

The Latter Days
Andrew Kneeland, November 27, 2022
Isaiah 2

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Happy New Year!

We have a few Sundays left in our calendar year, but today is the *first* Sunday of the new *Church Year*. We are in the season of Advent now, a season of waiting for Christmas.

The title of my message this morning might seem a little strange. Isn't "The Latter Days" a strange topic for the *first* day of the Church Year?

But I think talking about the Last Days here in the First Days is exactly what we need. It's no coincidence that our Scripture readings today all deal with this same topic.

Scripture has a lot to say about the Last Days. In fact, Jesus talked about hell much more than he talked about heaven during his years of ministry. He knew "the last days" would be a topic we spend a lot of time thinking about.

It sure seems like the Last Days are coming, doesn't it? There seems to be a perfect storm of wars, natural disasters, international pandemics, governmental corruption, and people rejecting the faith.

There's enough bad news these days to make us uneasy, to make us nervous, and maybe even afraid. Are you nervous or afraid? When we turn on the news, browse our news feeds, or page through Pastor Wesley's packet of news updates—most of them are disappointing, discouraging, disturbing stories about what's going on in the world around us. It can sure seem like the End Times are getting closer and closer. It's easy to be nervous about the End Times.

The Last Days are coming, but we do not need to be afraid. We do not need to be anxious. And our Old Testament passage in Isaiah 2 tells us why.

Let's pray before we begin: Father God, thank you for your Word. Thank you for the church calendar, the seasons of the church year. This Advent season we wait for you. We wait for you to come again in glory and rescue us from this broken world. Bless our time together this morning and sanctify us in your truth. In your name we pray, amen.

Isaiah is one of the most famous prophets in the Bible. He lived in Judah during some of the darkest days of Jewish history. God's people had escaped from Egypt, crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land, and had now

settled and were living in the land God had given to them.

But most of them quickly forgot about God and started worshiping the local gods of the surrounding nations. As a consequence for their sin, God was going to allow the Babylonian Empire to invade Jerusalem and take the Israelites into slavery and captivity in Babylon.

Isaiah knew this was going to happen. He was called by God to warn the people of this fate, go into captivity with them, and remind them that God was still in control through it all.

These first few verses of Isaiah 2 are a prophecy about the Last Days. This message for Israel is also a message for us. There will be painful and dark days ahead for the people of God... but we don't need to be afraid because for US, the Last Days will be wonderful.

Let's listen again to what he says:

Verses 2-3: "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, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

Mountains were important places back in those days. Mountains were often considered holy places, and they were often thought to be where gods lived. You probably remember the name of the false god, "Baal," right? Baal was one of the main false gods of this area, and he was probably even the chief god of the Egyptians and the Canaanites.

The people who worshiped Baal believed that he lived on Mount Zephon, a tall mountain in northern Israel. The Canaanite people who lived in the area, and even some Israelites, would build altars on Mount Zephon to Baal, and they would look to and pray to Mount Zephon when they needed help.

Mount Zephon represented the false, pagan gods of the people. In the last days, though, Isaiah says that the other mountains will fade away, melting into the ground, leaving just one mountain: one true Mountain of the Lord.

In the last days, the highest mountain will NOT be Mount Zephon... it will be the mountain of the true God, the only God.

It feels like we're living in the Last Days, and we very well could be. But as we notice more and more wars, more and more deception and dishonesty, more and

more evil and corruption... we can also know that all the false mountains will soon fade away.

Some people today worship at the mountain of politics; they put their trust in elected leaders and election processes, and turn to them when things aren't going well or when they want something. When elections go their way, they are proud and confident. When they don't, they panic and worry. The mountain of worshipping politics will fade away.

Some people put their trust in the mountain of finance. They turn to stock markets and IRA accounts for assurance when things are uncertain. They spend their whole lives worrying about money, piling up as much money as they can with one hand, while racking up thousands in credit card debt with the other. That mountain will also fade away in the Last Days.

There's also the mountain of leader worship, hoping and trusting in people to save the day. The mountain of empty platitudes, hoping that being nice and inoffensive will make problems go away. The mountain of entertainment. The mountain of worry. The mountain of meditation. The mountain of Anywhere-You-Go when things aren't right.

There are a lot of "holy" mountains out there. But just like Mount Zephon... every mountain will be dwarfed by the one, true holy mountain of our Lord. Everywhere we used to run for help and comfort will look like a meaningless hill when compared to the "highest of the mountains."

Friends, this is good news! Verse 3 says that many people will see that one, true, tall mountain of the Lord and will "flow to it" so they can be truly comforted... truly assured. They will go to the Lord, who alone can truly make things right again with the world.

"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The law convicts us of our sin and tells us that we can't make it on our own. That our own mountains are worthless. But the Last Days will bring with it the Gospel message that Christ has come down to pave the road of restoration.

Those of us who have been adopted into this heavenly, eternal family of God do not need to be afraid of the Latter Days. The End Times are coming, they might be coming very soon, but we do not need to worry or be afraid. Because our God is the God of the highest mountain; and His mountain will not fade away.

Just like the Jewish people were warned that a hard time of invasion and captivity was ahead, we too might have difficult times ahead of us. But our God

knows the end of the story, and everything will work out perfectly for us in the end. Isaiah comforted God's people with this good news of what will happen in the Latter Days. And we can be assured that the Latter Days are something we can look forward to.

Look what else Isaiah said about these Last Days, in verse 4:

"He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Isn't that good news? No more war! All of these devastating weapons and technologies that hurt and kill people will be changed into instruments of GOOD. From senseless violence to productive agriculture! From murder and corruption to peace and prosperity for the people of God!

It reminds me of the vision the Apostle John had of these Last Days:

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Isaiah talked about these Last Days that we can look forward to later in this book, too. Listen to what he says in chapter 11:

*"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy **in all my holy mountain**; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."*

Isaiah says in verse 5 that we will live and walk and work in the "light of the Lord." The Latter Days are coming, and we know what they will look like. It will be wonderful.

Of course, there ARE some people who DO need to be nervous and afraid about what's coming. The Latter Days is good news for us – for those of us who trust in the one, true God – but the Latter Days will be awful for people who are not members of the household of the faith.

Those so-called "holy" mountains will be leveled to make room for the one, true mountain, but they won't be the only things brought down. Verse 11: "The

haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled.” Verse 12: “For the Lord of hosts has a day... against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up – and it shall be brought low.”

The Lord “has a day.” My Old Testament professor in Bible College was Brent Olson, I think some of you might know him. He visited here a few Sundays, I believe. He taught me that one of the themes of the Old Testament is “The Day of the Lord.” A “Day of the Lord” is whenever God intentionally demonstrates that He is the Lord of all.

A “day of the Lord” is when God punishes unbelievers and rescues the faithful. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea while the pursuing Egyptians were destroyed. When the walls of Jericho fell and the people of God were able to enter the Promised Land.

When Isaiah says in verse 12, “The Lord of hosts has a day...” this is what he’s talking about. The Last Days will be another, decisive Day of the Lord. The faithful remnant will be rescued, but the faithless will be destroyed.

Anyone who puts their trust in themselves, anyone who puts their trust in possessions, in military strength, in political processes, in their own abilities or resources or friendships or connections. Anyone who thinks too highly of himself or herself. Anyone who compromises or cheapens the message of God by weaving in strands of falsehood and lies. Anyone who piles up treasures for themselves. Anyone who arrogantly looks to *themselves* as the source of their security.

In short: Anyone who worships on Mount Zephon—instead of the Holy Mountain of the one, true God—will be destroyed.

When the Day of the Lord comes, and it could be coming very quickly, the majesty of the Lord will be fully revealed and the faithless will try to hide in the dust before the absolute terror of the Lord.

The majesty of the Lord will absolutely wipe out all sin and evil. And many people’s hearts are *filled* with sin and evil. It will be an agonizing, awful experience for these souls around us who do not have a saving trust in Jesus Christ. They will crawl into any nook and cranny they can find, curling into a fetal position as they try to avoid what they know is unavoidable.

In that day, Isaiah says: “The haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away.”

The Latter Days will be a terrifying and awful experience for many, many people.

But not for us. WE are of the house of Jacob. WE worship not on Mount Zephon but on the Holy Mountain of the Lord. We are beloved, adopted members of God's eternal family and the death of Christ paid the price for our sin.

So here we are, waiting for the Latter Days. We keep our eyes and ears open to the world around us. We hear stories and reports of wars and rumors of wars. Of natural disasters and corruption and calamity. Of senseless violence and needless destruction. Of people running farther and farther away from the one, true God.

We hear these stories and we recognize that the end might be near. But we wait not in fear or dread, but in hopeful anticipation.

The shepherds in Bethlehem experienced the first Advent season. They knew a Messiah was coming, but they didn't know when and they didn't know where. They faithfully did their jobs and tended to their sheep... waiting for the promise to be fulfilled.

Now we're in a season of Advent, too, waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. Waiting for the Latter Days. We don't know when Christ is coming again... but we know that He IS coming. The Day of the Lord IS coming, and it seems like it's coming soon.

And that's good news for us. Paul writes: "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

We are in the End Times right now. And we are secure and confident not in ourselves, but in our loving and gracious and powerful God, who knows the end of the story.

Amen.