

Series: Here Comes Heaven

**Here Comes the King**

Sermon by Teaching Pastor Paul Joslin

Jeremiah 23:1, 5-6

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, December 8, 2024

A reading from the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘When I will raise up for David a righteous branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which He will be called, “The Lord, our righteous Savior,”’” The word of the Lord.

Paul: Good morning, Waterstone. You guys, wasn't that kids' singing awesome? So good. Yeah, I love when they get to join us on a Sunday morning. It is amazing, and as Sarah mentioned, it has been a fantastic week at Waterstone. She mentioned that we had sixty-six kids at our Bridge Christmas party on Sunday night. Also, am I in the dark right now? Is that true? All right, I thought I was, and they are working on it back there, so I am sorry to call them out. They are doing a great job, but we had sixty-six kids, and what you need to know about that is Kim does an awesome job with our Bridge. We typically have anywhere from like twenty to thirty students, fifth and sixth graders in that room. They made a huge push this year to tell those kids to invite their friends who do not know Jesus, so that they could hear the gospel story, and sixty-six kids came to that, so just phenomenal, like amazing that that happened. Then, I was also talking to Glenn, who helped. There we go. All right, now I can see. Well, actually now I can't see you, because the lights are blinding me. That's all good, so I was talking to Glenn today, who helps run our food pantry, and on Thursday this week we had 132 families come to our Waterstone food pantry to receive food, which is a record number for that group of people in that ministry, phenomenal, and that represents four-hundred individuals who are fed through Waterstone this week. So just amazing, awesome stuff that is happening in our church, and that is what it is all about. We are a church that wants to become like Jesus and live for others, and when we talk about those kinds of things, like sixty-six kids coming to a Christmas party to hear the gospel, or four-hundred individuals being fed by our church, that is made possible through your generosity, through your giving. It allows us to stay on mission, doing those things. I just want to thank you.

We are still ahead for the year, which is amazing and something to celebrate, but we always at the end of the year, we have a huge push at the end of the year to finish strong in our budget, and so if you would consider giving to us this year as we close the year, we would appreciate that, and it allows to keep doing the things that we are doing, but here is the truth about that. It is that we do not give because of what we get, or even because of what happens in the church. We give because of what we have been given, and it is just a way of expressing worship back to our Lord and savior of what He has given to us, and so we would love for you to consider giving to us as we close the year out. Sound good? All right, let me pray for us, and then we are going to jump in today.

Heavenly Father, God, as we come to this passage, this ancient text from the prophet Jeremiah, who hundreds of years before Jesus looked to the horizon and saw that heaven was coming, that saw this

promise of a king who had come to set things right, Lord, as we look at that text today, I just pray that you would fill our hearts with hope this advent season, and it is in Christ name that we pray, amen.

All right, so I do not know if you know this or if this feels true to you, but trust in our nation's institutions is at an all-time low. Does that resonate? Do you feel like that is true? Yeah, a little bit? All right, so I was doing a little work this week, and in this past spring, so 2024, the Pew Center reported that only 22% of U.S. adults say that they trust the federal government to do the right thing just about always or most of the time, 22%, which to be honest with you, felt a little high to me. I was not quite sure how we got double digits, but I guess we got there. That's great, but here's the thing; that may not surprise you, but this did surprise me. That is down from 77%. That was a statistic six decades ago. So, sixty years ago, 77% of our country believed that they trusted the government to do the right thing, and now we are down at 22%. That's wild, but it is not just the government. Also, people's faith in religious institutions has been plummeting, so Gallup reports that just 32% of adults trust churches or organized religion, which is down from 65% from the early seventies, and it even extends to the medical community. So, over roughly the same time, we have fallen from 80% trust in our medical institutions down to 36%, which to be honest with you, that makes sense to me, because we have Web MD, like do we really need doctors? I'm just kidding. That's a joke. We do, but we do not trust them. So, there is just this, the all the stats say, and I am sure your experience lines up with this idea that we just have this institutional crisis, where we do not trust leaders. We do not trust that people who are in power are going to do the right thing. We do not trust that they have our best interests in mind, and so it is causing this friction that we feel society.

As I was thinking about that, I was reminded of a few quotes that I have come across, whether it was in U.S. history class back in high school or just different readings of different leaders who have said things that encapsulate this idea that that we have some people who are just not great in power sometimes. So, here is one for you. I don't know if some of you remember this quote from Richard Nixon, "When the president does it, that means it is not illegal." That is not great. Like, we do not agree. That is not how things should be, but I don't know. It seems like it is true. All right. Then this one. Man, this one is just brutal, from Joseph Stalin: "The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of a million is a statistic." Man, that just like bad. Here is one that I feel like encapsulates a lot of how leaders act these days. Machiavelli said this: "It is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both," and then one of my personal favorites is actually from the philosopher and author of "Somehow, I Managed," Michael Scott from The Office, who said this: "Would I rather be feared or loved? Easy, both. I want people to be afraid of how much they love me," right? Which on the face of it feels better than Stalin's quote, but I do not know if it is all that much better, right?

But there's no question that we have and are living through a significant crisis in trust of leadership. When we see people in power, whether that is government or church or other institutions or corporations, there's just something within us that has this skepticism towards them, and while we may see that we have been on a plummeting scale of trust in institutions, it is not a new problem, right? For hundreds of years, people have looked at those in power and questioned and wondered whether or not they have their best interests at heart, and the truth is that at the heart of our text today, that is what Jeremiah is wrestling with. He is a prophet who is living through the downfall of his nation, and he has seen leader after leader after leader who has disappointed or proven to not be who they said they were.

Jeremiah has lived through leaders who have abused their power and oppressed the people, and he is looking at that, and he is seeing this disconnect between these people that God has put in place and told, “You are to shepherd my people and care for them,” and Jeremiah is looking at that and seeing that no one is doing what God has tasked them with doing. They have abdicated their responsibility. They have abused their authority, and so he comes to them in Jeremiah 23 verse one, and he says this to the leaders of Israel: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture.” He starts out with this warning against all of these leaders and these shepherds, who, the kings, the prophets, the priests who were supposed to take care of the people of Israel. They were supposed to shepherd them and watch over them and guard them, and instead, they were leading them into spiritual idolatry. When the people began to feel guilty about the things they were doing and thinking, “I am not sure this is quite right,” the prophets falsely told them, “Do not worry about it. God is fine. He does not care what you do,” and it continually led them to a place where they were facing exile and ruin, and instead of stewarding the responsibility God had given them, the prophets, kings, and priests of Jeremiah’s day had abdicated their responsibility, and so he is looking at this, and he is wanting to see someone who will come and properly shepherd and take care of the sheep.

What we all know intuitively, and the reason why when we see people who are supposed to be in leadership, who fail to live up to the standards that have been placed on them, who fail to look out for the people they have been tasked with taking care of, the reason that why that does not sit well with us is because we know it is impossible for people to flourish when leaders constantly fail, and so we live in this tension, this frustration, with knowing that people who are supposed to be in power, they are supposed to care for us, they are supposed to lead and shepherd and protect, and yet we become disillusioned and frustrated, because they do not turn out to be who they said they would be. They fail at their promises, and it is not hard to see why we would distrust them. We have the receipts.

It reminds me of my favorite Christmas movie. Is anyone a fan of, “It’s a Wonderful Life”? All right, thank you. I was about, we were just going to stop and watch it if you have not seen it, okay? It is so good. If you have not seen it, your task this Christmas is to watch, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” before New Year’s Eve, okay? Can you do that? It is such a good movie, and I love the main character in the movie, George Bailey. He is just the epitome of selflessness and caring for other people and taking care of others. He is the kind of leader we all want in our lives. He is the kind of person we can live up to, but his foil in the movie is Mr. Potter. Do you remember Mr. Potter? He is this angry curmudgeonly old guy who, it is just like he is evil on an insidious level, because he is not like super-villain evil. He is not trying to destroy the world. He is trying to steal your mortgage and make your family destitute, which is just like a different kind, and he goes about his life trying to take advantage of people who are vulnerable and trying to take people like George Bailey, who are trying help others, and get them to join him, so he feels less guilty about all the things that he has done, and he is completely irredeemable. He is corrupt. He is greedy, and here is the thing, why those leaders like Mr. Potter are so insidious. It is because throughout the story, if you remember, what those kinds of leaders do to us is they end up stealing our hope.

It’s not just that when we see people who fail in leadership, we end up being disappointed, but it is that we end up in a place of hopelessness, because we think, if those people who are supposed to be in charge, or if those guys are the people who are supposed to take care of us, if those are the people who are

supposed to have the right answers, if they do not care about us, and if they can't live up to those standards, then it leaves us at the place of thinking, "What hope is there?" and that is the place that the people of God have found themselves in. They have been waiting year after year after year, king after king, priest after priest, hoping and waiting for someone to show up who will just do the right thing, and they are left in a place of hopelessness, because if you wait long enough for the right person to come along, and they never do, then you are in a place where you think no one will ever come, and so they have lost hope, and in this space where they have lost hope, Jeremiah speaks these words in Jeremiah 23 verse 5. It says, "The days are coming," he starts this prophetic word with a promise of something that is to come. He is looking at the horizon. It is this whisper of hope. He says, "I know how things have been. I know how disappointed you are. I know how frustrating it is. I know how long we have been waiting, but "'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'When I will raise up for David a righteous branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.'" He starts with this promise of hope that one day, what God is doing in the midst of the waiting is that He is raising up someone who will be the type of king we all long for, the type of leader we all want to follow, someone who will be wise and execute justice and bring righteous. He is the king who embodies all that the failed shepherds could not, and he even has this hopeful image of a righteous branch.

Something that they are pulling on and the prophets are pulling from is this idea that the line of David had been cut down and destroyed, that over and over again, the kings who were supposed to lead the people did not live up to who they were supposed to be, and so the dynasty of David is seen as this stump, this lifeless stump with nothing left on it. Its best days are behind it. There is no hope of glory or future, and they say from that lifeless stump, God is bringing new life and going to raise up a leader. It is this prophetic promise that Jeremiah gives, this image of a stump, this prophetic promise that one day God will raise up a shepherd and a king who will truly take care of the people

He goes on in verse six, and he says this: "In his days, Judah will be saved," so in the days of this king, "Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety." So, there is salvation, and there's security offered, "and this is the name by which He will be called, 'The Lord, our righteous savior.'" What Jeremiah is saying is that this king will not only bring physical deliverance from all the evil of the world, but there will also be a spiritual salvation and a righteousness that the king has, that He imputes to those who follow Him, and that this person, this king, will bring restoration from sin and corruption and brokenness to the world. This prophecy is a beautiful promise that God will send a righteous king who will establish justice, bring salvation, and offer righteousness to his people, giving us hope for a restored world.

That is the promise. The problem is, when does this happen? Because we feel that tension, don't we? Like yes, Jesus came. He arrived. He was the Messiah. We believe that, and yet it still feels like there are quite a few people in power who are maybe not this way. It still feels like at times we are stuck in a world of darkness and hopelessness, where people do not have our best interests at heart, where people are leading people astray, where people are lying and using power for their own advantage. When we look at this picture, we can understand that there was a king who maybe brought salvation and righteousness, but what about justice and restoration? It feels like there is a little bit of a lag there sometimes, doesn't it? That is where we sit in advent. It is this gap between when Jesus came and saved, and when Jesus will return and reign, and we are caught in the in-between, and the trick of that is sometimes it is easy in those

spaces to lose hope, and to wonder, “How long do we have wait for that king? How long will it take for restoration and justice to take place?” During advent, our prayer often becomes not, “Joy to the world,” but “Come Lord Jesus, come,” because we are tired of the waiting, and the real truth, the real reason I think sometimes that is so difficult is because the people of God have always been a people who have been called to wait. When you think of the prophecy of Jeremiah, he is talking about hundreds of years of kings who have abdicated their responsibility and who have abused their authority, and he is praying, and he’s looking at the horizon, and he is saying, “God is doing something. God will bring the king that we all long for, but the days are coming. They are not fully here yet,” and that too can feel like a disappointment.

I feel like for the people that are reading these stories during the advent season, or even if you go back to first century Judaism, and they are longing and looking and hoping for a king, and they are living under Roman oppression, and they are seeing these Caesars who rise to power, and it has been country after country who have taken over them and left them in destitution and limited their scope of ability to live for God. They are just waiting, and then we have in the gospel of Matthew the place that we all like to skip over when we open to the New Testament, the genealogy, right? We skip over it, because we get to the first page of the New Testament, and it is like, “You are just giving us a list of names that we do not care about and frankly cannot even really pronounce.” It is really hard, right? We sit there, and we wonder like, “What is going on with all these people? I have no idea who these people are. I get a couple of them, but most of them I have no idea,” but there is a reason why Matthew starts his gospel with a genealogy, and what he does is he lists the kings of Israel, the leaders and kings and priests of Israel who have been waiting for the king, and what I would like to do with you today, as we close our time together, is I want to read through that, and now before you just tune out and fall asleep, I am going to try to provide a little color commentary for you with the genealogy, because there are stories in those names, and when a first century Jew who is waiting for the Messiah to come heard the stories of those people, they are not just hearing a story of like, “Oh yeah, that was that person.” They are thinking about all the different ways that these kings did not live up to the standard God had placed on them. It is like a who’s who of failures that Matthew starts with, and so I want to walk through and maybe give us an idea of Jesus’ dysfunctional, kingly family tree, and so we have an understanding of this idea of waiting.

So, begins in Matthew one, and I am not going to put it on the screen with you, so if I mispronounce it, you do not know, okay? I am just telling you, friends, that is what I decided to do, so you can’t judge me. Here we go. It starts with Abraham. Now, when we hear Abraham, what we have to understand is there is a footnote next on his name. He was a failure of a leader too. Abraham lied about his wife Sarah to Pharaoh, saying, “She is not my wife. She is just my sister. Why don’t you go ahead and have her for your wife?” He just totally abandoned his wife so he could protect himself, and he gave her to Pharaoh, and that is where we start. That is the first person on the list, Abraham, who was the father of Isaac and Isaac, who was really a coward and a failure of a father. He was the father of Jacob, and Jacob was a deceiver and schemer against his brother and also a dysfunctional father. He fathered Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.

Now a quick side note about that story. There is a lot of background there. If you know the story of Judah and Tamar, you know that Tamar was not just the mother of his children, she was actually his

daughter-in-law, and she had married his sons, and they had died, so they placed a family curse on her. They thought she was cursed, and so they left her destitute, and so she took matters into her own hands. She dressed herself up as a prostitute, tricked her father-in-law, Judah, who slept with her, then found out she was pregnant and threatened to kill her, and she said, “Sorry, you are actually the baby daddy.” If that story were on the Jerry Springer Show, you would not believe it, right? You just wouldn’t. Like that’s too absurd, but that’s in there.

Then we go from Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron was the father of Ram, Ram the father of Aminadab, Aminadab, the father of Nashon,” so we get through a couple of generations without a lot of drama. That’s nice, right? Then Nashon is the father of Salmon, which is always really funny to me, that there is a name “Salmon” in the lineage of Jesus, but Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, who was not just pretending to be a prostitute, but actually was a real prostitute, and Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, who was not even Jewish. Good job, not gasping at that. I was kidding. All right, Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of King David, which means his great, great grandmother was a prostitute, and David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife, which is another way of saying that David took Uriah’s wife and forced her to sleep with him, and then when Uriah started to get a hint of that, he had Uriah killed, and he was one of the good kings. Then from David was born Solomon, who was wise but married over a thousand women, which has all sorts of implications about his character. We do not even need to go there, but he was the father of Rehoboam, who was so unjust and so wicked and such an evil taskmaster that he was compared to Pharaoh, one of Israel’s greatest enemies, for how he treated the people like slaves, and he was the father of Abijah, and Abijah was the father of Asa, and while Asa started his reign like pretty strong, and he was faithful to the Lord at the beginning, eventually he turned away from God and turned to human solutions, and he made political alliances whenever he faced difficulties and lacked faith in God. So, his reign ended, and Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram, and Jehoram led Judah into idolatry, and he caused significant moral and spiritual decline for the people of God. He fathered Uzziah, and Uzziah was the father of Jotham, and Jotham was the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz was one of the most evil kings in all of Israel’s history. He sacrificed his own son to idols, and he promoted widespread idolatry. He was the father of Hezekiah, who did a pretty good job but still ended up being lackluster and a disappointment, and Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, who was without a doubt the most evil king in Israel’s history. He promoted idolatry, he sacrificed children, and he even placed idols in the temple, where we think he performed sacrifices of children, in God’s holy temple. He was the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah, who was actually a pretty decent king, and he turned the hearts of the people back to God. He found the Bible, and he was like, “This is really good. We should read it a little more,” but then at the end of his reign, things began to fall apart, and he too was sort of lackluster. Then Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin, which is another name for the king in Jeremiah 23, when Jeremiah looks at the kings of Israel and says, “Woe to you, because you have led the people astray and scattered the sheep that you were supposed to take care of,” and, “Jehoiachin and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.” The genealogy of Jesus is literally this who’s who list of all of these terrible people, who even some of them started out promising and started out with a glimpse of hope and a glimmer of maybe they are the kind of king we want and the kind of king we long for.

Then, every single one of them led to disappointment, and sometimes it was not even pure evil. Sometimes it was just that they let people down. I mean, have you ever been there? I mean, it is easy to point out the evil leaders. We can look at certain people on the world stage and say, “That is just a bad person,” but so many times the disappointment comes in leaders who are people we actually know, people that maybe we have placed on a pedestal. Maybe it is someone that we’ve respected, and then somewhere down the line, we figure out they were not quite who they said they were, or we feel disappointed because they just let us down, and it turns out that this person that we thought was our hero just turned out to be a human just like us, and it leaves us in that place of longing and frustration and disappointment.

I remember a couple years ago there was a lot of national news, because some very prominent pastors, one after another was falling, falling, falling, scandal and abuse and different things that were happening. I remember talking to a few other pastors, and they were names that many of you probably all know, and we had looked up to them. They had been global movement makers for the kingdom of God, and then it turned out behind the scenes they were trying to abuse their secretaries, or they had different things going on with financial strain that they were abusing ministry funds for. I remember talking with a group of pastors, and was just like, if all of these people that we have looked up to, who have taught us about ministry, who have written books we have read about how to care for the church, if these people continually fail us, then what hope is there? What hope do we cling to when people and leaders disappoint us and let us down?

That is the place that the people of God have been waiting and longing for, and my guess is that you have felt that sort of disappointment, that hopelessness when a leader whom you have placed on a pedestal has fallen, but thankfully the story does not end with Jeremiah 23 and Jehoiakim. The genealogy continues, “Jehoiakim was the father of Shealtiel.” That is the one I did not know how to pronounce, that I am just glad is not on the screen. “Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.” That was just fun to say. “Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, and Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Mattan, and Mattan the father of Jacob, and then we get this line, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus, who was called the Messiah.” That is our hope. This is another way of saying, “This is the long list of people whom we have been waiting for. This is the thousands of years of our history where we have waited for a king to come who will treat us with respect and compassion and justice and strength.” We have been waiting, but in this person Jesus the Messiah, He is the fulfillment of all our longing. He is the fulfillment of the promise of Jeremiah. He is the one who will reign wisely and justly and with love. He is the one who will bring the sheep back to the fold. They no longer have to be scattered. We are brought into his kingdom, where there is justice and love and healing, and He will establish a reign of a kingdom that will never end. That is our hope. Our hope is not in earthly leaders who fail us again and again and again. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, who never fails, the king of kings who was promised. Amen?

The difficulty with Christmas is the waiting. It is in the advent between Christ’s first arrival and his second arrival, and sometimes in the waiting it is easy to try to have a false optimism, but there is a really stark difference between optimism and hope. Do you know the difference? I mean, optimism is the kind of thing that a person says “Yeah, I hope the weather is going to be better this week,” right? That is

optimism, or “I hope that my relationship with my family, I think that will probably get better.” Or maybe, “My job. It will turn a corner eventually.” That is optimism. It is this unrealistic reality check, where we just think somehow things will progress and get better. Hope is very different than that. Hope lives in the moment, recognizes the difficulty of the circumstances we find ourselves in, and yet has an unwavering commitment to the God who will fulfill his promises. No matter what villains may rise, no matter what leaders may disappoint, we believe in a God who is who He says He is, and who does what He says He will do, and so we can look back at Jeremiah 23, which was prophesied thousands of years ago, and we can sit in the waiting, where we have experienced part of the fulfillment of that promise, and we can look to the future in hope, because we believe in a God who fulfills his promises, and we know that we believe in a king, Jesus, who will come to set everything right and conquer all villains and never disappoint. Amen? Amen. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, as we sit in the season of advent, God, I am sure there are people in this room who are in seasons of waiting, who have maybe experienced something of your goodness and life with you, salvation and righteousness and the things you offer, and yet are still waiting, Lord, for your ultimate return. God, we are all waiting for ultimate restoration. We are waiting on your kingdom. Help us to wait in hope. Help us to hold onto the truth that you are a God who does what you say you will do, that even through the prophet Jeremiah, these words that were spoken thousands of years ago, the days are coming. Lord Jesus, that is our prayer. The days are coming. That is our hope that we hold onto. Despite what we see in this world, despite the brokenness or the hardship or even the evil, we believe in a God who says the days are coming when all things will be made right. Help us to live in the waiting with hope, and it is in Christ Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

As we close today, I just want to invite you to stand in this moment and respond to this ancient prophecy, this idea that Jesus is the king of kings that was promised, and sing to Him your worship, your gratitude, and your joy that He is who He says He is.

32:16 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

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