

Peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated. We begin our Advent season with our Old Testament reading from the book of Jeremiah. Now remember, Jeremiah was the prophet who got the opportunity to actually see his prophecies come true, at least the main ones or the immediate ones. Every other prophet generally spoke of something that happened in the future, and more often than not, they were not alive when the events actually took place. But Jeremiah got to see the Israelites being taken off into Babylon into captivity for 40 years. And so, he is promising to them, "I know the Lord is coming and I know we are going to be taken off into exile, but there will come a time when the righteous branch will spring up of David and will execute justice and righteousness in the land, and Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely."

Now, you can imagine the Israelites being taken away into captivity, Jerusalem being ransacked and destroyed. You can imagine they were looking forward to an earthly kingdom. And so, they were focused upon the here and the now, and that was really part of the whole problem and why they were going to exile in the first place. The Israelites were focused upon what was going on in the world. They wanted a safe world, a good government, low taxes, peace and prosperity throughout the land, no wars or rumors of wars. They were looking for peace and security in the world around them.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with looking forward to those things. However, what they failed to look forward to and what they failed to look at was God. They were looking more for security in this world rather than security in eternity. And so, they had failed to continue to worship God as they were supposed to. They had started chasing after false gods, false securities. Back in those days, it was Baal and Asherah and other different gods, gods of the nations around them. Today, our false gods might be our bank account or the government that is in place or the right social systems or whatever we might put as those false senses of security, because if we do not have Christ, we do not have security. We do not have peace with God, then there is no justice and there is no hope.

And so, we are not looking to the things of this world. We may be frustrated with what's going on in this world, and we may look at the struggles that we have, but we still have hope in Christ. Even if we have high taxes, we can still be saved in Christ. Even if we have bad government, whatever it might be, we can still have faith in Christ. We can still have salvation. Even if we have insecurity and wars and rumors of wars, we still have security and faith in Christ.

And so, what this season of Advent is pointing us to is pointing us to look at our security, our hope, our salvation, our confidence, not in the things of this world, but rather in the things of God. To look to salvation in a place that we would not

expect, first off in a manger. I mean, we are celebrating this Advent season. We got all the lights and the trees and all these wonderful things, new songs, new pyramids, new colors. Everything is coming out in anticipation, but the king is not yet here. We're waiting for his coming, which will be symbolized of course on Christmas Eve when the baby is sitting in the manger, lying in the manger. But we already know he's come. I mean, he was in the manger some 2000 years ago. But the Advent that we are looking forward to is his second coming when he will not come humble and in a manger, a feed trough for the animals, or as he comes, if you might recognize in our gospel reading, his Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem. See, the humility that he started with in his birth continues through the rest of his life. His humility in entering Jerusalem, it was not hugely impressive. If you've ever seen a colt of a donkey, not exactly impressive steed, and imagine a full-grown man trying to ride a donkey that had not been broken yet. None of this makes much sense and none of it is very impressive, but it's a continuation of the theme of the humility of God. God came to be humble like us in every way so that he might redeem us in every way. And so, while we begin waiting for the king, we're not just waiting for Christmas day. Although it's wonderful and the presents are great, we are looking forward to the greatest gift that was given to us and that greatest gift we see on the cross. When Christ died on the cross, that is the best gift that we have ever received, the best gift that we could possibly receive. Because in Christ's death and then his resurrection, he offers to us the forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

Jeremiah promised that righteousness will be in the land and God will execute justice. That wasn't about justice in the here and now. It was about justice for us, for all eternity, payment for sin and the hope of salvation. Judah will be saved not from the Romans, but from their sin. Jerusalem will dwell securely, not from man-made wars, but they will dwell securely in the loving arms of God. And that is why we begin this celebration with a reminder of why he came, of why he came, so that he might enter into Jerusalem humble, humble enough to receive the punishment that we all deserve and die on the cross to forgive our sins. And so, we live with joy and thanksgiving.

In the meantime, as we wait for the Advent, the second Advent of our king, we are called to remember what Paul has told us, to love one another, to abound in love and to increase in love towards each other. We can only do that by keeping our eyes focused upon the message of Christ's love for us. And so, in this Advent season, yes, we're excited about the new songs and the presence under the tree and the beautiful lights and the beautiful colors and everything else that comes with this season. But let us also share the true joy of the season, which is the love of God for mankind, the peace that surpasses all understanding, which is only found

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in Christ Jesus our Lord, so that he might establish in us a holiness and a righteousness so that in his second coming, when he comes in glory and majesty and might, we do not need to be afraid. We do not need to cower as Adam and did in the garden of Eden. We were scared because we were naked. Our sins were laid bare before God.

This time when he comes, we will rejoice because we are known by God and we are clothed in the robes of his righteousness, and we will see him face to face and not be afraid. That is the gift. That is the joy. That is what we are looking forward to as we anticipate and wait for his coming. The Israelites were taken away for 40 years and they looked with anticipation for their return. And so also, we are in the wilderness of this world, and there is going to be heartache, and there is going to be frustration, and there is going to be pain, and there's going to be bad government and high taxes, and who knows what else is going to happen. But through it all, through it all, God brings us peace. The peace of God which surpasses all understanding is Christ on the cross for you and for me.

May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always as you remember the greatest gift he has given you from now for all eternity. Amen.