

THE ROOT OF JESSE

Isaiah 11:1–10

Key Verse: 1:10

“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.”

What do you think about the world? Are you positive about it? Negative? Indifferent? The reality is, the world we live in is troubled—both the natural world and the human beings in it. Sometimes this world seems downright scary: so much deception, anger, hatred; so much corruption, pride, evil; so much bad leadership. There never seems to be a cure: not education, not policies, not tons of money, not any human effort. The more we think about the world, the more hopeless it seems. But the Book of Isaiah has a theme about the world. What is it? It's *hope*. Isaiah saw the darkness of his times, and he could see that darkness continuing well into the future. But God gave him a vision. Despite the hopelessness around him, when Isaiah saw God, he could see God's hope for this world shining brightly. He describes God's hope with some of the most beautiful words ever written. “God's hope for the world.” What is it? It may sound vague, but it's specific and very real. It culminates in the coming of Jesus our Messiah. Today's passage is famous because it depicts not only our Messiah Jesus, but what his kingdom will be like. It's not a fairytale. The coming of Jesus and his kingdom are unlike any that has ever existed. His coming and his kingdom are the only real hope for all people of all time. As we reflect on today's passage, we want to know who Jesus our Messiah is, what happens when we receive him, and what his kingdom means to us. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

In chapters 9–10, Isaiah has just prophesied against Assyria. The Assyrian Empire and its kings were proud, thinking they could dominate the world forever. But God would chop down the “forest” of that empire, and they would never rise again. In fact, God would chop down Judah and its kings also, due to their sins. But Isaiah could see that God would never turn back on his promises to his people. Read verse 1. “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” A stump in the ground looks hopeless. But a shoot can come forth from that stump. And that shoot can then grow into a branch that bears fruit. This illustrates the life-giving power that only the Creator God has. Earlier, Isaiah called the stump that's left after God's judgment “the holy seed” (6:13). Because of who God is, there's hope in the stump.

Here Isaiah mentions “the stump of Jesse.” Jesse was the father of King David. Using Jesse's name reminds us of David's humble background. Over the years David's royal dynasty had become proud, and in their pride they ended up producing some really bad leaders. God's hope through David's descendants looked as though it had been chopped down, like Assyria was. But God would go back to his original purpose and call from among the roots of Jesse a leader who would be the true shepherd and Savior of his people.

Verse 1 also calls him “a branch.” In 4:2 Isaiah wrote: “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.” God will make his branch grow and bear fruit. His branch will produce the fruit of justice and righteousness (5:7). Jeremiah 23:5 says, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”¹ How will this Branch, this promised Messiah, bear fruit?

Read verse 2. “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.” Isaiah mentions God’s Spirit 16 times, more than any other Old Testament author.² Later he describes how God’s Spirit produces a fruitful field in a wilderness (32:15). He repeats that God puts his Spirit on his Messiah.³ The Spirit is his power source. The Spirit fills him with wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD. This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Mt3:16–17). The Spirit filled Jesus with God’s life-giving words.⁴

Jesus, filled with the Spirit, also baptizes us with the Spirit (Jn1:33). Jesus calls him “the Spirit of truth” who guides us into all the truth (Jn16:13a). He’s the Spirit who glorifies Jesus to us (Jn16:14). He doesn’t just give us *information about* Jesus; he fills us with all the fullness of God in Christ, especially the greatness of his love.⁵ He’s the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph1:17) who shows us the depths of God (1Co2:10–13). He empowers us to be his witnesses (Ac1:8) and bear good fruit (Gal5:22–23). The Spirit gives us hope.

What will this stump of Jesse do when the Spirit rests on him? Read verse 3. “And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear...” Through the Spirit, this leader “delights in” the fear of the Lord, which literally means he enjoys the smell of it. He loves living in reverence for God and in encouraging such reverence in his people. His reverence for God gives him keen discernment to see through appearances. Proverbs 1:7a says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...” So later, Isaiah says, “...the fear of the LORD is Zion’s treasure” (33:6b). Isaiah urges us to fear the LORD and obey the voice of his servant.⁶

Next, Isaiah describes what the Messiah will do with this fear of the Lord. Read verse 4a. “...but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth...” He’s most interested in the poor and the meek. They are the ones who usually don’t get justice; they get either abuse or sickly sympathy. But filled with the Spirit, this Messiah helps them

¹ (cf. Jer33:15; Zech3:8; 6:12)

² (11:2 [4X]; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:21; 61:1; 63:10,11,14); the Spirit in Ezekiel: 14 times.

³ (42:1; 61:1)

⁴ (Jn3:34; 6:63)

⁵ (Eph3:16–19; cf. Ro5:5; 8:15)

⁶ (50:10a; cf. 8:12–13)

with “righteousness” and “equity.” Read verse 4b. “...and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.” When the wicked go unpunished, there is no justice. But this Messiah will strike down the wicked with his powerful word and bring God’s justice to this world.

Isaiah says one more thing about him. Read verse 5. “Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.” At his core, he’s all about righteousness and faithfulness. Tragically, this was what was lacking in David’s descendants. It’s still what’s lacking in most leaders. People may not see it, but at our core we’re all unrighteous sinners. But by faith, anyone can “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,”⁷ who becomes our “wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1Co1:30). He’s our armor of God.⁸ Getting to be clothed in his righteousness and faithfulness gives us hope.

Then, in verses 6–9, Isaiah describes the outcome of this Messiah’s reign. Elsewhere, the Bible warns that if God’s people set up a king, he would become greedy and proud⁹ and use and drain his people.¹⁰ It happened to David’s royal descendants. In this same vein, Isaiah had rebuked the elders and princes for devouring God’s people (3:14). But the reign of the Messiah will have a totally opposite effect. What is it? Read verse 6. “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.” What a lovely scene! These animals are natural predators and prey. Wolves, leopards and lions *eat* lambs, goats and calves. Figuratively, it describes what the more powerful nations and people do to the weaker ones. Due to the sinful nature in us all, rich and powerful people, on their own, never get interested in poor and helpless people. Quite the contrary, they despise them, make use of them and eat them up. But under the Messiah’s reign, such predators stop devouring. Instead, these former enemies dwell, lie down and journey together peacefully.

Verse 6 depicts real reconciliation. It reminds us of Ephesians 2:14–18: “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility...For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” To put it simply, in Jesus, impossibly hostile enemies become friends. An old bumper sticker said, “No Justice, No Peace.” But another bumper sticker was made that says, “No Jesus, No Peace; Know Jesus, Know Peace.” In our world we see severe divisions, so much estrangement, hostility and rage. On the news we see ethnic wars, pride, revenge, anger and all kinds of oppression. When will it ever stop? But our Messiah Jesus brings peace. How? He gives us deep peace in our souls by giving us God’s forgiveness.¹¹

⁷ (Ro13:14; cf. Isa61:10)

⁸ (Eph6:11,13–17; cf. Isa59:17)

⁹ (Dt17:16–17,20)

¹⁰ (1Sa8:10–18)

¹¹ (1:18; 33:24; 40:2; 43:25; 44:22; 53:5)

A major theme in Isaiah is peace. He repeats the word “peace” 28 times. And just as with hope, this peace becomes reality, both in us and among us, when we welcome our Messiah Jesus. Isaiah has just described him: “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. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall 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” (9:6–7). As we see the glory of Jesus our Messiah, may his peace come to each one of us.

Verse 6b concludes, “...and a little child shall lead them.” This phrase paints a picture of the most humble kind of leader. Our Lord Jesus is like a little child, gentle and lowly in heart.¹² This Messiah, born in David’s line and sitting on his throne, is our real Shepherd. Isaiah describes him further in 40:11: “He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”

Under his reign, carnivores become herbivores; snakes have no more poison, and most vulnerable little ones are safe (7–8). Verse 9a says, “They shall neither hurt nor destroy on all my holy mountain...” Isaiah repeats these same words at the end of his book (65:25b). He often mentions this “holy mountain” of God.¹³ In one sense this “holy mountain” refers to the temple mount, called Mount Zion.¹⁴ But in another sense, Zion (also known as Jerusalem)¹⁵ foreshadows the eternal, holy city.¹⁶ It’s a place where God’s glory and his holy presence dwells,¹⁷ a place filled with God’s justice and righteousness (33:5), where God has laid his “precious cornerstone,” Christ himself,¹⁸ a place where all the ransomed people of God will come with singing and everlasting joy, “and sorrow and sighing shall flee away,”¹⁹ a place of refuge for all the afflicted of the earth.²⁰

Later, Isaiah sees a spectacular vision of this holy mountain. In 25:6–8 he writes: “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the LORD God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.” Jesus our Messiah invites us by his grace to this heavenly banquet, where death will be no more. Isaiah concludes in verse 9b, saying, “...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the

¹² (Mt11:29; 18:4)

¹³ (2:2–3; 11:9; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11,25; 66:20)

¹⁴ (4:5; 8:18; 10:12; 16:1; 18:7; 24:23; 29:8; 31:4; 37:32)

¹⁵ (1:8,27; 2:3; 3:16–17; 4:3–4; 10:24,32; 12:6; 14:32; 28:16; 30:19; 31:9; 33:5–6,14,20; 34:8; 35:10; 37:22; 40:9; 41:27; 46:13; 49:14; 51:3,11,16; 52:1,2,7–8; 59:20; 61:3; 62:1,11; 64:10; 66:8)

¹⁶ (1:26; 33:20; 52:1; 60:14; cf. Rev3:12; 21:2,10,22–23)

¹⁷ (4:5; 12:6; 24:23)

¹⁸ (28:16; cf. Ro9:33; 1Pe2:6)

¹⁹ (35:10; 51:11)

²⁰ (14:32; 30:19)

sea.” On this mountain God is present in his holiness, and people enjoy knowing him to the fullest. It’s an eternal kingdom of peace and love. This is what Jesus our Messiah will accomplish.

Read verse 10. “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.” In verse 1 Isaiah called him “a shoot from the stump of Jesse.” Here, he’s “the root of Jesse.” The Book of Revelation calls him “the Root of David” (5:5) and “the bright morning star” (22:16). He came for the salvation of all the world. In this hopeless world, he’s a signal, like the morning star, to guide all those who are fearful and hopeless back to his glorious resting place. What is his glorious resting place? Later, Isaiah calls it “the new heavens and the new earth.”²¹ Wow! This holy mountain, this eternal city, this new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells, is our eternal home!²² In light of God’s glorious hope for the world, what should we do? It says, “...of him shall the nations inquire.” “Inquire” means to seek him from our hearts. Seek his hope.

Today we learned that Jesus our Messiah, the root of Jesse, is filled with the Spirit, ready to bring God’s justice to the world. Under his reign, all creatures can find true peace and eternal rest. This summer, may God fill us with his glory and the glorious hope of his kingdom, which is the only real hope for the world.

²¹ (65:17; 66:22)

²² (2Co5:1; Heb11:16; 2Pe3:13)