

## **Advent: “Between Two Homes”**

### Hoping For Future Deliverer – Part 1

Isaiah 11:1-3a

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<sup>1</sup> *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*

<sup>2</sup> *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.* <sup>3</sup> *And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes...* Isaiah 11:1–3a (ESV)

Advent is a time of waiting and anticipation as we approach the celebration of the first coming of Jesus with a longing for his second return. The word “advent” is an anglicized version of the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming.” If you grew up in a church that followed a liturgical calendar, you will know that Advent is the first month of the church calendar, which concludes on Pentecost Sunday in May.

Whether celebrating Advent has been a part of your spiritual journey or not, I think it is helpful to really focus our minds and hearts on the significance of what this time of year means in the story of redemption. After all, the entrance of Christ into the world as a baby was the inauguration of the plan of God to make atonement and forgiveness possible. Without Christ becoming human, there would be no salvation. And without Him becoming a helpless baby, there would be no model for Christian living or framework for our Christian relationships. This time of year has significance far beyond the traditions and our celebrations. Without Advent there would be no hope.

### **Why Isaiah 11?**

Over the next three weeks we are going to do something different. We are going to be studying the same passage and examining it in three sections over the next three Sundays. This week we will be examining verses 1-3a, next week verses 3b-5, and on the final Sunday of the year, our three Pastoral Residents will be preaching in each of the three services on verses 6-10.

We are going to dig really deep into this text over the next few weeks because this is a very important passage in the overall story of the gospel, it played a critical role in the history of Israel, and there are some great lessons to learn. The text is loaded with some great promises, none of which were fulfilled before Christ, some of which were fulfilled in Christ, and others for which we are still waiting.

This text is not only packed with meaning and significance, but it is also relevant to how we experience this holiday season. We are celebrating a powerful moment in redemptive history, there are many promises that we have received in and through Christ, and we are still waiting for

the fulfillment of other promises. Christmas is a time that we celebrate God's faithfulness and a time for us to anchor our lives, afresh and new, in the future promises, especially if the celebrations around you seem a bit odd because of some pain in your life. Isaiah 11 is a hopeful text in the midst of a scary moment in biblical history.

### **The Background of Isaiah 11**

In order to appreciate the full meaning and significance of this text, you have to understand something about the background of when this text was written and what was happening. It was a very desperate time for the people of God.

Isaiah 11 is set in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (BC) when the nation of Israel is divided into two kingdoms: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Isaiah was a prophet during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all of whom were kings of Judah (1:1). The main focus of Isaiah's ministry was to the Southern Kingdom, as the Northern Kingdom grew closer and closer to God's judgment, which would eventually come in 733 BC at the hands of the Assyrian Empire.

Isaiah's message for the people of Judah was to turn from their wickedness and their hard-hearted self-confidence and look to God as their Savior, even as judgment comes. Isaiah 1-2 serves as a great summary of the entire book.

The people of God have rebelled:

*<sup>2</sup> Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me . . . <sup>4</sup> Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. (Isaiah 1:2, 4) (ESV)*

Restoration through judgment is coming:

*<sup>25</sup> I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. <sup>26</sup> And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." <sup>27</sup> Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness. (Isaiah 1:25-27) (ESV)*

There is a promise of future glory:

*<sup>2</sup> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, <sup>3</sup> and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2-3) (ESV)*

As we study chapter 11, you will see these themes emerge again. God is going to restore His sinful children through judgment and deliverance to a future glory. That's the theme.

But you also need to understand the political landscape in order to appreciate this text. The king of Judah was Ahaz,<sup>1</sup> the eleventh king since Israel and Judah were divided, and the grandson of King Uzziah.<sup>2</sup> He was not a king who followed after the Lord but instead embraced Baal worship, child sacrifice, and he led the land of Judah into rampant idolatry, even building a pagan divination altar in the court of the temple (see 2 Chronicles 28:1-4 and 2 Kings 16:10-16).

Soon after Ahaz was crowned king of Judah, the kings of Israel and Syria attempted to force Ahaz into an alliance against Assyria, the dominant Middle-East superpower. Isaiah's continual message to Ahaz was for him to put his trust in the Lord. However, after lost battles with Israel and Syria, and after additional invasions by the Edomites and Philistines in the South, Ahaz appealed to Assyria for help (2 Chronicles 28:5-19). While under great political pressure, Ahaz paid tribute by giving the Assyrians the gold, silver and treasures from the temple and his own palace (2 Kings 16:8-9). Judah became an Assyrian vassal state for the next thirty years, and they discovered that life under the Assyrian reign was nearly impossible. Assyria was a means of God's discipline (Isaiah 10:5-6).

Now in order to understand Isaiah 11, you need to know that the prophet Isaiah was continually telling Ahaz not to put his trust in Assyria but to trust the Lord.

*<sup>3</sup> And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. <sup>4</sup> And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. Isaiah 7:3-4 (ESV)*

Isaiah told Ahaz to ask for a sign from the Lord to assure his heart in 7:10, and when he refused, Isaiah famously said, *"The Lord himself<sup>3</sup> will give you a sign. Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14).<sup>4</sup> Matthew cites this text in his gospel as he connects the birth of Jesus to this promise. The promise to Ahaz had a fulfillment in his lifetime and in the future.

Isaiah attempted to strengthen Ahaz's faith with the promise of God's deliverance, even though the situation was dark and hard. *<sup>17</sup> I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him"* (Isaiah 8:17 (ESV). And central to this hope is the longing for future deliverer – one who will be sent from God.

*<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)*

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<sup>1</sup> Also called Jehoahaz

<sup>2</sup> It was after the death of Uzziah that Isaiah had his famous encounter with the holiness of the Lord in Isaiah 6.

<sup>3</sup> "The Lord himself" is the theme of the book of Isaiah.

<sup>4</sup> For a sermon on this text see <http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/why-everyone-should-love-the-name-immanuel/>

So the setting of Isaiah 11 was during a time when Ahaz was fearful of the alliance between Israel and Syria, and he was tempted to look to Assyria for his deliverance. Isaiah exhorts Ahaz to put his trust in the Lord himself, and he used the promise of the future to attempt to strengthen Ahaz's faith.

Isaiah wanted Ahaz to know that God himself is going to rescue and restore His people through a coming deliverer. And so during this Advent season, it is good to look at this text because it shows us the plan of redemption as God Himself restores His people. The God who disciplines is the God who restores.

### **Characteristics of the Deliverer**

The hope of God's restoration was based upon Someone who was yet to come. In verses 1-10 Isaiah introduces this person (vv.1-3a), describes how He rules (vv. 3b-5), and identifies the characteristics of His kingdom (vv. 6-10). We know from the New Testament that this future deliverer in Isaiah 11 is Jesus Christ, and that is why we are studying this text in Advent. But what do we learn about Him from Isaiah 11?

#### **1. The One Who was Promised**

In keeping with what we have already seen in Isaiah 7-9, our text begins with a promise that is connected to a Messiah or Deliverer who is yet to come. Isaiah aimed to show Ahaz that God has a plan that will bring ultimate restoration. Ahaz needed to trust in God's plan and not fall into a panicked trust in an earthly superpower. God gave the people of Judah and Ahaz a hint as to what the future looks like.

*<sup>1</sup> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*  
Isaiah 11:1 (ESV)

This verse is loaded with language that we need to understand more fully. If you read the first ten chapters of Isaiah, you will see that Isaiah loves agricultural metaphors. Take the following for instance:

- A disciplined Judah is described as "an oak whose leaf withers, like a garden without water" (Isaiah 1:30)
- The proud are described as the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan (Isaiah 1:13)
- The people of God are called a vineyard that produces wild grapes (Isaiah 5:1-20)
- When Isaiah describes the fear of the people over Syria and Israel, Isaiah says "the heart of the people shook as trees of the forest shake before the wind" (Isaiah 7:2)
- The discipline of the Lord is compared to the chopping down of a forest with so few trees that "a child can write them down" (Isaiah 10:19)

This theme of a forest laid bare is picked up in 10:33-34 as God himself cuts down the ungodly, including his disobedient people.

<sup>33</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. <sup>34</sup> He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One. Isaiah 10:33–34 (ESV)

So it is not by coincidence that the image of a “stump” is used in verse 1. The image that is intended here is one of destruction and devastation. A mighty tree, and even a forest, has been cut down. The forest is the people of God, and the tree is the line of David.

That is why the stump was called “of Jesse.” God promised that someone from David’s line would always rule over Israel, and Jesse is the father of David. So to call this the stump of Jesse was to clearly link the promise of a deliverer to the covenant that God made with David. In other words, even in the midst of God’s discipline, there is still hope because God will keep His word. God is thorough in His discipline and yet kind in His restoration. And even though you may not be able to see underneath the surface (“roots”) there is a gracious undergirding that is real and alive.

The second thing to notice in verse 1 is the imagery of life reflected in the words “*there shall come forth a shoot . . . a branch . . . shall bear fruit.*” Isaiah 4:2 uses similar language to describe the blessing of God’s reign through the coming Messiah, even linking Exodus-like language to the glory of it all.

<sup>2</sup> In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. <sup>3</sup> And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, <sup>4</sup> when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. <sup>5</sup> Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. <sup>6</sup> There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain. (Isaiah 4:2–6) (ESV)

It is a beautiful picture – one of peace, safety, and forgiveness. Isaiah wanted Ahaz to see how the Lord could be trusted even in the midst of fearful and painful seasons. The message of verse 1 is that when the landscape of your life or humanity looks like a field of stumps, do not forget the grace of God that lies underneath. Underneath devastation is divine promise.

For those of you who do not yet consider yourself a Christian, it might help you to know that this narrative of God keeping His promises is central to the message of the Bible. In fact, to become a Christian, you must believe God’s promise to cleanse people of their sins through the death of Jesus on their behalf. That belief is what the Bible calls faith. You believe God’s promises; you put your trust in Him. To be a Christian means that you rest your hope entirely on God’s promise to forgive you through Christ, not because of your righteous works. The Bible is God’s revelation of promises kept and promises that must be believed.

For those of you who are believers in Jesus, I hope that you can feel the hopeful significance of this text for your life. I love the message in Isaiah about God’s deliverance in the midst of devastation. God took the devastation of sin that plagues the entire human race, and He made it possible for

people to be reconciled to Himself. Sin made humanity a bunch of stumps. And yet God enters our stump-filled existence and rescues us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6). Who would have thought that God would do that through the brutal death of His own son on a symbol of human oppression and imperial power?

Further, next month we will be studying Romans 8, and we will see that underneath every event in life – even hard and painful ones – is the kind providence of God working everything out for our good (Romans 8:28-29). I think that is really important to remember this time of year because Christmas can be a great time of celebration, but it can also be a painful time, because in the midst of all the festivities, you can feel what is missing. Maybe 2014 has been a year with the loss of a family member, the addition of a major illness, another year without a pregnancy, still being on the waiting list for an adoption, another year where loneliness is the norm, or an uncertain future in your job. You may resonate with the “stump life.”

This text and this time of year serves as a beautiful reminder that God always keeps His word and that there is always a gracious plan underneath painful moments. Life may not turn out like you desired, but you can take the long view when you know God’s promises and His heart.

God told Ahaz about the future for the same reason that he has told us: so that we too can trust the promises of God when it feels like we live in a land of stumps.

## **2. The One Who is Empowered**

The second thing that we see about this coming deliverer is that He is uniquely and thoroughly empowered by the Spirit of the Lord. The prophet Isaiah referred to the Spirit more than any other Old Testament prophet (see 30:1, 32:15, 34:16, 40:13, 42:1, 44:3, 48:16, 59:21, 63:10-11, 14).

When verse 2 says, “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him . . .” that is more than a statement of fact. It is a marker for being the Anointed One. God’s leaders were marked by the empowerment of the Spirit (see Numbers 11:25, 2 Kings 2:15).

David was such a man. He was filled with the Spirit of God; it characterized his life and leadership, and it set him apart from the Spirit-less Saul. When David was anointed as heir to the throne by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16, the text says that “the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.” He was a man empowered by God. And the Messiah would fit that model of a leader empowered by God Himself.

Additionally, in verse 2 we find three pairs of descriptions as it relates to the Spirit’s role in Messiah’s life:

- The Spirit of wisdom and understanding
- The Spirit of counsel and might
- The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord

The ESV Study Bible distinguishes these three as empowerment for leadership, for carrying out wise plans, and for holiness. Others link the seven references to the Spirit, including the Spirit resting on

the Messiah, with the seven spirits of God in Revelation 3:1. It seems to me that Isaiah is merely reflecting the total empowerment of the Messiah by the Spirit or by the complete saturation of the earthly deliverer with divine power. The Anointed One is the personal embodiment of the power of God. He would be “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). The Messiah would possess a power that was reflective of God’s power.

Now if you know the New Testament and the life of Jesus, you are already seeing the connections with the empowerment of the Spirit. The anointing of the Spirit of God marked Jesus’ life. A few examples:

- Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18)
- At the baptism of Jesus by John, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as the Father said, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well-pleased” (Mark 1:10-11)
- After his baptism, Jesus was “full of” and “led by the Spirit” into the wilderness where he was tempted (Luke 4:1-2)
- The first text he read after his baptism, announcing His ministry, was from Isaiah 61, and it said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18-19)
- He conducted His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14), casting out demons and performing miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:28)

Clearly the Holy Spirit played a critical role in the life and ministry of Jesus. Everything about the entrance of Jesus into the world and His ministry on the earth was somehow related to the Spirit. And this meant that Jesus was not only a miracle worker, a healer, and a communicator of God’s word but also that He truly was the Anointed One, the Deliverer promised in Isaiah 11.

His rule and reign would never be characterized by sinful fear, or injustice, or self-centered policies, or any form of corruption. The Messiah lives and rules by the power of God Himself, through his Spirit. Unlike Ahaz and countless other kings that occupied the throne of Judah or Israel, this king will usher in the very glory of God for the entire world to see. He will restore the people of God, and He will reveal the glory of God.

*<sup>10</sup> 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. Isaiah 11:10 (ESV)*

As our three Pastoral Residents will explain to you on the final Sunday of the year, the ultimate fulfillment of that moment is yet to come. However, the incarnation of Jesus, His death, His resurrection (by the Spirit! – Romans 1:4), and the sending of the Holy Spirit in His absence have inaugurated the last days and the kingdom of God.

If you are a follower of Jesus, He has sent His Spirit into your life, and you need to consider the historical significance and the practical power of what that really means. At an historic level, it means that the personal indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in you is something that the Old Testament saints would have marveled at and coveted tremendously. Do not underestimate the historic significance of what it means that the Spirit has indeed come. The same Spirit that

empowered Jesus indwells those who belong to Him. J. D. Greear has written a book on the Holy Spirit and he says, "The Spirit inside of you is better than the Jesus beside you." Jesus said in John 16:7 that it was advantageous for Him to leave so that they could receive the Spirit.

There are personal and practical reasons that we need to see the Spirit's role in Isaiah, study it in the life of Jesus, and then apply it in our lives. The Spirit was given to inaugurate the rule or reign of Christ in our lives. Part of what was promised in Isaiah's day is being fulfilled now. Oh, there is much more to come, but there is something special and powerful right now as it relates to the Spirit of Jesus.

On January 4 we will reach the summit of our study in Romans as we start chapter 8. I could show you the role of the Spirit from all over the New Testament, but I only just want you to see it in one chapter of the Bible. If you want more (and you should!) then go find more texts in other places of the New Testament. Here is what Romans 8 tells us about the Spirit:

<sup>2</sup> *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* (Romans 8:2) (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*<sup>5</sup> *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*<sup>6</sup> *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* (Romans 8:4–6) (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*<sup>10</sup> *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*<sup>11</sup> *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.* (Romans 8:9-11) (ESV)

<sup>13</sup> *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*<sup>14</sup> *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*<sup>15</sup> *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"*<sup>16</sup> *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...* (Romans 8:13–16) (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* (Romans 8:23) (ESV)

Our deliverer has come! And we long for him to come again. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

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