient and impotent, including whatever each one of us might devise for ourselves in our own minds. But this word-promise from God stands forever. Peter tells us explicitly that “*this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you*” (1 Pet 1:22-25). In addition, what we see is that the breath of the Lord (His Spirit) dries up and destroys, but the same breath/Word/Spirit brings forth life and stands forever (Isaiah 40:6-8). Same Word, same Spirit, same Lord. Two results: death and life. The only difference? Faith.

Celebrating Glory – One definition of glory is “a created manifestation of the uncreated God; a physical manifestation of the spiritual God; a visible manifestation of the invisible God.” And so how do we celebrate John 1:14, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*”? First, there should be a manifestation of your faith and love for the Incarnation, for Emmanuel, “God with us.” If you choose to celebrate the Incarnation, it follows that it should be a very incarnate celebration. This means singing Christmas carols, giving and receiving gifts, lights in dark places, trees of life with new gifts, and fudge. It means loving others like God loves others – in ways that transforms their lives, carries their burdens, comforts their hearts. It means finding ways individually and, more importantly, culturally to declare and imitate and celebrate the glory of the Incarnation. Go do that. Go prepare for that. You are celebrating for yourself and for this world that God was, is, and will do what looks to be, at the moment, impossible.