

2) In Isaiah the people devastated.

The northern kingdom of Israel had been carried into captivity (722 B.C.), and the kingdom of Judah was in the middle of idolatry and evil. The kingdom of Assyria had dominated the Fertile Crescent and posed a major threat to both kingdoms; and the kingdom of Babylon was gaining power and would replace Assyria as the dominant threat. The people of Israel would be concerned about their lot in life—what would become of the promises of God? How could the chosen people survive, would David's line sit on the throne? There would be a purging of the nation because God is holy. Before the nation could inherit the promises made to the fathers, it would have to be made holy. So God would use the pagan nations to chasten Israel for its sins and cleanse it from iniquity. Must the remnant of the righteous also suffer with the nation that for all purposes was pagan? Jerusalem, their capital city would soon be in ruins.

3) In Isaiah the people were devastated. They were to look for God's rescue!

But in the midst of their tribulation, Israel is called by God to be servant, messenger, and witness for him. Jerusalem would be restored. So God calls upon Isaiah to comfort Jerusalem with news of help, to bear witness to God's majesty and power to save, and to witness to his announced plans...offering a new day of hope.

4) Similarly, Mark wrote the Gospel to address a Christian community under duress – attacked by the Jews and the Romans – mocked and persecuted for their belief in Jesus. These perils had given rise to questions about

5) Christians were being persecuted when Mark wrote his Gospel- they were to look for God's rescue!

6) Mark points back to the “good news concerning Jesus Messiah, Son of God,” to remind them of who Jesus was and what he had come to do as well as what he would do. This Gospel offered a renewed basis for their faith, made clear the dangers and pitfalls along the way, and offered the hope of the Kingdom to come, the day of harvest, the resurrection, and the ultimate perfect completion of God's rule.’

Both in Mark and in Isaiah, God's people were desperate. They were to look for God's rescue!

7) Today, we here are not persecuted, our lives are not in peril. But do we live in desperate times?

- Violence, Corruption, Hate
- Threats of War, Acts of Terrorism
- Addiction, Obesity, Healthcare
- Education, Civil Rights, Poverty
- Pollution, Inequality, Bullying

Are we relevant today?

Do we meet our own & others' spiritual needs?

8) Whether or not you'd call these times desperate, or if we are in need of God's rescue, we still have scripture as our guide: We are to seek the Savior.

Isaiah 40:5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Isaiah 40:10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

9) Isaiah 41:20 so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Isaiah 42:9 See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”

10)

Last week we learned that the story of Advent is intertwined and depends upon God’s desire to love us, to be in relationship with us. We believe that advent is about Jesus’ important arrival on earth so that we could be able to arrive back in God’s presence like in the beginning when God walked with us and talked with us in the Garden of Eden. We know that God eagerly anticipates, long awaits, and yearns for each of us to come back into his perfect love. But we are rebellious and have an inclination toward evil. But every time we stray, God waits. God eagerly anticipates our return to Him! Patiently God worked through Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; through Moses and Aaron, and the Judges. Through Saul, David and Solomon, through Jeremiah, and Micah, and Isaiah, and all the others worked through, until the time came to work through Mary & Joseph...and even since.

We are waiting for Christ to return, many of us yearn for that day. Just as in the days of John the Baptist, we look for God’s salvation; we await Christ, the messiah’s return.

But what message did God give John? From Isaiah 40:3-4

11)

[To be] A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

They were expecting God would prepare a highway through the desert for the exiles to return to Jerusalem. What we find, however, is the opposite—Jerusalem is to prepare a highway for God.

12)

We sometimes expect God would prepare a highway for us –right to our doorstep...right to the hearts of our neighbors, of those who are meek – and to those who bully. We expect God to act and prepare, and do and solve and fix and heal and comfort...those are things we are to do for each other and the world to proclaim who our God is and that we are in but not of the world.

13)

Mark 13: 34 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

35 “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

We are to keep at our tasks – being relevant and meeting the needs of our souls and the souls of others to know Christ and his forgiveness. To know peace that passes understanding, and have a fire inside to side with the least, the last and the lowest. – Making disciples of all nations, colors, socioeconomic classes, and each neighbor we don’t look like, sound like, or run around with. We are a church with potential – we are people that can make a difference for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world! Pick something and examine it, prepare a highway for the Lord to enter in!