

A King for God's People

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on December the 13th 1998.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled A King for God's People and is from Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1 to 16.

Almighty God we pray that you'll give us eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to understand and apply your word that we may be ready for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may like to have open in front of you page 558 in the Bibles from Isaiah chapter 11. And we're continuing this sermon series through the book of this Old Testament prophet.

Some of you may remember Rolf Harris' painting on television. His paintings would invariably begin with something fairly incomprehensible, a daub of paint, and you wonder what's going to develop from this.

[1 : 1 6] And gradually as he speaks and the paint gets more and more on the canvas, the picture comes into shape. In a sense the book of Isaiah is a bit similar to that.

Running through the book is the warning and threat of God's judgement against his people. But periodically there are speckled throughout daubs of paint of hope that initially look a bit hard to understand, a bit strange, a bit lacking in connection.

But gradually throughout the book these daubs of hope begin to take a coherence and connect with each other. Three weeks ago we saw an enigmatic statement at the end of chapter 6 that the holy seed is its stump, a glimmer of hope in words of judgement.

And then two weeks ago we saw the prophecy of the birth of a child called Emmanuel. Again somewhat strange, a bit hard to understand, but gradually the picture beginning to take shape.

And then last week a clearer picture of the son who would be given, a child that was born and so on. And today again words of hope from Isaiah chapter 11.

[2 : 3 6] And gradually as we'll go throughout the book over the next few months here and there, we'll see a more coherent picture of the hope of one to come. The context, remember, is Israel under threat from the world superpower of Assyria, 730 BC.

The north part of Israel has already been devastated and claimed as an Assyrian province. And the people of God in Israel and Judah are living under fear of Assyria marching further south.

And we know in history that within 15 years of these words, certainly the main part of the northern kingdom is all totally destroyed and gone. And the southern kingdom is almost under siege.

But in chapter 10, we're told, in the chapter that we're sort of skipping over from last week to this, we're told of Assyria, the world's superpower, who will in turn receive God's judgement.

And the very end of chapter 10 likens Assyria to a mighty forest. Look, the sovereign, the Lord of hosts, will lock the boughs with terrifying power.

- [3 : 43] The tallest trees will be cut down and the lofty will be brought low. He will hack down the thickets of the forest with an axe and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.
- That's the threat of God's judgement against Assyria. The mighty forest chopped down, never to rise again. And in 609 BC, just over 100 years later, Assyria fell to Babylon, never to rise again.
- There are no Assyrians left in the world today, virtually. But by contrast, the people of God, Israel and Judah, who have faced devastation at the hand of Assyria, they, which are also in a sense like a chopped off tree, none the less have hope.
- Some years ago when I was studying at Ridley College, I shared a house for a few months in East Preston. And under the ancient title deeds of the land on which this house was, the back part of the garden was actually a road, a path.
- But for some reason it would have been incorporated into the back garden of the house I was in. As it happened, the neighbours to the back were rather upset that this path was part of our property's land.
- [5 : 07] I think it had been for many decades, probably. And so periodically as they made their statement of claiming this land, they would chop down a tree in the back of our garden.
- Now this, I gather, had been going on for quite a time before I moved into the house. But a main tree, outside the kitchen window, had been chopped off. But the trouble for the neighbours was that this tree kept sprouting again.
- And a shoot would grow and gradually that shoot would grow longer and stronger and then at some point when we're away from the house, it would disappear again. And then another shoot, sometime later, would grow and so on.
- That's the model that's used at the beginning of chapter 11 in Isaiah. This is not a natural progression.
- This isn't because the people of Israel and Judah happen to be the sort of tree that never says no and keeps on shooting. This is God's work. It is God's hand to bring life to what in effect is a dead stump that has no hope.
- [6 : 25] God, of course, is the God who always does that for his people, bringing life from death. He did it to Baron Sarah, the wife of Abraham, giving her a child when, in a sense, her womb was dead.
- He gave life to Isaac when he was under the point of being sacrificed to death. But pre-eminently, of course, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, bringing life to death.
- God is the God of the impossible. God is the God who brings life, even in situations of death.
- And here, facing the devastation of God's own people, a shoot from a dead stump, a foretaste of resurrection life, in effect.
- This shoot is not, of course, a real tree. We're speaking metaphorically. And this shoot is one person. Notice how verse 2 goes on to say, The Spirit of the Lord shall rest not on it, but on him, the person, who is the shoot that will come forth from this stump.
- [7 : 33] The end of chapter 6, we saw that the holy seed is its stump. Now we find out more. The picture, the daubs of painter, beginning to take on more coherence here. Because this shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse.
- Jesse. Who and what is Jesse? Jesse was the father of King David. David is the one to whom God promised an everlasting dynasty of kings over God's people.
- This shoot, then, that is coming from the stump of Jesse, is a kingly person. Not called a king, as we saw last week, but nonetheless clearly a king.

It's the stump of Jesse, because it's another David. David was Jesse's son, but this is another David. This, as we'll see, is a greater and more glorious David. A David who never fails.

A David on whom the Spirit of the Lord rests eternally, not just temporally. We're in a limited form. The Davidic kingship, you see, has failed.

[8 : 38] We've seen that in recent weeks. King Ahaz on the throne at the time of these words is a failure as a king. In one sense, politically shrewd, but spiritually devoid of trust in God, as we saw two weeks ago.

Since David, despite the occasional good king, like his son Solomon, by and large, the Davidic kings have been failures. They've worshipped idols, they've not trusted in God, they've led the people astray spiritually.

God then, in that context, is promising a perfect king. He'd promised to David that his line would last forever, and even though his successes have failed, that does not thwart the promises of God.

God is faithful to his promise, and will provide the perfect king, the shoot. When we begin to read the New Testament, in the very opening words of the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 1, we find who this shoot is, of course.

Jesus Christ, descended from Jesse, a son of David, Jesus the Messiah. God knows that if he provides another king for Israel, unless he does something supernatural about this king, he's just going to turn out to be another Ahaz, another one who fails to trust God, another one who leads the people astray, another one whom the people, in the end, will go into idolatry with.

[10 : 16] So God says that he will do something special. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord did come upon select individuals only.

The first king, Saul, received the Spirit of the Lord, but it was withdrawn from him when he failed God. David received the Spirit of the Lord, but it seems even then, David wasn't perfect, and it was in a sense a limited giving of God's Spirit.

For this shoot, this Messiah, the Spirit of the Lord rests on him, a word that suggests permanence. Everlastingness. And the result of that are the various things described in the rest of verse 2.

It's not several spirits, but one spirit, and the result of that spirit are the six things described. Wisdom and understanding. By contrast, even to the great king Solomon the wise, this one will have perfect wisdom and understanding.

And certainly in contrast to the king of Assyria, who boasted in chapter 10, by the strength of my hand I've done it, and by my wisdom, for I've understanding. A vain boast, if ever there was one.

[11 : 37] This is real wisdom, real power, and real understanding, for it comes from God himself. So this shoot, this Messiah king, is marked out as being quite distinct from any Davidic successor, and also any Assyrian king.

This one is unique, for he has God's own wisdom and understanding, and moreover, God's counsel and might, with a sense of strategy, and the ability to fulfil that strategy as taken up in those two words.

Again, in contrast to King Ahaz and the other Davidic kings, in contrast to the Assyrian king, who boasted in his might and strategy. But this one will have perfect might and strategy and so on.

And finally, the Spirit will bring him knowledge and fear of the Lord. Not a knowledge in an academic sense, but knowledge of God always is relational. It's knowing the person, rather than knowing about the person.

This is a knowledge that is relational, in a relationship with Almighty God himself. And the fear of the Lord is not a negative thing, but a positive thing. The appropriate response of a person who knows God to an Almighty God is to fear him.

[12 : 57] All these attributes in this verse, too, are fruits of God's Spirit at work in this Messiah king. They mark out the Messiah from King Ahaz, even from King David and King Solomon, and certainly from the Assyrian king.

This is no normal king that is being predicted here. This is clearly somebody supernaturally endowed with God's own Spirit.

If God is the real king, as we've seen in the last few weeks, then God's own Spirit is needed for a human being to exercise godly kingship.

And where is this fulfilled? Again, as we read into the New Testament, we find one who stands in a synagogue in Nazareth and says, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Jesus Christ, at the beginning of his ministry, more or less. In the New Testament, the Spirit of God is given to all Christian people, not just the select leaders or the select few.

[14 : 11] And as in Isaiah here, so in the New Testament. The function of God's Spirit is primarily to form godly character. The attributes that are mentioned in verse 2 apply particularly for the ruler of God's people, but they are godly attributes.

They are marks of godly character. The same in the New Testament. The fundamental reason for the Spirit of God being given to all of God's people, as it is to every Christian, without exception, is to form godly character and fruit within that person.

If we then are to be more like God and more Christ-like in our character, then we, like this Messiah would, must rely on the Spirit of God within us at work forming God's character.

But on the other hand, if, like the Assyrian king, we boast in our own strength and ability, then we are in effect denying God's character and placing ourselves under the same judgment that Assyrian kings face.

This character is not something to be kept privately by this Messiah, but something that would be publicly demonstrated in his acts.

[15 : 27] That's what's in verse 3 and 4 and 5. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear. That's like human beings because we can only see the surface of things.

But rather, with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. Justice and righteousness and equity. They're the key characteristics that will be demonstrated in the actions of this king.

And they're the very things that Isaiah has bemoaned are lacking in the land in chapter 1 and lacking in the king Ahaz in chapter 3. You see, this king will be so different from any other king, it will be clear that he is exercising godly wisdom and counsel in his actions.

How we must long for that. Even in our own day and age, just this week we've seen two examples where in one sense we must question human judgement in the courts.

In that detective who's now being told that he's been murdered, his sister-in-law in the Jaden Lesky case where we're not sure now what's right because no judge has perfect judgement in our land.

[16 : 34] We can only see with human eyes and hear with human ears. But this judge will judge perfectly. He will know the hearts of people. He won't be deceived by the facade or deception on the exterior.

There is no hiding from this judgement. And when on that final day before the throne of this Messiah you and I each face him there'll be no deception.

We won't be able to deceive him by claiming something that is untrue. He will know our hearts and judge them perfectly but also with righteousness and equity.

When Jesus was exercising his ministry it is clear that he is the one who fulfills this. He said at the end of John chapter 2 that he knows what is in the hearts of people.

Again these words point to him. When I was about eight I joined the Cub Scouts.

[17 : 45] You may know that the Cub Scouts leadership take on the names of various characters in Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book.

Arkela is the head of the Cub Pack. Bagheera and Baloo and Shere Khan and so on are other names. So therefore when you're in Cubs you get to know and read the stories of Kipling's Jungle Book.

The little boy Mowgli is taken care of by the wild animals in India. Arkela the Chief Wolf the Shere Khan the Tiger the Bear and the Panther and so on.

A wonderful story of a human child and wild animals relatively at peace but throughout there is still difficulty. Throughout there is still competition between the animals and there is still death and bloodshed between them.

Even in Kipling's fruitful imagination there is no perfect harmony between the child and the wild animals and within the wild animals as well. So what follows in verses 6 to 8 here is really a most startling picture because here we have wild animals and plenty of them a wolf a leopard a lion and so on but we find harmony between them and the domesticated or tame animals like a sheep or a goat's kid but moreover even a child in their midst in safety.

[19 : 16] This is a more striking story than any great children's story or fairy story but how are we meant to understand these verses the wolf shall live with the lamb the leopard shall lie down with the kid the calf and the lion and the fatling together a little child shall lead them and so on.

Is it just a fairy story? Is it something that we are to understand literally as though this is a picture of what heaven would be like literally speaking these animals getting on together and yet elsewhere even in Isaiah we get another picture of heaven that tells us there are no lions there so how does that fit?

Is it allegorical that is the lion stands for pride and this is saying that in this picture of restored humanity and the world and heaven there will be no pride symbolised by the lion the trouble is that that's our association pride and lions rather than an ancient Hebrew one and we don't know any other connections between any other animals if an allegory works there must be enough clues within it to tell us what each thing stands for rather probably this is a figurative picture a broad sweep on a canvas rather than each detail being of great importance it's certainly a picture of no fear certainly a picture without insecurity no terror or menace or evil no danger certainly a picture of reconciliation between animals and child that would normally be at enmity and in danger certainly a picture of peace and harmony and it's certainly a picture that is far greater than just political peace you see Isaiah's picture here goes far beyond the threat of ancient Assyria this is to a picture of a perfect world order that will last forever but a lot more is being said here as well what this picture is of is going back to the very beginning of the

Bible to the original perfection of creation in verse 6 we have the human little child leading these wild animals exercising dominion over them and that's exactly what humanity was meant to do in the original creation in Genesis 1 in verse 7 we find that lions shall eat straw rather than meat and that's the picture you get in Genesis 1 as well where humans will not eat meat nor it seems that wild animals as well and in verse 8 we get a great picture of the nursing child playing over the hole of the asp and the weaned child putting its hand on the adder's den now sometimes Christians misunderstand verses like this and say well because we're Christians we should have no fear of snakes and serpents so they play with snakes invariably somebody gets killed fairly stupid in my opinion this you see is not a picture of playing with snakes but like in the opening chapters of Genesis where the serpent standing for

Satan is at enmity with the people of the world and God's people now there is safety the child can play over the asp's hole not because the asp has lost its bite but rather because it's gone the hole's empty the den's empty the serpent all that is evil is gone in this picture the curse is removed this is the perfection of the original creation but it's even better because there in the original creation was the serpent leading Adam and Eve into temptation now that's gone this is a picture of perfection that will last forever and is not under threat at all it's far more glorious than just peace with Assyria it's far more glorious than even our own world in harmony this is perfection that's Isaiah's picture and that's what his Messiah will come to bring but it's also a

[23 : 41] God-centered picture because the means by which the Messiah brings about this perfect place we see in verse 9 is that the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea not just Jerusalem not just Israel slash Palestine being full of the knowledge of the Lord but the world this is a picture of humanity throughout the world of any race not just Jews in a relationship with God that is the picture of perfection and the Messiah alone is the one who can bring this about now an implication of that is that God's people in this picture are not just Jews descended from Abraham God's people are people throughout the whole world Jew or Gentile the word means non-Jew in verse 10 we see that the root of Jesse this Messiah shall stand as a signal or banner for the people the nations of the world shall inquire of him you see he's a rallying point not now just for Jews or

Israelites but for the world for people of every nation tribe tongue and language Jesus is the focal point of this picture this vision he is the one who himself in his life said will draw all people to himself so what we get in verses 11 onwards so the gathering of God's people from all the world verse 11 tells us about some of the places they come from Assyria the world's superpower to the north Egypt a traditional enemy to the south Pathros is part of Egypt upper Egypt Ethiopia also to the south Elam to the northeast Shinar to the east that's another name for Babylon Hamat to the north and the coastlands of the sea the Mediterranean that is to the east to the west from all directions that is God's people will be brought to the Messiah their rallying point verse 12 reiterates that verse 13 tells us that when they're gathered all

God's people will be reunified 200 years before when Solomon died the north and south of the people divided Ephraim to the north Judah to the south now there'll be harmony between the two again a reunification of God's people and then in verse 14 the expansion of their territory verse 15 tells us that as part of this God will destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt a reference to the Red Sea but not only that he'll wave his hand over the river with his scorching wind and dry it up so that you can cross it on foot the river is the river Euphrates in the north what this is saying is that in the older times under Moses 600 years before God had brought his people through the Red Sea crossing it on foot into the promised land the Israelites now he's going to do it again a second time we're told in verse 11 he will extend his hand and he'll gather his peoples now not from Egypt not even just from Babylon but from the four corners of the globe and he'll do another exodus drying up the metaphorical rivers so that they can cross over and come to their

Messiah now we might think that this is another promise just for Jews and Israelites the first exodus was for Israel but this second exodus we're told will be for everybody verse 16 says for the remnant that is left of his people that's the second exodus as it was for Israel in the past that is Israel in the past now it's the world now it's Gentiles as well will be gathered again in an act of redemption by this Messiah what's this anticipating for people in Isaiah's day and the years following they probably saw its fulfilment 200 years later when they came back from exile in Babylon but the trouble was there was no Messiah then not even a Davidic king then not even a kingdom then that fulfilment lapsed there are those today who tell us that the fulfilment of these words are found in 1948

AD when the modern state of Israel was formed and Jews of various countries around the world have begun to congregate in Israel that's a seriously misguided view because this picture is of Gentiles and Jews gathering not just Jews it is a picture of gathering to the Messiah not to the particular land really no the fulfilment of this comes in the Messiah Jesus Christ far beyond Isaiah's problems with Assyria the fulfilment of this is found in about 0 to 30 AD Jesus Christ his first coming showed he was descended from Jesse he was the shoot from the stump of Jesse the son of David he was the one on whom God's spirit landed he was the one in whom who exercised perfect wisdom and he is the one who sent his gospel into the world through his apostles and when he returns for his second coming at some stage in our future then he will gather his people from all nations

[29 : 30] Jew and Gentile but united in Jesus Christ he is the one who is the banner to rally his people he is the one who when he comes all his people will be gathered up into the clouds to meet him on that final day and he is the one who will take us and all his people into his perfect place where metaphorically speaking the wolf shall live with the lamb and so on then shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the Lord then there will be access to heaven but only through the Messiah that's why in the end of the Bible the last book of the Bible we see pictures of this of God's people of every nation tribe race and tongue gathering around the Messiah the throne of heaven is the Messiah's throne the throne of the Lamb and there they and we will worship and praise him for the salvation which is ours through that stump that shoot from the stump of

Jesse let us pray our great God we thank you that in your eternal mercy you raise up a shoot from the stump of Jesse to bring salvation and redemption for your people throughout the world and throughout the ages thank you that he's come thank you that we are his and we long for his return to gather us up to the place where the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea Amen God peace thank you Jesus I have what what was this