

An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Jesus in the Old Testament — The Branch

Isaiah 10:33-12:6

By **Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III**

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Isaiah chapter 10. We're going to read a section that runs from Isaiah 10:33 all the way to 12:6. We're looking tonight in our series called, "An Ancient Christmas," at a passage, especially Isaiah 11:1-10, which speaks of the prophecy of a branch. Now this branch prophecy is an important Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. If you were to turn to Jeremiah 23 verse 5, you would see Jeremiah prophecy the coming of the branch. It's an important theme, an important term, that is used for the coming Messiah. And our concentration tonight is going to be on verses 1 to 10 of Isaiah chapter 11. But I want you to understand the context. Once again, the predominant context of the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah is the threat of invasion, the rule of wicked rulers, the alliance with the Assyrians, and the question as to whether Israel is going to trust in God or is going to trust in man, whether Israel is going to be faithful to God or whether Israel is going to continue in idolatry.

And so I want us to look at Isaiah 10 verses 33 and 34 because in those verses you see a picture of God's judgment on the Assyrians. Then, I want us to see the aftermath of verses 1 to 10 of Isaiah 11, especially going into the words of promise and hope that are mentioned in Isaiah 12. So we'll read from Isaiah 10:33 all the way down to Isaiah 12:6, but our focus is going to be on Isaiah 1-10 tonight. Before we read, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we're so thankful to be under it. We need Your Word. Father, however tired we may be tonight, however distracted we may be tonight, however burdened we may be tonight, we pray that You would speak to us in a specific and powerful way, wherever we're sitting tonight in the pews with Your Word. Who knows, Lord, what word You have in Your Word for each of us tonight. We pray, of course, that we would all be faithful to understand this truth in its context, but we also pray that in a special and powerful way that You would even speak to our hearts and lives by the very reading of Your Word, bringing some of these things to special point of application by the work of Your Holy Spirit as Your Word is read as a public means of grace. Now bless us in the hearing of it. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

This is the Word of God. Hear it, beginning in Isaiah 10 verse 33:

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. He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 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. 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, but 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. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

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 the little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. 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.

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 that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the

remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to You, O LORD, for though You were angry with me, Your anger turned away, that You might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation."

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted.

Sing praises to the LORD, for He has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

Have you seen a pattern developing in these passages that we've read together? First, in Genesis 3:15 and the promise of a descendent who would crush the serpent's head, we have God saying to His people, "I'm so committed to your salvation that I am declaring war on the serpent and sending a descendent of the woman to crush the serpent's head." It's a battle that will end with victory, but it is also a battle that ends with the hero dying. And then Isaiah 7:14 where the Lord says, "Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son." And it's as if the Lord God is saying to His people, "I'm so committed to My promise to David that I'm prepared to bring the heir of David into the world through a virgin so that his kingdom and rule will last forever." And so it's a sign of a virgin bearing a baby to be king. But of course the very idea of a king born of a virgin raises all sorts of questions about dynastic legitimacy and of course we also know what happened in the story of Mary and Joseph and Jesus. Joseph was not the only one to doubt Mary's story initially and there were things that were said, evil things about Jesus, because of that unique way of being brought into the world. And then this morning in Isaiah 9:6 and 7 where the Lord speaks of raising up a child who will be "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace," it's as if the Lord has said, "I'm so committed to My people who are now walking in darkness and gloom and strife that I will send a child into the world who will be their peace." It's a sign of hope for peace, but it's supplied in such a striking way — through a child? That looks so weak. A hero dying in a battle that ends in victory. A king being born of a virgin. A child, the sign of hope and peace.

And then tonight, in this promise of a branch, it's as if the Lord says, "I'm so committed to restoring the de-forested wilderness of My people that I am going to raise up a sprig in a stump, a branch, a tiny sprout in a clear cut forest — the sign

of God's rescue. It's a striking sign, isn't it? You see the picture in Isaiah 10:33 and 34 as the picture of the judgment that God is going to bring on Assyria. That makes sense. God is showing His might by hewing down the mighty forest which represents Assyria. But the sign of hope is strange, isn't it? You can picture in your mind a clear cut forest. All you can see, as far as the eye can peer, is stumps. All the trees are gone; just stumps left. And the sign of promise in this passage is a little sprig coming up out of one of those stumps. God's sign of promise to His people here in Isaiah 11 is that He's going to cause a little sprig to sprout up.

You see the irony of each of these passages as the ancient Christmas is prophesied. And I'd like us to see four things in this passage together tonight very briefly. And I want you to look at four parts in the passage. The first part is in verses 1 and 2 where we see the ancestry and the endowment of the branch, then verses 3 to 5 where we see the rule of the branch, then verses 6 to 9 where we see the world that the branch is going to bring, and then finally in verse 10, the worldwide significance of the branch.

THE ANCESTRY AND ENDOWMENT OF THE BRANCH

First, the ancestry and endowment of the branch. Listen again to what Isaiah says. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 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." Now the stump of Jesse refers to King David's lineage. And so just like in the passage this morning, over against the wicked King Ahaz, is a promise that God is going to raise up a king in the line of David who will not be like Ahaz. Ahaz is the exact opposite. This king will be filled with wisdom and understanding and counsel and might and knowledge and fear of the Lord and Ahaz is not. And so this is a prophecy of a Davidic king to come. It is the son of Jesse and he is endowed by the Lord with wisdom and understanding and counsel and might and knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

THE RULE OF THE BRANCH

And then His rule is described in verses 3 to 5. What will the rule of the branch be like? Well first of all, "His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD." In contrast to Ahaz, who is an idolater, in contrast to Ahaz who offered his own son as a sacrifice to his own god, this king will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will love God, He will trust God, He will know God. God Himself will be His delight. And He will not judge with the eyes or with the ears. He won't go by hearsay. He won't judge by appearances. He will see into the heart of things and judge in accordance with the truth. He will take care of the poor; He will deal with the wicked. He will be a righteous king, a faithful king — you see the words of verse

5. "Righteousness shall be the belt of His waist; faithfulness the belt of His loins." And so unlike Ahaz, His rule will be just.

WHAT THE BRANCH WILL BRING

Then, what kind of world will the branch create? Well look at verses 6 to 9. "The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the lion shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them." Now what's this a picture of? It's a picture of Eden. It's a picture with all the bloodshed of nature removed so that beasts that are normally natural enemies, or at least some beasts that are natural food supplies for beasts higher up on the food chain can lie together and no harm is done. Carnivores become herbivores; little children lead ferocious wild animals. It's an Edenic picture. This king is going to bring Edenic conditions into the world. He's the stump of Jesse, He's in David's line, He's a Davidic king, He delights in the Lord, and He is going to bring about a restoration of Eden.

THE WORLDWIDE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BRANCH

And then look at verse 10. What will be His worldwide significance? Well, look again at the words. "And He will be a signal for the peoples — of Him shall the nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious." You know the apostle Paul quotes that verse in Romans 15 as the reason why he wants to go to the Gentiles and share the Gospel all the way to Spain. Isn't it interesting that Katie and Daniel Brink were here today, this morning, on their way to Spain as missionaries for two years to share the Gospel? Well Paul quotes this passage as why he wants to go to the Gentiles and go as far as Spain to share the Gospel. Why? Because the branch that he serves, the King that he serves, is the King of the nations, the peoples, the Gentiles. He is a signal for the Gentiles.

And so in this passage, in contrast to the unrighteousness and the unfaithfulness of Ahaz, a branch is prophesied who will be everything that Ahaz was not and who will fulfill all the promises that God had made to David. But what of the meaning of that branch prophecy? The picture is strange, isn't it? A picture of hope of a forest of stumps with one little sprig coming up out of it. It doesn't look like much. You know, if God said, "Here's your hope, here's the sign of your hope — a little spout in a forest of stumps," you might say, "It doesn't sound like much, Lord." Well interestingly, that's exactly how the branch prophecies play out in the New Testament. Do you remember at the end of Matthew chapter 2 where Matthew says that Jesus lived in Nazareth and so was fulfilled what the prophets said, "He shall be called a Nazarene." Now the interesting thing about that is, you can look through all of the prophets and you will never find the words, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

So what does that mean? Does it mean that Matthew thought that there was some place where prophets said that Jesus was going to live in Nazareth and therefore be called a Nazarene? No, probably not. You will remember in John chapter 1 when Jesus meets Nathaniel, Nathaniel is told that Jesus came from Nazareth, and you remember how Nathaniel responds? “What of any importance ever came out of Nazareth? What good ever came out of Nazareth?” That actually is a picture for understanding what Matthew means when he says that Jesus shall be called a Nazarene because the word, “Nazarene,” rhymes with a word that is used for “branch” here in Hebrew. When Isaiah says that a branch will come forth — look at Isaiah chapter 11 verse 1 — “the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots”. It doesn't look like much. Can anything good come out of that little sprig? And the answer is, “Yes. Yes, the branch is the Davidic king who is endowed by the Spirit with a delight in the Lord who will reign in righteousness and faithfulness, who will bring about Edenic conditions and the Gentiles, the nations, the peoples of the earth will come to Him.”

The branch prophecy is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ who, to the eyes of many, didn't look like much. Isaiah himself will tell us, won't he, that there was nothing in His visage that would have attracted us to Him. He came in lowliness and poverty; He came in the weakness of our flesh, as we've just sung, and yet He was the branch, prophesied by Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 11, who would save His people, who would set up God's kingdom, and who would draw the Gentiles to Himself. We've seen throughout this ancient Christmas that God works in the most surprising ways, that God brings about His purposes in ways that you never would have anticipated. I don't know what's happening in your life right now, but that is a cause for trusting God, not simply looking at the external experiences, the external appearances, the challenges, and trying to derive your faith from something that you can read in the signs of the times, but trusting in God's promise and His Word, who brings His King into this world even though all He looks like is a little sprig, a little sprout, a little branch, because after all, He shall be called a Nazarene. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending the Branch into this world. We thank You for His delight in the Lord, and we want to delight in You, O God, something like the way He delights in You, and we want to praise You and worship You just like we were exhorted to in Isaiah 12 using language that sounds like the exodus all over again, for we know it is — it's a greater exodus, the thing that the exodus pointed to, the deliverance of Your people from sin and woe and into Your eternal kingdom. O Lord, grant us grace to believe in Your Gospel, to trust in the Branch, to learn His person and His work, to cling to Him, to lift high the cross, to take the Word of Him to the nations. We ask all these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Would you please stand for the Lord's benediction?

Peace, be to the brethren and love with faith, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).