

1 Samuel 7:3-17

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[0:00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you this morning. Would you turn with me to Isaiah chapter 11? That's page 575 in the Pew Bible, if you'd like to follow along there.

We're looking this morning at Isaiah 11, verses 1 through 9. Let me read Isaiah 11, 1 through 9 for us.

Isaiah writes this, 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.

[1:27] 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.

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 whole 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 how does the story end? Here we are just a few days away from Christmas, and for the past three weeks we've been looking at key Old Testament texts that light up that event for us.

We've seen that Jesus is the new king who establishes the new covenant and who grants us new hearts. But Christmas, you see, is actually really the middle of a much larger, great, and wonderful story that God is telling.

[2:47] And where exactly is it all going? How does it all end? I had a friend in high school who in English class would always jump to the end of whatever book we had been assigned, and she would always read the last chapter before we actually finished the book.

I know I always felt that that was sort of cheating, being sort of a natural people pleaser and rule follower. I thought that, hey, you shouldn't do that. After all, you should have to do the hard work of reading all 300 plus pages of *Pride and Prejudice* over whatever it is, before you actually find out whether Elizabeth gets with Darcy and her 10,000 pounds a year.

You can't just skip to the end. That doesn't seem right. But, you know, the funny thing about the Bible is that God is always telling us how the story ends.

Again and again and again, he's always breaking into the present with a glimpse of his future. It would seem that God really wants his people to know where it's all going.

And no matter what happens, to not forget. And the passage that we just read is just one of those places where God wants us to hear loud and clear, here's how the story ends.

[4:05] And what do we see? What do we see just looking at this passage from Isaiah 11, 1 through 9? Isaiah's telling the people of his day that a king will come.

And that he will judge. And that all creation will be healed. And, you know, you see that threefold movement. Again and again in Isaiah.

And even across the Old Testament. Listen to Psalm 96, 11 through 13. And here it is again. Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar and all that fills it.

Let the field exult and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord. For he comes. For he comes to judge the earth.

There it is. The Lord will come. He will judge with perfect justice. And all creation will erupt in joy. Of course, we don't always connect judgment and the joy of creation in our minds.

[5:11] That connection seems kind of odd to us. But you see, the coming justice of God, friends. That Isaiah connects with this coming king. And who we know from the perspective of the New Testament is Jesus himself.

The justice that he will bring one day. Is the justice that will finally remove evil and wrong. And put the world right again. God isn't going to scrap creation and start over.

No, he's going to make it right. And he's going to make it new once more. So do you see the utter brilliance and beauty of this true story that God's bringing to pass?

That according to the Bible, what God began in creation, he's going to bring to its fulfillment in the new creation. That God is taking this story to a new heavens and a new earth where everything that the fall has stolen and broken is restored and healed.

And if we can catch a glimpse of that, if we can really listen to what God is telling us about how this story, about how our story ends. It will do at least two things.

[6:22] It will give fresh shape to our living for Christ. And it will give depth to our love for Christ.

It will give fresh shape to our living for Christ. Because if you know how the story is going to end, then it's going to shine a whole lot of light on how we ought to be living now.

And you know that sort of intuitively, don't you? Because your car ride to vacation has a totally different tenor and quality than your car ride home from vacation. Right? You know how that story is going to end.

There's cupcakes and cookies and presents in grandma's house over the river and through the woods. Here we come. This journey ends in about 10,000 emails piled up in your inbox.

And a lot of paperwork you have to do. Problems and fires you have to put out. So it gives a whole fresh shape to our living for Christ. But you know, it also gives depth to our love for Christ.

[7:20] And particularly for us in this season of the year, it will make the event of Christmas all the more wonderful for us. It will make us see all the more how worthy he is of our trust and our affection.

Because if we really want to appreciate Jesus' incarnation in all its fullness, then we have to see what his incarnation actually achieves in all its fullness. And when you can see it from the perspective of the end, oh friends, it becomes a deep and wondrous mystery.

So let's spend some time this morning looking at the picture of the new creation that Isaiah gives us here in chapter 11, especially verses 6 through 9. The king, Isaiah says, will bring the new creation.

So what's it like? And I think we see at least four things here. And the first thing we see is this. The new creation that Jesus brings is a physical, material, bodily future.

Look again at the imagery of verses 6 through 9. Wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, cows grazing, lions eating, children playing. Now, of course, there's a figurative element to what Isaiah is saying here.

[8:30] And we'll get to that. But don't miss the obvious point that's right there before our eyes. God's future will be a physical, experiential reality. Why on earth use such earthy images unless to say that it is this earth that will be swept up and made beautiful in the most unimaginable ways?

And of course, the new heavens and new earth will be hard to imagine, right? Probably about as hard to imagine as a wolf dwelling with a lamb or a lion eating straw like an ox.

There will be changes that we can't now wrap our minds around. But don't think that the future God has in store for his people and for his world is some merely spiritual thing.

As if we'll all be bodiless spirits floating on ethereal clouds. Oh, no, friends. Listen to how Isaiah describes it a little later in chapter 25 of his book.

There he comes back to this new creation theme and writes, The Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of rich food. A feast of well-aged wine.

[9:41] Of rich food full of marrow of aged wine well refined. If Isaiah 11 has us leading and playing in verses 6 and 8, Isaiah 25 has us feasting and drinking.

In the new heavens and the new earth. The future that God has in store. His new creation. Will not disappoint. Don't we often fall captive to the thinking that our best life is now.

Or at least ought to be now. That we need to make the most of it before we pass our prime. I'm reading all these sort of depressing articles every now and then. That sort of in your early 30s, you're hitting your prime.

I read those and I think it's just like downhill from here. Here I go. Here I come. Happy days are gone. Don't we think that we need to experience everything we possibly can before it's too late?

And doesn't that produce so much anxiety? And on top of that anxiety, so much regret. Beth and I this past May celebrated our 10-year wedding anniversary.

[10:52] And I was so anxious to get the details of our sort of time together just right. Because you only get one 10-year anniversary, right? But friends, what if the end of the story for those in Christ isn't what we commonly think of as heaven?

That is a sort of bodiless existence about as thrilling as a high school organ recital? What if what he had in store was a new heavens and a new earth?

Where there will be leading and playing. Tasks to explore. Joys to be won. Feasting and drinking. Wouldn't that be a liberating thing for you now?

That even if you didn't get into the school of your dreams. That even if you didn't land the job of your dreams. That there's still a future in store for you. That will thrill you to your bones.

And then open a horizon with even greater thrills to come. Something that would outstrip even your most audacious dreams that you dare to dream for yourself.

[12:07] Wouldn't that release you from the deadly anxiety that you feel? And actually free you to live with joy right now. You know, it may seem a bit paradoxical, but I think it's true. That only if there's a greater joy to come can you ever really know joy in the present.

Because if you know that the future that's held out for you is not one of joy, how can it not just color your present with a cloud of anxiety and despair?

You see friends, the sea route of joy isn't living like you're dying or dancing till the world ends, but realizing that the king is bringing the new creation. A new creation that is bodily, physical, experiential in a degree that we can only now begin to fathom.

So that's the first thing Isaiah wants us to see, that this new creation is a physical future. But second, he wants us to see that this new creation is a future without enmity and without strife.

The animals in verses 6 and 7 are all natural enemies, aren't they? Predators and prey, hunter and hunted, strong and weak.

[13:20] And of course Isaiah is using these images to point to an even bigger reality. That in the new creation, all the enmities that rip our world apart, all the strife that causes creation to groan will be healed.

Hostility will be replaced with hospitality. That's what the word dwell in verse 6 really means.

To welcome a sojourner. To bring them in. And the images of eating together in verse 7, don't they pretty much express the same thing? There they are, enemies now sitting at table, eating together in peace.

In Revelation 22 that Elizabeth read for us earlier, John writes of the healing of the nations. And the new heavens and the new earth. Now that is where God is taking creation.

A future free of enmity and strife. A future full of reconciliation, a peace where hostility is being replaced and has been replaced by hospitality.

[14:29] Doesn't it make sense that the church should be living in advance of that great day? Ought we not to be a people who are deeply concerned about reconciliation now?

If that's indeed the grain of the universe, friends. That is where God is taking us. Why not live that way now? In advance of that great day?

Ought not the church be the place where hospitality is extended to one another? Even if we have very little in common. Even if before coming to know Christ, we may have been natural enemies.

Yankees and Red Sox fans, here they are. Gathering around table. But it gets more serious than that, doesn't it?

In light of a passage like this, it's hard not to think about the racial tensions that have gripped our country. Not just in the past months, but over our entire history, it seems. And Isaiah is telling us that God's future is one where such divisions will be healed.

[15:43] Not by looking the other way, but will be healed with perfect justice. And that gives us much hope in the midst of these trying times.

But it also means that the church, here and now, as a people living in light of the new creation in Christ, should be a place where the world can get a glimpse, even if an imperfect one, of that coming day.

In Ephesians 2, Paul says, We've been reconciled to God through the cross, and therefore reconciled to one another through the cross. And as we practice that cross-shaped life together, extending hospitality, where there was once hostility, we become a glimpse of God's new creation to come.

That the world will start to see in us where God's plan is headed. And they'll be shown that there's a whole new way to be human.

There's a whole new way to be alive. Right here, in the church of Jesus Christ. Of course, reconciliation is hard work.

[17:01] Loving each other, especially when we're different from one another, is hard work. God's vision for the church to be a people who know unity in and through diversity is not easy, given our natural selfishness.

But friends, doesn't it thrill you to think that by God's spirit at work in us, when we do this work, it's a signpost of what's to come.

It's a demonstration of God's new creation in the midst of the old. And in many ways, that sort of thinking should begin to color more and more everything we do.

If in Christ we are a new creation, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, then we should be asking how every aspect of our lives can be signs and emblems of that great fact.

How can everything we do be a foretaste of what God has in store? Our life together as a church will be part of that.

[18:06] So will our lives at work. As we seek to love our neighbors and do things that are full of beauty and justice and love and truth. Our lives at home will be rich with that reality of wanting to be a beacon of creation healed.

Friends, the King is bringing the new creation, a future without enmity and without strife. A future where there will be lasting peace and order. And insofar as our lives embody these things in response to God's grace, we're a sign of it in the present for the world to see.

But Isaiah has even more to tell us about what's in store. It's not only a future without enmity, but third, it's a future even without death. In verse 8, Isaiah gives us the image of an infant playing over the hole of a cobra, of a toddler sticking his hand in an adder's den.

Now, I don't know about you, but that seems like a very strange image. John Oswalt in his commentary on Isaiah, which is quite excellent, explains it this way.

He says, The contradiction of a child playing about the den of poisonous snakes can almost be felt physically. One wants to snatch the child away from the presence of such sudden arbitrary death.

[19:31] And then he goes on and says, In what more effective way could a writer communicate his conviction that in the Messiah's day, death itself will be conquered?

One thinks of the New Testament's appropriation of Hosea 13 in 1 Corinthians, O death, where is thy sting? What's Isaiah getting at with this picture in verse 8?

That in the new creation that Jesus brings, death itself is defanged. That there will be no more fear of death, for death will be defeated once for all.

In Revelation 21, we read, He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away, And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new.

Reflecting on these truths, the early 17th century pastor and poet John Donne wrote, Death, be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.

[20:46] For those whom thou thinkest thou dost overthrow, die not, poor death, nor yet canest thou kill me. One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and death shall be no more.

Death, thou shalt die. Friends, the Christian hope is just that. That death itself lives on borrowed time, and is headed for the grave.

The one great reality that we think none of us will shake or escape, is itself not the last word. That the power and mercy and grace of God has and will overcome the last enemy, Paul says, death itself.

When the king returns, our bodies will be raised, and death will be no more. And if that's where the story's headed, it too shapes how we live in the present.

Does it not? The Apostle Paul wrote to the young church in Thessalonica when some of their members had died, we don't grieve as others do, who have no hope. Acknowledging there, of course, that we should grieve, and we do grieve, but not as those who have no hope.

- [22 : 08] Our grief is surrounded in a deeper reality that death is not the last word, that Christ has conquered sin and death, and in new creation we shall rise never to die again, never to be separated again, never to know loss or sorrow again.

One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die. The new creation will be a future without strife and without death.

But fourth, the new creation will be a future without ignorance. Look again at verse 9. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

What is our greatest problem that God's redemptive history is going to solve? What's the deepest ravage of sin that God's story will restore in the end?

You see, the greatest problem and the deepest loss is that we no longer know the Lord. We no longer know the Lord in the experiential, personal way for which He created us.

- [23 : 41] It is this deathly ignorance that is our greatest loss. To be without God in the world, to know Him, it seems not at all.

Think of how lovers often talk when they lose their beloved. Nothing tastes anymore. Music is dull. Laughter is hollow.

Life seems thin. Don't you see, friends, this is the condition of humanity separated from God. We were meant to know Him and to commune with Him and in communion with Him to experience delight in all His gifts that He's given us in the created order.

But the double tragedy of sin is that we're not only cut off from knowing God, but we don't even realize what we've lost. It's a double ignorance. And yet there's coming a day when the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

That our ignorance will be washed away and not a single inch of creation will be without the intimate and awe-filled knowledge of God for which we were made.

- [25 : 09] The earth will be full. And friends, that knowledge will never grow old. Further up and further in we will go into the infinite depths of who God is.

Isn't it so stunning in Revelation 22 when John reaches the climax of his whole exposition, of his whole book, when he reaches the climax of the whole Bible, in such a short phrase he just says, they will see His face.

Friends, there it is. And in that moment we'll find that all our life in this world and all our adventures had only been the cover and the title page. As Lewis writes in *The Last Battle*, now at last they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Or as Revelation 22 5 puts it, and they will reign forever and ever. Friends, don't you see, if life in the new heaven and the new earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, if the knowledge of God will be the crowning feature and the infinite delight of God's perfectly restored world, then any act of growing in our knowledge of the Lord now is a step into the delight of the world to come.

So how can you best prepare for your future? Grow in your knowledge of the Lord. How can you and I best live in light of the new creation?

- [26 : 59] Grow in your knowledge of the Lord. Not just in the facts that you may know about God, but in your personal acquaintance with Him.

what will you do in the coming year to prepare for eternity? What good plans will you make to know God better this coming year than you've known Him the year before?

Will it be a resolve to read Scripture more regularly, more reflectively, more consistently?
Will it be a commitment to join a small group where you can seek the Lord's face together?

Will it be a decision to pray more earnestly for your neighbors and friends and to pray more earnestly that Christ would be your treasure? Will it be a determination to study in depth some attribute of God or some aspect of Christ's person or work through reading good Christian books from the ages?

Friends, whatever it is, do it with confidence that knowing God is what your future holds in Christ so that any genuine attempt to know Him better now is sure to succeed.

[28 : 22] That's where He's taking you and any step you take now is simply putting yourself in line with the very direction of His redemptive history itself and He will not disappoint you.

The King is bringing His new creation that will be a future without enmity, without death, and without ignorance. A healed world full of peace and life and the knowledge of God.

friends, I wonder as we've taken stock of Isaiah's picture here of the new creation how it all sounds to you. Especially if you're here and you're not a Christian, maybe the prospect of God's future sounds a lot like wishful thinking.

Like a dream that won't ever come true. Could God really make all things new? Of course, that's a really good question.

And you know, the best answer is that God has already shown us that He can and will do it.

[29 : 34] In fact, in a sense, God has already done it. In space, in time, in history. Because what God promises to do for the whole earth is already done in Jesus Christ.

look again at verse 1 of our text. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Isaiah is here describing the coming of the king. That out of the stump of the house of Jesse, that is, the royal house of David, a shoot comes forth. of course, a stump isn't a very flattering image, is it?

It's cut down, right? A stump is lifeless. But Isaiah says that new life will come from that seemingly lifeless place.

Out of the stump, a shoot. Out of the roots, a new branch. Out of the old, something new. Out of death, life. And notice, it's not replacing the stump with something else.

[30 : 46] God isn't throwing it out and starting over. No, from the midst of that old, fallen down, lifeless Davidic line, new life and new hope comes.

Like a shoot springing out of a stump. And friends, doesn't it become clear that the incarnation then, which fulfilled this verse in ways I'm sure Isaiah barely could imagine, that the incarnation is God beginning his new creation project.

That in sending his son to take on flesh, he was inaugurating the renewal of creation in and through him. You see, when he was born, Christ entered the fallen down, lifeless line of David, the stump of Jesse, and he fulfilled all of God's promises.

Jesus restored David's throne in an unexpected and glorious way through his death and resurrection. But you see, by entering David's line, Christ was also entering our fallen down and lifeless humanity.

He didn't just become the true David, but he became the new Adam. And that means that by taking on our humanity, Christ was taking into himself the very groaning of creation itself.

[32 : 10] That just as Adam had led creation into ruin, that Christ, the new Adam, would lead creation into glory. In other words, the green shoot that came forth from the stump of Jesse had roots that went down into God's cosmic order itself so that what God did for his son, especially in the resurrection, was a promise and demonstration of what he would do for all who trust in him and for even the created world itself.

This king born on Christmas day is the one who brings the new creation. In his first coming, he was a shoot springing forth from the stump of our fallen humanity with a promise of new creation for all who believe and in his second coming, he will consummate that new creation work and make all things new.

Do you see the magnitude now of what Christmas means in this son who was born? There it is, the very healing of creation, the end of our enmity, of our death, of our ignorance, and the beginning of the world to come.

Let's pray, friends. Lord Jesus, we pray that you would stamp eternity onto our eyes and you would stamp it onto our hearts.

God, thank you in your grace and your mercy and in your wisdom you tell us again and again and again where you are taking us through your son and by your spirit.

[34 : 07] God, help us to live in light of that great day. Help us to love and to rejoice and Lord, even to grow in our knowledge of you for that is where Christ, you are taking us.

Lord, we ask all this in Christ's name. Amen.