

PREPARE FOR THE ADVENT KING – ISAIAH 11:1-10

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A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD— and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

The cruel and gruesome Assyrian empire was the world power when Isaiah wrote the words before us in chapter 11. History tells us they skinned their enemies alive and displayed them outside conquered cities to remind people what happens when you betray the Assyrians. You didn't want to betray the Assyrians, you didn't want to get on their bad side. (You can see why Jonah was so hesitant to go to the Assyrians and tell them they were offending God.) The two nations of Israelites – Judah in the south, and Israel in the north were standing right in the middle of the Assyrian firing line. Israel had refrained from paying tribute to the Assyrians, and allied themselves with Egypt against Assyria.

The Assyrian army was bearing down on Israel and would destroy the Israelite capital of Samaria. This would be God's punishment for the wickedness of the nation of Israel. The Assyrians displayed an incredible amount of power and might, and Judah was afraid it might get caught in the crossfire. But as strong as the Assyrian army was, it was nothing compared to God. The prophet Isaiah gave Judah comfort, he told them not to be afraid of the cruel and gruesome Assyrians. He compared the Assyrians to a mighty tree. God, through Isaiah, said, **"See, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low."**

But Isaiah warned it was not only the Assyrians whom the Lord would chop down and bring low, but it would be the Israelites themselves, for the wickedness they have done, for their forgetting God. God would chop Israel down, like an ax chops down a tree. This happened first for the nation of Israel in 722BC, and eventually for the nation of Judah about 150 years later in 586BC. Isaiah warned of this, over a century before his time, as if it had already happened. Because to God, it had happened.

It is with all of this in mind that Isaiah spoke the words before us in chapter 11. The Assyrians were destroyed, the nation of Israel was destroyed, it would seem like Israel was like any other nation – it rose, it fell, it was destroyed, never to be heard from again. And the promise God had given the Israelites to bless them and all nations of the earth through them would be just another unfulfilled promise of a nation's god, made up to give a nation hope. In all of this despair and turmoil, Isaiah has lit a flickering candle of hope – a shoot will come from the stump of Jesse. This is Isaiah's Christmas prophecy we look at this morning. This is how the Messiah would come, as a branch from a dead stump. Be prepared for it, be PREPARED FOR THE ADVENT KING.

1. What he has come to do
2. What that will accomplish

(1)

From death would come life, that is how God pictured the Messiah coming. When David was king over Israel, God gave him the promise that he would have a descendant which would reign on his throne forever. It was true, for over 400 years after David lived, one of his descendants reigned on his throne in Jerusalem, but when Jerusalem was destroyed, that royal lineage ceased to rule. It was like a tree that had been cut down. Usually the only thing you can do with a dead tree stump is to grind it up and pull it out of the ground. But not this stump, God had other plans for it, he would bring life from death.

That's why when you read the opening chapter of the gospel of Matthew you have that long list of names, starting with Abraham, going to David, and finally leading to Jesus. Matthew was tracing the line of the Savior, he would have had Isaiah's words in mind of a branch coming from the stump of Jesse. Jesus was that branch that came from the root of Jesse. Jesse, if you don't remember, was the father of King David, by using this term (instead of the stump of David), Isaiah would harken the Israelites back to the humble beginnings of King David. It would be a clue to the humble beginnings of this branch.

And from this humble branch, something unexpected will come; unexpected, but marvelous. Just look at his qualifications – **“the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.”** You could have entire sermons written about each of those 'spirits.' As a brief summary, we see how Jesus met all of these qualifications, at the Jordan River as he was baptized by John, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him, his Father in heaven said, **“This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased.”**

His qualifications enable him to accomplish what he has come to do. Listen again to Isaiah's words, **“He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.”** At first this may seem to be absurd, how can you not judge by what you see and hear, that is the only way you can judge. You can't judge people on what they haven't done. But what Isaiah is saying, is that this Messiah will look beneath the surface. **“With righteousness he will judge the needy...with the breath of his mouth he will slay the wicked.”** He judges not what is visible, but what is invisible, that which is in the heart. He will judge people how they deserve, not on what they think they deserve.

His judgment is just, right, and true. It is something that all our courts and justice system strive to do, but can't. Because our justice system can only look at the evidence of what they see and hear. This

judge can search beneath that muck to find out what is underneath, to find out what really happened. This is what he has come to do, and how are we able to PREPARE FOR OUR ADVENT KING? Repent.

Remember back to our gospel this morning? When John the Baptist was baptizing by the Jordan River. He was preparing the way for the Messiah Isaiah was talking about. His message was “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.**” And many people did come and repent, or turn, from their sinful ways and behaviors. But then the religious leaders approached, the Pharisees and Sadducees, and John had a different message for them. He said, “**you brood of vipers.**” They had come not to confess their sins, for they thought they had none, but to see the spectacle.

Now I don’t think any of us would ever compare ourselves to the level of the Pharisees, saying we are without sins to confess. But are we prepared for what the Messiah has come to do? His judgments will be based on God’s justice, not my own warped sense of it. He will judge not on what I have done, but what is in my heart, and that is a scary proposition. My heart is the one place I can call my own, where what I think and how I feel can be kept hidden away from the world. But the deep, dark, secret sins God knows about. He knows about them, even if I don’t admit to it myself. With a judge like this, I cannot think to ever be prepared for him to come. I must lay myself at the mercy of God.

This is how we are to prepare our hearts for his coming. To do a “spring cleaning” of sorts, and not just acknowledge that we are sinful and need a Savior, but that we are sorry for those sins. That’s what repentance is – a

U-turn from sin. Sins that offend our spouse, sins that offend our family, sins that offend our God. I must let go of any idea inside of me that thinks I am worthy, or I can live in a way that pleases God. I must repent. Because when I repent I am part of what he accomplishes.

(2)

“**Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.**” This is what John the Baptist cried. This unlikely Messiah, springing forth from a dead stump, would accomplish something we can only dream about. He will accomplish peace. What he will accomplish is unheard of in this world. Predators and prey eating together, sleeping together, playing together. Kids playing with snakes, every parent’s worst nightmare, will not be harmed. There will be peace on God’s holy mountain.

Last week, we heard Isaiah’s prophecy of the mountain of the Lord’s temple being established. The temple referred to Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, that mountain, God’s kingdom would be higher than any other kingdom, philosophy, religion, or worldview. Now here, Isaiah points to what God’s kingdom will be like. It will be peaceful, peace is established. We may not see this peace established in our world today, but this describes a time when Christ comes to take us to be with him in heaven. And yet, this prophecy of Isaiah is not just some “time in the future” prophecy, it’s foundation of peace is realized now.

Not only did Jesus come to proclaim God’s word, he came to save God’s world. He came to save a world that was dead, just like the stump of Jesse. A world that was dead in sin. A world that was hostile to God. He established peace between God and man with his sacrifice. Prepare the way for the Lord, believe what he has accomplished. It takes no work on our part, simply believe, and live how you were born to live.

We are PREPARED FOR THE ADVENT KING coming in Isaiah's prophecy. We have heard what he has come to do, we have heard what he has come to accomplish. Now, what will you do? This last week, I had an opportunity to lead a chapel service at our Lutheran grade school on the northwest side of town. The theme of the devotion was "Dressed and ready to go." It gave a reminder similar to today. There are certain ways we dress when we get ready for something. We get ready to go to church by putting on some nice clothes, we get ready to go hiking by getting a hat and a good pair of shoes, we get ready for the cold outside by putting on our jackets. Based on what we are wearing, people could tell what we are doing. It is the same thing with a Christian life, based on the way we act, people can tell we are Christians.

We act like Christians prepared for Christ's return when we love others, even if they don't love us back, we act like Christians prepared for Christ's return when we put others before ourselves, we act like Christians prepared for Christ's return when we give back to the Lord generously and from the heart for all the generosity he has shown us.

We do all of this because of the root of Jesse is our banner, it is what we rally to. Isaiah's message before us this morning about the branch of Jesse is a both a message of warning and a message of hope. We must prepare a place in our hearts for our Advent King. We prepare our hearts by repenting of our sins, and believing in his message of peace. For only when we have done that are we truly prepared for Christmas. Amen!

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.