

The Resurrection of Our Lord
April 21, 2019
Isaiah 65:17-25
“The Impossible Made Possible”

I admit it...I confess: “I am jaded.” How so? Well it didn’t start but it reached its culmination a couple of years ago. We were on vacation (I don’t remember exactly where we were) but we were in a mall and in that mall in one of the rented spaces were a couple of cars, Tesla cars. I had heard rumors but I had never seen one of these fantastical totally electric cars. So I went in.

Luckily the salesman was dealing with a couple further into the space who were looking over a Tesla Model X, their SUV. So I slipped into a beautiful red Model S and I melted into the seat. It was the singular most comfortable car ever. The seat wrapped around you, hugging you, encasing you in luxury. The dash panel was beautifully, artistically laid out. The touchscreen was huge. Easy to read. Easy to access. Intuitive to learn. All of the controls were within easy reach. The steering wheel itself was right there not requiring any great movement or effort to reach or manipulate. And then it happened. The salesman made his way over to me. He began the whole spiel about the design, construction, and stability of the frame. He showed me the huge battery packs that fueled the vehicle. He amazed me with the fact that you could replace any part of the vehicle easily in case of accident. He stunned me to silence with the fact that the Model S can accelerate from 0-60 in under 3 seconds. He intrigued me with the fact that you could click your key fob in a parking lot and your Model S will come to you. No more wandering around trying to remember where you parked. It was an incredible sales pitch. I wanted one.

And then I asked what anyone would ask, “How much is it?” I almost swallowed my tongue when the salesman quoted the cost of the Tesla Model S as “107,000 dollars.” A loan to pay that amount over the course of six years would mean that every month I would have to pay about 1600 dollars. That’s more than my monthly mortgage payment! Now that was disappointing but that’s not the reason I am jaded.

I am jaded as I confessed earlier because later I learned that in spite of all of the incredible promises made by Tesla regarding their beautiful car and in spite of the fact that it is entirely electric and great for the environment, Tesla is way behind on actually delivering their vehicles. And those that are being delivered have all kinds of issues. The batteries fail. The touchscreen that controls everything on the vehicle locks up. Water finds its way into the cabin when it rains. The reality just doesn’t live up to the hype. So I’m jaded. Give me a promise and I am not likely to believe it. I live and breathe the maxim: “If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.”

You know what I’m saying, because you too are jaded. You’ve been lied to too many times to take people at their word. “I will love you forever” quickly becomes “I just don’t think I love you anymore.”

“I will pay you back as soon as I get my next paycheck” becomes “I still don’t have the money. Just give me a little more time.”

“If you buy this program you will lose all that excess weight without changing anything in your life” becomes “Why am I so gullible?”

Israel knows what it’s like too. They’ve been lied to as well. False prophets have come and gone giving their assurances, “Fall down to Baal and your crops will grow and multiply. Worship Asherah and your wives will bear strong healthy children. Burn your baby in the arms of Molech and your sacrifice will be rewarded with enduring peace in your country.”

They believed the lies. They prostituted themselves at the altars of Baal and Asherah. They murdered their babies by laying them in the red-hot outstretched arms of the statue of Molech and watched them burn. And then in spite of all the promises they watched as the invading armies of Assyria marched into Israel moving from one town to the next murdering Israelite after Israelite, tearing unborn babies from the wombs of their mothers, dashing children against the rocks. They had to watch as their people were dragged out of their homeland with fish hooks in their noses and taken back to Assyria to die as slaves. They saw their fields uprooted, the labor of their hands being enjoyed by foreign invaders. They witnessed their own homes being inhabited by those who had not built them. Oh yes, they knew what it was like to be jaded. They had been duped, fooled, deceived. And now they were dying in a foreign land being forced to work themselves to death and not enjoying any of the fruits of their labor.

Oh yes they knew just like we know. They had been tricked just like we have been tricked. They had believed a lie just like we have believed a lie. And now they wait without hope that anything will ever change. They are jaded.

And then a prophet comes. You can almost hear it can’t you, “Oh no, not another prophet. We’ve had enough of prophets and false promises. We will not be tricked again. We will not believe whatever you say.”

And who can blame them? I mean really, who can possibly believe what Isaiah brings and announces? Isaiah claims to be speaking for Yahweh: “Behold I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind...I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days...They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands...Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,’ says Yahweh” (Isaiah 65:17, 19-20a, 21-22, 24-25).

You can almost hear the scoffing, can't you? The people of Israel are languishing in Assyria under the heavy load of slavery and Isaiah brings this drivel? "Who do you think you're kidding Isaiah? We've been there, done that, we will not believe fairy tales anymore."

And we can relate. We can understand their hesitation. Isaiah brings a message in which the Lord promises that He will make all things new, heaven and earth will be renewed. Then he explains what that means. The relationship between God and man will be new: "Before they call I will answer." The relationship between creatures will be made new: "The wolf and the lamb shall graze together." And well, it's just too good to be true, isn't it?

Except...this prophet is not like the false prophets who had seduced and duped the people of Israel with the sad result that they are in this mess in Assyria when Isaiah announces this promise. This prophet actually speaks the Word of God. You know how to tell who is a real prophet of God and who is a fake, don't you? The events foretold by the real prophet of God will actually come to pass. What he says will happen.

So has what Isaiah proclaimed come to fulfillment? Well yes. Isaiah 7:14: "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call His name Immanuel." Matthew tells us that Jesus's birth fulfills this prophecy. Isaiah 40:3: "A voice cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Again Matthew identifies this voice with John the Baptizer who announces the coming of the Messiah. And of course there is the whole fourth Servant Song Isaiah 52:13-53:12. For our purposes consider this portion: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – everyone – to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:4-7). Each Gospel writer picks various aspects of the Suffering Servant song to make the case that Jesus' suffering and death on the cross fulfills the prophecy.

So you see, it is clear. What Isaiah foretold has come to pass. It finds its fulfillment, its culmination in Jesus Christ. Therefore Isaiah actually is a true prophet of Yahweh. He speaks the Word of God.

So when he predicts what is yet to come we can be absolutely certain that it will happen as he says. And this is important because when we hear our Old Testament for today our jadedness is likely to make us roll our eyes and mutter "Yeah, right!" I know, believe me, I know.

When Isaiah foretells Yahweh's promise "Behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create" (Isaiah 65:17-18a) I wonder "How can this be? How can I rejoice and glad when I no longer remember the depth of despair in which I languished in this world?" You see for us it seems like there can be no real joy apart from sadness. But in the Lord's economy there

is nothing but joy and gladness and I don't really understand that. Or when Isaiah predicts Yahweh's future happiness over His people with the words "I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress" (Isaiah 65:19) I shake my head in wonder. "No more tears. No more crying." What is that even like? I can't begin to imagine life without sorrow. Furthermore when Yahweh indicates that "No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days or an old man who does not fill out his days" (Isaiah 65:20) I wonder what it would be like to have people living without sickness and disease. What is the world like when death is undone?

And then I shake my head and remember the maxim by which I live: "If it's too good to be true then it probably is." And I think: "Oh there I go again believing in unicorns and bigfoot and fairy tales like life without end in a world without sorrow in the presence of God in whom there is only joy." And I mutter: "Yeah right."

Except...except today is Easter! Today is all about the impossible being made possible. Today we walk with the women in mourning to the grave of Jesus Christ who was subjected to unbelievable suffering, crucified on a cursed cross, and laid in a borrowed tomb. We expect to find the tomb closed and sealed and a dead Jesus inside. Instead we find the impossible! The huge sealing stone slid aside. Two men in dazzling white announcing the impossible! "He is not here, but has risen" (Luke 24:5-6). He is risen! Impossible! Dead people do not rise! Except Jesus did! The impossible is made possible because of this day!

The impossible is made possible because of Easter. And what that means (among other things) is that what Isaiah foretold has begun. In the empty tomb of Jesus Christ death has been reversed. Death has had to give up its victim. Jesus has exploded an exit out of death in His empty tomb. And Paul tells us that this is not a once-and-done occurrence. "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Now if Jesus is the firstfruits that suggests that there is latter fruit still yet to come. This is what St Paul is saying, "For as by a man came death, by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:21-24). In other words, we too will rise from death to new life.

That's the message of Isaiah. This unbelievable picture of a remade heaven and earth, remade humanity, remade God and human relationship, remade creation has actually begun and we stand in view of the evidence, the empty tomb of Jesus Christ, the firstfruit of the resurrection.

Stand in awe with Peter as he gazes into the empty tomb and realize that the recreation has begun. Jesus is remade! He lives! And you too will be remade. You too will live even though you might die. Creation will be remade and I for one cannot wait! I will be there enjoying life where there is no sin, no disease, no sickness. The former things will not come to mind because there will be only joy and gladness in the presence of the Triune God who will hear even before I ask.

And I will run my hand through the majestic mane of the lion. I will pet the great grizzly. I will witness the justice of the Lord as He ensures that the ancient serpent will still have to eat the dust. This is no fairy tale that should be dismissed out of human jadedness. It is the fulfillment of a long running promise that has already had its beginning in the empty tomb. It is Easter and the impossible has now been made not only possible, not only probable, but inevitable. The new creation has already begun and you are recipients of it because you believe that in Christ Jesus your sins are forgiven and you too shall be raised to new life in a new heaven and new earth the home of righteousness. Do not doubt it. Christ has been raised! You are forgiven and you too will rise. You will see the events Isaiah foretold unfold before your very eyes. You will be there because in Jesus everything that separated you from God the Father has been removed and you are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.