

Behold Your King!

The Righteous Branch (Isaiah 11:1-10)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on December 4, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ If you were with us this past fall, we had been going through the book of Judges, and we titled the series “You Really Need a King”. That’s essentially the message of Judges. We were never meant to rule ourselves. You and I weren't meant to be our own standard, our own guide, doing whatever is right in our own eyes (Judg. 21:25). **If you live without a king, Judges happens.** All the depravity and violence and injustice – all that takes place in the book – happens. **The point is that we were made to live and serve under a King.** Under the good, loving rule of the King of kings. We really need a king.
 - Well that led right into our Advent series, which we’re calling “Behold Your King!”. Advent is that time of year where Christians celebrate and observe the coming of the King. It happens in two directions. **In one sense, Advent looks back at the coming of the King, over two thousand years ago, when he was born in a stable on the streets of David’s town.** He came that first Christmas with a mission to redeem for himself a Bride, a people purchased by his blood. He came to redeem his Church.

- ❖ **But Advent also looks forward to the second coming of the King.** One day, this same Messiah will return in the same way he left. He left in resurrected glory and will return once more in glory to bring his kingdom in its fullness and to establish his kingly reign forevermore. **In his first advent, Jesus came to redeem his Church. In his second, he comes to restore his world.**
 - So the Advent season is about setting our hearts and minds on both comings. **Looking back in faith and gratitude. Looking forward in faith and hope.** As we study Isaiah and consider the ancient Israelites and how they eagerly anticipated the coming of the Messiah, holding on to the promises of God, in hope believing against hope – **as we consider their faith, we aim to strengthen our own, to hope against hope, believing that the Messiah is coming once more into the world.**

- ❖ This morning’s passage is perfect in the way it has both advents in view. The promises found in last week’s passage in Isaiah 9:1-7 were fulfilled in the first advent. **But the promises found in today’s passage will be inaugurated in the first advent but fulfilled in the second.** So as we study it together, we’re going to set our eyes on the future and learn more about this coming King and his coming rule over all the earth.
 - I’ve divided things up into three sections. First, we’ll consider the qualifications of this coming King. Second, the character of this coming King. And third, the glorious rule of this coming King.

The Qualifications of this Coming King

- ❖ Let’s begin by looking at the qualifications of this King. It’s described for us in chapter 11:1-2. Let me set the context for you. **Isaiah is going to apply the imagery of a chopped down (or burnt down) forest.** It’s not the first time. Earlier in **chapter 6:13**, in describing God’s discipline over his own people, Isaiah used the same imagery. He said Israel, in all its arrogant pride, will be brought low, will be felled by God. But he’ll leave a remnant – like a single stump that remains after a forest has been burned down (cf. Isa. 9:18-19).

- ❖ And then in the verses right before our text, in **chapter 10:33-34**, the same imagery is applied, but this time in reference to Assyria, the global power that was threatening Israel's very existence. Against this arrogant nation, the LORD promises to lop their branches and cut down their thickets with an axe (cf. Isa. 10:17-19).
 - In other words, whether it's being applied to the enemies of God's people or God's people themselves, this imagery of a forest laid bare, chopped down because of an infestation of human pride – the imagery reflects the judgment of God.

- ❖ **But as we enter chapter 11, we see that, even in judgment, there is mercy.** Just picture chopped down forest with nothing left. Gone are all the branches. All the foliage. All the tree trunks. All the woodland birds and critters. All gone. There's no sound, no movement, no life.
 - Except for a single stump. **And out of that stump, a green shoot has sprouted.** That's the picture Isaiah is painting for us in chapter 11:1. *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”*

- ❖ Everything above the topsoil is dead, chopped down or burnt up. But beneath the surface, the roots of this tree are alive and well. And from its roots shall come forth a branch that will bear fruit once again.
 - Now in v1 this branch (or shoot) is described as coming forth from the stump of Jesse. **It's rare for OT prophecy to make reference to Jesse, the father of King David.** Most messianic prophecies speak of the Messiah as a son of David, an offspring of David, someone of the line or house of David. Jesse is rarely mentioned. So when he is, there must be a good reason.

- ❖ **I think it's because the point Isaiah wants to get across is that God is doing something new here (cf. Isa. 43:19).** There's going to be a reset, a restart. You see, by the time of this prophecy, there had already been many sons of David, many kings of Israel, but none have proven to be the Messiah. They all failed to one degree or another.
 - **So what's promised in v1 is not just a new king from the line of David – but a new David.** It's a reset. God will raise up another David out of the same stump of Jesse. Like David, he'll rule as a man after God's own heart. Like David, he'll be zealous for the name and glory of the LORD.

- ❖ **That's why this coming King is uniquely qualified to rule over us. He won't repeat the mistakes of the former sons of David.** He'll be different this time. It goes on to say in v2 that the Messiah will rule with a different spirit. It says, *“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.”*
 - Throughout the OT, the Spirit of the LORD would temporarily fill someone and empower them for mighty service. Supplying that person with a supernatural strength or capacity for ministry. We saw that a number of times in the book of Judges.

- ❖ **But here it says the Spirit of the LORD will rest upon this King. Not for temporary service but for a forever reign.** Unlike the judges and kings of Israel, this forever reign will not be marked by pride and idolatry, by foolishness and immorality. No, because he has the Spirit in him, his rule will be characterized by wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the LORD.
 - This is the King who would eventually spring up from the stump of Jesse. But that won't be for a long time coming. Historically there's a 700 year span between chapter 11 and the birth of Christ. **So put yourself in the shoes of those listening to Isaiah's prophecy for the first time. For them, the stump is just a bare stump.** It probably looks scorched and charred all over. It looks dead. It doesn't look like anything is going to grow out of it.

- ❖ But the message is clear: **All is not lost.** Even when it feels like God has laid waste his people. His chastisement is so severe. It feels like he's through with us. Like he's left us in the dark. But it's when the darkness is at its thickest, that a shaft of light breaks through. **It's out of the devastating ruins of judgment, that hope springs forth.**
 - Some of us are looking at our lives, and right now it looks like a wasteland. Like burnt down forest. You feel devastated by God. Like his hand has been against you. He's laid you to waste. But that's when you need eyes of faith.

- ❖ All is not lost. There's a stump somewhere. Maybe you can't see it right now. So ask him to open the eyes of your heart to see. **Because out of that stump, hope springs forth.** Jesus sprang forth, the first time around, when no one expected it. When all hope seemed lost.
 - So is it any surprise, that the second time around, he'll arrive when you least expect. When you're looking at your life and feeling like it's hopeless. If that describes you right now, then the promise of this passage is what you need to pray over your heart.

The Character of this Coming King

- ❖ All is not lost. We have a King who has come and will come again who is qualified. Who is fit to rule over us with the Spirit of the LORD resting upon him. So now let's consider the character of this coming King.
 - Look with me in v3. Isaiah goes on to say that this coming King's delight will be in the fear of the LORD. **He won't just fear God. He won't just reverently submit himself under God. He'll love it. It'll be his delight.** That's huge. That makes him a King you *want* to trust. That you *want* to follow.

- ❖ Think about it. **Why is it that people don't trust their own political leaders?** It's because there's a general impression among your average citizen that all politicians are beholden to special interest groups. To lobbyists. To the rich and famous. Politicians need the backing of the powerful in order to stay in power themselves. It's because they fear man – it's hard to trust them, to believe they have our best in mind.

- ❖ **But imagine being ruled by a King who fears no man.** Who is beholden to no man. Under the thumb of no man. A King who only fears God (and delights in it!). That's the kind of king you want to follow. And that explains why he'll be a King who's adored by the poor and needy of the world. It goes on to say in v3 that, "*He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear.*"
- ❖ Ancient kings functioned as judges do today. Hearing complaints and adjudicating cases. **What we're told is that this coming King will not be one to judge by appearances but by righteousness.** So he won't show partiality. He won't favor the rich and powerful.
 - But rather it goes on to say in v4, "*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.*"
 - So unlike the kings of the earth, even the kings of Israel, this coming King won't see himself as privileged but as responsible – responsible to work for the good of all his people, especially the poor and meek of the earth.
- ❖ When it says he'll judge the poor, that's not a bad thing. That doesn't mean he's going to look down his nose at them. No, it's a good thing. **It means he'll be the kind of King who makes decisions for the protection of the poor and needy.** The meek, the helpless, the outcast will know they have a King of their side, who rules with righteousness and equity.
 - **And again, the only way the poor and needy are going to feel truly cared for is if the King is not beholden to the rich and powerful in order to gain or maintain his authority.** Only if we have a King who fears no one, who has no political opposition, who never worries, who never feels the need to curry the favor of the mighty – only then can the weak know they have a Ruler who rules for them.
- ❖ But don't misunderstand what I'm saying. **I'm not saying a just society – where the needs of the poor are heard and satisfied – requires for there to be a strongman in power.** I'm not saying we need a one-party system or that we need to eliminate special interest groups or lobbyists. **I'm not making a political point at all** (which you might assume during this politically-charged season).
 - **No, I'm making a theological point.** No governmental philosophy or system, no politician, no mere man or woman in office or on a throne is going to be the kind of ruler you can wholly trust and give your life to.
- ❖ Only Jesus. **Only Jesus is the kind of King who can rule with no opposition or challenge to his authority and yet not become a strongman motivated by pride or personal gain.** Why? Because he's not clothed with the trappings of human ego – but clothed with righteousness and faithfulness.
 - Look at v5. **We're told that righteousness and faithfulness will mark the very core of his being.** He's wrapped by these very attributes. In fact, the belt of his waist, (of his loins) is referring to his loincloths, to his undergarments. It's trying to say that underneath it all the Messiah is characterized by righteousness and faithfulness.

- ❖ Friends, this is a King you *want* to trust, that you *want* to follow. **Now for those of us who do, who are followers of Jesus, I encourage you this Christmas season to follow him to the poor and needy.** Think about it. When the Messiah arrived in his first advent, he drew so near to the poor and needy that he became one of them. He entered their world.
 - He came not as a wealthy aristocrat but as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. As one despised and rejected by men (Isa. 53:3-5). He was born to a Galilean carpenter and his young bride. He was born lower class. He identified with the poor.
 - So what does that mean for us? **It means getting into the Christmas spirit this holiday season will involve drawing nearer to the poor and needy around us.** Talk it over with your family or your small group, and find a way to give of your time and to spend your resources in loving the poor and needy.

- ❖ But before we move on, I want to say that I think it's good to do something during Christmas, **but remember that Christ didn't just drop in to visit the poor for an annual visit.** Remember, he identified with them. He lived among them for over thirty years. So it's not just about doing our part this holiday season to help the poor and needy. We've got to figure out how to identify with them and draw near to them as a part of our discipleship to Christ.

The Glorious Rule of this Coming King

- ❖ Let's consider the glorious rule of this coming King. This is the most striking aspect of the passage. It clearly describes a reality yet to come. It may be inaugurated by his first advent, but what we read in vv6-9 awaits a future fulfillment at the King's second advent.
 - What we see is that his rule will establish true peace on earth. Not just the cessation of conflict or the absence of war. No, true peace is a transformative peace, where nothing remains the same. **When Jesus' kingdom comes in all its fullness, ancient hostilities will be put to rest and ancient foes will be reconciled to each other.**

- ❖ We're given numerous pictures in vv6-7 of predator and prey living at peace with one another. **It's a complete transformation of the present order of things.** Where it says "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb*", that's the word for sojourn. It means to dwell in another's house as a guest. **We're to imagine, when the Messiah's rule comes in its fullness, there will be such peace on earth that the sheep will invite the wolf to stay over as a welcomed guest.** The same goes for the leopard and the young goat; the lion and the calf.
 - And then it says a little child will lead them all. **When the Messiah returns, the world will be so transformed that even a little child will be able to exercise the dominion that was given to man over the rest of God's creation** (cf. Gen. 1:26).

- ❖ Right now, we don't have that dominion. We forfeited it at the Fall. So right now the animal kingdom can be downright scary. A little boy climbs into a lion's cage and the whole world freaks out. **But one day, when the world is made new again, that little boy is going to take that lion out for a walk.** And v7 goes on to describe an entire change in the constitution of these animals. Bears and lions will be grazing on grass instead of preying on the cow and ox.

- ❖ What's happening here? **What's happening is a return to an Edenic paradise.** When the Messiah returns he will complete a transformation of this world, a reversal of the effects of the Fall, a removal of all traces of sin's curse. He will make all things new (Rev. 21:5).
 - This becomes crystal clear in v8, "*The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.*" **What this is saying is that, when the Messiah returns in his second advent, the ancient enmity between the offspring of the Serpent and the offspring of the Woman will finally be put to rest** (Gen. 3:15). The curse will be gone. The Fall reversed. Like Tolkien says, everything sad is going to come untrue!

- ❖ There'll be nothing more to fear. **Evil and injustice, violence and oppression, harm and suffering – they will all be eradicated.** On that day, "*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.*" All the enemies of good will be made a footstool for the feet our King (Heb. 10:13).
 - **It says the whole earth will be the King's holy mountain.** That's referring to Mt. Zion, the hill upon which Jerusalem was built, where the Temple of God used to be. So v9 is saying that, when the King comes again, the whole earth will be his holy abode. **He will reign, not just over Jerusalem, but over every square inch of this planet.** The whole earth and everyone in it will be filled with the knowledge that he is their Creator, Redeemer, and King.

- ❖ And then in v10 we read this, "*In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples-of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.*" I never noticed this before until I studied the text this week, but notice how in v1 the Messiah is identified as the shoot that springs out of the root. But here he's identified as the root itself. He's the root of Jesse – the source of Jesse.
 - It's strange. **We already saw how v1 says Jesse is the source of the Messiah ("a shoot from the stump of Jesse"), but now in some mysterious way, the Messiah is also the source of Jesse.** Jesse is the source of him, and he's the source of Jesse.
 - The only way this can make any sense is if the God of all creation – the Root of everything (including Jesse) – somehow entered creation itself and was somehow born of a woman in the line of Jesse. **That's the only way someone can be a descendant of Jesse AND be the very source of Jesse.** Only the Incarnation makes sense of this. Only Christmas.

- ❖ And v10 goes on to say that, on the day he returns, the Messiah will stand as a signal (or banner) for the peoples. The signal serves as a rally point. **It's a sign calling all the nations home.** All the peoples of the earth, will come flooding in to worship at the feet of our King.
 - **What's interesting is that the word for 'signal' is the same word for the pole on which Moses set a bronze serpent in Numbers 21:9.** Because of their sins, the people of God fell under God's judgment, which came in the form of venomous serpents that invaded their camp. But anyone bit who looked up at the pole (at the signal) was healed.

- ❖ Well later on, in the Gospel of John, **Jesus would actually make reference to that bronze serpent, that signal that was lifted up high.** He said just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (Jn.3:14-15). And later he would say, "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself*", and we're told that by saying that he was describing by what kind of death he was going to die (Jn. 12:32-33).
 - **When Jesus was lifted up high on that cross, he stood as a signal for all the peoples, for all the nations, to come.** To come out of their sin and darkness. To come into his holy light. To draw near and find their rest in him.

- ❖ Think about this. **Jesus will one day draw all the peoples of the earth to himself, and he'll do it – not by threat or intimidation and not by force of personality or charisma – but by sacrificial love.** His dying love, in our place for the punishment of our sins, speaks a universal language that peoples of all nations can understand.

- ❖ Church, this is our mission. To go to the nations, to raise the signal, and to call the peoples of the earth to look to Christ and be healed. **This Christmas season let's remember our brothers and sisters who have left from among us to go to the nations as missionaries.** During the holidays, missionaries can feel especially homesick. So make a point this season to personally reach out to them.
 - I encourage other small groups to do what ours did the other night. If your group is a Ropeholder for one of our supported missionaries, get together and send them a care package for Christmas and consider putting together a monetary gift as a means of appreciation and as a real way of partnering with them in the gospel work they're doing, on our behalf, for the sake of the kingdom. Don't forget our missionaries.

- ❖ And don't forget that we have a mission to accomplish here in our city. We've got to take the signal (the banner) and hold it up high for all to see. Let's lift up Christ. Let's invite our friends and family to lift up their eyes and see Jesus for themselves. Invite them this Friday or Saturday to our Christmas Pageant, and we'll do our best to raise the signal high.