

Isaiah 11:1-10

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, would you cause the Holy Spirit to rest on us as it rests on Jesus! Oh, so lovely to be in the brilliant and bizarre world of Isaiah again.

Isaiah is bewildering, bewildering, it's bewildering and beautiful at the same time. It's a book that's designed to heighten our longing for the coming of Jesus, which is precisely why the church reads it, especially during the season of Advent.

Throughout church history, it's often been called the fifth gospel. You have Mark, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and if you go back, you have Isaiah. Because his depictions of the Messiah are so vivid and the results of his saving work so gripping that it's hard to read Isaiah without coming away that you've been feeling that you've been face to face with the Savior.

Now, the particular section that we're dropping in in Isaiah is the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, and it's quite a depressing section of the book. It's a lot of doom and gloom.

It's a lot of God's people feeling like they are growing weary, waiting for the promises of God to be fulfilled in their lives, and yet waiting and waiting and waiting.

[1 : 44] And God gives them, in the middle of their waiting and the doom and gloom, he gives them timely little glimpses of the coming Messiah. He gives them little visions of hope, little portals into a world of redemption that is coming their direction when God sends his Messiah to save the world finally and firmly in the hands of his love and his mercy.

And in chapter 11, we are dropping into one of these little portals of hope. And Isaiah shares the hope with us in three parts. In verse 1, it's the promise of the Messiah.

In verses 2 through 5, it's the person of the Messiah. And then verses 6 through 9, it is the peace of the Messiah. And right off the bat, he begins in verse 1 with the promise.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the main point is this. Life is not hopeless because the promise of God is not fruitless.

Now, you have to think about this image. Think of the stump of Jesse. On the one hand, Jesse was the father of David. So he represented all the promises of God that had been going down through the centuries and were supposed to come to fruition in this Davidic king who would rule and reign and have a throne forever on behalf of God.

[3 : 04] So to mention Jesse is to mention, to call to mind all the promises of God and where they're supposed to be heading in the world. And to bring up the image of a stump is to bring up the image of a tree that's been felled and cut down and all that's left is something on the ground with no life in it.

So it's an image of lifelessness. It's an image of fruitlessness. And if you put these two things together, the stump of Jesse, it raises the question, have the promises of God come to nothing? And this is a question that God's people were asking in this season of their lives. And maybe that's something that when you look at your life today, you go, there's not many signs of God's life in me right now.

Or maybe you look at the church around you and you go, where are the signs of God's life or the world around you? Where are the signs of God's life? Have the promises of God come to nothing? Are they fruitless?

Now to make matters even worse, in the book of Isaiah, a stump is an image of divine judgment. So it's not just that God's promises haven't come to fruition or we're wondering how they are going to come to fruition.

[4 : 18] It's that God has been judging his people for their sins and their unbelief and their injustice and also judging their enemies as well. And so there's this image of an axe being laid at the root of the tree and it's about to be chopped down.

That's something that even John the Baptist was describing, right? And so the question is not just have the promises of God come to nothing. The question is, will the promises of God survive the judgment of God?

And verse one is a visual affirmation straight out of the gate that the promises of God will hold true for his people no matter how dire and desperate the situation gets.

It's an image of a new green sapling emerging out of a dry, barren stump. It's the promise of new life and new grace and new mercy.

And in the second half of verse one, we see that there's a new branch, which Isaiah goes on to describe as the person who the Messiah is. And then this branch will bear fruit, which Isaiah goes on to describe as the peace that the Messiah will bring.

[5 : 31] And so the main point right out of the gate is life is not hopeless, even if it seems like it is, because the promise of God is not fruitless. He is sending a Messiah who will bring a reign of justice and peace.

So let's look at verses two through five, the person of the Messiah. Now, this word Messiah literally means anointed one. It's translated in the New Testament as Christ.

So whenever you see the word Christ in the New Testament, Hebrews would have been thinking Messiah, and that would have meant anointed one. And that's the first thing we learn about the Messiah here in verse two, that he is uniquely anointed by the spirit of God to bring justice to the world.

Verse two, the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. It's the same language that's used in the Gospel of Matthew when it describes Jesus' baptism.

It says, Jesus saw the dove descending from heaven and resting upon him. 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 of the fear of the Lord.

[6 : 43] In other words, Isaiah gives us seven descriptions of the spirit, the number of completion and perfection, because he wants us to understand that all of the spirit rests on all of Jesus.

That there is no aspect of gifting or power or might that the spirit withholds from the Messiah. The Messiah is full of the fullness of the spirit.

God does not hold back from the Messiah, the fullness of the spirit. You get the point? Now, this is why he's different from every other ruler in the world, because he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is why people, when they heard him teach, they meant, this guy teaches with such power and authority. That's why they saw him cast out demons and heal the sick.

And that's why they saw him sit down with sinners and tax collectors and yet stand up to the scribes and Pharisees. And that's why they heard him utter words of forgiveness from the cross to the very people who nailed him there.

[7 : 47] Because the spirit of the Lord rested upon him. And every word he spoke and every thought he thought and every decision he made and every intention of the heart and every action that he took in life, all the aspects of his kingship and his leadership emerged out of being full of the Holy Spirit.

And Isaiah, as he goes on, he highlights three of these things for us. He says the Holy Spirit gave him great insight and great integrity and great inclination.

And we see the great insight through this word knowledge. The Messiah knows exactly what is needed in each situation. Verse 3, that's why he doesn't need to judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear because the spirit of the Lord gives him wisdom and understanding and counsel and knowledge.

He has the power to see into the heart of every single person. To see into the dynamics of every single situation. To understand exactly what the right course of action is for each person, each place, and each situation.

He has great insight. And the second thing is added to his insight is great integrity. And thank the Lord for that. I mean, how many leaders today might have insight into what to do in a situation, but what they lack is the integrity to follow through and do it?

[9 : 13] And the key word here is righteousness, which shows up in verse 4. But with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. And with the breadth of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Verse 5, righteousness shall be the belt of his waist.

In other words, the Messiah not only knows what to do, but he has the character and capacity to do it. Righteousness is his moral integrity. He knows exactly the right thing to do in every circumstance.

And no matter what opposition comes his way, he will set his face to doing it. And added, thank the Lord, to this great insight and this great integrity is great inclination to do the right thing.

So this comes up at the end of verse 5. If you look at that word, faithfulness is the key word. So we have knowledge, we have righteousness, and we have faithfulness. It says that faithfulness is the belt of his loins.

[10:18] In other words, the Messiah knows what to do. He has the character and capacity to do it. And he has the desire and the faithfulness to do it. He's hungry to do this.

He's committed to fulfilling God's promises for his people, no matter what it costs him. So faithfulness describes that aspect of Jesus' character, that consistency and that dependability and that loyalty that he has to pursue the promises of God in our lives and in our world in all circumstances.

It's wrapped around him like a belt. He's ready for action. He's ready to act on behalf of another over and over and over again. And so the person of the Messiah that Isaiah wants us to long for this Advent is somebody who is full of great insight and full of great integrity and full of great intentionality and inclination because he's full of the Holy Spirit.

And that's what Isaiah is doing. He's pulling back the veil for us. And he's saying life is not hopeless because the promises of God are not fruitless because God has a spirit-anointed Messiah who will bring justice to the world.

And when his righteousness flows like a mighty river and his justice stands like a mighty mountain, the world will be remade by his peace.

[11:48] And that's the third thing that we see in verses 6 to 9 is Isaiah's vision describes the peace of the Messiah, what the results of his reign will be. And the image is wonderful.

It's the image of a new creation. The image of a new Garden of Eden. In verse 6, we see that enemies are reconciled to one another.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat. And the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together. And the little child shall lead them.

In other words, animals that are normally in competition with one another are actually dwelling together and hanging out together. Enemies are reconciled. That's the image. And then in verse 7, we hear that order is restored.

The cow and the bear shall graze. Their young shall lie down together. And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. In other words, the lion has become a vegetarian.

[12:52] Now, this sounds like a small little detail, right? I don't... But it actually is hearkening back to Genesis chapter 1, where all the animals of the fields and the forests are given plants of the earth to eat.

So it's not that the Bible has a vision of... this utopian vision of everything's vegetarian. But there is this image in Genesis chapter 1 of animals eating the plants for their sustenance.

So here in verse 7, by highlighting the fact that the lion's gone vegetarian, Isaiah is basically saying the original order of Genesis 1 has been restored.

So enemies are reconciled. Order is restored. And then verse 8, we observe that the curse is removed. They shall not hurt or destroy.

And sorry, that's verse 9. Verse 8, the nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

[13:54] You know, there's this part in Genesis chapter 3 after Adam and Eve's sin where there's a curse put, and there's a conflict between the serpent and human beings.

The serpent's head will be crushed, but the human being's heel will be bruised. In other words, there is a damaging conflict between them. And so this imagery of the child and the cobra playing together is meant to be this poetic way of saying the curse has been lifted and removed.

So we have enemies reconciled, order restored, curse removed. It is the total, all-encompassing piece of the Messiah when he comes to reign.

And yet maybe the most surprising and stunning statement of all actually comes in verse 9. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. Why?

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In other words, everything in this new creation, as magnificent as it is, hinges on one thing.

[15:00] It's knowing the Lord. In verse 2, the Spirit gives knowledge to the Messiah to establish justice on the earth. And now in verse 9, the world's peace depends on knowing that Messiah.

Now, you can imagine people saying, are you really sure about that? Are you saying? Are you saying that knowledge of the Lord is the only way to world peace?

Because I know a lot of people who claim to know the Lord and they still get caught up in a whole lot of power games and battles. Or I know a lot of people who think that the claim that there's only one king or one savior or one Messiah or one God that we must bow to is actually part of the problem that's causing so much strife in the world.

Like, how many bloody wars have been started by exclusive claims to divinity and messianic claims to be the only savior? And, I mean, wouldn't the world actually be a better place if we abandon those messianic claims and we let people kind of run their own lives where people were allowed to look after themselves and pursue their interests and just live their version of what's the best life? Doesn't world peace come by embracing diversity instead of insisting on one person's supremacy? I think it's a fair question.

[16:29] And I think unless we feel some of its weightiness, I don't think we're going to feel the full weight of the vision of Isaiah 11. Isaiah is saying, in no uncertain terms, there is no other way to peace in the world than through the reign of this one king and through a deeply intimate, saving, personal knowledge of him.

Now, verse 9 is probably better translated the knowing of the Lord instead of the knowledge of the Lord. And that's significant because what makes for peace here is not an abstract knowledge, I just know about somebody.

It is a deeply personal knowing, a seeing somebody face to face. And when creation knows Christ face to face, when the beauty and the glory of Christ is revealed for all of creation, it changes everything about creation, nothing remains the same.

The lion and the lamb dwell together, the children and the cobras play together, everything transformed by the glory and the beauty of the Lord, becoming lovely as it reflects him and finding its peace and its place and its joy under him.

People finding their meaning and their purpose in him and connection and relation to him and bathed in the peace of knowing him. As the waters cover the sea, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord and peace will reign.

[18:02] Now, I can imagine some of the inner skeptics in us probably piping up at this point and saying, well, that's great and all, Jordan, but when is all this going to happen? It feels more like a utopian wish dream than it does a promise of assurance or something we can bank our lives on.

Like, how are we to live when in the middle of great injustice, which still exists? And how do we hold on to hope when things feel pretty hopeless, like I just see a bunch of stumps around?

I mean, that's a nice vision of a garden, but I feel like I'm living in a wasteland. And I want to suggest that this is precisely what the season of Advent is all about in the church.

It's why the church reads Isaiah in Advent, because Isaiah is a book that's designed to heighten our longing for the coming of Jesus. It doesn't resolve all our tensions.

It heightens our longing. And actually, when Isaiah speaks, it almost, in a sense, creates a spiritual tension in us because Isaiah is saying that the promises of God are true.

[19:16] They are not fruitless and they are not lifeless. They will come to fruition in your life. They will come into fruition for God's people. They will come into fruition for the world. There will be justice and peace that reigns over the whole world.

And yet we're sitting here looking around going, Lord, that's not the world I live in. How long, O Lord? When will your Messiah come and establish what you said he will do?

And so Isaiah himself creates this tension in us between the promises of God and the world around us. And even when Jesus comes, it doesn't fix the tension.

It almost heightens the tension because we finally get to know who it is that is this person, this Messiah that is described as being full of the Holy Spirit. And it heightens all these expectations. We say, finally, he's going to bring priest to the poor. Finally, he's going to care for those who are fatherless and orphaned. Finally, he's going to bring a redemption in my life that I've finally been waiting for.

[20 : 19] I'm so glad the Messiah is here. And yet we realize that even when we know him, we do not experience the fullness of peace that Isaiah promises.

And so we live in this already and not yet tension where the person of the Messiah has been revealed to us and we see him face to face. And yet the peace that he has promised to bring to us, we know is not yet here in all its fullness.

And so we keep looking at the person and we say, please bring the fullness of the peace. And it's as we keep looking at the person that we keep realizing that we can trust that he will bring the fruition, to fruition the promises of God, that life is not hopeless because the promise of God is not fruitless, because he has sent a Messiah who will bring justice and peace to the world.

He has come for us once and he will come for us again. And of that we can be assured. And so we can join our voices with creation and with all the saints who have celebrated before us for many centuries and we can cry, come, Lord Jesus, come.

We can live in the tension of knowing the person and still waiting for the full fulfillment of the promises because we know that the promises of God are not fruitless.

[21 : 50] Brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you on the second Sunday of Advent as we wait for him to come and set us free.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.