PM Isaiah 11:1-10 & Luke 12:22-34

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Date: 11 October 2026

Preacher: Rev Ronnie Christie

[0:00] Testament reading is in the book of Isaiah chapter 11 and we're going to read verses 1-10.! Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1-10. This is entitled The Righteous Reign of the Branch.

! And this of course is a reference to Jesus. It finds its fulfilment in our Lord. And so it's an Old Testament passage that has got New Testament content in it.
There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear. But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.
And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his head.
[1:47] The Lord shall play over the whole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. In that day, the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the nations, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.
Just to there, may God bless to us this reading. We'll sing now in Psalm number 6. Now, our New Testament reading is in Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, and we're reading verses 22 to 34.
Luke chapter 12, at verse 22, and that is on page 1050. 1050. And it's entitled, Do Not Be Anxious.
And he said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.
[3:01] For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap.

They have neither storehouse nor barn. And yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?
If then you're not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow.
They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?
And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.
[4:15] Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Just to there, may God bless to us this reading also.
We're going to look at Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, and verse 32. Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, and at verse 32.
That's on page 1050. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

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[5:26] We've looked at different pictures that are used to describe the church of God. We've talked about it as a body. In the human body, there is diversity of form and function, and yet there is harmony in the healthy body.

All these different, varied parts work together as a unit. That's the way it's to be in the church. We're all from different backgrounds. We've got different gifts by the Holy Spirit.
We've got different experience of his operation in our hearts. We've got different cultural levels, perhaps, if you might put it that way. And yet, by a common experience of grace, we're united together to function as a body does, in complete harmony and unity.
That's what the church is, as a body. I think also we thought about it as a building. We lay ourselves upon Christ, the chief cornerstone, and we are being built up as a holy temple.
And that does all sorts of connotations, all sorts of applications to our daily life. But this idea of a building is displayed in Scripture as a suitable way of representing what the church is.
[6:47] I think we also spoke about the church as the pillar and bulwark of the truth. And we thought about decorative pillars. The church people are meant to adorn their doctrine.

They're meant to have lives that make the doctrine attractive, just like pillars outside, big key buildings, are meant to make it especially attractive.
And here, we've got a whole range of things that this verse brings to our attention. We are a little flock to whom the Father has been pleased to give the kingdom.
So we're going to look at this idea of the little flock first of all. Well, in a minute anyway. Now, you're familiar with the idea that you can be something outward, whereas you're something else inward.
It used to be that poor people would do anything to show that they weren't poor, even though they were. You had to cover up that and pretend to be better off than you really were.
[7:56] The Pharisees were like that. They were good outwardly. People thought they were good, but inwardly they were full of sin. And Paul had a similar way of looking at things.

Outwardly, we're perishing. Inwardly, we're being renewed day by day. So, I'm making this point. You can look at yourself, you can look at the church, you can look at the congregation from different perspectives.
And sometimes if you look at it in one way, you'll see something. But you can look at it from a different perspective, and you'll see something quite different indeed.
And that, it seems to me, is what we've got here. We've got the church, or the congregation of God's people, displayed in really various ways.
They are, on the one hand, a little flock. But they are also children of a heavenly family. They are subjects of a royal edict, and they are recipients of kingly status.
[9:03] And if you only see yourself in one way, you're missing the point. You're not to see yourself from one point of view, but bear in mind everything that is said here.

And the result of that will simply be this. You'll not be afraid. So here are our various descriptions of what God's people are like. And they have to be held in due balance.
And if we do that, it will be of great usefulness, practical usefulness for our Christian development. So let's look at these various pictures that we've got here.
And the first one is, we are sheep in a little flock. Now, the idea of God's people being sheep is quite a common one in the Old Testament and in the New.
But it's used in various ways. For example, all we like sheep have gone astray. That says Isaiah. And what are they thinking about?
[10:06] The proneness of sheep to stray. The proneness of the human heart to stray. Of the Christian to stray from God's paths. We're sheep in that sense.

Or we've got something much more positive in the 23rd Psalm. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. We are the sheep, and he's our pastor. He's feeding us.
He's caring for us. He's directing us. And that's something that gives us comfort and strength and hope for the future. When we see our relationship to the pastor in those terms.
But here, I think what he's got in mind is the vulnerability of sheep. They're defenseless creatures, generally speaking.
There are some animals that can escape predators by running away, but the sheep can't run fast enough to escape from wolves, for example.
[11:05] There are animals that have claws to defend themselves, but sheep don't have claws to defend themselves. There are animals that can bite and defend themselves in that way, but the

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sheep only has teeth that are equipped to crop grass.

All that the sheep can do is keep together. It's their best hope. But really, if it's a little flock, they're vulnerable indeed. And that is the way that Jesus is depicting his people here.
They're a little flock vulnerable to attack. They're, from the human point of view, relatively defenseless. defenseless. And they don't amount to much, it may seem.
And from that point of view, they are vulnerable to attack, as I say. And this is probably the sort of thing that Jesus derives from what he has said previously, or what he says in another place.
I'm sending you out a sheep in the midst of wolves. That's the way he sees the flock. Sheep in the midst of wolves. He sees their weakness, their vulnerability.
[12:16] And that's a way in which we often think of ourselves. We often say of a small congregation, it's just a little flock. And we're pointing out the relative weakness compared to what it used to be.

The difficulties that they feel because the world is against them. There are people that surround them, deriding their faith, contradicting their assertions.
And in general, undermining the truth of the gospel. Everybody's against them. They're up against it. They're facing difficulties. They're a little flock. And that's the way that we often see ourselves.
And that's the way the world sees us. Who are they? Just a little bunch of sheep. A bunch of stupid sheep. That's the way the world may well look at God's people. But the answer to the thing here is that Jesus takes that picture and uses it so that, although in some ways it's a very pessimistic one, Jesus recognizes that it's a realistic one.
And he says, Fear not, little flock. He acknowledges that that's what they are. Now, it is possible that they could be depicted in other ways. At this stage, they're really doing pretty well.
[13:33] And they're gaining converts and people are flocking around. But he doesn't say, You're like a mighty army sweeping all before you. He says, You're a little flock. And he doesn't bring in the picture that we have had historically of ourselves.

We are a Christian church and a Christian nation. We're no longer that now. But that's what we thought of ourselves for generations, for centuries indeed, in our own land. But he doesn't take that rather optimistic and positive picture.
He takes this one because he understands that this is indeed the situation of his people at different times of history and even in their own day.
They're going to face persecution. They're going to be taken before the courts. They're going to suffer death. They're going to be scattered. They feel like a little flock and Jesus acknowledges that.
Now, there's no harm in that. No harm at all in saying we're just a little flock. No harm in feeling that way from time to time. But the point I'm making is this.
[14:39] It's okay to feel that way but that's not the only way that we should see ourselves because he goes on to say other things here that balance the picture and unless we get these positive things in mind we're using this in a way that's less than helpful.

So yes, we are a little flock and if we see it that way well, Jesus saw it as well and we should not necessarily be ashamed of it. But let's make sure that we see ourselves in the way that Jesus respects us here and that leads us on there to the other points that we're going to look at.
We are also children in a heavenly father in the heavenly family. Just that word here father that's the way he's seeing them.
He's seeing them in relationship to those around him a little flock. Now he's seeing them in relationship to the one who's in heaven and he speaks of a heavenly father. They are children in a heavenly family.
Now many people wrongly think that everybody's a member of God's family. We're all God's creatures so we are. He cares for us all so he does.
[15:55] But the Bible undoubtedly makes it plain. There's another way of looking at things and it's not that we're members of the family by natural right or because we've been created by a loving caring God.

There's an added experience that makes us members of God's family and Paul in particular is one that speaks about this. We're adopted into God's family.
We are heirs of God and joint heirs along with Christ. And that clearly doesn't refer to everybody. It clearly means that there's something got to happen to you apart from being created by a gracious heavenly God.

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There's another experience by which God in his grace takes us from where we are and brings us into the family circle and makes us members of that circle so that we enjoy the privileges of that heavenly family.
And that's the experience that's behind the words that Jesus speaks here. And we've got it even in John's gospel. We don't have to go to Paul for it. We've got it in John's gospel.
[17:02] To those who received him, he gave the right to become the children of God. By receiving Christ, resting upon him, taking him as our own, taking him as our saviour.

By doing that, we have the right to become the children of God. We are brought into his family and can call him father father and look to him in that capacity.
And that's a way we have to see ourselves as well. Not just as a little flock, but as children in a heavenly family. And this brings us an enormous sense of well-being.
There's something particularly warm and comforting about this. Now some people may have not had great experiences of their father, who may have been not all that the father should have been. But it doesn't stop the fact that we all know what a father should be.
And so we've got to get this picture of an ideal father. And we've got to say that's the way that we've to see God. One who cares, one who understands, one who sympathises, one who's at our side to comfort and sustain and strengthen and direct and encourage.
[18:05] And that's what we've got in mind here. We're a little flock that are encouraged by a relationship with God by which we see ourselves to be his children and the father's care becomes ours.

So that's the next thing we see. A little flock, yes, but members of a heavenly family. Not only that, but we are subjects of a royal edict.
Now what we're looking at here are just these two words, good pleasure. It is your father's good pleasure to do something for you, to give you the kingdom.
It's his good pleasure. This is the way that a monarch speaks. These are the words of a sovereign who is making some sort of official appointment.
The king is pleased to appoint so-and-so to be his ambassador in somewhere. The king is pleased to do this or to do that, make an award or whatever.
[19:02] And even prisoners are held during his majesty's pleasure. It's the voice of authority. This is the act of a sovereign making official appointment.

Now the problem that I've got about this word is it can sometimes seem very, very cold. The king says I am pleased to appoint you, but he might have no particular feelings about the man or woman.
He might not even know them, but that's the way you speak, because he's the sovereign. It can be cold, it can be indifferent. He's up there and there, down there, and he says I am pleased to do this. It's something very distant sometimes. And I have to say that that's the way that this idea came over to me when I was much younger, just a teenager or even before that.
We were brought up in the Shorter Catechism, which I take it most of you know about, and there was this phrase in the Shorter Catechism that came over to me as ice cold.
[20:07] God, out of his mere good pleasure, elected some to everlasting life. His mere good pleasure. It sounded something impersonal, as if he didn't really care.

It was his mere good pleasure. He did it just because he wanted to do it. Nothing more than that. No warmth in it. That's the way it came over to me. And I fear sometimes that that's the way that sort of teaching comes over to people.
But that's not the spirit of it at all. When it says good pleasure, it means good pleasure. When this king makes an appointment, he does so with a smile in his face and with warmth in his heart.
And that's the way we should look at this word in the scriptures when it refers to God's activity. God was pleased to do this or pleased to do that. It doesn't just mean that he gave his sovereign appointment that this should take place or that should take place.
We have to think of the delight that lies behind it and the pleasure, the genuine pleasure that he took from it. And we know that in particular because this is the word that is used by the father about Jesus.
[21:15] You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased. Was that something cold and indifferent? The opposite. Warm delight, that's what there was.

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He loved Jesus for what he was doing. And he refers to his divine sovereign appointment in regard to it. But surely, surely, pleased means pleased.
It refers to delight. So this is the status of the members of the little flock. These are sheep, yes they're sheep. But also, there is this remarkable thing about them, that God has looked in them and he's chosen them as his own and he's made a sovereign appointment about them.
And he's done so with a smile on his face. And that's something, of course, that we should cherish. Because the world looks at us and mocks, or the world looks at us and frowns.
But God looks at us and smiles. And that's what this, to my mind, is teaching us. He's spoken about us. He's issued a decree about us that cannot fail to be accomplished.
[22:23] And he's done so with delight in his heart. Because good pleasure is good pleasure. So, what is it that God has appointed for us? And that leads us to the next thing here.

We are recipients of kingly status. So, we are not just a little flock, children, and a heavenly family, subjects of a royal edict. We are also recipients of a kingly status.
What is it he has appointed us to? It's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. kingdom. Now, this doesn't mean simply or mainly that here he is bringing us into his kingdom and making us subjects of his kingdom.
He's giving us the kingdom. And that isn't just the same as saying he's making us subjects of the kingdom. And the best way that I can put it is, which isn't very adequate, I feel, but we are recipients of a kingly status.
So, it's not just that we are brought into the kingdom to be humble subjects of the kingdom. We are that. But he's given the reins of the kingdom to us.
[23:37] He's giving us kingly status to us. We are made recipients of a heavenly, of a kingly status. And we've got that, of course, elsewhere in the scriptures, in 1 Peter, it says, I think, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a royal priesthood.

We are royalty. We're not just members of the kingdom. We're royal members of the kingdom. That's the sort of idea that there is expressed here. Now, of course, the difficulty is explaining what that means.
And I don't know what that means, if quite honest. I don't know what that means. But I get the general idea that Jesus is trying to convey here. You're not to think of yourselves as mere subjects in the kingdom.
You've got a ruling function. You've got a measure of authority in the kingdom. You're people that have to be respected as princes in the kingdom, princesses in the kingdom. That sort of thing is what is in mind here, I think.
Now, it may be that the proper realization of this in practice will come out in the future, in the hereafter, in the world to come.
[24:44] And it may be that that is what we should be thinking of, mainly here. I don't know. I do remember that the disciples were told, you shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, which implies to my mind some kingly status, some authoritative position in the kingdom.

And that, I think, is what he's talking about here. As far as what it means for us in this life, there's one thing that I probably mentioned it before here, but I'll mention it again because I like it and if we could only hold on to that, it would make a difference to the way we saw ourselves.
Jesus says to his people, ask and it will be given to you. And we take that as a promise, whether we hold on to it as well as we should or not, I don't know.
But, you know, just think of that. Jesus says, ask and it will be given to you. That's amazing.
What authority that gives to us. We've just got to ask for something and it will be ours. And not only that, it brings us into line with what was said to Jesus.
[25:56] He was appointed king as we saw in Psalm 2. And what did the father say to him? Ask of me and for heritage that heathen I'll make thine.

And for possession I to thee will give earth utmost line. The father said to the son, ask me and it will be yours. And the son says to us, ask and it will be yours.
This is giving us the sort of status that Jesus himself enjoyed. Astonishing. But then Paul says we're heirs of God and joint heirs along with Christ.
And if he's got kingly status and we're heirs along with him, we've got kingly status. I've no doubt at all that that's what the Bible is teaching us. What it means goes beyond my powers to describe or even imagine really.

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But it's a remarkable thing that he's saying here. And what he's saying, and he's saying this to the little flock. Don't worry. Don't be afraid.
[27:04] It's your father's good pleasure to give you kingly status. No wonder he says do not be afraid. Do not fear. Don't fear. Fear not.

No wonder he says that. Because if you hold these things side by side, yes we're a little flock despised in the world, small in our own eyes, with no great prospects from the human perspective. But on the other hand, we've got a heavenly father who has set his love upon us and delights in us and gives us some measure of authority in the affairs of the kingdom.
And this can only mean that we're not going to fear. What does it matter what the world says to us? God has said to us, I take delight in you.
What does it matter if the world finds when God smiles? What does it matter if the authorities of this world seem to be against us and haul people before the courts for preaching the gospel?
[28:09] What does it matter if we've got God the father on our side who will care for us as a father cares for his children who moreover has appointed us to this dignity?

Why be afraid of the world when we've got a God like this on our side? And that seems to me is the teaching that this verse is giving to us. And so the secret is to bear these two things in mind and try and put them together in our thinking so that the one affects the other.
And when we do say, oh, who are we? We're just a little flock. I don't mind you saying that as long as you also say, yes, but there's another side to the picture.
So every time that you think of being discouraged and of being poor and needy and despised and helpless, just remember the other side of the picture and chase your fears away and say, no, I'll trust in God.
He's made these promises. He's expressed this purpose. I will not fear because we have a heavenly father who has made a royal edict about us and that is that we should have kingly status.
[29:24] May God bless to us his word.

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