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Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Luke 12:32-40

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### **It's Not the End of the World, But the Breaking Through of the Kingdom**

When we hear Jesus talk about unexpected arrivals, readiness, and thieves breaking in, we immediately think about "end times". Our cultural context encourages these interpretations—stemming from real anxieties about climate change and nuclear war, as well as popular American Millennialist theology (think the "Left Behind" series). We think of God's wrath and judgement, and we listen with "eschatological ears", that is, focusing on the ends of things.

But what if Jesus isn't speaking here about the world's end, but about how we as God's people are to live right now? That's exactly what today's readings mean when we connect Isaiah's call for repentance and justice with Jesus' vision of the Kingdom. To understand what Jesus means, we need to first hear the prophet Isaiah's urgent message for God's people.

Isaiah was prophesying during a time of great social upheaval which sounds remarkably familiar—the Assyrian empire was aggressively expanding (to put it mildly), Israel (the northern kingdom) would soon fall in 722 BCE, and Judah's leaders (of the southern kingdom) were making desperate political alliances with both Assyria and Egypt instead of trusting God. And Isaiah wasn't a "lone voice crying in the wilderness", as his contemporaries Amos and Hosea were active in Israel and Judah at the same time (and in February we'll encounter Micah, another contemporary). All of them are preaching strong messages of judgement and social repentance. This prophetic chorus tells us something is profoundly wrong with God's people—not just a political crisis, but a social and spiritual one as well. In this setting of political anxiety and spiritual compromise, Isaiah delivered a stinging critique that cuts straight to present moment.

Isaiah's first words are to compare the kings and people of Judah to "rulers of Sodom" and "people of Gomorrah"—but not for the reasons we might expect. The real sin of Sodom wasn't sexual immorality, but violence, inhospitality, and exploitation and oppression of the vulnerable. Isaiah isn't being metaphorical here: he draws a straight line between the oppression of the vulnerable in Sodom to the greed, injustice, political corruption, and neglect of the needy in his own time.

Given this systemic injustice, God utterly rejects their outward shows of religious observance:

"Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul *hates*; they have become a *burden* to me, I am *weary* of bearing them"

God rejects empty sacrifice and demands its opposite:

"Cease to do evil, learn to do good;  
seek justice, rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan, plead for the widow."

--and this demand echoes through every prophet, pointing towards the kind of faith Jesus will embody.

Compare this to the familiar words from Isaiah 58 (written in exile 150 years later):

"Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
<sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him,  
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?  
<sup>8</sup>Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up speedily;  
your righteousness shall go before you,  
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Notice how this language is rooted in collective action and identity. All the prophets speak to the people of Israel and Judah as a collective, and guilt, repentance, and restoration are collective acts. In our modern, Western world we tend to first think of ourselves first as autonomous and separate. We might ask ourselves "Who am I? Have I sinned? What do I need to do to address this injustice?" when Isaiah and all the prophets ask us a deeper question: "Who are we becoming together? What kind of society do we co-create with God?"

The Kingdom of Heaven is found in seeking justice for the poor and the marginalized, in changing the systems that perpetuate that injustice and oppression. The prophetic call to repentance, then, cannot be reduced to only a question of personal piety—it is a summons to collective transformation. God's intention for us is not one of judgement, but of invitation: an invitation to turn together toward a way of life rooted in justice, mercy, and

ethical integrity. And this summons sets the stage to understand what Jesus means by being "ready".

This prophetic vision of justice-centered faith comes alive in Jesus's kingdom parables. Jesus doesn't just echo Isaiah's call for justice—he shows us what happens when God's Kingdom breaks into the world. Watch how he does this in three movements: assurance, action, and readiness.

First, Jesus offers us *assurance* rooted in God's loving-kindness and generous heart, when He says:

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

That's the foundation, the cornerstone—God's generous and loving heart towards us.

But notice what Jesus demands in response--not just gratitude, but *radical (and collective) action*:

Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus isn't speaking metaphorically here: he's pointing towards the ethical demand that follows from God's generosity. And that demand is for collective economic redistribution, not hoarding, greed, and fear. It is in fact through living out this response to God's generosity to us that we can co-create, with God, the Kingdom, right now.

Economic redistribution is radical enough, but Jesus isn't finished. *He wants us to be ready* for something even more shocking and surprising. He tells two parables about watchful waiting, and here's where everything we think we know is turned upside down.

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.

Pay attention to this stunning detail, when the master returns and find the servants ready:

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and **he will come and serve them**. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

This would have been shocking to Jesus' first-century hearers: masters don't serve slaves! But this reveals everything about God's Kingdom. The hierarchy based on dominance, ownership, and servitude is flipped on its head. Here the master becomes the servant, those who were waiting receive hospitality, and those on the margins are brought to the center.

This isn't just a nice story about God's kindness. This is a radical vision of shared power and mutual care, which overturns empire's logic of hierarchy, where God (or Caesar) sits at the top of things and demands obedience. Instead, it points to who Jesus is: the Son of Man, the New Human Being, who comes not as a Caesar with armies, but as a servant ready to tie up his robe and serve a feast to the weary and the watchful.

This New Human Being shatters unjust systems and exposes false security, whether in political alliances and empty, ritualistic worship as in Isaiah, or in money and possessions as in Luke. The New Human Being reveals to us what a redeemed humanity can look like: a people who watch for and seek out justice, not simply safety; a community that doesn't simply wait passively, but lives right now as if the Kingdom were already arriving, already here; a way of seeing and being that disrupts empire, economic hoarding, and spiritual complacency. And notice, this disruption doesn't destroy—it invites. It invites us to live right now as the redeemed humanity God intends us to be.

This is the God Isaiah saw through the ritual smoke—a God not satisfied with empty, burnt offerings, but a God hungry for justice for all of God's people.

This is the master in Luke who defies every expectation, turning the tables of power to become the host.

And this is the faith the writer of Hebrews commends to us—a faith that dares to live towards a better country, even when we cannot see it yet.

Here's our calling then: We are the people who stay ready: not for the world's end, but for the Kingdom's breakthrough. We are the people who live awake to injustice around us. We are the people who walk together toward the vision Isaiah and Jesus shared. With lamps lit, hands open, and hearts tuned to justice and mercy.

It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. Let's live like we believe it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.