

The Blessings of the Branch

Isaiah 11, Romans 15:8-13

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: . . . (v. 1)

“ . . . for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” (vs. 9-10)

⁸ Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: ⁹ And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. ¹⁰ And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. ¹¹ And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. ¹² And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

¹³ Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. (Romans 15:8-13)

Devastation and Destruction

Things looked bad for Israel, and even worse for Assyria. Yes, the Assyrians would invade (Isaiah 10:5-6; 36:1-2), but after they destroyed Israel, the army would meet their doom. The British poet, Lord Byron (George Gordon) described the story recorded in Isaiah 37:14-38:

*“The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.*

*Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.*

*For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still! . . .”ⁱ*

Proud Assyria boasted that it was “the axe” (Isaiah 10:12-15) to decimate Israel. But ultimately, the Lord would deal with Assyria with all the wrath of a raging forest fire:

“Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. ¹⁷ And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day; ¹⁸ And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standard bearer fainteth. ¹⁹ And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.” (Isaiah 10:16-19)

This imagery helps us understand the first words of Isaiah 11:1. Picture scenes like the recent forest fires in California. “Across the state, fires killed more than 40 people and scorched more than 1.2 million acres, towering over the five-year average of 202,751 acres.”ⁱⁱ In the words of verse 19, **“the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.”** Israel would be destroyed by “the axe” of Assyria; and Assyria would be like a disaster field after a forest fire. Could there be any hope for the future?

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: . . .(Isaiah 11: 1) “The contrast between the lofty/proud trees of Assyria and the lowly “slip, stump” of Jesse confirms that God is in the business of demonstrating his glory by raising up people of humble means. This has always been God’s methodology.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Remember, this is the God who gives “beauty for ashes,” (Isaiah 61:3). He gives us hope through the humble Root of Jesse. And according to Isaiah 11:9 the results will be glorious: **“for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”** When the psalmist asked, “Why do the nations rage?” (Psalm 2), God’s answer to the worldwide conflict is the lowly Root of Jesse.

In this holiday season, and throughout this coming year, we can trust in the promise of Romans 15:12-13: **¹² And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. ¹³ Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.**

Isaiah 11 reminds us why we have such hope.

- vs. 1-5: The remarkable Root of Jesse. As we studied in recent messages, Jesus (fully God and fully human) was empowered by God’s Spirit as a pattern for all of us.
- vs. 6-9: Earth’s transformation will be brought about by the Root of Jesse. Predatory animals will become peaceful.
- vs. 10-16: The final gathering of the nations under the leadership of the Root of Jesse: He will gather the remnant of Israel (vs. 10-12), and bring lasting peace by His mighty hand.

Changing the Course of Nature

The Root of Jesse, the Lord Jesus Christ, will bring about the most dramatic change in the history of the world. Remarkable as it sounds, it will be like a return to Eden! “It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East (and still today) to expect that the rise of a new political leader will produce an idyllic time of peace and a return to Eden-like conditions [see Isaiah 51:3].^{iv} If He can change the very nature of predatory animals, He can do the same with predatory human beings! You know that Jesus can change lives in this amazing manner.

- Manasseh was one of the most wicked kings in the history of Judah (see 2 Chronicles 33:2-6). But consider the transforming grace of God recorded in 2 Chronicles 33:12-13: **“And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, ¹³ And prayed unto Him: and He was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.”**

- Saul, the persecutor “breathed out” threatening and murder (Acts 9:1). He consented to the murder of Stephen (Acts 8:1) assisting those who killed him (Acts 7:58). But Acts 9:1-22 records Saul’s dramatic conversion from arch-enemy of Christ to Gospel preacher.
- Mitsuo Fuchida was the commander of the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor. Jacob DeShazer was a U.S. corporal and bombardier who dropped incendiary bombs on Nagoya, Japan in retaliation. DeShazer was imprisoned by the Japanese. He asked for and received a Bible, and was gloriously converted. After the war, Deshazer became a missionary to Japan and wrote a Gospel tract about his experiences. Fuchida, who became a rice farmer after the war, read the tract and was gloriously converted to Christ in 1950. Ultimately, Fuchida became an evangelist and made many trips to the U.S. to witness to Japanese immigrants. DeShazer and Fuchida became close friends.^v

Who is “the worst human being you know?” Isaiah 11 and Romans 15 give us hope. If the Lord can change the very course of nature, He can change human nature!

In one lecture, C.S. Lewis reflected upon this fact with awe: “It is a serious thing . . . to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is I the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is the immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.”^{vi}

Jesus Christ, the lowly Root of Jesse, came to this earth to be born of a virgin. His first cradle was a feed trough in a cattle stall. Throughout His life, He was mocked and scorned and misunderstood (even by His own family members, John 7:1-5). He came as our Substitute – to die in our place – to save us from our sin (Matthew 1:21). Isaiah 53:10-11 testifies:

¹⁰ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Through His glorious death, burial and resurrection, the Root of Jesse shall “**see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.**” And what does this have to do with you and me? God the Father **shall see of the travail of his [the Son’s] soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.**”

The Root of Jesse is the Servant and Son of God, and Romans 15:9-13 tells us why this is so significant to us today. This is God’s purpose:

⁹ And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. ¹⁰ And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. ¹¹ And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. ¹² And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. ¹³ Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Now the God of hope fill you with joy in believing
Just as He did when your heart first awoke
By the pow'r of the Spirit with hearts full of singing
Filled with all joy and abounding in hope

For the promise He gave in the low Root of Jesse
Jesus our Lord! Jesus our Lord!
That the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy
Praise ye the Lord! Praise ye the Lord!

Now the Gentiles rejoice as they join with His people
Praising the Lord! Praising the Lord!
And with one heart we sing with our voices so joyful
Praise ye the Lord! Praise ye the Lord!

Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio

ⁱ Lord Byron, George Gordon, "The Destruction of Sennacherib" <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43827/the-destruction-of-sennacherib>

ⁱⁱ Umair Irfan, "Southern California is (still) on fire. Now it has the largest blaze in state history." December 28, 2017. Accessed at <https://www.vox.com/2017/12/27/16822180/thomas-fire-california-largest-wildfire>

ⁱⁱⁱ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 270–271.

^{iv} *Ibid.* p. 269.

^v Mel Barger, *Mature Living*, Toledo, Ohio, October 2008. Accessed at http://melbarger.com/DeShazers_Remarkable_Forgiveness.html

^{vi} C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) pp. 14-15 cited by R. Kent Hughes, "Disciplines of a Godly Man," (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991) p. 190.