

Our World Transformed

[Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

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One of my favourite places in Richmond is when you're heading north on 2 Road, and you start crossing the bridge to Sea Island, when you reach the top of the bridge, the view opens up and you can see the North Shore mountains extending across the horizon in every direction – on a clear day, it's absolutely glorious. I'm sure many of you have a similar spot somewhere in the Lower Mainland, a favourite place to just marvel at how beautiful this part of the world really is. I was born in Vancouver and lived here most of my life, but even though I've seen them countless times, that view of those mountains never fails to amaze me. The city beneath them is constantly changing – new towers going up, bridges and highways and skytrain lines crossing back and forth, but the mountains themselves never seem to change – they are so solid and so permanent, no matter how much the rest of the world changes, they stay the same. Especially when you compare that with a place like Richmond – this city is built on island in the Fraser River, an island that was constantly changing and transforming, and would still be changing and transforming if we hadn't built all these dikes and pump stations to keep the river and the ocean from flooding back in. Some things are permanent,

and some things are temporary – mountains stay the same forever, while islands and rivers are always changing.

And I'm sure the people of Judah in Isaiah's time thought that the same thing was true. After all, they were mountain people – they lived up in the hill country of Palestine, the mountains around Jerusalem, because that was the only place they knew they'd be safe. The flat and open places, the plains down by the sea, those were lovely places to live and plant crops and build cities, but they were also easy places for foreign empires to march their armies through – if you settled on the plains, you could count on having the armies of Egypt or Assyria or Babylon marching through your backyard every year, pillaging and looting as they marched, taking what they wanted and killing anyone who tried to stop them on their way through. Up in the mountains it was so much safer, so much more predictable – you could build strong fortresses to hide in, towers to store food, dig deep wells to draw water from mountain springs, and there no matter how the wars raged on outside the walls, inside your mountain stronghold you would be safe from the storm. For hundreds of years, that's how the people of Judah had survived – leave the rich and fertile plains for others to fight about, and stay in the mountains where things were safe and strong and permanent.

At least, that's how it was supposed to work. But in Isaiah's time, things were starting to go wrong. The invading armies that used to stay down on the

plains where the looting was plentiful and easy were now coming up into the mountains, attacking their fortresses, besieging their cities. The wars that used to wash over them and pass by were starting to return, year after year, stronger and stronger armies, with cruel new weapons for tearing down walls and breaking through fortresses, and every year that they withstood the invasion, that just meant using up their stores of food and water, leaving less for the next invasion, the next siege. The people of Israel thought that the mountains were permanent, strong, safe, but it was starting to feel like death and war and suffering were even stronger than the mountains, even more permanent realities in their lives. If the mountains couldn't protect them, what hope did they have? If death and suffering, war and starvation, fear and despair, if those are the permanent mountains they are facing, what hope did they have?

And in the middle of this crisis, the prophet Isaiah brings a message for the people from their God. In the days to come, the mountain of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above all the hills. God tells Isaiah that he is going to take the mountain of the Lord, Jerusalem's highest hill, the place where God's temple was located, God is going to take this permanent, unchanging stronghold and God is going to make it completely new. Completely different. It will be raised up higher than every other mountain, every other hill, Jerusalem will be transformed into the highest stronghold in the entire

world. And to a people exhausted by constant invasions and warfare and chaos, that must've sounded pretty wonderful. God was going to transform the world to make Jerusalem completely inaccessible to the rest of the nations – to take this permanent, solid mountain and lift it so high out of sight that those invading armies would have to give up and turn around and go home. But Isaiah isn't finished yet. When Jerusalem is lifted up, instead of making the city inaccessible, a distant stronghold far away from the world, the transformation God was bringing would instead place Jerusalem at the heart of the world – every nation will stream to it, every people will say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. God is going to transform the world, transform Jerusalem, but that transformation won't protect God's people by hiding them behind strong walls and mighty fortresses, by cutting them off from the world around them. The nations that are coming to Jerusalem now as invading armies bringing death and destruction with them, they will still come to Jerusalem, but this time they will come in peace. This time they will come to learn, to hear about the ways and walk in the paths of the God of Jacob. God is promising here to fundamentally transform the world, to take the most permanent, solid, inescapable, unyielding things and transform them into something new, something completely different. God will move mountains. God will transform war into peace, despair into hope,

death into life. Everything that seems so strong, so solid, so permanent, God is going to make them entirely new. God is going to make the world new.

And the way God did this, the moment this happened, was in Bethlehem. When God became a human being, when God created himself out of flesh and blood, built himself in human form inside a young girl's womb, when God set aside his eternal nature and power and love to become frail and helpless and weak, the world itself was forever changed. Because God is part of this world now. God is part of creation. Every rock and tree, every star and planet, every mountain and every blade of grass, all of us share part of our nature, part of our identity, with the Everlasting Creator of the Universe, the Great, Infinite I AM, he has come close to us, thrown in his lot with us. In Jesus Christ, in the child of Bethlehem, God made himself temporary so that we could become permanent. We who are so frail and delicate, who wither and fade with age and disease and death, God took all of those burdens upon himself so that we can experience eternity, so that we can join him and learn what it is like to last forever. In Jesus Christ, God has raised us up so far higher than we could ever imagine – In Christ, God has lifted us up out of the trouble and pain of this world and opened for us the kingdom of heaven, so that we can learn his ways and walk in his paths and become more and more like him, like our creator and King. Because of Jesus Christ, we can walk in the light of the Lord.

And that means that when we look at the troubles of our world, we can know that nothing that we see around us, nothing that we fear, none of it, none of it is permanent. All the strongholds that seem so strong, all the fortresses that seem impossible to defeat, none of them are permanent, because our God has already transformed this world. We look at war and pain and injustice, fires and floods and famines, we look at cancer and disease and infirmity and death, and all these things seem so permanent. They seem so strong, and so inevitable, but all of these enemies have already been defeated. All of these powers have already been brought low, when Jesus Christ was lifted up. Our God used death to conquer death, so that we could have everlasting life, and that means that even death is no longer permanent. Even death has been transformed, like swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, death has been beaten into submission, to be used for the glory of God so that God's people can be blessed. We have nothing to fear, because the only thing in this world that is truly permanent is the love of God, made real for us through the grace of Jesus Christ. Our God is still a God of transformation, a God who takes things that seem so permanent and makes them completely new. Mountains become sanctuaries. Swords and Spears become plowshares and pruning hooks. Bread and Wine become body and blood. Death becomes resurrection. God becomes a child. And when God is with us, we always

have hope, because the world is becoming new, and in his life, we find everlasting life. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.