

*Isaiah 11:1-10. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> 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— <sup>3</sup> 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; <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.*

**God's kingdom is worth waiting for.**

- 1. The King comes from surprise origins.**
- 2. The King comes as one who is surprisingly different.**
- 3. The King comes and brings a surprising ending.**

My parents love the Hallmark Channel. In their retirement years, they have grown fond of Hallmark Channel movies especially during this time of year. If you are unfamiliar with this seasonal tradition, in the weeks running up to Christmas the Hallmark Channel will play special Christmas movies 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Thus, into the wee hours of the night, my parents will watch and watch some more. My observation of these movies is that they are not just Christmas movies, but Hallmark Christmas movies are almost a certain category of their own. Just about everyone that I have seen, or even caught a few minutes of, have the same basic set up. There is a basic story of a person a bit down on their luck or in a spot of trouble, but after a few “unexpected” twists and turns, the story ends with a happy ending. Each one follows this formula to the point that the “unexpected” twists and turns become rather predictable, yet for some reason, these movies have a way of getting you to stay and watch to see exactly how this one is going to end. As my parents will tell you that the denouement or the grand finale is always worth waiting for. (My father particularly likes to use the word “denouement” which is a word of French origin and means an untying - which I suppose is a fitting way to describe how all the twists and turns are untied and the end of the story a happy ending is laid out, complete with some festive touch.)

And so it is that here we have a familiar and moving picture with a festive touch. We have been told the stirring ending. We are familiar with the main character's origin of humble beginnings. We are told of his stirring heroics but regardless of the repetition, this is a tale that draws us in unto the very end. For this is a script carefully crafted and carried out by God, and the Holy Scriptures reveal a narrative that has much more substance and importance than any other tale of love and woe. Yes, there are a few “unexpected” twists and turns that we ought to see coming from mile away, yet these twists and turns are so lovely and so wonderful that no matter how many times we hear it told, they display the wonder of God's love which will always have the power to take our breath away. For within these promises we are told a message that pertains to eternal life and death and a revealing of

God's undeserved love. Thus, our lesson for today includes a recounting of God's promise of deliverance, redemption, and eternal salvation. This is part of that marvelous record, the true account, of an unfaithful people and forever faithful God that ends in a way that is so incredibly different from how it should have ended.

Therefore, let us settle in as we marvel once more in the beautiful promise that God in his love gives to us his people. Yes, God's kingdom is worth waiting for. Our King comes from surprise origins. He comes as One who is surprisingly different. Our King comes and brings us a surprising ending.

The people of Isaiah's day were of course down on their luck and in a spot of trouble. But it was not a comedy of errors or some series of unfortunate events that led them to this point. They only had themselves to blame. The choices that they had made as individuals in their devotion to foreign gods, the choices that they had made as a nation in cozying up to other nations and seeking allies that might protect them instead of trusting in God, left them in some dire straits. They were unfaithful to their faithful Lord and God would call the people to repent.

Their response did not please the Lord. God would send prophet after prophet, but the people would not listen. Finally, he warned them that destruction was coming, justice had to be served. God would, in a sense, whistle and foreign nations would come at his beckoning and do his bidding. The northern kingdom would be swept away by the Assyrians and the southern kingdom would see this and turn back to God. Unfortunately, it didn't take that long and God's people rejected him again and as a result, God's people of the southern kingdom of Judah would be carried away as well.

The kings who were supposed to care for God's people and direct them to God were at the very heart of this terrible collapse. These weak and wicked kings often cared for nothing more than their own interests. In their selfishness, they ignored God's Word and His will. They failed to care for God's people. They were so bent on their own self-serving ways that they were even known as those who preyed on the weak and the vulnerable. It got so bad that widows and orphans were mistreated. And thus, the once-mighty line of King David would be cut down by God in his righteous judgment. Notice how that once lofty line of kings is referred to in this prophecy: not the throne of David, not the sons of Solomon, but the stump of Jesse. Jesse, the father of David, had no special claim to fame. A father of 8 sons, a farmer, herder of sheep, from the small town of Bethlehem, that's about the extent of what we know of him. Thus, Isaiah speaks these words of God as if to say that this mighty oak of a royal family would be shaved back, chopped down, to its humble beginnings. God refers to this once noble line without rival as the stump of Jesse. The mighty tree of David and Solomon would be chopped down to its humble roots and would sit dormant and nearly dead for years upon years.

Imagine that picture for a moment. In place of a big beautiful Christmas tree in your house or church, imagine if we had nothing but a stump to stare at for years and years. No majesty, no lights, nothing decorative ornaments or lovely garland, but a dead and lifeless reminder of what once was. But then suddenly after all those years of having to look at that awful stump, there was suddenly a shoot, a lovely green, life-revealing, life-giving, hope renewing sprig would sprout. This sprout would then grow and become strong and would bear fruit. And so here's that twist, the well-known twist, that we ought to see coming from a

mile away, but still it is so full of incredible and undeserved hope and love that it pulls us in and takes our breath away. We listen intently as we hear that promise and we breathe this truth in, once again. And with thankful awe, we are refreshed and renewed as we consider what our God has done. ***A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*** Jesus would come. In that tiny town of Bethlehem, Jesse's town, a son born not to nobility but born in poverty, he would come to bring life and forgiveness to those who didn't deserve it. God in love promised to his unfaithful people that he would remain faithful and he would deliver.

This promise is for us as well. What comfort there is for us in these words of promise. Instead of rotting away year after year in the hopelessness our sins, and the death that our self-serving ways deserve, God sends his awesome promise of life and deliverance. We have not treated others as we should. We have taken advantage of others. We have not put our trust and hope fully in the Lord. We have put our trust in useless things. We are unfaithful to God and yet see how your faithful God comes for you. He comes for us. He comes to forgive and to restore God and his people.

The Shoot from Jesse, this righteous Branch would come. He would be born to the house and line of David, just as promised. This is the promise that Isaiah gave to the people to sustain them and give them hope. But look closely at his description and you will see that there are some twists and turns and unexpected surprises that would come with this Root of Jesse. The promised King would come, and he would be surprisingly different than any other king. The mighty days of earthly power and might were over, but a different kingdom would come, and this different kind of king would be a greater kind of king. Unlike the wicked kings who deserted the ways of God and thus God had forsaken them; this king would be equipped with the Spirit of God himself and this King would follow the ways of God. And therefore, this King would perfectly serve and save the people. Filled with the Spirit of the LORD, he would delight in the LORD and he would serve the needs of the people. He would not think and act to please his own self-interest, but his sole interest would be to follow the will of the Lord. He would trust the ways of God fully. The coming one would follow the will of the Father through and through, from start to finish. We remember how he came according to the will of the Father. We remember in the Garden of Gethsemane how he was in anguish and yet managed to utter the phrase, "not my will, but yours be done!" To know and do the will of God even if meant to suffer, to think and act rightly, to rule with care and concern for his people, this would be the lasting mark of the coming one. He would not prey on the weak, but with compassion and salvation he would come. He would come with his good and powerful Word he would lead, protect, and deliver his people. This is how Isaiah describes the coming one. ***<sup>2</sup> 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— <sup>3</sup> 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; <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.***

How sweet these words of promise to a people who knew only self-serving rulers who led them into destruction! How sweet these words to us today who live in a time where

integrity and honesty and righteousness and godliness are traits that are difficult to come by in our leaders and even in ourselves. Surprisingly different, and set apart, and wonderful is our King Jesus!

And take notice of the surprising power of his word. The rod of his mouth, the breath of his lips, he will strike the earth, he will slay the wicked, but he comes to save, to lead, to guide the weak, the sinner, the penitent and humbled. As we are told later in the book of Isaiah, ***a bruised reed he will not break, nor a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*** His Word is mighty but is also a word of incredible compassion and love. His Word serves as this double-edged sword that both humbles but then also forgives. And the Spirit working through his Word gives faith to us who believe, and through that Spirit-given faith, we lay claim to the incredible blessings of his unique and wonderful kingdom: forgiveness, eternal life, and peace.

Jesus would come just as promised, but there would be those unexpected twists and turns in our Messiah's coming. He was born of a humble virgin from the house of David. Born in the town of Jesse, not in a king's palace and a hero's welcome but the Son of God was born in a crude and lowly place among the animals. He would live a common life, but he would establish his uncommon kingdom through his mighty Word. Righteousness and faithfulness would never depart from his presence. He would be blameless in his life and in his faithful service to God and his people. The resulting kingdom that he would ultimately establish would be something unlike anything this world has ever seen. His kingdom, as Jesus in his humble state, would later tell Pilate, "is not of this world" but instead it would be a spiritual kingdom established not with the show of might but by his powerful word that brings hearts that are dead in sin to everlasting life and peace and eternal rest.

With soaring words of promise and breathtaking beauty, Isaiah takes us to the glorious denouement, the grand finale. He reveals this moving picture of peace and the untwisting of all things that is so picture perfect. And it is so lovely, so different, so surprising, so unlike what we deserve that even though we can see this "unexpected" twist from miles away we know that it will be worth the wait. A place of perfect peace and rest. In this moving picture of promise rich with symbolism, not even the animals will prey on the weaknesses of others, instead, every living creature will live in peace. What a marvelous picture of peace God gives to us. ***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. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain.*** Fear and anxiety, pain and sorrow, war and discord, strife and tension - all the awful things of this life, all that came with sin and death, all that adds to anxiety and our daily restlessness, it will be wiped out completely. And this one born as a child will lead us. ***The Root of Jesse will stand a banner for the nations.***

In a world that often seems restless and hopeless, this is the message that lifts us up to give us hope and peace. This is the message of forgiveness freely given by a faithful Savior is the message that we gladly lift up for all people to see. Instead of judgment, instead of dread and despair and death that our sins deserve, we have this promise of deliverance and of life and of rest, through Jesus Christ our mighty Savior, who came in humility to give us peace with God. That is a happy ending that is far more than a thrill that lasts for a brief episode or brings a warm feeling merely for a season, this is happy ending that is wonderfully real, absolutely eternal, and certainly worth waiting for. Amen.