

## Isaiah 11

### Isaiah 11:1-2

**A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
From his roots a Branch will bear fruit;  
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him.**

In 1999 I was really pleased to be given much more information about my ancestors

- I knew that my grandfather had been born at Cawsand
- And my great-grandfather had been born at Millbook
- But through the research of my father's cousin
- We were able to trace our roots in south-east Cornwall back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> C
- Mainly in the parishes of Boconnoc and Braddock near West Taphouse
- It is a place with an interesting history, including two battles in the English Civil War
- And the settlement is mentioned in the *Domesday Book*
- On discovering that so many of my ancestors had lived and worked there
- I was pleased to be able to go to an open day on the Boconnoc Estate
- And I wrote a bit about this in a book I produced during my 1999 sabbatical

I guess that not everyone is interested in their family tree but I know that many of us are

- Therefore we probably would not welcome this piece of news
- Your family tree has been cut down

Isaiah 10 ends in just this way – boughs are lopped off, lofty trees are felled

- Tall trees are brought low and forest thickets are cut down with an axe
- This, however, is not about forestry but about God's judgment
- The cutting down of lofty trees refers to the destruction of Assyria
- It is a particularly dramatic judgment for the Assyrian Empire has been flourishing
- The progress of the Assyrians has been relentless (Isaiah 10:28-32)
- But suddenly they are felled

The international and national situation at the time of Isaiah was not good

- it is the time of the divided kingdom - Israel in the north and Judah in the south
- what had once been the great realm ruled over by David is now divided
- and both kingdoms are threatened by the expansion of the Assyrian Empire
- as far as the military and political situation is concerned there is little hope
- as the story unfolds the northern kingdom of Israel is conquered by Assyria
- its people are displaced and carried into exile and nation is scattered never to return
- eventually the southern kingdom of Judah is conquered by the Babylonian Empire
- and Jerusalem is captured and the temple ransacked and desecrated

The family tree of Jesse – and of his great son, David, and grandson, Solomon

- has been cut down – only the stump remains
- the significance of this to the people of Jerusalem and Judah must not be missed
- this is their royal family, the family of their king
- and that family is highly representative of their kingdom and its people
- and because of its faithlessness it is cut down

Now to be fair I don't know that much about trees, so I had to do some research

- and I learned a little more about the ancient art of coppicing
- when a tree is cut down, there is, of course, the possibility of it dying completely
- but if it lives and new growth from the stump is thinned to one shoot per stump
- the tree will re-grow and can become again a full-size tree

Isaiah has been called upon to proclaim the Word of God

- during one of the darkest points of Israel's history
- these are the people who are walking in darkness, living in the shadow of death

Hundreds of years later, despite the most amazing technological advances

- it seems to me as if we are still very familiar with a people walking in darkness
- all around us, people are living in the shadow of death

In the early chapters of his prophecy, Isaiah had already spoken of one who would be born

- a child born of a young woman, which by the time Jesus is born
- the evangelist Matthew has understood that the young woman would be a virgin
- through her a son is given on whose shoulders the government will be
- and this son is given throne names:
- Wonderful Counsellor, Everlasting Father, Mighty God, Prince of Peace
- It is through him that we are introduced to a glorious hope

## I A GLORIOUS HOPE

In the summer of 1967, the so-called 'Summer of Love'

- Liverpool pop-stars, *The Beatles*, launched a song for the *Our World* TV programme
- Watched by 400 million people around the world – the title of the song was:
- *All you need is love* – it was a song that became something of an anthem of the 60s
- But one of the things we need to consider carefully is whether or not it is true
- Love is undoubtedly a great Christian virtue but is it all you need?

In New Testament times the church at Corinth was gripped by all kinds of problems

- If services in churches today are sometimes labelled 'dull'
- There was not chance of that at Corinth – many of the services were a bit of a riot
- Services of the Lord's Supper were often marred by gluttony and drunkenness
- People had spiritual gifts but did not use them to build up the body of Christ
- Instead there were factions, disunity and discord (not unknown in today's church)
- Set in the city that was home to the Temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love
- The temple boasted 1,000 cult prostitutes and many pagan shrines
- In his letter to the Corinthian church the apostle Paul wrote a great section on love
- What we call 1 Corinthians 13 is undoubtedly one of the great passages in the Bible
- But what we forget is that it is really a rebuke
- To Christians who, despite their spiritual gifts, were anything but loving, Paul wrote:

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13:13)

Although the Bible teaches us that love is in a sense our greatest need

- It very clearly is not all we need – for we also need faith and hope
- In modern English, hope means ‘expectation of some good thing’
- I hope it will be fine tomorrow – or any other good thing that we hope for
- In the Old Testament there is no Hebrew word that really means that
- ‘the expectation of some good thing’
- nevertheless, the Old Testament believers looked to God for deliverance
- they looked to God to save them – and that was hope
- and they believed that at a time that God appointed that God would
- in person, or through his representative, establish a new kingdom of righteousness
- and that, without doubt, is what this passage is all about

In the New Testament, Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God

- Jesus never used the word ‘hope’ – when he was near the Kingdom of God was near
- But since his resurrection the church has looked to the future with ‘hope’
- For Christians are those who:

live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

(Titus 2:12-14)

Just as in the time of Isaiah, the remnant of the people of God were surrounded on every side

- So we realise that we are living in an age of spiritual darkness
- And death is as much a foe to us now as it has ever been
- Under the judgment of God, his people had been disciplined
- The tree cut down was a sign of judgment
- But from the stump of that tree a shoot would come
- From the roots a Branch would bear fruit
- This shoot from the old stump, this King from the royal line, is Jesus

Jesus is the glorious hope, Jesus is the light who shines in the darkness

- Jesus is living hope for those living under the shadow of death
- For to Jesus, the darkness of death did its worst
- So much so that there was darkness over the land in the middle of the day
- But with the dawn of the resurrection morning came hope
- Hope in Jesus who appeared, risen as he said
- This was the beginning of the consummation of the Kingdom of God
- There had been glimpses of the Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus
- Just as there are glimpses of the Kingdom of God in his ministry through the church
- Hope in Jesus is not some vague notion that things will turn out for the best in the end
- Hope in Jesus is faith directed towards the future – faith, hope and love remain
- While many gifts are for a short time, faith, hope and love endure
- In effect the ‘Kingdom of God’, ‘heaven’ and ‘eternal life’ all mean the same
- The shoot from the stump of Jesse brings forward that new kingdom

We have seen that Isaiah announces a glorious hope to people walking in darkness

- To those living in the shadow of death – but this is not an abstract message
- In the way that some people say, ‘it will all turn out for the best’

The saga of which manager is going to be at which football club seems never-ending

- Even to people who like football – the speculation is fuelled by expectation
- People who believe that when the new manager comes all will be well
- A succession of failing managers often suggests the problem lies elsewhere

In many churches, but in the Methodist Church in particular, where ministerial change

- Is something built into the system
- There are people who believe that when a new minister comes all will be well
- Sometimes a succession of ministers who are perceived to have failed
- Suggests that the problem lies elsewhere
- We ministers know that the best minister a church has ever had
- Is the one before the last one

It was the same in the divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah – with a succession of kings

- In the northern kingdom of Israel, there was a succession of unrighteous kings
- While in the southern kingdom of Judah, the recent king, Ahaz, had been the worst
- No wonder the tree of the kingdom had been cut down and only a stump remained
- Hope in a new king could be as futile in the future as it had been in the past
- The question that had to be asked of the new king is what would he be like?

## II A GLORIOUS CHARACTER

The king has already been introduced:

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.  
He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing  
and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on  
and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.  
(Isaiah 9:7)

The fact that this new coming King will reign on David’s throne

- Is implied in the reference to David’s father, Jesse
- The effective zeal of the LORD Almighty is the richly empowering Spirit of the Lord
- There is a vast work to do but he is equal to the task

No wonder then that Jesus caused such a stir in his inaugural sermon at Nazareth

- For listen carefully to what he claims for himself

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the  
Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And  
he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to  
him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

(Luke 4:16-21)

Jesus is claiming the anointing of the Spirit for himself

- And saying that his proclamation is the very preaching of which Isaiah spoke
- But Isaiah was speaking of a coming great king of Israel
- To whom the Lord would give the skills he needed to reign
- In Isaiah 11 these skills are listed in three pairs
- The Spirit of wisdom and understanding
- The Spirit of counsel and of power
- The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD

Wisdom and understanding are standard qualities required in the king

- Wisdom is the quality which enables the king to make good judgments
- Understanding is the deeper intellectual insight into events to establish policy

Counsel and power are the fruit of the spirit of the Lord

- Such qualities are mentioned in the book of Proverbs (8:14)
- ‘Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power’
- Counsel includes the formation of strategy
- Power is expressed here through the rod of his mouth and breath of his lips (v. 4)
- Genuine authority is exercised by his decree

Knowledge and the fear of the LORD indicate a powerful life of faith and worship

- Knowledge refers to a true understanding of God and of his will
- Fear of the Lord depicts awe and submission of the king to the holy God
- It is the Spirit of the Lord who makes all these things possible

These are the characteristics of Christ – and therefore should be the character of the Christian

- When describing the model Christian today I wonder what words people might use
- Just recently a friend of mine and I were reading annual book of vacancies
- Of circuits and churches seeking new ministers – it’s interesting what they want
- Churches with no young people ask for a minister gifted in youth work
- Churches with small congregations ask for a minister who is a good preacher
- Think how very soon the minister would feel demoralised in those settings
- Ministers say churches want a minister who is a cross between Gabriel and Superman
- Perhaps ministers should be relieved that circuits are not asking for:
- Wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord
- But this is the character of the new, God-appointed leader of God’s people here
- One who will show righteousness and faithfulness

In the ancient Middle East it was the custom to have a child serve as a village herder

- For domesticated animals, such as sheep, goats and calves
- To drive them out to pasture in the morning and bring them back at night
- Isaiah continues with a wonderful picture of pastoral tranquillity
- Sadly, in the church as in the Kingdom of Israel, it is not like that yet
- We have wolves and lambs who do not live happily together
- Leopards and goats, calves and lions – who are not in happy fellowship
- And cobras and vipers who are as venomous as any snakes
- But that is not how it is in the Kingdom of God
- For under God even predators are tamed and reptiles are no threat

The character of the new king is that the Holy Spirit, in all his gifts and graces, rests on him

- He has the Spirit not by measure, but without measure
- And the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him (Colossians 1:19; 2:9)
- This new king is both the shoot from the stump and the Root of Jesse
- A combination that requires the incarnation for its explanation
- For the one who embodies the glorious hope, in a glorious character is:

### III THE GLORIOUS MESSIAH

The reduction of the great royal dynasty of Israel to a mere stump

- Was a true picture of the nation's condition when Jesus was born
- Without royal power for nearly 600 years – no real royal dignity remained
- It is not really worthy of the name 'house of David' – it is the 'stump of Jesse'
- God's people need more than the promise of fertile land or national life in the remnant
- What they need is the very incarnation of God's life in the Messiah

This is the one of whom Isaiah spoke saying;

- The Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious (Isaiah 4:2)
- He is the root of Jesse (Romans 15:12)
- The root of David (Revelation 5:5), the root and offspring of David (Rev. 22:16)
- The kingdom torn apart through the sin of a son of David (1 Kings 11:11 ff)
- Will be reunited under David's greater Son

It is hard to know how people in the world around us struggle on without hope in Christ

- This is the message that the people of God are now called to proclaim and to live
- There is a sense in which the anointing of the Israel's king with oil
- Was an earthly sign of a far greater anointing by the Spirit of God
- It is the coming of this anointed one – Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah
- That we both celebrate and anticipate in Advent and Christmas
- The critical question for us all is whether we will come under his kingly rule
- And so by repentance and faith become his subjects
- For in him we have the glorious hope
- In him we have a glorious character
- In him we have a glorious Messiah
- For he is our glorious King