Preparing the Way for the Prince of Peace

Isaiah 40:3-5

 Please open your Bibles or refer to the Scripture section of your bulletin. We are continuing our advent series as we prepare for the arrival of the Christ child. Today in our advent candle lighting ceremony we heard the words of the prophet Isaiah as he was predicting the coming of the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. We learned that the candle today represents preparation and peace. What we must remember as we read the words of Isaiah is that the prophet was writing to the nation of Israel as it was in exile in Babylon. He was writing to bring words of comfort and restoration to the people so that they would remember that God is still with them, even as they were being punished for their unfaithfulness to Him. Even though the nation was experiencing such a tough situation, they still had reasons to have hope for the future. God is promising that He will send the Messiah who will heal the broken relationship man has with God and that through the coming of this child all the nations of the world will be blessed. Last week we discussed why the coming of the Christ child brings us hope. Today we will be learning how we can prepare our hearts for the coming of this Child and how His coming kingdom will establish peace on the earth. Please read with me, once again, our passage for today, which is Isaiah 40:3-5 **“The voice of one calling out, “Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the uneven ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”** As we begin to unwrap what the Prophet Isaiah is teaching in this passage, we will learn how to prepare the way for this coming king, we will learn how the terrain of our lives must change as we prepare for His arrival and finally, we will learn how His coming will reveal the glory of the Lord as the Prince of Peace.

 As we begin, the first part of this passage provides for us instructions that show us how preparations will be made for the arrival of Christ. In verse 3 the voice (John the Baptist) is calling out to clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness. When we think of a wilderness what comes to mind? Normally this is a very open space that is quiet and is void of companionship. When the nation of Israel was traveling to the Promised Land, they had to spend forty years wandering in the wilderness because they refused to have faith in the ability of God to help them take the land. During those forty years the nation buried an entire generation and they had to fight against several enemies as well as deal with the challenges of getting food and water. God provided for them as they were wandering, but this time in the wilderness gave them time to grow in their faith. The wilderness Isaiah refers to are the times of exile and trial that the people are currently finding themselves in. The people in exile in Babylon are in need of restoration and renewal. The voice calls on them to prepare the way for the Lord. They need to look back to God who will provide for them the way to be restored with Him.

 In verse 3 the prophet also says that the voice is calling for a straight path to be made for the coming of God. In what ways can the people make a straight path for God? As they were spending time in exile the people prayed to God for His intervention in their situation so that they would one day be able to return to Jerusalem. The people had sinned against God and were in need of being restored as a sovereign nation. The first way the people were able to make this straight path was through repentance. They had to acknowledge their sin and confess to God that they were in the situation they were in because of their own rebellion. When John the Baptist appeared proclaiming that the Messiah was arriving, he told the people **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2).** So, to prepare for the coming of the Messiah the people were instructed to repent of their sins. Why was repentance of sins important for the coming of the Messiah? To answer this, we must understand what repentance is. Repentance is not only when a sinner acknowledges their sin before God. The other major component of repentance is when that person has a complete turn around meaning that they stop sinning and begin living in obedience to God. This allowed the people to be ready for the kingdom of heaven coming into their midst. When they acknowledged their sin admitting the need of salvation, they looked to the Savior who would heal their broken relationship with God. As we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ, we need to ask ourselves what obstacles do I have in my life that is stopping me from communing with God? These obstacles can be unconfessed sins or idols we have allowed to become present in our lives that deter us from living the way God calls us to live. Removing those obstacles is done when we repent of our sins and place our trust in Christ alone. As we celebrate this Christmas season let us remove all other distractions that deter us from recognizing why the coming of Christ is so important in our lives. Just as the words of “Joy to the World” tell us, “Let every heart prepare Him room.” May we leave room in our hearts for Him.

 In verse 4 we learn about how the terrain of our lives must change as we prepare for His arrival. Isaiah writes firstly to let every valley be lifted up. How many times in your life have you been in a valley? Valleys represent times in our lives when we face suffering, brokenness and when something happens that humbles us. When we place our trust in Christ alone and rely on His power, He will raise us up so that those trials and times of suffering do not defeat us. We can overcome through the power of God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. In Psalm 23 we read these words **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (v. 4).** The valleys we face in our lives are elevated by God who gives us the victory through His Son. is His His

 Secondly, Isaiah writes that every mountain and hill will be made low. What do mountains and hills represent in our lives? These are times when we allow the sins of pride and the resistance to God’s will to dominate our lives. When the Messiah comes, He will bring with Him the power to take these sins and bring them down so that we are humbled. When someone places their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, they come to realize that they are nothing and that they are lost without Christ. We cannot save ourselves no matter how we good we might like to think we are. As the Apostle James wrote in his epistle **“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (4:6).** Why is God opposed to the proud? He opposes the proud because it is the prideful that believe they do not need to be saved and are fine with being the way they are without God. The light of Christ exposes our sin and shows us that without Him we have no hope.

 Thirdly, Isaiah says that that to prepare for Christ we need to “let the uneven ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley.” What are the rough areas of our lives that God can make smooth? The rough areas are the spiritual challenges we face in life and when we harden our heart against God. What causes someone to have a hardness to heart towards God? This happens when someone faces a terrible tragedy in life or experiences evil or has been hurt by someone professing to be a follower of Christ. It is very easy to allow the tough things in this world to cause someone to become angry at God. The coming of the Messiah smooths out those rough places because when Christ enters our hearts, He removes the anger and fear replacing it with peace and contentment. An example of a person in Scripture who had such an experience was the Apostle Paul. In his younger years Paul was a devout Pharisee who was zealous for the Lord. He wanted to make certain that the law was being followed and he also wanted to punish anyone who challenged the teachers of the law. When he was about to round up followers of Jesus to imprison them Jesus changed his life. Once He became a follower of Christ his entire life was changed as well as his hard heart. He no longer wanted to kill others or take such extreme measures to show his devotion to God. Rather he began to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others and he used the rest of his life on earth to share that good news with anyone who would listen. God took a hard-hearted man and made him a vessel of love. This transformation is available to anyone who is willing to lay aside their anger and allow God to work in their life.

 As we approach verse 5, we find that once we have prepared ourselves for the coming of Christ and have allowed Him to change our hearts, we then will experience the glory of the Lord that comes with the Prince of Peace. When Christ came, He brought with Him the glory of the Lord. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh who came to make God known to humanity. The Apostle John in his gospel shares these words regarding the glory of Christ **“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14).** All of the things that Jesus did while here on earth were the full manifestation of the glory of God.

 Isaiah said that all flesh will see the glory of the Lord together. When Jesus died on the cross, having paid the penalty for the sin of man, He purchased the salvation for anyone who places their trust in Him. Salvation in Christ is not just for one nation or for one people. All the people of the world who trust Him alone for salvation are able to approach His throne of grace. Jesus Christ has made God known to man and through His life He allows all who trust in Him to receive the hope of eternal life.

 The last words in our passage today are that the mouth of the Lord has spoken all of this. What this means is that God has promised that those who trust in Christ will be saved. We can take courage in these words because everything that God says is true and He has always kept His promises. This speaks to the assurance of our salvation. One concern that some followers of Christ express is that they are unsure whether they have really been saved and will be in the presence of God for all of eternity. This brings up the question, how can I be assured of my salvation through Christ? Let me encourage you with these words from the Apostle John in his first epistle **“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13).** John is telling his readers that those who have accepted Christ as Savior have had their relationship with God restored and that they can trust in Him for salvation. This good news brings peace and comfort to those who have only had heartache and separation from God.

 It is at this point where we now begin to understand why Jesus Christ is called the prince of peace. Being at peace is having the assurance that everything is taken care of and also knowing that we do not have to fear the wrath of God any longer. In purchasing our salvation Jesus Christ has appeased the wrath of holy God who must punish sinners and see to it in every situation that justice is done. If you and I were really given justice for our sins none of us would be able to stand in God’s presence on judgment day with any hope. Jesus intercedes for us when we accept Him as Savior allowing us to stand before holy God. When God sees us, He no longer sees the sins we have committed, He now sees the blood of Christ that has washed us clean of those sins and allows us to be in His presence. This now brings peace to our souls because we no longer have to fear death or the grave. The chaos, stress and confusion that our lives would be filled with without Christ has been replaced with peace, love and joy. Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace allows us to live in perfect harmony with God, which brings peace to life.

 As we conclude, let us review what we have learned today. The coming of Christ has brought hope because we now have eternal life to look forward to when we will spend eternity in the presence of God. Also, we now have peace with God due to the fact that our sins have been forgiven through Jesus Christ. When we stand before Holy God on the day of judgment, we can stand in His presence covered in the blood of Jesus Christ who has paid the penalty for our sins. We are at peace with God and can look forward to that day. These two marvelous gifts, hope and peace, are gifts that we can never repay. Thanks be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who gives us the victory in His name. May we live every day in gratitude remembering these gifts that the Lord has given us through His grace. Amen.