

So there I was on the station platform in Figueres, expectantly waiting but for who? We were on holiday in Northern Spain and Anna had invited a friend to come and join us. It had been intended that all of us would pitch up to the station to meet her but it had ended up just me.

So I was waiting to meet Anna's friend Ruth.

However, I had not met her before and as I stood there a number of thoughts went through my head the obvious one was what was this person I was waiting for like but then I suddenly thought how are we to meet? I mean I am a pretty personable person but as a middle aged man I can't just go up to a random young woman and start talking to her. Fortunately the train arrived the crowds departed leaving one young lady on the platform rootling through her rucksack. It must be her!

Well on this Advent Sunday we enter into a time of expectant waiting. We wait for the advent of the Christ, waiting to celebrate his first coming as the babe in Bethlehem but also his glorious return in power and majesty.

Today we start a new series with the title the final word. It has been asked what do I, a man, know about having the final word!

The focus of the series is upon Jesus who came as the final revelation of God and who will return one day as the final word in salvation history.

I had an email a month or so ago from my son who lives in the States giving me details of his flight back to the UK. It was a word of expectation. I know he is coming and that once again he will be at home and things won't be the same for about 10 days. To me it is part of the expectation of Christmas, the coming of the son.

Advent is about expectation of the coming of the Son of God.

To start our series we head back into the Old Testament and to Isaiah 11:1-16.

We are in a situation 700 years before the birth of Jesus. God's people were failing to be that and despite the constant warnings from prophets like Isaiah they were heading for calamity which would see the northern Kingdom of Israel defeated and taken into exile in Assyria in 721BC and the southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylon in 587BC. But while the prophets spoke of judgement and exile they also spoke of hope and the return of a remnant of God's people from exile.

As we look at Isaiah we see this hope being focused in a new King. As we look at the nature, rule and kingdom of this King we see it fulfilled in part in the coming of Jesus but also that we are still waiting for its fulfilment which will happen when he comes again.

So let's look at this passage and as we do so the King whom Isaiah was expectantly waiting for and how Jesus fulfilled those expectations.

1. A coming King v1-5

I was intrigued by a photo from the Baptism of Prince George which had Queen Elizabeth II, Charles and William in it with the new Prince. Three coming Kings and how long they will have to wait. But Kings from the same lineage.

Here, in v1, Isaiah puts the coming King firmly in the lineage of the great King David who was son of Jesse, a shoot out of the stump, the tree as it were having been cut off by God because it was rotten. However, the reference to a branch from the roots suggests, because roots come before the trunk, that this King is different. He was before and is greater than David. I wonder how you would finish the sentence I can't think of anyone better than.....? To speak to these people of a King greater than David was an impossibility. However, if you know anything of the Old Testament we know that while David was a great King and a man "after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14) he was also flawed.

But not the coming King as we see from

a. his nature v2-3. Going back to the baptism of Prince George and the line up of three future Kings we might wonder what will they each be like as King? In these verses we see this coming King will be v2 led by the Spirit. We remember how at his Baptism the Spirit rested on Jesus like a dove. That Spirit, v2, brings wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. The point is that in the Spirit this King would lead people to God rather than as had happened with the others who mainly had led them away from God. The true King Jesus is God's final word of revelation so that in him and through him we might see and know God.

b. His rule v3-5 I'm not sure how it happened but during a Bible study on John the Baptist on a course I was on this week we suddenly ended up with Hitler and talking about his rule. Clearly it was an extremely vicious and inhumane rule. But then as we look at the Kings of Israel we see that many of them were far from perfect. Even the great King David took another man's wife and caused that man to be placed in danger in battle so that the whole thing might be hushed up. What of this new King. Led and filled by the Spirit of God what would King Jesus' rule be like?

In these verses we see two marks, v5 "Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist" Righteousness is that capacity for doing the right thing in every circumstance and faithfulness is being dependable. The rule of this King will be will be right and true. As we look at the New Testament and see how Jesus dealt with people we see something of that. Just think of the gracious way Jesus always dealt with Peter and then at the end with Peter having denied Jesus what did Jesus do? He proved dependable and fair, faithful to Peter and righteous in his action when he restored Peter. He deals with us as King in the same way.

A few days ago I watched an interview on TV with Alex Harris who was one of the 30 Greenpeace activists arrested by the Russian authorities and threatened with 15 years in prison for piracy. One of her comments was "15 years for something I didn't do". Now however we feel about such protest

we realise that often in nations justice is not done in the courts. The rule is not righteous and fair. However the rule of Jesus is right and true and so we can commit our lives to him as our King. We can accept his rule we can be sure he will act right towards us. He will not let us down. He will not lead us into bad things. He will not act for his own benefit but for ours.

2. An amazing Kingdom v6-9

Jesus is the King who Isaiah was expecting. The King who would be filled with the Spirit and whose rule would be right and true but what kind of Kingdom would that produce?

The short answer from these verses is a place of peace and security.

If you look at these verse I hope you can see that.

a. the reconciliation of old hostilities, v6. The wolf lying down with the lamb – what a picture! What God is saying through Isaiah is that in this new Kingdom where there has been enmity there will be peace. How will that be possible?

b. changed nature v7 – the lion will eat straw. There has been a change of nature, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Peace is possible because in Jesus we are changed.

This is what we find. Plenty are the stories of men and women who have led pretty debauched lives being turned round through faith in Jesus, their lives changed. For many of us coming to Christ we may not have been that bad before but we still find God at work in us to change us into the likeness of Christ so that in his kingdom we live at peace with each other.

c. the curse removed v8. As a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, God announced his curse upon the serpent and said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers” (Gen 3:15). That will be changed in God’s kingdom.

The picture is of peace and security. This was what God had intended from the beginning. But only God can establish a just and lasting peace.

At present we only experience that Kingdom in part because God’s rule is not yet complete. So while we are being changed we are not yet fully Christ like and so we don’t always live in peace but one day we will.

3. A reclamation and restoration v10-16

Isaiah looked to the day when there would be a restoration of God’s people, v11, “In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people.”

This did indeed happen and God’s people did return to Judah. As we look at the rest of v11 we are meant to see that they returned from all over “from the four corners of the earth” v12.

Back they came to Judah and to Jerusalem where they struggled to rebuild the walls and finally the Temple but it was poor by comparison to what it had been before the exile.

However, Isaiah is also looking beyond the short term restoration to a much greater reclamation of people which we see with Jesus. He came proclaiming the Kingdom of God and through him people from the four corners of the earth, not just Jews but Gentiles too, have been drawn into this Kingdom, drawn to a new Jerusalem which is in no way poor or disappointing.

What we see here is people being drawn to the banner of King Jesus, v12.

a. to a glorious rest v10, “his place of rest will be glorious.”

The expectation is of a place of rest to which God’s people come which will be glorious and of course where the rule of the King is complete. Again this is a picture of heaven.

b. the gathered people v10-16 “He will raise a banner for the nations”.

From every nation people will be drawn by the banner of Christ. We see this picture wonderfully in Rev 7:9, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” Friends we are part of this restoration if we are here this morning. Part of the fulfilment of these words of Isaiah because we have been drawn to the banner of King Jesus.

Then those who become part of the Kingdom also become its agents. In v14 we read “swooping down, plundering and laying hands on”. This is not meant as military action but those who enjoy the blessings of the King being used to draw others into that kingdom.

On Wednesday a small group of us finished the Lost for words course, a course which aims to help us ‘To learn to speak about our faith with anyone, in a *relaxed, natural, helpful way*, so they may discover and respond to God’s love for them.’

The group left motivated to do just that.

This is our task as individuals and as a church, to be used by God to draw people into his Kingdom with Christ as King.

It is not easy but here we see how God acts v15 &16 to remove the barriers which stop people coming into his kingdom. Supremely through the death of Jesus has been opened a new and living highway for his people to come into his Kingdom and rest.

c. the whole under God’s blessing as the restoration happens and people from every tribe and nation are drawn into the Kingdom of God to be his people in his place so they enjoy God’s presence and his blessing. In this way the promise made to Abraham way back in Gen 12 of a people, a place and a blessing is fulfilled by God in his Kingdom under King Jesus.

It is Advent and the Son is coming. In Advent we look forward to Christmas to celebrate the advent of the King but we also look beyond that to the return of King Jesus and the fullness of his Kingdom. Then the full reign of righteousness and faithfulness will bring perfect peace and security for the children of God.

But what about while we wait?

Can I suggest just two words come and hope.

The first is come – come to the banner. Come and place your life under the reign of Jesus. Accept what he has done for you on the cross and become a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

The second is hope. In the Bible that is not a vague word of wishful thinking but a word of certainty and we will end this series after Christmas with Jesus as the word of hope. But now while we wait for his return hope is key as we live often in dark and difficult times internationally, nationally and perhaps personally. But we know what lies ahead. We know one day he will return and his Kingdom will come in its fullness and we will know perfect peace and security. We will be God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing. Till then we walk on with hope in our heart.