

## Know God in Jesus

I can't conceive of Advent without referring to the prophecies of Isaiah. We read in Isaiah nine, "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isa 9:6 NLT) Isaiah has no doubt what or who the messiah will be and when, Philip, one of the disciples of Jesus, said "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?" (John 14:8-9 NLT)

In the light of this I would suggest this morning that if we want to know what God is like, we need to examine the life of Jesus. If we want to know God, we need to get to know Jesus. The message of Christmas is that God didn't leave us alone. He came into this world, and became one of us, so that we could have firsthand knowledge of him.

We know that Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah wrote extensively about the coming of the Messiah. It is in fact true to say that Isaiah wrote more about the Messiah than any other Old Testament prophet. And Isaiah made some promises about the future that I am sure seemed outrageous in his time, and are especially so in light of the way the world is today.

Last week we saw that Isaiah says that God's ultimate goal for humanity is peace and harmony between nations. That seems a long way away, doesn't it? Peace doesn't seem possible any time soon, but Isaiah promises that someday it will happen. And in today's text, Isaiah confirms what he had said earlier and makes another prediction, he says "the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD." (Isa 11:9 NLT)

God is not hiding, God is not dead, and God is a God who wants to be known. And He makes himself known to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. To know Jesus is to know God.

So today we are going to look at some verses in Isaiah 11 that reveal Jesus, God's chosen Messiah. These verses teach us what Jesus came to do for each and every one of us, and they also teach us a great deal about the nature and character of God. God's purpose in revealing Himself wasn't just advertising, it wasn't self seeking, it was and is meant to draw us close to Him so we can learn from Him and draw our strength from Him.

First of all God is the source of our spiritual strength, Isaiah says, "And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. He will delight in obeying the LORD. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay." (Isa 11:2-3 NLT)

Let's remind ourselves that the Spirit which rested in Jesus, the Spirit of God, is the same Spirit which is in every believer. God has chosen to give us His Spirit to live in us and minister to our spirit. So that everything the Spirit did in and for and through Jesus, He can do in and for and through us.

We can pull three phrases out of this sentence; Isaiah says the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Wisdom and understanding; of counsel and might; and of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. These are all things that we desperately need in order to live, and they are all things that we have in Jesus.

Why do we need wisdom and understanding? A businessman once said something like, "I want to do the right thing, but I have no idea what is the right thing to do. The decisions I have to make aren't 'black and white' decisions; there are too many shades of gray. If I make the wrong decision, I could lose my business. If I hesitate too long, I could lose my business. And if I lose my business it doesn't just affect me, it affects the lives of all my employees, and their families. I want to do the right thing, more than that I need to do the right thing, but I have no idea what 'the right thing' is."

I know that parents often feel this way. It's an old joke that babies don't come with instruction manuals, but it's true. When we were expecting our first child, it all seemed like a new adventure, and then reality set in, the reality of curtailment of our activities, the reality of new responsibilities. And things didn't get any easier when, being human, we didn't learn from our mistake and had two more. Parenting decisions aren't always clear cut. As a parent we need wisdom and understanding which is often beyond us. Where is that wisdom going to come from, if it doesn't come from God?

Isaiah said the Spirit of wisdom and understanding would rest upon Jesus, and that same Spirit is available to us. In him, in Jesus, we have access to God's wisdom. James wrote, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking." (Jas 1:5 NLT) Jesus is our source of spiritual strength; he gives us wisdom.

And then Isaiah said He is also the Spirit of Counsel and might. The word "counsel" also means "advice" or "guidance" or "direction." And when the word counsel is combined with the word might, or power, it reminds us that Jesus not only tells us what to do, gives us direction where to go, he also gives us the ability to do it.

I am sure that every one of us, Will at some time in our lives, been given impossible advice? Advice that is simplistic but completely unrealistic? Advice that is much easier said than done? You know the kind of advise that says, well you only have to decide to do it and that's all there is to it. It's like telling an addict they only have to decide to kick the habit and that's all there is to it.

There are a lot of people who are more than glad to tell us how to solve our problems, but they can't give us the power to do it. They'll say things like, "You need discipline." But the question is, "Where do I get discipline?" They might say, "You need to be more loving." But the question is, "Where do I find the power to love?" Or maybe they'll say, "You need to be holy." But "How do I get the power to live above sin?"

That power is found in Jesus. Isaiah said the Spirit of counsel and power would rest on him. And that same Spirit is here today, that same Spirit is available to us. God doesn't set impossible standards for us to live by. That's not to say He does not set standards, of course He does, and they are high standards, and they look like impossible standards, because they are standards of holiness, but He gives us the power to live by those standards. He is the source of our spiritual strength.

Then Isaiah says the Spirit in Jesus is the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. When we think of fear we tend to think of terror, but the word fear here means holy reverence. Knowledge of God and fear of God go hand in hand, because knowledge of God, of His might, of His power, of His majesty, of His glory, of His love, of His mercy, must lead to appropriate fear, or reverence. The more we know about God, the more we are able to revere him properly. And through Jesus we can know God. Through Jesus we learn that God is not vindictive, that is not to say that He does not get angry, the Bible talks about God's anger, but I also talks about a God who is "slow to anger and filled with unfailing love" (Number 14:18 NLT) Our God is loving and kind and full of mercy. He is also powerful beyond description and His power is to be taken seriously, reverently, even fearfully. Jesus is our source of spiritual strength, because He can bestow on us the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, and the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isaiah also says that the Messiah is a righteous judge, "He will delight in obeying the LORD. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay. He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited. The earth will shake at the force of his word, and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked. He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment." (Isa 11:3-5 NLT)

When the military campaign started in Afghanistan, in the aftermath of 9/11, it was designated "Operation Infinite Justice." Later the name changed because the term infinite justice was offensive to Muslim ideology. Muslims believe that infinite justice is something that only God can give, and in this they are absolutely right. Infinite justice belongs to God. And this is not an exclusively Muslim concept; it is an Old Testament concept. And Isaiah promised that infinite justice would be brought about through the ministry of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

If we follow the news we will soon realize that there is very little justice in the world, this week we had the episode of the bear named Muhammad, but we can't blinker ourselves and just point our fingers at the Muslim world, there are plenty of examples of injustice in the western world.

It is however true to say, that if I were guilty of a crime, I would rather be tried under our system than under any other system, because my chances of getting mercy are greater here than elsewhere. And, if I were charged with a crime I didn't commit, I would rather be tried in our system than under any other, because my chances of justice are greater in our system, than anywhere else.

That's the way I feel about God's judgment. Whether I'm innocent or guilty, and though my sin is covered by the blood of the lamb, I still know I'm guilty. I would rather have him as my judge than anyone else, because he will judge with righteousness, and when I am found to be guilty, he will judge with mercy. In fact He has already shown me His mercy on a cross.

The world would limit Jesus to the role of teacher or miracle worker. We need to remember who He really is, and that ultimately, he is our judge. Through him this world will experience, for the first time in history, righteous judgment, because he is the source of infinite justice.

And Isaiah, in today's reading, comes back to last week's subject, God, in Jesus, is the source of ultimate peace. He also mentioned it in our opening reading, Isaiah 9:6, "He shall be called the Prince of peace". Now Isaiah says "In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all. The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD." (Isa 11:6-9 NLT)

What we see again is what we saw in our text last week. God's ultimate goal for the world is peace. The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat. Even those who have always been enemies, God says, will someday live in peace. And we again remind ourselves of what the angels proclaimed, on the first Christmas, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." (Luke 2:14 NLT)

We won't see world peace between nations until the second coming of Jesus. We won't see this world peace until the prophesy is fulfilled "the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD." (Isa 11:9 NLT), but, as we saw last week, until that day, we can experience His peace within our hearts. We can experience His peace in the midst of turmoil. We can experience His peace in the midst of tragedy. We can experience His peace in the midst of conflict. We can experience His peace in the midst of fearful conditions. We can experience His peace in the midst of breakdown in the family. We can experience His peace in the midst of financial crisis. We can experience His peace in the midst of failing health, because His peace is freely available to all of us.

Shortly before his death Jesus told his disciples "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27 NLT)

Peace is a recurring theme in Christmas passages, because God wants us to experience it. It breaks God's heart that nations cannot live together peacefully. It breaks God's heart that families cannot live together peacefully. It breaks God's heart that friends and churches cannot live together peacefully. The Bible makes it very clear that God wants us to get along with one another. But getting along with each other only becomes possible when we experience his peace within our hearts.

Jesus came to bring peace. First and foremost, Jesus came to bring peace between us and God. Paul in his letter to the Romans wrote, "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us." (Ro 5:1 NLT)

If your world is in turmoil today, you can experience God's peace. It's available for the asking. To know God is to know peace.

And the only way to really know God is through his son Jesus Christ. Through him we have spiritual strength, wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Through Him we have infinite justice, He judges us with righteousness and mercy. And through Him we have peace. Peace with God, peace with others, and, ultimately peace with ourselves.

There are some today who know a lot about Jesus, but don't know him personally. If you don't know Jesus as you Lord and Saviour today, He is not the source of their strength, if He is not the source of your strength; He's not your source of peace. He can be, He wants to be. Open your heart to him; receive him and know His peace this Christmas time.