

Peaceful Rest

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*In that day the Root
of Jesse will stand
as a banner for the
peoples; the nations
will rally to him, and
his resting place will
be glorious.*

ISAIAH 11:10

One of the great tensions we often feel during Advent is the disparity between God’s promise of peace and the presence of war and violence in our world. Isaiah foretold that the Messiah’s reign would bring a world without worry. Picture a mother at perfect rest, watching her children play by the cobra’s den and not leaping into action. As a father of five, I find this is hard to imagine!

Parents know that feeling of overwhelming panic when their child approaches danger. During the Messiah’s reign, as Isaiah describes it, that feeling will go extinct.

But in our lived experience, the world doesn’t look anything like this. Thomas Hardy’s nearly 100-year-old poem “Christmas: 1924” laments,

“Peace upon earth!” was said.

We sing it,
 And pay a million priests to
 bring it.
 After two thousand years of mass
 We’ve got as far as poison-gas.

How do we reconcile the promise of peaceful rest with the reality of poison gas—or ballistic missiles?

The answer lies in the tension of the *now and not yet*. During Isaiah’s day, the promises God had made to King David in 2 Samuel 7—promises of an enduring and blessed kingdom—seemed broken. The house of David resembled a felled tree. But from its dry stump a Spirit-filled branch would emerge: Jesus, the Son of David. He would bring peace to both Jews and Gentiles, standing as a rallying flag to unite hostile nations (Isa. 11:10; Eph. 2:15).

This is realized *now* in part through the church, where even tax collectors like Levi and zealots like Simon find peace through Christ’s blood. God’s worldwide temple is made of living stones, and the bricks God builds with are chosen from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Today we can experience the promised peace of the messiah-king who says to the weary, “I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

But the *not yet* of Isaiah’s prophecy will arrive with Jesus’ second advent (Isa. 11:4; 2 Thess. 2:8). This is anticipated by the Edenic imagery

of subdued predatory animals in Isaiah’s prophecy. Jesus will one day perfectly subdue creation, calming deadly beasts and turning even a serpent into a child’s plaything. The glorified world of the new creation will ultimately satisfy our deepest longings for justice and peace.

Advent reminds us of the glorious rest given through Jesus’s first coming and anticipates the full restoration that will accompany his return. In this time of tension—between the now and not yet—God calls us to be marked by his kingdom grace, a people who pursue justice for the oppressed and spread the knowledge of Christ in our communities (Isa. 11:9; 2 Cor. 2:14). It is through this knowledge that weary sinners receive the glorious rest of Christ’s kingdom.

Ponder Isaiah 11:1-10.

Which descriptions of peace most draw your attention? Why? Pray, expressing your longing for the peace Christ brings in the now—and in the not yet.