

A BETTER TOMORROW

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ December 4, 2016



A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— ³ 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; ⁴ 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. ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. ⁶ 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. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. (Isaiah 11:1-10)

Dear brothers and sisters, let us walk in the light of the Lord,

The eyes of the country have turned this past week to the devastating fires destroying acres of land in the south eastern United States. The most devastating of which is the wildfires that burned through Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. These wildfires have burned more than 15,000 acres, 400 buildings, and have killed at least seven people, injuring dozens more. And while there is an outpouring of support and aid for the areas affected by the fires, the residents of these areas will spend the next days, weeks, and even months rebuilding what the wildfires took away in a matter of hours.

It was the mayor of Gatlinburg that offered encouragement saying, “We will rebuild, it’s going to be OK.” At this point in time, that’s the encouragement he can give. Tomorrow will be better. Whenever a tragedy like this happens, whether natural or manmade, isn’t that the encouragement that we give to the victims? Tomorrow will be better. A famous song from the musical *Annie* goes, “The sun will come out tomorrow,” meaning tomorrow’s a new day with new opportunities, a time to put the past behind.

The prophet Isaiah was painting a similar scene to the people of Israel 700 years before Jesus walked on this earth. He was painting them a picture of devastation and sorrow that would come not as a result of some natural disaster, but as a result of a manmade disaster. And like the mayor of Gatlinburg, like the little orphan Annie, God through the prophet Isaiah promises A BETTER TOMORROW

1. Because of God’s promised leader
2. Because of God’s promised kingdom

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Last week, we began to talk about the time in which Isaiah lived. He lived at a time when Egypt and Assyria were the two superpowers in the region. A time was coming soon when war would be at the

doorstep of Israel and Judah. And the Assyrians were not a nation you wanted to mess with. Isaiah predicted that the Assyrians would come and destroy the city of Samaria, the capital of Israel at the time, and sweep Israel away into captivity. But this didn't mean Judah was out of the woods. God would remain patient with Judah, but eventually, they too would fall.

For some, this might seem hard to understand, because after all, weren't the Israelites God's chosen people, why would God abandon them to their enemies? This can be traced all the way back to when they entered the land of Israel. God said to the Israelites, **"love the Lord your God...and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering...But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient...I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will *not* live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."** God made an agreement with the Israelites - obey me and stay in the land, or disobey me and I will drive you from this land.

This is what was going on for the nation of Judah and Israel. Like the sinful nature is apt to do, they strayed from worshiping and obeying the Lord, and the Lord was going to punish them for it. This was the manmade disaster that befell the Israelites. This was all because the kings that had led Israel and Judah for the most part (but not entirely) had selfishly abused the office of king, taking advantage of the people, and taking advantage of the power to do whatever they saw fit, instead of looking after the people and instead of doing whatever God saw fit.

And so in the agricultural imagery that is so prevalent in the Bible, God describes what he will do to Israel and Judah, he will cut them down, just like an ax cuts down a tall tree. This is what the stump of Jesse is talking about. Of all the kings that reigned over ancient Israel, King David is the most famous. God made a special promise to David that his family would continue to rule over Israel, that one of his descendants would be a king. And for 400 or so years, God seemed to keep that promise. David's family did reign first over Israel, but then over Judah. There were no successful rebellions, just one line of kings, a mighty tree. But this mighty tree was cut down by God for reasons aforementioned.

And for the next 500 years, that stump was dormant, it would appear for all the world to see that God couldn't keep his promise, because no one from the line of David reigned over the house of Israel. But Isaiah foretold all of this. He said "all hope is not lost," the promise of God is of A BETTER TOMORROW. **"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."** Isaiah was recording another promise of God. The promise we recall from last week is that God's Kingdom has come and is coming. The promise we hear this week is how spectacular that kingdom is. It is A BETTER TOMORROW.

What all those other kings who followed in David's line didn't do, the Messiah would do. But he would not do it in the same way that David's other descendants did it. He did not come to reign on an earthly throne (contrary to what many Jews at that time thought and hoped for), for that could only have been temporary. He came to reign eternally. And because he came to reign eternally, he came to do things in a different way.

The first way in which he would be different, is that **"The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him"** Isaiah says. A Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel and might, of the fear of the Lord. This Holy Spirit that would be with the Savior all the days of his life would allow him to judge justly and righteously. Isaiah puts this in what seems to be a strange way. **"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."**

When a judge determines whether a person is guilty or innocent, they look at the evidence that is presented - the evidence they see and hear. When we make “judgments” about people we base those on what we see and hear. That is what we are limited to. But this shoot from the stump of Jesse, this branch from the tree of David will not be limited to what he can see and hear. Because he can look into the heart and the head at the motivation and intent. We see this proven time and time again during Jesus’ life on this earth - whether it was revealing what people were thinking about him, or uncovering the improper motivations for their actions.

This alone is reason for A BETTER TOMORROW with God’s promised leader. Who wouldn’t want a leader who determines the course of action based on the thoughts and attitudes of his followers? Who wouldn’t want perfect justice and equality in this world? Who wouldn’t want the wicked punished and the good rewarded? Right now, we may disagree on who exactly is good and who is wicked, we may disagree on who is right and who is wrong, but to live in a place where all of this comes to be, wouldn’t that be wonderful?

But I think we also realize, we’re not capable of making that happen. I think we also realize that we’re not capable of being truly objective. I think we also realize we’re not capable of being unbiased. Not only is that true in the people we choose to hang out with, the opinions we hold on a number of issues, or the sports teams we like, it’s also true on a spiritual level. There is no way we can be objective when it comes our relationship with God. And there’s no way we can realize with this brain on top of our shoulders how much we have offended our God. There just isn’t.

But that’s what makes for A BETTER TOMORROW as well because of God’s promised leader. What we wouldn’t and couldn’t do, he came to do. He not only came to judge with righteousness and justice, he also came to live righteousness and justice. He did not live that way to show us how to do it. He lived that way for us. He is the ultimate leader who looked out for the needs of his followers, not their wants. He could not more deviate from this plan than we could follow it. It is God’s promised leader who leads us on to A BETTER TOMORROW in God’s promised Kingdom.

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It is a promised kingdom we heard a little bit about last week. It’s a promised kingdom that is dwelling within you now as you live in peace with God. But it’s also a promised kingdom that is still coming in A BETTER TOMORROW. It is this promised kingdom that we wait for tomorrow that Isaiah goes on to describe in the second half of our lesson this morning.

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat...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.” Sounds like a paradise here on earth right? Sounds like something you would want to be a part of right? It also perhaps sounds like something too good to be true. That would be like asking Arizona and ASU fans to get along together. Once again, pay attention to where this is going to happen, **“...on my holy mountain.”**

One important point that Isaiah made in chapter 2 (which we looked at in last week’s sermon) he makes again in chapter 11. **“On my holy mountain”** refers to Christ. Christ is God’s holy mountain. In Christ there will be this kind of kingdom, there will be this kind of peace. Outside of Christ, this cannot and will not happen. Because outside of Christ there is no knowledge of the Lord. It is something that we realize as Christians right now, it is something we are preparing to celebrate with the birth of Jesus in just a few weeks. But this is also a promise of A BETTER TOMORROW.

In A BETTER TOMORROW, all of these unnatural relationships, all of these seemingly absurd events, will be a reality, in God's promised kingdom. You believe this to be true, right? Because this is what we believe about heaven, this is where we believe we will be going, not because we hope we've lived good enough, but because of God's promised leader. You know something else about God's promised kingdom? There's still room for more people. There's still room for more people to live on God's holy mountain. What better Christmas present can you give to someone than an invitation to hear about A BETTER TOMORROW?

That is why we're here as Christians. Yes, absolutely we're here for our own faith, so that we can be strengthened and grow in our own faith and certainty and rejoice in what God has done. But we're also here to take God's message seriously. And we do that when we take his great commission seriously, which means we take seriously the pastor's encouragement to grab an invitation card and invite someone to our Christmas services, we invite someone to join us for a Bible Study, we seriously consider helping to canvass our neighborhoods around our church inviting them. We wouldn't do this to tell them about some "so-so" news. But we don't have "so-so" news, we have good news. Good news about A BETTER TOMORROW, and A BETTER TOMORROW is about God's promised leader, and God's promised kingdom. Amen.