

December 8, 2013
Advent 2

“Jesus, the Small Shoot with Big Blessings”

ISAIAH 11:1-10

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

When I hear the prophet Isaiah describe Jesus as a shoot from the stump of Jesse, I think of a plum tree that we had on our family farm. The blue plums that ripened in the late summer were so tasty and so sweet. One summer the tree was loaded with a bumper crop of green plums. A thunderstorm produced violent winds that snapped the trunk of the plum tree and left nothing but a stump sticking out of the ground. My dad sawed it off close to the ground with his chain saw. The next spring we noticed a shoot coming out of the stump. The shoot that came from the root stock grew quickly into a small tree. It produced plums that were even better than the plums from the previous tree.

Isaiah pictures Jesus as the tiny little shoot that comes forth from the dead stump of the nation of Israel. The mighty nation of Israel had been chopped down by conquering nations such as the Assyrians, Babylonians and the Romans. Out of that lowly, defeated and downtrodden Jewish nation a child is born. Isaiah gives him the familiar names of Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. There he lies in a lowly manger in Bethlehem. His young mother picks him up, holds him in her arms and nurses him at her breast. She believes that this seemingly insignificant child is actually her Lord and God from all eternity, the Savior of the world, a king whose kingdom will never end.

There is so much to think about in these days before Christmas. I need some quality and quantity time to think about Jesus' birth and what it means for us. Let's listen to what Isaiah tells us about this little shoot that will come from the stump of Jesse. This little shoot has blessings for us that last forever.

What beauty we see in him

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse: from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” See the

stump. It is all that is left of the nation of Israel. Isaiah describes them as a "sinful nation, people loaded with guilt, a brook of evil doers, children given to corruption." The Lord allowed these people to be chopped down because they were unfaithful to him.

There are places in Sequoia National Park where you can see the stumps of the once great mighty redwood trees. You can visit places in the world such as Egypt where you can see the leftovers of a once mighty great nation. Businesses that once flourished are now bankrupt. Marriages that seemed so solid and secure are now on the rocks. Great athletes once wowed the world with spectacular catches on the football field and gravity defying dunks on the basketball court. Now they struggle to climb up a shorts flight of steps. "All flesh is grass and all the glory of man is like the flower of the field." Even our shining moments in life are marred by sin. "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have become worthless."

But then we listen to Isaiah fill us with hope. There is a shoot that comes forth from the broken down stump of Jesse, and Israel and the entire human race. As we sang in the hymn, "Behold a branch is growing of loveliest form and grace." He looks like an ordinary Jewish baby born under the most humble of circumstances. His mother must nurse him, bathe him and change his diapers. His father teaches him how to work with his hands in the carpenter shop. This child is no ordinary child as Isaiah so clearly tells us.

"The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him- the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." This little shoot is no ordinary child. He is the Christ, the Messiah. The Spirit of the Lord anointed him at his baptism. He possesses wisdom and understanding. Jesus always did everything right. He made the right choices in his life. If a child hit him or said something mean to him, he did not display anger as we did when we were little children and still do today. He has the Spirit of counsel and power. He is our "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father." He has the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. If you want to know about God then listen to Jesus. "No one has ever seen God, but the Only Begotten who is at the Father's side has made him known." Listen to Jesus speak about his heavenly Father and you will realize how much your heavenly Father loves you and wants you to be his child in this life and for all eternity.

This little shoot from the nation of Israel will not engage in the kind of politics that mars our government and our personal lives. "He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 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." Jesus will not spin you. He will not just say the things you want to hear to be a friend to you. As a true friend he will judge you and me in righteousness. That means he will tell us the truth about sin. We may think that murder involves only taking another person's life in a sinful way. Jesus tells us the truth that our anger against our brother is a sin in God's eyes. That includes failing to love people as we should. Jesus does not hide from our eyes the truth that someday he will come back again and judge the world in righteousness. The standard is always the same.

If I go to a mechanic and the brakes on my car have no lining left on the brake pads, I expect the mechanic to tell me the truth about the car even if it will cost money to make the repairs. If the doctor can listen to your heartbeat and detect something is wrong, you expect he would tell you the truth and not simply ignore the problem. This shoot that comes forth from the stump of Jesse will always be honest with you. He will never sugar coat your problem of sin, or give you the impression that you can do your part to make yourself worthy as so many religions and even some so called Christian churches are doing today.

Jesus knows your problem of sin. He knows how far you fall short of glory and righteousness. This little shoot from Jesse lived the perfect life you could never live. He died the perfect death on the cross to pay for every sin you committed. Isaiah says of Jesus, "Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist." Look at Jesus and you see in him a righteousness you can never find in yourself. See him obey his father perfectly. Then realize that he offers this perfect life he lived to you as a free gift in place of all those times when you were unkind and unloving to your mother or father. No one was ever like Jesus. He was faithful right up to the end of his life. He prayed for his enemies who hated him as they nailed him to the cross. The prophet Jeremiah says of Jesus, "This is the name by which he will be called; The Lord our Righteousness."

Think back to the example of that plum tree I mentioned earlier to illustrate this righteousness that Jesus gives you as a free gift. What if the shoot that came from the stump of that plum tree produced a plum that was better than any fruit in the world? What if that fruit not only tasted good but also caused all of your health problems to go away. Aches and pains from arthritis are gone. Your skin is smooth instead of wrinkled. Muscle replaces flab. A weak heart is suddenly strong. No more reading glasses for the fine print. Imagine for a moment how valuable that fruit would be.

Do you see the point we are making? Jesus, that small shoot from the stump of Jesse is the only place in the world where you can find your greatest need in life which is righteousness. Jesus offers you this righteousness as a free gift. Jesus' perfect life is now your perfect life.

What blessings we see in him

And what is the blessing that comes with having Jesus and his righteousness? It is a peace and joy in life that this world cannot give. There are so many wonderful blessings to enjoy this Christmas season. The best blessing is the blessing of having Jesus live his life for you and Jesus giving his life for you and Jesus rising from the dead. Our lives totally change when these blessings are ours. We see the baby Jesus lying in a manger and we know we have peace with God as we sing in the Christmas carol, "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."

Isaiah pictures this peace that is yours in this way. "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. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." On God's holy mountain, in his kingdom, and in his church, people will begin to reflect the blessings they have in Jesus by the way they treat each other. They will try to live the way God wants them to live, the way the animals lived in God's original world. We wake up each day wanting to live up to what we already are in Jesus. This may bring tension in our lives but it also brings us a peace this world cannot give.

"The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." The real message of Jesus' birth is reaching millions of people all over the world. There are still a remnant of people who want Christ in their Christmas. They enjoy hearing the carols of Jesus' birth. They enjoy sending out cards with messages of Jesus' birth. They use this time of the year to tell others the real reason for the season. When you have tasted the fruit from this little shoot from the stump of Jesse you can't wait to share this blessing with others. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Amen.