

# Final Justice

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] new or visiting with us, we're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here, not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become so convinced there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word. We're still in the season of Advent together. You'll remember that the word Advent comes from a Latin word that means to come or to arrive. And so at the season of Advent, we do a few things. First of all, we celebrate the past. So we focus on Jesus' first Advent, his first coming to the earth. And as we celebrate the past, we sing songs like joy to the world. We don't just celebrate the past, though. We also look forward to the future. We long for Jesus' second coming, his second Advent. And that's when we sing songs like, O Come, You Come, Emmanuel.

And when we do both of those things, we're actually doing something that's not just for one season, but for the entire Christian life, that we are always looking back to what God has done in his redemption in the past. And we're always looking forward to what God will do in the future. And we take both of those things together so that we can live faithfully now in the present.

As we're feeling that tension of looking back and looking forward, we are continuing in the book of Isaiah. You'll remember that Isaiah is an Old Testament prophet in the eighth century who was sent to speak to the southern kingdom of Judah. And we looked in Isaiah chapter seven. We saw the challenge for King Ahaz to trust God, the challenge that he did not live up to. And then we saw last week in chapter 11, or excuse me, last week in chapter nine, the darkness that came to God's people in the midst of Ahaz's unbelief. And so we're going to continue sort of in that same vein of darkness as we advance to Isaiah chapter 11. And we're going to hone in on one specific issue of the darkness, which is the issue of injustice and oppression. The consequences of Ahaz's decision from chapter seven continue to unfold. And so things become worse and worse for the nation of Israel. And as we leave behind the passage of darkness last week, we're actually going to pick up with a description of a ton of darkness. At least that's what fills the rest of chapter nine and chapter 10 before we get to chapter 11. And so the question of this passage is a simple one, which is what do we do when we see injustice and oppression in the world? Too often the wicked are in charge. And so how is it that we hold on to hope as God's people in the midst of that?

It's with that question that I invite you to turn with me to Isaiah chapter 11, verses one through five. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn in your phone. You can turn in your worship guide.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go. And so that's why we read now Isaiah chapter 11, starting at verse one.

[ 3 : 1 8 ] There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear. But with righteousness, he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips, he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist and faithfulness, the belt of his loins.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our father in heaven, we confess that we do live in a world that has many places of darkness, darkness in our own lives and in our cities and our countries.

And so we ask that you would speak to that clearly in your word, that you would do what you always do, what you've promised to do, that you would show us our great need for the gospel in your grace. And you'd also show us how you meet us at that very same point of need, that you would cast a spotlight on Jesus Christ and we would see his beauty and his power and his glory and his holiness and his love, that we would grow in our love and our affection for him and that we'd grow in our reverence and our all and our obedience to him. And we ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you were in Sunday school about three weeks ago, I mentioned to you the number one show on Amazon Prime this past summer, which is called The Terminal List. And it tells the story of this Navy SEAL named James Reese. Most of his SEAL team is killed in this ambush and he returns home only to find his family quickly killed thereafter. And so The Terminal List is exactly what it sounds like.

It is a list of people to be terminated. James makes this list that he keeps on a drawing that his daughter made for him. So there's this sweet drawing from his daughter who's been killed and he has this list of names of people he's going to take out on the back. And we might say that he is making a list and checking it twice. The people who should have helped him should be helping him now are actually protecting the guilty and are complicit all the way up to the high levels of government.

[ 5 : 58 ] Now this is a situation where his team and his family have been killed. It sort of takes things to a bit of an extreme. But we have to ask this question of why is the show so popular? I'm not recommending it to you. I'm not saying it's good or it's bad. I'm just saying a lot of people watched it. And whenever there's a show that a lot of people watch, we can assume there's something in it that appeals to the human heart. There's something that people find alluring and gratifying. And I think it's this for that show. It is gratifying to see justice brought in an unjust world. It's gratifying to see justice brought in an unjust world. What do we do when power and money have greater value than justice and truth and faithfulness? What do we do when power and money have greater value than justice and truth and faithfulness? And in asking that question, we're putting our finger on one of the pain points, the pressure points of Advent. Advent is this tension, this pain of living between Jesus' two comings, knowing that he's already come and understanding the grace that we have access to because of that. But also knowing that not everything is right yet. Jesus has not come back to set this world right side up. And so there's this heartbreak to Advent. There's this waiting and longing that comes along with it. We're waiting and longing for many things. One of those things that we're waiting and longing for is for justice to finally be done. If you've lived in this world long enough, you have situations you know of and situations that you've come against where you didn't receive full and final justice. I think of a man I knew in a former life who ran a very successful business. And his accountant who worked for him told him that he was paying his taxes to the IRS every year. Well, it finally came out that this accountant was not paying the taxes to the IRS, but when every year he was actually taking that money and pocketing it. This man didn't know until the IRS came knocking and said, hey, by the way, you owe us hundreds of thousands of dollars and we're going to liquidate your retirement to pay that.

And my wife told me at one point, well, yeah, he's going to have to work longer than he was planning on working. He's not going to be able to retire because of what's happened. No matter what, there are some things that couple is never going to get compensated for in this life. We could take it up a notch. In Ukraine last month, there were two church leaders, a church leader and his son, who were disappeared by Russian soldiers. And a few days later, they were found, their bodies were found in the woods, in the forest, tortured and mutilated. And this father leaves behind a wife, five sons and one daughter.

And that will never be fixed this side of heaven. And so what happens when we demand complete and total justice now? Well, there's a few things. One, you could take the James Reese approach. You could find violence, someone deciding I'm going to make my own justice. That's one option. Another option would just be cynicism and despair. You're going to shut your heart down. You're going to stop hoping and connecting and engaging with others because it hurts too much. This man I told you about who had the experience with the IRS, I think he fell into the second category. He gave in to cynicism and despair in certain ways. That brings us to where we are in this passage, Isaiah chapter 11, because Isaiah's lack of faith from chapter 7 continues to unwrap and unravel. Chapters 9 and 10, which we skipped, God brings his judgment on his people and on Assyria. And

it's this great picture of darkness. Israel in the north falls into complete desiré. And we're told things like this in chapter 9, for everyone is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. Wickedness burns like a fire.

So there's this absolute devastation of God's people and of Assyria. But as we turn to the beginning of chapter 11, God has not left them without hope.

[10:08] And the good news for us is that God has not left us without hope either. And so that's why we have this image in chapter 1, verse 1, chapter 11. We're coming off this picture of hopelessness and despair, of wickedness flourishing in the land. But suddenly we're told out of this seemingly dead tree, there's going to come forth a shoot. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. What seemed finished is actually going to give birth to new life. There are going to be new beginnings for God's people after this judgment that they've experienced. It's not going to be true that they're going to live under the oppression of the Assyrians forever. It's not going to be true that evil and wickedness will continue to rule the day. In fact, it's not just that there's going to be new life. We find something even more exciting about it.

It's going to be a shoot from the stump of Jesse. Here's the story of the Old Testament. You know that Jesse appears in this featuring role in 1 Samuel 16 as the father of King David. God sends the prophet Samuel to Jesse and says, hey, one of his sons is going to be the next king. David is actually the runt of the litter, but God picks him anyway to prove a point. He doesn't need a man like Saul who's good by appearances, but he needs a man after God's own heart. The thing that's important for us to remember here is that when the word Jesse is used in the Old Testament, it is only in reference to David. It is never in reference to any other Old Testament king. And so when we're told that something's going to come forth from the stump of Jesse, what Isaiah is telling us here is there's not just going to be another king. It's not that there's a good king who's coming. No, this king is going to be so good. He's going to be like the greatest king Israel has ever known. This is going to be the second

David. That's the significance of the son of Jesse. This is the greater David that we're looking for. In the 19th century, a man named James Montgomery wrote a hymn titled Hail to the Lord's Anointed, and it referred to Jesus as great David's greater son, which is recognizing two things. First of all, Jesus is a descendant of David, so he's David's son. He's also greater than David. He surpasses David.

He's more righteous and holy than David. He's more powerful and glorious than David. In other words, in the midst of all this darkness, God is bringing a better ruler than his people have ever seen.

David is finally going to make a comeback. The king David is returning, and he will be better than the first version. So verse two here is telling us things similar to what we saw last week. So we're not going to dig deeply into that because there's overlap going on in the book of Isaiah. This is similar to chapter nine when we heard about the wonderful counselor, mighty God, but we're going to see that this king is filled with God's spirit in a way that's going to enable him to rule exceptionally well, better than we would expect from a mere human. Verse three, we find out that he's going to be filled with the fear of the Lord, which means he has no fear of man. And the important thing that we find out in verses four and five is that the poor and the meek are finally going to get a fair shake.

[13:38] Verse four, with righteousness, he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. No longer will it be true that those who have the most money get the best results.

It's not saying that the poor are going to win everything. It's going to say, it's saying here that they are no longer going to get the short end of the stick. This king is going to be able to see and understand things that are more and beyond mere appearances. That's what we learn in verse five. Excuse me, verse four, verse three. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear. He is able to see beyond the appearances of the matter to its very truth. He is able to do what judges and juries can only dream of.

This king is going to bring full and final justice. It's not going to be only those who can afford lawyers who are going to be able to get justice. It's going to be everyone.

And so the point here is pretty simple. The poor are going to get a fair hearing, and the wicked are going to be brought to justice. The poor are finally going to get a fair hearing. The wicked are finally going to be brought to justice. Finally, full justice is going to arrive. Finally, everything will be set right. Verses four and five. Jesus is the one who has a terminal list.

[ 15 : 31 ] Jesus is the one who knows the wicked and everything they have done. He is the one who is going to hold them to account. Verse four, he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Jesus is the hope of these people to make everything in the world right, to settle every score, to make all accounts come out as they should. And that's the hope of Israel as they live under the burden of Assyrian rule. That's the hope of Israel as they see injustice after injustice. That's the hope of Israel as they are living in a land filled with darkness.

And so that raises the question again for us of the temptations that we face as we also live in a world filled with darkness, a world that does not yet see the full light that it will in Jesus' second coming. How do we walk through that and avoid the landmines and the temptations that present themselves?

And there's a few temptations I've named already. First is the one to take justice into our own hands that we, if someone has wronged us, must punch back. Now I'm going to say, by the way, revenge is not the same as accountability. There's an appropriate way to be a whistleblower, to press charges, to pursue litigation without seeking revenge and vengeance. There's a time when we protect other people by bringing evil into the light. What I'm saying here is there's a temptation when we see and realize we can't get the justice we want in this world to take things into our own hands. It could be extreme, like James Reese.

It could be small and obscure, like destroying someone's reputation as a way of getting even. Even then, even if we do everything we can, justice is not full and complete. We cannot completely undo the wrong of this world.

The other temptation is not vengeance, but despair and bitterness and cynicism. To shut our hearts down and to eliminate the possibility of joy, to simply say, this is a dark world, and so I'm going to be filled with darkness as well. My only response is to stop looking for things to be right, to stop hoping and dreaming, to no longer have a heart that works. And the answer to both of these temptations is the same.

[ 18 : 18 ] How do we hold ourselves back from making all things right? How do we keep from shutting down our hearts because the pain is too great? It's not that we stop looking and longing for justice.

No, keep looking and keep longing. That's the point of Advent, that we live in this tension, and we're looking forward to Jesus' second coming, knowing that he's coming back and saying, as it said at the end of the book of Revelation, even so, come Lord Jesus. And so the solution is not that we stop hoping and longing to looking.

The solution is that we hope and long and look in the right direction. The solution is that we look to the shoot from the stump of Jesse, that whether we're tempted by vengeance or cynicism, that we set our eyes on Jesus. If we're tempted to take things into our own hands, we set our gaze on Jesus, knowing that he's coming back to make all things right. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, so we can stand down.

If we're tempted by cynicism and despair, our solution is also to look to Jesus and say, no, I don't have to give up in this world because I know one day everything may be set right. The court system may have gotten it wrong. Jesus will not. I may have been wronged. Jesus will make it right.

And so there's a turning away. There's a turning away from our own solutions and despair and turning towards Jesus and the justice that he is bringing. Now, this doesn't mean that we're apathetic about injustice in this world. I'm not saying that we give up fighting for what's right. What I am saying is this, we will not be able to do it all. No matter how hard we work, we will not make everything right. And so it means not that we turn away from doing what's right, but that our hope is firmly fixed on Jesus. That the horizon line that we look forward to is not when we have finished everything, but when Jesus returns again. As we live after the first advent, what we are looking forward to is the second advent. That everything falls into perspective as we look out on the horizon line of Jesus coming again. We have a different timetable and a different expectation.

[ 20 : 48 ] things in this world will not be completely fixed until Jesus comes again. And so that's why we look towards his second advent. That's why we pause this morning for a brief moment in our lives to say, hey, let's stop and remember that Jesus is our hope. Let's stop and remind one another that Jesus is coming again. Let's stop and guard one another against the dangers of revenge, the danger of giving up, and instead have the joy and hope that we talked about last week from looking darkness right in the eyes, but being able to stand it because we know that Jesus is

even brighter.

Knowledge of Jesus' return gives us a way of living in the world right now. Now the original audience, those who were living under Assyria, their encouragement was to hope and hold on. In fact, Isaiah tells us in chapter 10, in that day, the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

Brothers and sisters, we have even more reason to hope and hold on. Because we are not looking forward to the branch from Jesse.

We know he's already arrived. We are not looking forward to Jesus' first advent. We've already seen it. We are not hoping on a hope.

[ 22 : 36 ] We have a down payment. And so we have even more and greater reason to look and hope in Jesus. Jesus is able to bring full and final justice without crushing us because Jesus is the just one who was judged unjustly.

Jesus is the one who put himself on the terminal list so that he could take us off. Jesus is the one who's able to bring justice without crushing us, not because we're blameless, but he's taken our blame onto him.

And so that's our hope in Advent. Our hope is twofold. One, we know that Jesus has forgiven us and died for our sins. And two, we know he's coming back to make all things right. He is the redeemer and the creator.

He's redeemed us from our sins, and he's coming back to rescue and restore all of his creation. I shared with you last week that Jonathan Clark and I, Jonathan who preaches here from time to time, go and walk his dog Tuna every other Wednesday at 6.30 a.m.

And recently, Jonathan shared another story with me about his challenges, his adventures in parenting. Some of you may have met his daughter, Phoebe, who's four years old, and she's the most extroverted four-year-old you will ever encounter.

[ 24 : 08 ] And so Phoebe was very excited. They were going to go out trick-or-treating on Halloween, and they went out and they were having just such a fun time. Everything was great. But there was a man who decided he was going to have a fun time as well, and he dressed himself up like a shrub.

And then dressed as a shrub, he would hide by other shrubs, and he would jump out at little four-year-olds and growl at them. Very traumatizing experience. And so this man jumped out and growled at Phoebe, and of course she was scared and confused.

Before anything could happen, this man ran away. And so Phoebe, knowing that her father was there as the one to fix everything, said, Dad, what are we going to do about that?

And Jonathan said this. He said, Phoebe, God tells us to forgive our enemies. God will forgive him or God will punish him. It's not up to us to determine that he gets punished.

God will forgive him or God will punish him. He said, this is a four-year-old playground theology here for you. All of his badness is put on Jesus or God will pay him back for his badness.

[ 25 : 27 ] That's our hope. And so that night they prayed for the man who was scary and dressed like a shrub and was scaring little kids on Halloween. And Phoebe was still a little confused by that, but I think Jonathan just kept telling her, like, look, Jesus is going to take all his badness or Jesus will punish him for his badness, and we just trust Jesus to handle that for us.

And I told Jonathan, I said, I'm not a four-year-old, but can you call me every week and tell me that? I need to hear that too. Simple, profound, easy to forget.

You can be peaceful. You can have hope because God has been violent. He was violent either to Jesus on the cross or he'll be violent on the last day to make everything right.

But with righteousness, he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips, he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist and faithfulness, the belt of his loins. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you haven't left us alone as orphans in a merciless universe, but instead you father us, you speak to us.

[ 26 : 50 ] When we ask you, what are you going to do? You tell us all the badness that we put on Jesus or I'll punish the badness. We thank you that that's our hope and our confidence.

We ask that you would stir that up in our hearts, that we would look to you more than anyone else, that we would long for your second coming, your second advent, and that would allow us to live with joy and confidence in this world.  
We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.