

“The Church’s View” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Advent 1 – November 27, 2022

- I. **Isaiah 2:2** – It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it
- II. **In Jerusalem, some renters sign a lease with a “Messiah clause”**
 - a. You see, the orthodox Jewish people today do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, so they are still waiting for the Christ.
 - b. Some property owners who reside outside of Jerusalem and rent their space, include a clause in the lease that says if the Messiah comes, the lease is immediately terminated.
 - i. They believe that the Messiah could come while they are not living in Jerusalem, and if He does arrive and set up the third temple of the Lord along with making Israel into a paradise, they want to take up residence in their home immediately... rather than have some renter in there until the lease is up.
 - ii. One of the real estate agents discussing this clause with a reporter said that when the Messiah comes, her clients would recognize Him because, “It’s in the Old Testament... when He comes, we’ll know.”¹
 - iii. Of course we know that the Messiah did come already in Jesus of Nazareth, but orthodox Jews today refuse to believe –
 1. Unfortunately, the reason the Jews didn’t believe in Jesus when He came – and still don’t – is because they thought He would set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem – but He did not – He set up a heavenly kingdom through His death and resurrection... the Church of God became the new temple and God resides in us.
 - c. Isn’t it interesting that Jerusalem is still the focus of the coming of the Messiah, the Savior promised long ago in the Old Testament?
 - i. Many different people see God setting up an earthly kingdom – whether by a future Jewish Messiah – or the return of Christ the true Messiah.
 - d. However, my question is, “Where is the mountain of the house of the Lord?”
 - i. Many Jews believe that the first Messiah will come and establish the third temple (the first was Solomon’s, then Herod built the second) because the previous two were destroyed.
 1. In fact, if you go to Jerusalem today, the temple is no longer there, just the foundation, on which sits the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim holy sight and mosque.

2. Yet, the hope for these Jewish people is that God will come to restore the temple and restore the Promised Land to the chosen people of Israel.
 - ii. On the other hand, many Christians believe that Jesus will return only when the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem.
 1. The idea is that if Christians support the Jewish people and they are able to build the temple again, Jesus will return for His 1000-year reign.
 - a. By the way, this is the teaching of the Left Behind series of books, along with all the people who believe that the Books of Daniel and Revelation point to a rapture (when believers are lifted into heaven), a 7-year tribulation of God's judgment, and then Jesus returns for 1000 years to reign over the world before the final judgment.
 - b. I've shared this all in Bible class before, but we do not see Scripture point to these events, but instead, we are in the midst of the 1000-year reign of Christ – and He will return once... and all things will be over – no rapture, just the final day and our resurrection.
 2. The point is that some Christians believe that the mountain of the Lord is Jerusalem, and without the temple being rebuilt, Jesus will not return.
 - iii. In all these views, we need to go back to our reading in Isaiah and understand what it means by “in the latter days” (vs 2)
- III. **The “latter days” are not way out in the future.**
- a. Listen to what Hebrews 1 says, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.” (Hebrews 1:1–2)
 - i. The last days, or the latter days is the time we are now living in since Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.
 - ii. We live in the last days now – it is not hundreds of years in the future, but God is speaking to us through His Word.
 - b. Isn't it interesting that Isaiah says people will be freely streaming to the mountain of the house of the Lord so that, “He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.” (vs 3)
 - i. In other words, no one will force others to come to the Lord and His teachings, but they come of their own free will.
 - ii. It's not some kind of forced kingdom that requires all people on earth to recognize and honor the King... they come freely.
 - c. So when we think carefully about it, the mountain of the house of the Lord is where God is in charge, and He makes Himself known to people, as well as gathering people from all over the world by His Word...

- i. Sounds a lot like the Church to me!
 - ii. Sounds like a description of this place as God's Church where people freely come to gather around His Word and walk in His paths.
 - iii. Even though Isaiah lived 2700 years ago, he saw the "latter days" and what God had in mind...
- d. Now you might be saying to yourself, "This world is a mess, I'm not seeing Isaiah's prophecy of peace!"
 - i. However, what about the angels telling the shepherds about Jesus' birth – they said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)
 - 1. Jesus makes peace between us, as well as with God.
- e. Still others might believe that it's all about Jerusalem and it can't be the whole Church... but Isaiah says that "out of Zion shall go forth the law [or God's instruction], and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Is 2:3).
 - i. We don't have to go to Jerusalem to get these blessings because Word comes to us...
 - ii. Just as Jesus told His disciples to be witnesses starting in Jerusalem – then throughout the region and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)
 - 1. The Word and promises of God found in the Gospel went out from Jerusalem and is now shared wherever we are at.
 - 2. Just think about it – people all over the world – from every language, culture and background freely come to the mountain of the house of the Lord to be blessed by His Words of forgiveness, His Son's body and blood, and to receive the gift of Baptism.

- IV. **On this First Sunday in Advent**, we freely come to receive His gifts... on the mountain of the house of the Lord!
- a. We receive the blessings of God's Word that says, "I forgive you."
 - b. We receive the blessings of gathering together and experiencing many others who are at peace with God and at peace with each other.
 - c. I know it seems strange to think that we are experiencing in the here and now what some believe is waiting for us in heaven... but we get a taste of heaven all the time.
 - d. I often describe the Lord's Supper as a gathering of the people at church and the communion rail, the people who are now in glory, along with our living God.
 - i. The sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross as His body and blood were given and shed for you...
 - e. Yes, we are experiencing the presence of God now, and in fact Paul tells us we are the Church and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. (Eph 2:20-22)
 - f. It's also true that we are looking forward to a day when all things will come to an end as we know it – a time when Jesus does return in power.

- i. In that Day, we will experience another level of peace and joy...
- ii. But we get to experience a part of that as we join together on the mountain of God's house.
- g. As the mountain, the Church's view is not about looking far off into the distance, but instead we see each other – and very work of God in our midst.
- h. God is faithful to His promises, and one of those is that He will always be with us – that is our hope this First Sunday in Advent as well – as we dwell on the mountain of the house of the Lord. Amen.²

¹ Adapted from Malka Fleischmann, "Weekend Essay: For the Ultimate in Preparedness, add a 'Messiah Clause'," *New York Sun* (7-25-22); Jeff Moskowitz, "Why Jerusalem renters are wary of the Messiah's arrival," *Christian Science Monitor* (2-12-14).

² Message adapted from *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, "Mountain View," by Rev. Geoffrey Brent McGuire, Copyright © 2022 Concordia Publishing House.