

**2025 TALK, 23.11.25, ISAIAH 60:17-61:3, REVELATION 21:1-5, 22:1-7**

**THE KING OF TREES & THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Today, as usual, we are splicing together two passages. One from the 'First Testament', the second from the 'New Testament', or what could be called the 'Last Testament'. It's always good to reflect on the interplay between scriptures. Here we can see, straight away, the influence the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah had on the writing of the Book of Revelation. John of Patmos, the writer of Revelation, had read & re-read the Book of Isaiah so many times, that it fired his imagination in his sleep & infused all of his thinking during every day. John was so immersed in the prophetic writings, that he was able to write prophecy himself. So much so, that he was able to complete the 'New Testament', with this Book about what God had told him was: 'soon to take place'. The series of visions given to John must have felt very immediate to him, because he was indeed living them in his own time. And yet, here we are nearly 2,000 years later. Along with Christians of every age, we are still wondering: 'when will these things come to be...?'. The groaning of creation & the prayers of God's people all combine to ask the same question: 'How long O LORD?'.

Isaiah talks of the new heaven & new earth no longer needing the light of the sun or moon, because the glory of God will provide the eternal light source for the new world... Wow! What a vision that is. And John takes this vision further in the Book of Revelation. God's presence is so real that the glory of God shines out everywhere. From within the new Jerusalem. From within all of the new creation. From within every created being. What a promise!... We will have God glowing within us. Our new bodies will each reflect & bear the light of God. (Just an aside. This does date me... If you are my age, or older, you may recall those Ready Brek adverts from the 70s I think... Every child who ate Ready Brek for breakfast was sent off to school with an unearthly, warm glow inside them...! A distant memory... a slightly tongue-in-cheek picture, I realise).

... You see, God can use the imagination of adverts. God certainly used the imagination of the Prophet Isaiah to enlarge the visions that John of Patmos received, just before he wrote the Book of Revelation. What a picture this is... I am always profoundly moved by the image of God wiping away every tear from every eye. So profoundly personal. Also, this understanding that everything

within God's new creation - including ourselves - being filled with the joyful shining of God... Alleluia!

But here God is reminding us, in the new world, ***all of God's creation*** will display ***all of God's splendour***. It won't be for show... It won't be an opportunity for particular people to boast (like Donald Trump's golden toilet, or his latest extension to the White House). No, it will be to display ***God's splendour – in order to share God's glory*** with ***all*** of the new creation in Christ. What a vision that is! The riches of heaven & earth combined in the most amazing cosmic symphony of praise... ! Alleluia ! Every musical symphony that has ever been conceived & performed on earth will combine in the new creation's hymn of praise... Throughout the Book of Revelation, there is this combined hymn of praise that rises & falls: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive all glory & honour & praise'... 'for the blood of the Lamb has purchased men & women for God from every tribe & language & people & nation.' 'All nations will come to praise the LORD!'... And this mega-symphony reaches its crescendo with these invitations from God in the closing chapter of our Bibles: 'The Spirit & the bride say "Come". Let the one who hears say: "Come". 'Anyone who is thirsty... come & take the free gift of the water of life...'

In the writing of the closing chapters of the New Testament, God called John to go beyond the imagination of the Prophet Isaiah. He called John to go beyond his own imagination. In the same way, God has a much bigger picture to share with all of us this Advent... Need I remind you of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2: 'Things beyond our seeing & understanding - have all been prepared for us by God'... And of Paul's words to the believers in Ephesus: 'Now to him who is able to do ***immeasurably*** more than we can ask or imagine, according to ***God's*** power that is at work within us, to our LORD be glory in the church & in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever & ever!...'. Amen! Amen ?

Here in Isaiah & Revelation, we are not just confronted with God's plans for this world. We are also confronted with whole panoply of God's character & being. The overwhelming & mysterious glory of God's face / God's name. Just as God was revealed to Moses in a burning bush, so the totality of God's cosmic splendour is somehow revealed to us in a single oak tree, the King of Trees. The One who speaks to us from within the burning bush & from the splendid oak, is the God of all, who has been made known to us in the majesty of the life of one human being: Jesus of Nazareth. We come face to face with God - in Christ.

As Paul puts it so wonderfully in 2 Cor 4: 'For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory – displayed in the face of Christ'... Alleluia !

There's something else to draw our attention to, from Isaiah 60 & 61... It's good to give a fuller context to the verses of Jesus' Nazareth Manifesto, when he quotes the opening two verses of Isaiah 61. Reading parts of Isaiah 60 and the end of verse 3 show us two things: Jesus' plan for his earthly mission was founded upon God's ultimate vision for a new heaven & earth. Second - this vision embraces all of creation – because God's splendour can be seen not only in God's people, but also in a single oak tree. One oak tree (even one plant grown from a tiny mustard seed) are pictures of God's glorious Kingdom. PTL!

One human life, one tiny seed encapsulates all that God has in mind for our planet & for the whole universe. This Advent, let us re-capture something of God's global & cosmic plan to reveal God's new creation. It seems a bit of a non-sequitur, a bit of an anti-climax to mention COP30 right now... What do we see at this year's COP30 global conference, except lots of nations arguing & haggling as to what they might agree to, to ensure a more healthy planet for us all - & for future generations. One group of around 80 nations (nearly half of the total attending) have been refusing to agree the final text, unless it includes some wording about 'phasing out fossil fuels'...). LORD, may it be so... When I wrote this talk, we were still awaiting the final outcome of COP30...

Let me share a story I heard, from a BMS online webinar, I attended this week. One of the speakers was from Bangladesh. He works alongside Louis & Peter Lynch, at the same Christian College in Dhaka. Two things I would like to share with you, from the experience of believers in Bangladesh, one of the world's poorest countries, one of the most at-risk places from flooding if climate warming & climate chaos continues to worsen, like it is at present.

I learned firstly, that the Christian College in Dhaka is now at greater risk of flooding than before... Why is that? Well, it's because many of the buildings around the college have built up their flood defences & gathered together what soil they have on their land, so that they are less liable to flooding... That's **one** response to impending disaster. But, of course if the now lower-lying College gets flooded, it's very likely that all the surroundings buildings will also have to be abandoned too... Vast areas of that city will become uninhabitable,

due to filthy flood water spreading diseases, throughout the city. That will be whether or not some buildings escape being flooded. I can't help thinking here of Jesus' parable of the wise & foolish builders... Going beyond that story, by using prophetic imagination, we can see this as a parable for our times. For these times of a gathering storm; times of growing disaster & chaos...

It is only by concerted & combined action that we will be able to take our stand **together** against climate chaos. A minority (the super-rich in particular) trying to save themselves only is not going to work very well, if at all... The 2nd thing to learn from our Bangladeshi brothers & sisters in Christ is this: all of the 8,000 students studying at that Christian College are being encouraged to have a creation-care mind-set. Just one thing they are being encouraged to do as Christians is to grow at least 3 trees in their lifetimes... What a hopeful vision of new life for Bangladesh. Perhaps we could take a leaf out of their book...?

Today, I have used Isaiah's picture of the majestic oak tree. A bit like John's picture of the Tree of Life in Revelation 22. This glorious tree is somehow seen growing on both sides of the banks of the River of Life which flows through the middle of the new Jerusalem... Another case of God's vision going beyond our imaginations... What I'm thinking though, as I draw my talk to a conclusion is this: Some of us here, if not all of us here, might have problems relating ourselves to the splendour of the mighty oak tree. We might think: What are we, compared to the majestic oak tree? Well - how about instead thinking of ourselves as the mustard tree, mentioned by Jesus, grown from the tiniest of seeds?. How about the bruised reed, mentioned by the prophet Isaiah & in Matthew's gospel ? God will not overlook those who feel bruised by this life. God will not overlook what seems insignificant. God can do miracles with whatever little we feel we have. PTL! (I'm reminded of something we will see just next week. Michael Upton, bless him, has specially re-made our Nativity scene for us, for this Christmas. One renewed something for us to look forward to seeing, next weekend, as we decorate this place for Christmas).

This Advent, as we pray for the coming of our King, let us pray for God's vision for our church, for our town, our nation, our world. At Advent we stand at the beginning of a new church year. This season is not just about preparing for Christmas, as wonderful & important as that is. It is also about us preparing for God's future & what God has in mind for 2026... Let's have a few moments

quiet now. You should be able to see some pictures on our screen, during this time of quiet... (PICS OF ACORN ETC)

Look at these pictures of the acorn, the oak tree seedling & the young oak tree. And ask yourself: *What does God imagine for you & for Carey next year ? What new things does God want to grow in you, in the coming weeks & months? What does God have in mind for you & for Carey BC in 2026? Let's ask to be given visions & dreams of what God wants to grow in us & in Carey in 2026...*