

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Prince of Peace and the King of Kings, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

We have finally arrived at this, the last Sunday of the Church Calendar. This has been traditionally called Christ the King Sunday. Next week we enter into the church season of Advent when we focus on the coming birth of Jesus. That's not what we've about today though. Today we're thinking about what it will be like when Jesus comes again. Jesus said he would come again on the clouds with all the heavenly hosts. What a grand and glorious day that will be!

Looking far ahead, Isaiah the Old Testament prophet understood the implications of what it means for all people when that glorious day arrives. In the chapters we read first, Isaiah was describing the attack and near fall of the Southern Kingdom of Israel. If you remember, the Assyrian army utterly defeated the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the year 722 BC. They had every intention of taking the southern kingdom of Judah as well. As our scripture says they had surrounded every city and town in Judah and thought it was only a matter of time before every city fell into their hands. (SLIDE)



They were so confident in their victory they sent out the Rabshakeh to goad King Hezekiah into surrender. The Rabshakeh was the King's Chief of Staff. This

was the title of the King's Chief Cup-Bearer and most important advisor to the King. What King Sennacherib didn't count on was the power of the prayers of a repentant people. (SLIDE)

Starting with the King of Judah, King Hezekiah, all the people of Judah prayed to God and asked the prophet Isaiah to intercede on their behalf. Intercede he did! Isaiah told the king's servants not to worry, God had a plan.



Though it is clear the blockade of Jerusalem ended without significant fighting, how it was resolved and what stopped Sennacherib's massive army from overwhelming the city is uncertain. The Biblical account of the end of Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem holds that though Hezekiah's soldiers manned the walls of the city, ready to defend it against the Assyrians, something called the



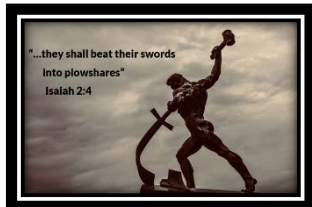
(SLIDE) “destroying angel,” sent by the Lord God, annihilated Sennacherib's army, killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in front of Jerusalem's gates. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus describes the operation as an Assyrian failure due to a “multitude

of field-mice” descending upon the Assyrian camp, devouring crucial material such as quivers and bowstrings, leaving the Assyrians unarmed and causing them to flee. It's possible the story of the mice infestation is a reference to some kind of disease striking the Assyrian camp, possibly the septicemic plague. In either case,

God's people didn't lift a finger in the battle. When Hezekiah and the Judeans saw what God had done, defeating the massive Assyrian army without having to fight, they must have thought they were a pretty powerful nation. Even though God had saved Jerusalem as an answer to the prayers and repentance of the King and the people, many of their towns and even fortified cities had been seized and destroyed. King Hezekiah realized it was his own anti-Assyrian policies and alliances with the enemies of Assyria that led to the invasion. King Hezekiah had not paid the tribute demanded by Sennacherib for several years. After Sennacherib withdrew his siege forces from around Jerusalem, Hezekiah began to pay the tribute once again to appease the Assyrians. They demanded ever greater amounts of gold and other commodities in exchange for peace. This arraignment lasted for over 100 years, until the time of King Nebuchadnezzar and the rise of the Babylonian army. It was the Babylonians who in the end defeated Judah and took Jerusalem in the year 587 BC. Once again the primary outside cause of the invasion was the King's decision to withhold the paying of tribute to the King of Babylon. It looks like the saying it's always about the money held true even way back in ancient times as it still does today. On the inside, the Judeans had once again turned away from the Lord God. They intermarried with people of other pagan religions and followed other gods. They even entered into a mutual treaty

agreement with Egypt of all nations... Once The Lord removed the protection he provided, Judah was easy pickings for their far more powerful neighbor.

As interesting as all these ancient accounts of siege warfare and God's intervention, I still wonder about the vision of Isaiah from the second chapter where he envisions a day when all the nations will stream to the great mountain of the Lord, Mount Zion. Isaiah tells us there will come a day when the nations will stream to Zion and all will hammer their weapons of war into farming implements.



(SLIDE) I wonder about this vision because it doesn't seem to be any closer now than it was when Isaiah first uttered it some 2700 years ago. I mean, I know God always plays the

long game, but you'd think in 2700 years we'd at least be able to see some progress toward this goal. My wonderings come down to this: what is keeping the nations of the world from streaming to Mount Zion? What will it take for the nations to stop making implements of destruction and turn their efforts to making implements for the production of food for all people instead?

Chapter 2 offers a vision of what the life of people who are redeemed by God's grace will look like. In a world that's becoming increasingly polarized, Isaiah's vision tells us that, in the end, The Lord has invited all people into his dwelling place. Not all will choose to come, but those who seek God's instruction and want to be in his presence are welcome, regardless of the differences they may

have had before. Isaiah invites us to imagine a world where boundaries have been erased and all become one in God's presence.

Hezekiah and the Judeans repented and prayed for deliverance and God saved them from the horrible defeat at the hands of the Assyrian army. Through their own efforts and offering of good will and tribute to the Kings of this world, Judah bought a tenuous peace with their superpower neighbor. They must have thought they could do anything! Unfortunately, their willingness to kowtow to foreign kings didn't last. Neither did their willingness to follow the ways of the Lord their God. They soon forgot just how amazing and powerful this Lord their God really is... Soon they were looking to the god's of their neighbors once again and turning away from the God who had rescued them over and over again. It wasn't long, a little over 100 years when God allowed another superpower to invade. This time there would be no miraculous rescue.

In second Chronicles, chapter 7, God says, ¹⁴ "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." It sounds so easy... All we have to do is humble ourselves, pray, seek God above all else, and give up our evil ways... Ahh... If only...

If only we could do these things then we could rely on our own effort and good deeds to make us righteous. If only we could do these things, well, we certainly wouldn't have any need for God to save us... Sadly, we can't accomplish this on our own. We do in fact need God. We need our Savior, Jesus to rescue us once and for all from our sin, from the devil, and from death itself.

I'm thankful I have the time and the inclination to wonder about some of the marvelous promises God makes to us. As far as this promise about the nations streaming to Zion and never learning or studying about war any more, my best guess is that's going to take Jesus coming again in all His Glory and with all the Angels and archangels, and all the heavenly hosts before that time of eternal peace and love can come to fruition.

This vision of Isaiah's from Chapter 2 shows us what is possible when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. That day has not arrived yet... In the meantime, what are those of us who love the Lord supposed to do? I for one can learn from the words of the one who wrote the historical books of the Chronicles and learn to be more humble. I can certainly pray for that kind of eternal peace way more than I currently do. I can listen to God's Word spoken in the Bible, in our songs and hymns, and from other Christians when they tell me I'm out of step or my pride has taken over my thoughts and actions. In short, I can try to live, to the best of my ability, according to God's Word. Another prophet of

the Lord who was a contemporary of Isaiah and also witnessed the devastation of the Assyrian army famously said, “what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? That’s from Micah the 6th chapter, verse 8.

May the Lord God be patient with us even when we forget to ask for the forgiveness we all need each and every day. May the Lord not deal with us according to our deeds, but according to His love, mercy, and grace. By God’s grace, may we learn God’s justice and love. Amen.