

# The Beautiful Branch in the Midst of Ruin

Isaiah 4:2-6

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## **Introduction**

Today as we return to our series in Isaiah, I would remind you that chapters 2 through 4 make up a single unit of prophecy...

- This whole section begins with a description of what God is going to do with His house (or His church) in the latter days.
  - We are told that His house will be established over all other houses (all other mountains where idols are worshipped) and that the nations will eagerly flow to it to obtain salvation.
  - Isaiah is speaking of the coming of Christ who established God's house.
    - He did this by furnishing to things for the house:
      - atonement to secure the pardon of all who are in the house by faith...
      - the Holy Spirit to transform the house and to make it holy.
- This is a remarkable prophecy that could only come by divine revelation.
  - It bears the stamp of divine foresight because Isaiah saw that Israel, which at the time of the prophecy was about to be overrun by her enemies,
    - and which Isaiah also foretold...
    - would, at a later time become the source of salvation for the nations!
  - That even though Israel was herself by and large rejecting the grace of God,
    - and even though the nations had no interest in looking to her for salvation...
      - that in the latter days they would come to receive the salvation that God would bring to Israel for the world!
    - How could Isaiah possibly know that when Christ came on the scene, the nations who, until that time were in darkness, would begin to turn to the LORD?
      - The only explanation is that he was given this revelation, as he says, by the LORD.
      - That it was given by him long before the fact cannot be refuted, for the Jews had these prophecies long before Christ came.
        - Yes my friends, be assured that this book is not of man, but it is all that it claims to be—the very Word of God.
        - Well, then, let's return to our overview...
  - Isaiah uses the prophecy of the nations coming eagerly to receive the blessings that were first promised to Israel to spur Israel on...

- In verse 5 (Isaiah 2:5), he says:
  - Isa 2:5: O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD.
  - The idea is,
    - “If the Gentiles are going to eagerly come to the light in the last days (when the Messiah comes), how is it that you are so indifferent about the light?”
    - “How is it that you who are so privileged to have the light do not rejoice in the light?”
    - “How is it that you who have God’s grace and salvation so near to you do not eagerly embrace that grace and salvation?”
- This same charge can be levelled against us today who live in Canada...
  - Brothers and sisters, we are among those nations who have eagerly come to Christ in days past...
    - but now we have grown cold and indifferent to the light—
      - many are even antagonistic against it!
    - Yet, we see nations who are just now being exposed to the light coming with eagerness and delight to obtain God’s salvation in Christ!
      - I mentioned as an example the people in Myanmar, or Burma, where the United Reformed Churches have, in 16 years, planted 20 churches with 15,000 believers!
      - We ought to be ashamed!
      - We have been privileged for so long—but we have grown cold to our privileges.

And after setting this forth, Isaiah begins to speak of the wretched condition into which Israel had fallen... a condition so similar to our own...

- In chapter 2:6-22 he explains how they have filled themselves with empty things when they might have been filled with God’s grace and blessing!
  - He describes how they are full of pride and self-reliance...
  - He declares that in the days to come, they will find all these things they are now glorying in to be absolutely worthless...
    - God’s judgement will fall on them as those who have done the worst thing a human being could ever do...
      - Spurned the grace of God!
      - It would have been better for them if they had never known the way of salvation than to have known it and to have wickedly rejected it.

- In chapter 2 the prophet speaks especially about the final judgement that will come upon them at the last day...
  - the judgement they continually try to deny—just as we do today in Canada...
- And then in chapter 3 he speaks about the more immediate judgement that is coming upon them as a society...
  - He speaks of the unravelling of the whole society,
    - the breakdown of leadership and good government,
    - and the turning of the people to vanity and greed so that injustice prevails leading at last to the collapse of their whole way of life.
  - If we look at our society today, we can see these same things happening...
    - Our heroes are in Hollywood—they are not people of virtue...
    - Our goals are not to be full of holiness, godliness, and love,
      - but to be the most seductive or the richest or in some way the most envied.
  - Isaiah prophecies that all the riches and the apparel and the luxury that is gloried in will be taken away in the very near future...
    - Times will become so desperate that the issue will be mere survival...
      - The women who prided themselves in their independence will become so desperate that seven of them will clamour after the attention of one man.
    - And of course what Isaiah foretold is exactly what befell them...
      - The Assyrians were able to come and Israel had no strength to resist them...
        - and then the Babylonians came and carried them into captivity.
    - Things were to become very desperate for Israel...
      - All the glory of David and Solomon's days would be a thing of the past.
        - Israel would be under the thumb of oppressive nations.
        - Already the signs that the foundations were crumbling were evident even as they are evident in our land today.

But Isaiah does not end with this—not at all!

- He has some very encouraging words for those who would continue in the LORD.
  - There were people in Israel who were still following Him.

- Most of the people had rejected Him and had only a mere form of religion if even that, but there were those like Isaiah who believed...
- And in chapter 4, Isaiah tells them in the day when all this destruction comes upon the society,
  - God's grace would gloriously shine forth to His elect people!
    - Even when the church has fallen into hypocrisy and has come under the chastening hand of God,
      - There would be those who would know God's blessing and grace.
- Oh my friends,
  - This passage speaks of those who escape all the ruin and destruction that comes upon His apostate people.
  - God always has a people who escape all this...
    - I desperately want you be one of those people!
    - I want you to see how they are described by Isaiah in our text...

**I. First, see that the ones who escape are the ones who have the BRANCH of the LORD for their beauty and glory.**

- You see in verse 2 it says,
  - Isa 4:2: In that day, the BRANCH of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped.
- A. The picture here is that of a sprout coming up after a great tree has been cut down.
  1. There is death and destruction all around—
    - but there is this little BRANCH —this little sprout—that is coming up out of all the ruin.
    - Look at the time that this BRANCH is said to appear...
      - It is “in that day.”
        - That is how the passage begins—“In that day the BRANCH of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious...”
        - In what day?
          - In the very day of the destruction that Isaiah has just been speaking about...
          - The day spoken of in verse 1 when seven women shall take hold of one man because they will be so desperate for attention...

- The day when the society had collapsed.
- The meaning here is that this branch will be their beauty and their glory...
  - All the vain substitutes for beauty and glory will gone, but the branch will remain as beautiful and glorious in the midst of all the destruction.

TRANS> But what is this little sprout of life—this BRANCH that appears in the midst of all this ruin?

2. The BRANCH is Jesus Christ—the Son of God and the Son of Man!
  - a. In calling Him the BRANCH of the LORD, Isaiah refers to His deity...
    - 1) The idea is that this branch *is* the LORD or an extension of Him, even as the branch of a tree is an extension of the tree.
      - The LORD in the analogy, is like a tree, and this branch is a branch that extends forth into this miserable fallen society...
    - 2) Now I will readily admit that grammatically this could mean nothing more than a branch that the LORD provides,
      - but we do not need to pretend that we have no other revelation to help us understand what is meant here.
      - The Bible is clear that this Branch is Jesus Christ, and it is clear that He is none other than God the Son who came from heaven to our ruined world.
        - He is the one who was in the beginning with God and who is God.
        - No other would be able to bring glory into our ruin as He does.
    - 3) So when we see Him called the BRANCH of the LORD,
      - we do not understand Him to be a branch of the LORD in the same way a Son is the branch of his father.

TRANS> But this BRANCH is not only divine...

- b. In calling Him the fruit of the earth, Isaiah also refers to His humanity!
  - 1) God the Son became flesh and dwelt among us in order that He might be our Saviour.
    - All along the way, the LORD promised that the Messiah would come of the seed of the woman.
      - He is the seed that was promised in Genesis 3 that would crush the serpent's head...
      - And He is the seed of Abraham in whom Abraham and all the nations of the earth would be blessed

- He is also called the BRANCH of David, showing that He would be a descendent of David.
- 2) Because as man, he comes from the earth, He is here called “the fruit of the earth.”
- We, by our sin, brought death upon ourselves,
    - But here is a Branch of the LORD who is also a branch from us who comes to bring life into our death.
    - He is the BRANCH of life in the midst of death.
      - And He is there even when Israel had collapsed through apostasy and judgement.
      - He is there for those who have not joined in the apostasy...
        - Therefore, Isaiah shows us that...

B. Those who escape have Christ the BRANCH for their beauty and glory!

1. They realise that in themselves, they are all unrighteousness.
  - a. The haughty daughters of Zion that went about with their proud and haughty looks had their own beauty and glory...
    - It was a beauty and glory that was vain and empty—only a show...
  - b. And apostate Israel had what they thought was their own excellence and appeal...
    - As we saw in chapter 3, they were full of eastern ways, full of silver and gold, full of horses and chariots, full of idols...
    - They thought themselves quite glorious indeed.
  - c. There are so many in our day who are satisfied with their own glory and the glory of this fallen world...
    - They go along from glory to glory, finding their life in passing pleasures, in their successes, in their relationships, in their art, in food and drink...
      - all things that are indeed the gifts of God to us and so ought to be enjoyed under Him...
    - But they do not consider that all these things are corrupted and polluted by their sin and ingratitude...
      - that true beauty is found in these gifts when they are used to the glory of God, in love to Him and to each other, with thanksgiving and praise to Him, in justice and holiness before Him.

- Sex is beautiful when used as God intended it, but we pervert it and debase it in our sin...
  - Food and wine are gifts of God, but we become gluttons and drunkards—or even if we receive these in moderation, we receive them without appropriate thanksgiving to God...
  - Material possessions are His gifts to us, but we become greedy and deceitful and begin to devour one another...
    - and to debase ourselves as if our life consists only in the abundance of what we possess.
- d. And then there are those who are in a society that has lost all the things they glory in...as Israel had here...
- but who wallow in despair rather than turning to the BRANCH where true beauty and true glory are to be found...
  - Any society without the BRANCH is either deceived so as to think they have glory and beauty without Him...
    - or they are in despair because they know they know that they are without glory and beauty.
2. But Christ is the beauty and the excellence and the glory and the appeal of those who have escaped from all this vanity and despair that apostasy brings!
- a. We who have Christ know that apart from Him were are bankrupt!
- We know that apart from Him, we are death and vanity...
  - We know that apart from Him, we have nothing to commend ourselves to God...
    - we are all unrighteousness...
    - all our own righteousness is filthy rags!
    - We glory in our poverty so that we may glory in our Redeemer!
- b. He is the Lamb and the Lamb is all the glory!
- The LORD Jesus Christ who came from heaven to be our Saviour is our glory!
    - He is our life, He is our light, He is our beauty, He is our salvation!
    - He is the One who pleases the Father!
    - He is the One who is full of love and purity and beauty!
    - We are the fallen image of God, but He is the exact image of God...
      - God's beauty shines forth fully in His human flesh.
- c. We have escaped death and destruction by finding our all in all in Him!

- We were condemned, but He came and died on the cross to bear our condemnation...
  - In love, He took the full weight of sins penalty for us.
  - All who escape from the ruin of this world come to Christ to be clothed with His righteousness...
    - Like Paul, we want to be found not with our own righteousness which will never save us,
      - but with His righteousness received by faith.
  - We do not look to the Lord to accept us for our righteousness,
    - but on the basis of Christ and His righteousness...
      - The branch who is our beauty and our glory before the Father.
      - He is our excellence and our appeal.

TRANS> And I tell you when you have Christ for your beauty and your glory and your excellence,

- you aspire to be like Him—to love as He loves, to serve the Father as He serves Him, to be pure as He is pure...
  - This is all your desire...
  - And I tell you, if you are among those who have escaped—

**II. If you are among those who have the BRANCH as your glory and beauty, then you will be holy in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.**

- verse 3 says:
  - Isa 4:3: And it shall come to pass that *he who is* left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.

A. The emphasis here in on the holiness...

- A literal translation would be:
  - “As for the one that is left and the one that remains—holy shall he be called.”

1. This is the greatest thing that you could be called!
  - a. To be holy is to be one who fits with God—one who is able to associate with Him...
    - You see, God is holy and He is a consuming fire to all that is not holy.
      - At Sinai, He told the Israelites that they dare not approach the mountain on which He appeared lest they be pierced through.



- When God's holiness is revealed on the day of judgement,
  - His wrath will envelop all that is defiled and unclean.
- But those who are holy are able to come into His presence and have communion with Him!
  - They are able to draw near to Him without being destroyed.
  - They are like Him—they are suited to stand before Him.
- b. Nothing is better than holiness—nothing is more to be desired!
  - Holiness is far better than intelligence, far better than riches, far better than beauty...
    - It is what really matters—that we should be suitable and pleasing companions to the LORD Almighty who created us!
- 2. And when our text says that it will come to pass that those who are left in Zion shall be called holy—
  - It is saying these ones who escape from the apostasy that has fallen upon the people at large
    - the apostasy or the departing from the LORD.
    - They stand out among them as those who are still following the Lord when so many have forsaken Him.

B. And how is it that they will attain this holiness?

1. Look at our text... v. 4...
  - a. They will attain this holiness because the LORD Himself will wash away their filth and purge their blood-guiltiness...
    - He will make them holy by His gracious and powerful working...
    - Everyone of them who are recorded among His people will be given this holiness—not one will be excluded.
      - Ephesians 1:4 says He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him...
      - All those who are ordained to life are ordained to be made holy...
  - b. This is not a washing or a purging that you can do yourself...
    - You cannot take out that old stony heart and turn it to a heart of flesh...
    - You cannot put love where there is envy and malice and bitterness...
    - You cannot take a heart that is cold toward your Creator and fill it with praise and gratitude!

- You cannot remove the corruption and put to death all the sinful desires and the inordinate lusts...
    - You can try to deny that they are if you want to, but you cannot take them away!
    - Only the LORD can do this...
  - c. Neither can you by any means take away the guilt of your past sins...
    - You are not able to provide an atonement for your cleansing...
      - That required nothing less the Son of God, crucified on the cross!
      - It is only by the shedding of His blood that you are pardoned so that you may draw near to God.
2. And I want you to know that one of the reasons Jesus Christ came into this world was do this transforming work in you who are His—to make you holy...
- a. Titus 2:14 says that He
    - “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”
    - Jesus came not only to die on the cross for our forgiveness, but also to make us into a holy people to the LORD.
      - Without His death, we could not come to God at all,
        - But neither could we come to God without His transforming of us from our sinful disposition to be holy.
  - b. And He does this by giving us the Holy Spirit
    - John introduced Him as the one who would baptise us with the Holy Spirit.
      - And the LORD tells us in His Word that He gives us the Spirit to cleanse us and renew us so that we will delight in His ways and walk in them.
      - The Spirit is the one who transforms us and gives us life who were once dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from God by wicked works.
        - This work is called the washing and the renewing of the Holy Spirit in Titus 3:5.
3. This washing and purging is something that every human being is in great need of!
- a. We are all defiled by filth and by blood as Isaiah describes it here...
    - *Filth* refers to excrement—

- we are full of dung and we need to be bathed by the bath than on Christ can give us...
  - *Blood* refers to the murderous nature we all have since the fall...
    - The nature that turns God's way of love around and says:
      - "your life for mine" instead of
      - "my life for yours."
- b. There have always been many who deny their need of washing and purging...
- Prov 31:12 says: "*There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness.*"
    - Until God opens our eyes to our sin,
      - we are all like the mother of the mass murderer who says of her dear son, "Really, deep down inside, he is very good hearted."
  - I hope that none of you are like this!
    - I hope that none of you think you have little need of cleansing and little need of purification!
    - If you think that, you are very deceived—
      - you have no idea what the LORD is like and I tremble for you!
      - If you only knew, you would be desperate to seek His cleansing.
- c. You see, our hearts are so stubborn and wicked that we won't even come to the Saviour that God sent from heaven to redeem us...
- We go on, never admitting our desperate need of cleansing...
  - Let that not be true of any of you!
4. Verse 4 in our text (Isaiah 4:4) explains how the LORD carries out this cleansing and purging work...
- a. First, by the Spirit of judgement...
- That is, the Spirit gives us an ability to judge—to understand the difference between right and wrong—from God's perspective...
    - When the Spirit does this, God's word cuts right into us and strips us bare...
    - We see what we are—we see our need of salvation—of cleansing—of purification...
      - We see our need of a Saviour to die on the cross for us and to be our glory and our beauty because we have none...

- And we see our need of Him to cleanse us and purge us by His Spirit.
- Have you seen this?

b. Second, by the Spirit of burning.

- As we see what is wrong with us by the Spirit of judgement, the Spirit then comes to us as a Spirit of burning...
  - He comes to burn away or purge away the wickedness.
  - He actually removes the corruption from our hearts by His powerful, gracious working so that we are made into new creatures in Christ.
  - We are being renewed in righteousness and holiness after the image of the one who created us...

TRANS> And so it is that by the cleansing and purging of Christ, we are found holy in the midst of an apostate generation...

- We begin by taking Christ as our beauty and glory—our righteousness and our salvation as the one who died on the cross...
  - And then we are made holy by the cleansing and renewing of the Spirit.
  - This is a wonderful blessing that we have in the midst of a ruined society that has lost its way with God...
    - But the blessing does not end here.

**III. Third, I want you to see that in the midst of a society under God’s judgement, the LORD Himself becomes your protector.**

- You must remember what we have already seen in Isaiah about judgement...
  - Judgement comes upon the society as a whole when it has become apostate.
    - When the economy collapses, it collapses for the just and the unjust...
    - When a plague enters a city, it strikes the just and the unjust...
    - When enemies come in war, they attack the just and unjust.
- God’s judgement is coming upon our society today as those who have turned from the LORD.
  - We will all be afflicted by the things that befall us—we will all suffer...
  - But there will be a great difference between
    - those who have the BRANCH as their glory and righteousness and those who do not...

- those who are holy and those who are not...
  - for these afflictions will destroy the ungodly but they will actually bless the righteous!
- The question is not if you will be judged, but if you will stand in the day of judgement.
- And there is only one what that you will be able to stand...
    - And that is by Jesus Christ, the branch...
    - If you are found in Him, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness that comes by faith, you will stand.
      - He Himself will be your shield and your protector.
- A. You are told in verse 5 & 6 that He will create a cloud and flame for a covering for you!
1. This, of course, refers to the pillar of cloud and fire that accompanied Israel while they were in the great wilderness.
    - These were the symbols of God's protection of His people in a place where they could not protect themselves from many destructive elements.
    - God is the one that created this cloud and fire for the protection of His people.
      - The word "create" translates the Hebrew word *Bara* which means "to create out of nothing"...
      - The Lord did not use something already in existence to protect His people at this time—
        - He created protection for them out of nothing!
        - It expresses His direct care of them.
        - It is not a work that He assigns to others, but carries out personally.
  2. Let us take a little survey from Exodus to recall three ways this pillar was used for Israel's help:
    - a. First, it was used to guide them:
      - We find this in Exodus 13:21:
        - Ex 13:21: And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.
      - We desperately need God's guidance to keep us from going astray.

- We have His Word which He has given us from His own lips, and which we receive by the working of His Spirit to keep us from going astray.
  - In this way, He keeps us on the right track in difficult times.
- b. Secondly, it was used for protection:
- In Exodus 14:20 it says:
    - Ex 14:20: “So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness *to the one*, and it gave light by night *to the other*, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.”
  - You see here how the cloud and fire was used to ward off those who would have come to destroy God’s people...
    - We have many enemies, but if we are in Christ, they will not be able to harm us because the LORD Himself will be our protector...
      - Satan will not even be able to touch us, much less to lead us into spiritual death or apostasy.
      - We will be kept by the power of God through faith.
- c. Thirdly, the cloud was used to show the people that they had access to Him.
- In Exodus 40:34, it says:
    - Ex 40:34: Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”
  - Now we have a crucified Saviour who has ascended into heaven and we are told that we may approach God through Him and His sacrifice.
    - We are told that the LORD is always with us and that where two or three are gathered in His name, He will be present.
    - We can draw near to the holy of holies now on the basis in Christ’s sacrifice and obtain audience with our God...
      - It is this fellowship with Him and this communion with Him that sustains us through the very worst trials and temptations.
3. Notice how God’s protective presence is spoken of in verse 5...
- It is said to be “above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies.”
  - This language seems to refer to these last days—the days between the first and second coming of Christ—
    - when God meets with His people wherever they are gathered in Christ’s name.

TRANS> Whatever the case, the point is that God is there as a covering for us to protect us from all that would otherwise harm us.

B. The point is not that we will have no affliction, but rather that God protect us from harm as His elect.

1. In verse 6, this canopy that He creates will be a tabernacle (or a tent) to protect us from the burning heat of the day and from the storm and rain.

- It is our refuge—a place of safety and protection to which God brings us.
- The same burning sun and pounding storm comes down upon us,
  - but these do not harm us because of God's grace that shields us!

2. That is how we must look at God's work of judgement upon the church...

a. When the church (collectively) becomes apostate and begins to turn away from the LORD, the LORD will bring two sorts of judgement upon us...

1) He will bring heretics who will come in among us.

- They will come in the Lord's name, but they will bring in destructive doctrines...
- And many in the church will be deceived and will follow them!
  - They will turn from God to idols that are set up by these false teachers!
  - They will deceive even the very elect if it were possible!
- But you see those words, "if it were possible" is what this is all about!
  - It is not possible that the elect can be deceived because the Lord will keep them!
  - There are many false sons in the church and they will be deceived and they will follow these destructive heresies—
    - Ten thousand will fall at your right hand, but it will not come near you because the Lord will keep you...
    - He will be a pillar of cloud and fire to keep you.

2) And besides heresies, when the church is apostate, the LORD will also bring persecution and other afflictions upon us...

- There will be persecutions from governors and from church leaders...
  - And when these come, those false sons in the church will give way under the pressure...
    - they will not continue to profess the Lord but will deny Him.

- But here again, the elect will not be shaken but strengthened...
  - because the LORD will be to us a pillar of cloud and fire to keep us and to protect us.
  
- b. All this ought to change the way you look at those things that seem to destroy the church—those heresies and those persecutions...
  - 1) Yes, they cause many who profess the LORD to deny Him—to go ought from Him and walk no more with us...
    - indeed they do!
    - It may look like the church is being destroyed when this happens...
      - But it is not...
  
  - 2) These judgements actually strengthen and purify the church...
    - The LORD uses these things to refine us, both collectively and individually.
    - Certainly the outward glory is diminished,
      - but in reality the church is being prepared for glory and service.
  
  - 3) So do not despair when you see heresies and persecutions leading many astray who once professed...
    - I do not mean you should not weep for them—of course you should...
      - But you must not despair as one who thinks the church is being destroyed!
      - It is not!
        - It is being purified and strengthened!

**Conclusion: Now this brings us back to where we started...**

- verse 2: “In that day”
  - In what day?
  - In the day when God’s judgement falls upon His apostate people...
    - In that day when the church is being torn apart...
      - “In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious...”
  - It is in the very day of trial and affliction that the life-giving BRANCH will be the most beautiful and most glorious...
    - It is then that we will see Him like never before.
    - It is then that the salvation and the life that He gives to us will be tested and caused to shine forth like never before.