

"Future Hope"

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Date: 15 December 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Isaiah chapter 11? That's page 539 in the Pew Bible. We'll be looking at verses 1 through 9 of Isaiah chapter 11 as we continue our Advent series today.

Let me pray, and then I'll read for us. Father, we do ask for a fresh sense of that joy that we have just spoken of. Joy, joy, for Christ is born. Lord, as we come to Your Word now, would You lift our spirits, help us to see these great truths that You've shown us about our King and His kingdom and the great future and hope that we have, and by Your Spirit, would it fill us with joy?

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. All right, let me read Isaiah 11, 1 through 9. 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 the 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. 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." So our passage begins with the image of a cut-down tree with a stump. Now, there are lots of reasons you might cut down a tree, right? You might go to a Christmas tree farm this time of year. You might go pick one out and cut one down and tie it to the top of your car and hope it doesn't fly off on the drive home, and then you might set it up.

[2 : 5 7] But, you know, you also might cut down a tree, and this is maybe more likely at other times of the year. You might cut down a tree because the tree is diseased, starting to rot away from the inside out, and pretty soon it's likely to fall, causing more damage. So you hire an arborist, and the arborist comes out and inspects, and he says, yep, it's got to come down.

So you cut it down, and nothing but the stump remains. Now, the stump here in Isaiah 11 is a bit like that. It's a failed and fruitless tree that's been cut down. You see, in this section of Isaiah that we've been looking at these last few weeks, the people are experiencing, and Isaiah looks forward to the people experiencing the consequences of failed leadership. Their king Ahaz has rejected the Lord. He's forged this alliance with foreign nations, and rather than that move saving the kingdom, it would lead to conquest and judgment.

And so what Isaiah tells them is that the people are on the verge of destruction and deportation. And if the people are on the verge of destruction, dark days were ahead, everything would be cut down. Nothing but a stump would remain.

And I think in that place, in that place of darkness, the people would naturally ask, looking at the barren stump of their lives, is that the end? Is that the end of the line?

Is that the end of all the promises that God made to us? Is that the end of what we hoped through us would be the world's rescue, which is what God had promised to do through Israel?

[4 : 45] Now, I wonder if you've ever been in that place, you know, wondering, are my failures final? Is there any hope for the stump of my life? Can anything new, can anything good come out of this?

And what message does Isaiah 11 bring to us there? Well, it brings a message of hope. From the felled tree of ruined Israel, from the cut-down stump of ruined humanity, Isaiah sees a shoot, a branch coming out. Verse 1, There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

You see, where Ahaz had failed, where all the Davidic kings had failed, where Israel had failed, where you and I and all humanity had failed, where despite all of our efforts, we've left nothing behind us but a cut-down stump, right there in the middle of our fallen humanity, right there in the depths of our darkest day, Isaiah says, a shoot from the stump bears fruit.

New life comes and grows in the place of the old. A new king will come with perfect justice and heal creation, Isaiah tells us in this chapter, and this king will be a banner to gather all peoples to himself. You see, what Isaiah 11 is about is about the Messiah. It's about the promised king who will come and make the world right, put the world to rights, and he will do that because everything he does will be completely and utterly right.

This branch that bears fruit will be the new and better David, David that David and all of David's descendants had never been and could never be. That's why there's a reference to Jesse in verse 1. Jesse, if you remember, was the father of King David. So verse 1 is telling us that this coming king, this Messiah, won't just be like another David in David's line.

[7 : 14] He's going to be a totally new David, a better David, a better king. And how will he be better? Verse 2 says, because he will be full of God's Spirit. And then verses 3 through 5 say that he will execute perfect and lasting justice. The poor and the meek will be protected and raised up.

When it says he will judge the poor, it means he will judge on behalf of the poor, judge for them. And of course, it says the wicked at last will be called to account.

And when this new king comes with this perfect justice, Isaiah sees that it will usher in a new and healed creation. You see, the stump won't remain a stump because the king will come and make things right. Now, Isaiah has already told us in chapter 9 about the birth of this king. Remember back in chapter 9 where we're told that his kingdom would know no end. But here in chapter 11, we see what the outcome of his reign will be. What is the future that this king will establish as a result of his righteous rule? Now, we know from the perspective of the New Testament that this Messiah is none other than Jesus. In chapter 9, we're given a glimpse of Jesus' first coming, his birth and the inauguration of his kingdom. But in chapter 11 here, we're given a picture of Jesus' second coming, his return in perfect righteousness to consummate this kingdom. And today, for us, we live in between these two comings, don't we? You know, we've seen the fulfillment of Isaiah 9, the one Isaiah called,

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace. He's come for us. Unto us a child has been born, and through his death and resurrection, he now sits enthroned forever. His kingdom will never fail because he's gone through death, never to die again. We've seen the fulfillment of Isaiah 9, but we await the completion of Isaiah 11. We look forward to his return and the consummation of his kingdom. For us, the light has dawned, but there's still much darkness, is there not?

For us, the branch has begun to spring forth bearing fruit, but there are still many stumps. So Isaiah 11 then, Isaiah 11 lifts our eyes up to the coming fullness of this kingdom, to the ultimate restoration of all things when the Messiah Jesus comes again in glory.

[10:12] And he shows us this vision so that we might not lose hope in dark days, so that we might know for sure that because of Jesus, our failures are not final.

Because of Jesus, our stumps are not the last word, but they too will bear fruit. So why don't we look at this future hope in verses 6 through 9? Why don't we take some time and just zero in on it? Let's look at the fullness of what Jesus has in store, the fruit that he's going to bring to completion in the last day so that we might not lose heart in dark days. What will the fullness of his reign look like when he comes again? Well, we see three things here in Isaiah 6 through 9.

We see that old hostilities will be reconciled, and then we see that old natures are going to be changed. And then last of all, we see that the ancient curse will be removed. Those are the three things we'll look at. First, we see that old hostilities will be reconciled when his kingdom comes in fullness.

Look again at verse 6. It says, "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." Did you know the future, the future that God has in store is of a healed creation?

God isn't just going to reject everything and start over, but He's going to heal it and restore it. I mean, think about it. After all, why did the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, become a human being? Why did the Word become flesh? Why did He lay aside His heavenly glory and enter into the cut-down stump of human existence? God became a human because His desire is not just to reject fallen creation, but to heal it, to get inside of it, and to assume it into Himself, and to redeem it, and to bring new out of the old. And that's what Isaiah's language here in verse 6 is pointing to, a creation that's a creation that's been healed, where there's no longer predator and prey, no longer the strong eating the weak, but where all those old enmities and hostilities have been done away with forever.

[12:38] Now, nearly every commentator on Isaiah will tell you that the prophetic language here isn't just about animals. It's not just about animals. It's about an entire creation that's been healed. It's not just about wolves and lambs and lions and calves. It's about every enmity, including the human ones, especially the human ones. There will be no more hostilities when the King comes. There will be no more of the strong taking advantage of the weak. There will be no more broken relationships, no more broken families or marriages. Our relationships will be healed and at peace. Imagine a world where all the old hostilities have been reconciled, where peace is so prevalent that it won't take armies and treaties and alliances just to keep conflict at bay. Look at the end of verse 6. It says, a little child shall lead them. That's how secure the peace will be. That's how lasting the reconciliation will be. That's how safe the King will make His creation. It won't take nuclear armament to keep humanity at peace. A little child could lead them.

I think if we're honest, many of the stumps that we see in our lives, many of those barren places really represent broken relationships, don't they?

These stumps are a result of broken relationships with a spouse or an estranged family member or a friend. You know, we make a mess of things. And then we wonder, are those failures going to be final?

But Isaiah says, the King will come and He'll make things right. And you know, the truth is, friends, even now, we see the dawning of His kingdom.

Just think of the church. Friends, the church of Jesus Christ is meant to be the place where natural enemies become friends, where Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, young and old, all gather as one around the truly righteous King Jesus.

[15 : 16] Now, how can that be? Well, at the heart of it, it's because in the church we realize that there is only one who is truly righteous. We're all sinners, each of us. No matter what our age, or our ethnic background, or our socioeconomic status, we're all sinners. None of us deserves a thing before God. But Jesus, through His righteous work on the cross, forgives us sheerly by grace.

And if the church is a community of forgiven sinners, a community saved by grace, not by works, then that means we're all on the same level. There's no more wolves and lambs. There's no more lions and calves. There's no more strong and weak. There's no more rich and poor. In the church of Jesus Christ, we're all one. And insofar as we live in that grace, as forgiven sinners, as one with our brothers and sisters in Christ, insofar as we live that way, now we are a sign of the new creation, a sign of what's to come, a sign of what's to come when our King comes to reign in glory. So, when people are in our midst, do they experience a foretaste of the peace and reconciliation that verse 6 describes?

Do they get a foretaste of that coming kingdom in fullness? Or when they're in our midst, do they experience the same old hostilities and animosities?

Right? Is there gossip and hatred? Is there prejudice and bitterness? Or is there honesty and honor? Is there forgiveness and a desire to reconcile? Is there joy and safety?

Friends, may we be that sort of church, a foretaste of the day, the day to come when all the old hostilities are reconciled.

[17 : 30] But you know, Isaiah goes on in this passage, he goes on, you know, if the old hostilities are going to be reconciled one day, then that must mean, right, that a deeper change has taken place.

I mean, after all, at some point, the wolf and the lion are going to be hungry, right? And what will become of the lamb and the calf then? But in verse 7, we see that when the king comes in perfect righteousness, it won't just be our old hostilities that are reconciled, but it's actually going to be our old natures that will be changed.

Our old natures are going to be changed. Look at verse 7. It says, Now, Isaiah's prophetic language here is hearkening back to the beginning of Genesis, to the original creation before the fall. And if you go back and you read those opening chapters of Genesis, you'll see that we're told there that God has given the green plants for food to all the living creatures on the ground. And here in Isaiah 11, in Isaiah 11, in this vision of the new creation, we see that once more, the animals return to eating plants for food. No longer do they feed on each other. They return to the original design of creation. That's what Isaiah sees. Now, I don't think the main point here is really about the diet of the animal kingdom and the new creation, as interesting as that might be, right? I think the point that Isaiah is making is that when the king comes to put the world to rights, our old natures and our old desires are going to be changed once and for all. Our old desires for conquest, for violence, for greed, for self-exaltation, for consumption, our old desires that want nothing but to feed themselves, even if that means doing so at the expense of others. That old self-centered desires, they're going to be changed.

The hunger of our souls on that day will be transformed. And what will be our hunger? What will be our desire on that day?

Well, it's going to be the same as it was in the original creation before the fall. We will want what God wants and will desire God in God's ways above all else. Our hunger will be for His glory and for His praise. Our desire will be for His beauty and His reign.

[20 : 14] On that day, our sinful natures will be at last put off forever. Can you imagine what it will be like to live without that clinging, old, sinful nature that we carry around?

I mean, the truth is, we can't really imagine what that will be like. You know, sometimes I see people running or exercising with like weights on their ankles or wrists, or sometimes I see people like walking with those weighted rucksacks, you know, up and down Whitney Avenue.

Yeah. Now, if you've ever done that, I've never actually worn one of those rucksacks. They look kind of cool. If you've ever done that, right, I'm sure you know how it feels at the end of a workout or at the end of a hike to take the weight off, to lay it aside, to feel the freedom, to feel the strength, to feel the lightness of just unencumbered movement. You know, I haven't worn a rucksack, but I have gone hiking with a big backpack, you know, and if you take off like 20 or 30 pounds after a two-, three-, four-hour hike, you feel like you're walking on air, right? Like you could just float.

So, friends, imagine what it will be like when after living for 70, 80, 90 years, carrying the weight of our old sinful nature, imagine what it will be like when we finally lay it aside.

Imagine the freedom, imagine the lightness of soul that we'll experience on that day. When the King comes to liberate us, not just from external hostilities and injustices, but comes to liberate us from our internal bent to glory in ourselves and our own petty desires.

[22 : 07] Imagine what it will be like to love God more than we love sin, to love God alone with no rival and with no limit.

It's an old hymn called Love Divine, All Love's Excelling that ends like this. It says, "Changed from glory into glory, till with Thee we take our place, till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise." That's it. Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

And you know, if you've ever been struck, if you've ever been struck even for a moment with wonder, wonder, then you know that being lost in wonder, being lost in wonder before something truly wonderful doesn't actually mean that you lose yourself, but you find your true self.

And here's the utterly wonderful thing. Friends, the King has already begun this work.

Do you remember the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians? He says, "If anyone is in Christ, there's a new creation." The same Holy Spirit that filled Jesus during His earthly ministry is now at work in us. Through the gospel message of Christ crucified and risen, the Holy Spirit comes and causes hearts to come alive, to trust in Jesus with saving faith, to turn from our old self-reliance and our old self-obsession and to begin living in complete dependence on Him, to love what He loves, to rejoice in what He rejoices in, to live as He lived.

[24 : 15] You see, again, the church is meant to be a sign, a foretaste of what's coming. Of course, we'll never be sinless in this life. Only when Jesus returns will our old natures be put aside forever.

We're still going to carry that weight. But now, even so, in this life, we are progressively becoming more and more like the Lord who loves us. We are learning now how to take off the old self, which belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. We are learning what it means to have our desires, our hungers change from the inside out, to hunger more and more for God and God's ways, to desire more and more to please Him and not other people. This is the work that Jesus does now in His followers through the same Holy Spirit that filled Him, the same Holy Spirit that now lives in all those who trust in Him.

And as we experience that new nature now, it actually makes us hunger even more for the day when we'll put aside our old fallen nature once and for all in the new creation.

You know, as we see the shoots growing up from the old stumps of our lives, it makes us long for the day when we will be fully grown mighty oaks in the presence of our Savior, when we'll be full grown, when we'll be lost in wonder, love, and praise.

But you know, Isaiah's vision doesn't even stop there. When King Jesus comes to consummate His kingdom, it doesn't just mean that the old hostilities are reconciled. It doesn't just mean that our old natures are finally once and for all changed and liberated. But last and greatest of all, it will mean that the ancient curse is removed once and for all. Look with me again at verses 8 and 9.

[26 : 30] It says, The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand into 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." I think that's perhaps the most shocking of all the imagery Isaiah gives us here in this picture of the new creation. You know, you read it and it sort of makes you feel a little anxious, right? A little child putting his hand in an adder's den, right? A toddler playing over the hole of a cobra.

You know, I'm sure parents think about that and they're like, I'm getting a little nervous just thinking about that. And yet, the picture here is that they're completely safe. It's a completely safe existence in the presence of once deadly enemies.

A child now plays innocently in the face of what would once have been certain fear and death. What has made that change?

What is it that will free us from fear and death forever in the new heavens and new earth?

Well, again, Isaiah's language here is hearkening back to the opening chapters of Genesis. You know, in those opening chapters of Genesis, the first humans fell under an awful curse.

[27 : 58] They listened to the lies of the serpent and they disobeyed God's good rule, and as a result, they came under a just and terrible curse.

Because they had rejected God's rule, because they made themselves the measure of right and wrong, they now were doomed to die. The blessing of God's favor was removed and the curse of death now hung over them. And the rest of Genesis is the story of what God would do in response to human rebellion and the dreadful curse. And God's response begins actually in the very beginning. He promises to Eve a son, a son whom the serpent would strike on the heel, but a son who in turn would crush the serpent's head. In other words, through Eve, a child would come, and that child would himself taste the curse. The serpent would strike him, but in that striking, this son would overcome the curse, and the serpent would be crushed.

So then Genesis proceeds to tell the story of the sons of Eve, of Seth and Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And in the midst of the ongoing curse, God continues to make His promise. A son would come to Abraham, to Abraham, an offspring would be born. And in the face of the curse, God promises, I'll bring blessing when the offspring comes.

But the book of Genesis ends where? The book of Genesis ends not with the curse lifted and humanity returned to the garden of God's favor. No, Genesis ends with God's people in Egypt in exile, and Joseph, who seemed like He might be the rescuer, in a coffin. The curse still dreadfully at play.

But when in the story does the curse end? Keep going in the Old Testament. Does it end with Moses? Keep going. Does it end with David? Keep going. Does it end with Hezekiah or Josiah? Some of Judah's good kings? Keep going. Does it happen after the people were brought back from Babylonian exile with Zerubbabel or Ezra or Nehemiah? No. As the pages of the Old Testament come to an end, and the stump of humanity still bears the scars of that original curse, the curse is still there.

[30 : 55] But then you come to the pages of the New Testament, and you read things like, in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, the curse of the law, to redeem those who are under the law.

Eve's long-promised son, Abraham's long-promised offspring, David's long-promised heir. From the stump, a branch comes forth. But here's what's very interesting. In His first coming, many did not recognize Him. A little later in the book of Isaiah, in chapter 53, Isaiah describes the coming of the Messiah, of Jesus, like this. He says, "For He grew up before us like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He had no former majesty that we should look at Him and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." When the branch came the first time, He didn't come in splendor or majesty or power.

Why? Because He came to deal with the curse. And to remove the curse, He had to do exactly what God had said on that day in the garden, that the curse would be unleashed and exhausted at one and the same time.

The serpent would strike the heel of the sun, and the sun would crush the head of the serpent. He came to take humanity's place under the curse in order to liberate us from it.

Again, Isaiah goes on and describes this very thing. In that same chapter, Isaiah 53, he says, "Surely He's borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, but He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

[33 : 23] Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to His own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." There it is. The curse falls on Jesus, so that it might no longer fall on all who trust in Him. He dies in our place so that we might live in His.

And so when Isaiah describes the new creation, the healed creation, there is no more curse, and there is no more death, and there's no going back. Why? Because the righteous King has conquered sin and death. He's undergone the curse for His beloved people, and in so doing, He's crushed the serpent's head. And now the serpent poses no harm.

There's no more death, and no more fear. And best of all, there's no more running from God. There's no more running from God.

"For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Now, knowledge of the Lord here in Isaiah's language doesn't mean just sort of like knowing facts with our heads, right? It means intimate knowledge with our hearts. We will know God, God. And that sort of knowing God will be the reality in every corner of creation. There will be no escaping it. Just like you can't escape water if you're in the middle of the sea, in the new creation, intimacy with God will be inescapable. There'll be no more curse, only blessing.

Inescapable, intimate blessing in communion with God. Because the curse is gone. But this blessing only comes through Jesus Christ, the righteous one. To reject Him is to reject the only one who's dealt with the curse and made it possible to have intimate communion with God in blessing. You see, outside of Christ is to remain under that curse for eternity.

[35 : 55] But in Christ, connected to Him, is to know unceasing blessing in freedom from the curse. You know, that's why the rest of Isaiah 11, if we were to go on and keep going in this beautiful chapter, that's why the rest of Isaiah 11, having described the new king and then having proclaimed the new creation, goes on to talk about a new exodus. And the rest of Isaiah 11 will picture the Messiah, the branch, as a banner, as a rallying point for all peoples. As if in the middle of fallen humanity, a great banner goes up. The king has come. He's come to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

So the banner goes up and the call goes out, rally to him. Rally to the king. Flee to his banner. His kingdom is open to everyone. All can come and find protection and redemption in his perfect righteousness. This king excludes no one who comes with empty hands ready to receive his grace.

And for all who rally to his banner now, they will be assured of a place in his new creation kingdom when it comes in fullness. And it will come. The branch has already sprung from the stump, friends.

Jesus Christ, the righteous one, has lived, died, and risen again. And what he has promised is that what is true of him will be true of everyone who is in him.

We too will know resurrection life. The dark days will not last forever. The fruitless stumps will not be forever barren.

[38 : 01] In fact, the psalmists say that the forests will clap their hands. The trees will rejoice when the king comes to reign. Creation will flourish under his rule. And we will reign with him. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we pray that by your spirit you would fire our hearts with deep joy because of the great hope that you've won for us and given to us. Oh Lord, would we rally to your banner now knowing that the new creation has come and will come in fullness when you return. Amen.