

Advent - Isaiah 11:1-10 - ADVENT 1-Emotions of Christmas: Longing & Hope

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Like many of you, I love the Christmas season. I love the celebrations, the music, the traditions, everything that goes along with Christmas.
- I try to pack as much of that as I can into the month of December. And I usually find myself exhausted even before staying up all night on Christmas Eve.
- For others of us, Christmas is painful and hard for a variety of reasons. We just want to get it over with and get to the new year.
- Regardless of which one of those groups you would put yourself in. And whether we're rushing to get it over with or packing the calendar with Christmas festivities, most of us struggle to allow the story of Christmas to penetrate and deeply impact our hearts.
- [1 : 09] For some reason, it's just one of those things that's really tough for us. And it's so vital that that happened because our hearts, those deepest emotions and affections, that they shape who we are and how we approach all of life each day.
- Our hearts control the rest of our lives, right? How we speak. How we spend our time. How we make our priorities. How we engage with others. And so it's vital for us to let God's Word address and shape our hearts.
- And I think it's particularly important with the message of Christmas. The fact that the incarnation of the very Son of God Himself, the coming of Christ to earth to rescue enemies of God like us and make them His sons, it has to impact us at the deepest levels of our heart.
- It must. But it's so easy to miss. So over the next few weeks, we're going to look at Christmas and our hearts.
- Let every heart prepare Him room. Every heart. That means hearts busy with Christmas merriment and hearts just ready to rush past it and get it over with.
- [2 : 31] We're just going to try together to slow down. Not merely to learn some more things, but actually to experience together the impact of the coming of Christ.
- To have His birth address the range of emotions that we experience day in and day out, year-round, not just at Christmastime. Now, I know that to a room full of a lot of engineers or a lot of Type A personalities like myself, the idea of spending multiple weeks addressing our hearts and the emotions there is a little risky.
- I feel that. Some of you are ready to leave now. But we need this. Y'all, we have to have the reality of the incarnation of God impact our hearts.
- God has worked on my heart so richly and deeply as I've prepared the past few weeks. And I'm excited to get to share in this and in some of these glorious passages we're going to look at over the next few weeks.

So let's pray together for this time in God's Word. And then we'll talk this morning about longing and hope from Isaiah 11. Pray with me. Father, we come to Your Word and we're thankful that it is living and active.

[3 : 57] That it penetrates dividing joint and marrow to our very hearts to show us the thoughts and the intentions of our hearts. We thank You for that, but honestly, sometimes we don't like that.

We'd rather keep Your Word and even You at arm's length. Oh, Holy Spirit, don't let our hearts do that this morning.

Would You mold our hearts as we come to the Word of God and open it together. You, Holy Spirit, soften our hearts. Shape them as You would have them to be that we might know more and love more our great God.

Would You do that work in each of us for Your glory? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Many of us have visited the beautiful mountains of East Tennessee.

glorious forests like this one in Gatlinburg. We've vacationed there, enjoyed the beauty and the grandeur. And so we watched this week with great sadness, didn't we?

[5 : 13] As reports came back of forest fires. Devastation that was going on in the Gatlinburg area and the areas around there.

Buildings, homes, neighborhoods, and forests decimated by the blaze. Basically, beautiful, glorious places brought to nothing overnight.

Those beautiful forests we've seen reduced to smoldering stumps. Pictures that you see discouraging and lifeless and hopeless.

Well, that's the context of Isaiah chapter 11, actually. God has spoken of His people Israel and other nations as well as mighty forests that He has decimated swiftly.

He's reduced them to stumps, as it were. They are seemingly lifeless and hopeless at the end of Isaiah chapter 10, brought to nothing.

[6 : 27] And to that very hopelessness, He brings this hope through the prophet Isaiah chapter 11 at verse 1. This is God's holy word.

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 waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

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

[7 : 35] The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or 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 peoples, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Amen. What a beautiful passage. What a glorious, hopeful prophecy. But the passage starts describing God's people as a stump.

As I said, they've been described as a forest, now decimated. And they've been longing, haven't they, to be who they were created and called to be, as God's glorious image bearers, his treasured people, a kingdom of priests to be a light to the nations.

This is who they are to be. That's the longing that the people of God have been experiencing for generations. I want us to explore that longing for just a couple minutes.

[9 : 01] For our purposes this morning, I'll describe longing as our deep desire for true fulfillment. For things to be as they should be.

You see, for God's people in Isaiah's day, this longing that they have is not a recent development, is it? You can go all the way back to Eden, to the garden, where God creates people to live in this wonderful relationship with Him and to reflect His glorious image, but they fall.

They're banished from the garden, having broken their relationship with God and brought themselves and the rest of His good creation under a curse. Things don't work the way they should.

And even there in the garden, there's the promise of the offspring who will come, all the way back in Genesis. A seed who's going to come from the woman and crush the head of the serpent.

He's going to fix that broken relationship. And so, God's people wait and long for things to be as they should be.

[10 : 16] For the curse to be broken. For blessing to come again. Just this fall, Cubs fans finally experienced the breaking of their curse.

Finally, after 108 years of losing, they finally won the World Series again. 108 years. That's a long time, right?

Year after year. Imagine if you're not a Cubs fan. Pick your own team. The disappointment. The expectations let down. Things not going the way you planned.

For some Cubs fans, for their entire lifetime, this happens. No World Series victory. But for God's people here, waiting even longer than 108 years.

Generations and generations waiting for the curse to be broken and promised blessing to make things right again. And that blessing is spoken again to Abraham.

[11 : 23] But then God's people, Abraham's descendants, spend generations in Egypt. Not feeling blessed, but enslaved and oppressed and seemingly abandoned by God.

It wasn't supposed to be like that, right? God had promised blessing to Abraham and his descendants. We were going to be the ones on top. He was going to take us to the promised land and he was going to be our God and fight for us.

And yet they're far away in every way. They're longing to be delivered and for things to be as they should be. And they do get to the promised land.

But even after they settle in the promised land and blessing is promised to David and his royal descendants forever, they experience the pain of exile, don't they?

Evil kings and evil people removed from the promised land again. Taken away. They're beginning to doubt the promises of God. A sense of desperation beginning to build.

[12 : 32] This is not the way we were promised it would be. Longing for it to be right again. When will it ever change? And all of that is tied up in the picture of the stump of Jesse.

The crushed, defeated, dejected nation. Longing generation after generation for centuries for things to be made right.

In many ways, that prolonged desperation is the essence of the Advent season, isn't it? As we await and long for Christmas, the coming of Christ to make things right.

Already this week, my four-year-old came downstairs the morning after we had decorated our home for Christmas. And she ran immediately to her stocking and grabbed it and looked in and said, there's no gifts in my stocking, mom.

Something's wrong. That's not the way it's supposed to be, is it, kids? Stockings are meant to be full of wonderful, happy things. And Christy told me that story and I thought, oh, it's going to be a long December.

[13 : 50] It's not there. Things aren't right. And so it's waiting and waiting and waiting for Christmas.

But while that longing is there in a child in that kind of comical sense, it's something that we all experience deep in our hearts, isn't it? Christians, atheists, agnostics, all of us at times feel this deep sense of being made to be a glorious forest, but experiencing life feeling much more like a smoldering stump.

It happens so often that we've got a category for it. We sometimes call it a midlife crisis. A longing for my body to work like it used to.

A longing to do something that really matters. Perhaps coupled with a deep doubt that I'm actually capable of that. I long to be truly significant, but I struggle to believe that I really am.

Maybe you would describe your longing as an ache. An ache because you feel perhaps the absence of a loved one that leaves you feeling always a little empty, never quite fulfilled.

[15 : 20] Maybe you long for freedom from a lifelong struggle. A battle with sin maybe. A fight with addiction.

A battle within yourself. Maybe the honest truth is you just feel like your life is not what it's supposed to be.

Certainly not what you always pictured it would be. You don't like it. If you're honest, you struggle to like yourself. You don't find deep purpose and significance in anything.

You're really just longing for something to be different but you're not even certain what it is. But that lack of fulfillment just gnaws at you constantly.

It comes up again and then you ignore it and you go on and it comes back and I just don't feel important. You feel you were made for something more than this.

[16 : 20] Why aren't things as they should be? Ever? And so we wait. Day after day.

Sometimes year after year. Through seasons of our lives with this ache and with these deep longings in our heart to be mighty trees in a glorious forest and feel like we're part of something even bigger than ourselves but with lives that feel like smoldering stumps.

Unfulfilled. Most days hopeless. One of my very favorite things about Isaiah 11 is that it's right there.

Right there in those very low and dark and hopeless places. It's right there in one of those hopeless stumps that hope grows.

It's not from some nation that's mighty and controlling others and achieving great victories. It's not from some other person who really does have life together and seems to have things figured out and that's where hope is.

[17 : 39] It's not in either of those places. But rather it's in the stump of Jesse. Verse 1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

A branch from his roots shall bear fruit. A small shoot appears from the stump. There's hope that is promised. The shoot is coming up from what was hopeless.

just minutes or days ago. Hope is promised. Christmas. The Christ is coming to make things as they should be.

That's the promise of Isaiah 11. The promised one. The anointed one. The Messiah. He brings hope. Look at what the rest of the passage says about what he will be and do.

At first he will bring a righteous rule. Verse 2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. The spirit of wisdom and understanding.

[18 : 46] The spirit of counsel and might. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. As a result what does it look like under his rule? He'll judge not by what his eyes see or what his ears hear but with righteousness he shall judge the poor.

With equity he'll decide for the meek of the earth. He's going to strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. With the breath of his lips he'll kill the wicked. How? Why?

Because righteousness is the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt of his loins. That is his very essence. That's what that means. That's who he is at the deepest part of who he is righteous and faithful.

faithful. No more idolatrous kings. No more leaders who oppress the poor to cement their own power. No more injustice for the people.

A king is coming whose very essence is righteousness. It's his very character to the core of who he is and his just deeds reflect that righteous character without fail.

[19 : 59] Finally the righteous king and just kingdom we've been longing for. Second he'll bring a restored Eden.

Listen to the beautiful picture of the curse being broken and the good garden restored. It starts at verse 6. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze their young shall lie down together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. You've not seen these things. Something's changing. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. It's a picture of Eden isn't it? It hasn't been like this since then.

None of God's people have witnessed this reality. Predator and prey together in peace. Mankind in the person of the little child back where he was made to be in his role of great dignity ruling over and caring for the creation.

[21 : 19] If you want to know for sure that the curse is being reversed that God's going to make it all back to the way it was meant to be the seed of the woman is near the seed of the serpent without being harmed.

That's the picture Isaiah is painting. That's poetic prophecy right there. That's for all the non-engineers. Everything all of creation will be back the way God intended it.

No pain and destruction but instead the glorious intimate unhindered relationship with God from sea to sea.

Oh Israel was longing for that. They hadn't known that. None of them. What would that even feel like to relate to God like that?

Finally the hope promised is that the Christ will bring a recovered people. Verse 10. In that day the root of Jesse who shall stand as a signal for the peoples of him shall the nations inquire and his resting place shall be glorious.

[22 : 42] Don't miss this. It's so good. I love this verse. Here's what's going on. The one who has been called the shoot coming out from the stump is now also called the root of Jesse.

He's not merely one more king in the line of many kings who've come from Jesse and David but one who is unique in that he was there before Jesse as well as after.

He's promised all the way back in the garden right? This one is coming a king in to be a signal a banner what why what's so special about him?

He comes and what happens? A sign a banner is raised and the nations run toward him rally around him as it were joyfully celebrating him.

You see Israel wasn't the only nation that was promised to be reduced to a stump was it? They were but so was once mighty Assyria so were many other nations promised to be destroyed like them and only one stump Jesse Israel would have a shoot come up.

[24 : 03] There was just one stump with one shoot but the whole forest the whole glorious beautiful thing is going to be replanted isn't it?

The righteous ruler will bring back the restored creation and all the nations will find their life in him the forest around that one stump with that one shoot will be magnificent glorious again the way God intended it can't you just not wait to be a part of that a beautiful multicolored forest living together in peace enjoying the glorious presence of our God just the way he designed us to live listen there's somebody in your life who needs to see you point them to Jesus the banner the signal so that they can run to him and be a part of that glorious forest to have the hope of experiencing life as it should be finally where does that hope come from that's a glorious hope in verse 10 at the end of this passage don't miss where it's coming from it comes from

Christmas it's only in the righteous ruler it's only in the little child who shall lead them it's only in the root of Jesse that single shoot that comes forth becomes the righteous branch that's the only place the hope is found on that first Christmas the shoot shoots forth sprouts out of the stump an unassuming child born in a stable in too little unimportant Bethlehem in a place of hopelessness he is the one from whom all this glorious hope will come he will live in humble poverty die on an awful cross and in so doing those things he will bring hope to the nations because it's only in those places that hope truly grows the long expected

Jesus is Israel's strength and consolation and the hope of whom all the earth he is the joy of every longing heart except that sometimes we stop short of Jesus don't we sometimes our hearts do long and and they want fulfillment but but we think the fulfillment we're longing for can be found elsewhere don't we sometimes we grasp for hope that that is immediate and temporal and we think that's finally going to do it for us be be honest does it ever feel like just a little more money a little different family a little better life circumstance would make things as they should be do you ever feel like that that deep longing you feel could be satisfied forever with just a just a small change in life situation

I was going to run through a list of seemingly successful people who have said they found little hope or fulfillment in their success and in changing their circumstances and reaching the top as it were quarterback Tom Brady Madonna but then I decided actor Jim Carrey said it better than any of them this is what Jim Carrey said he said I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer they should do everything they ever dreamed of have all their dreams come true so they can see it's not the answer that's true isn't it you may not have had all your dreams come true and done everything you ever dreamed of but you've done a lot of things you've had a lot of things and yet that ache hasn't gone away completely has it no temporary improvement of circumstances has ever filled the deep longing has it that's why it's still there sometimes the people of God have long struggled to find the true hope that will meet the true longing of their hearts they've chased idols that they hoped could give them rain for their crops or victory in battle they hoped the promised

[29 : 15] Messiah would deliver them from foreign oppression and put them in charge and make things a little easier and we will talk next week about the comfort in this life that Christ brings it's true that is there but the hope of the gospel is an eternal one it's an eternal hope it's why C.S. Lewis wrote if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world perhaps some of God's people were putting their hope in one who would come to bring a little more political power a little more temporal comfort and God says listen I've got so much more in mind for you it's so much better than that eternal harmony and flourishing with all my people the way it was meant to be in the beginning all under the righteous rule of a divine king that's the hope of

Isaiah 11 isn't it Isaiah 11 offers hope not in change not in altered circumstances it offers hope in a champion an altered eternity in fact an eternal savior who will come again and God says to us this morning I know in your longing you look for hope in a boyfriend or a girlfriend in a different spouse in a different job you look maybe to that method that you're using to escape the pain of life or to numb the ache that you feel so often and that seems like the only thing worth grabbing onto for hope and God says listen I've got so much more than that in mind it's so much better than just that there's only one stump with a green shoot only one place of true hope and life amidst the devastation and ache of your heart it's the righteous branch who offers in himself hope true hope hope of finally and forever being what you were truly made to be deep fulfillment true freedom eternal glory friend

I would plead with you this morning not to settle for anything less than that run to Jesus and find the purpose for which you were created in him and in his glorious multi-ethnic everlasting forest that you can be a part of that's the hope that Christmas offers the coming of God into this world and his return that we still await brings eternal hope and fulfillment not a temporary earthly reprieve from difficulty and longing we haven't gotten rid of longing have we after all creation itself is still longing according to Romans 8 creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God the whole creation groaning together and not only the creation but we ourselves groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons redemption of our bodies for in this hope we were saved not in a hope of just today not in the hope of a small change to my circumstance but the hope of redemption forever my adoption as the son of

God and the glorious redemption of all of creation in that hope we were saved creation waits and longs still today with us for the hope of an eternal salvation a glorious restoration to the way things were created to be that's the hope hope of all creation I don't know about you but I still ache I ache a lot not just the morning after setting up the Christmas tree and waking up and feeling my back and that kind of aching I ache for the world to be a place of justice peace I wait and wait for a day when I no longer have a selfish heart that hurts those that I love the most and makes me feel deeply inadequate I long for the dignity and the glory for which I was created to be something I experience every day and day after day rather than something I feel I have to manufacture or pretend so other people will think I'm important and tell me

I'm valuable I'm so thankful that the call of Isaiah 11 that the message of the gospel is not quit longing and get over the ache it's not that at all rather acknowledge your true deepest longing feel it deeply and let the longing you feel whether you feel it waiting for Christmas this year or whether you feel it longing and waiting for Christ to come again let that longing drive you to true hope there has indeed come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his root has borne fruit and in that day one day he promises his coming soon the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal for the nations of him all of them shall inquire and his resting place shall be glorious amen let's pray

[35 : 52] Jesus what a day that will be when you and we with you will be at rest that's our hope don't let us settle for anything less than that there's great glory you have intended and designed for us you're working it out right now but it's coming in its fullness and we are desperate for it to come our hope indeed is in that one day someday we're not there yet but we have a savior who is taking us there and Jesus we thank you we pray come Lord Jesus make this world make your people everything that you would have us to be for the glory of your name and for our eternal fulfillment and joy in you oh Jesus meet our longings with true hope we ask it in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org for more information visit us online at southwood.org