

Our God Saves: Turn

God's Kingdom: A Righteous Reign

Isaiah 11-12

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"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 a 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." (Isaiah 11:1–10).

"Hope, it's the only thing stronger than fear."

The evil tyrant in *The Hunger Games*, President Snow, makes this eerie statement to his game master when their power is threatened by an uprising. Snow continued, "A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is fine, as long as it's contained. . .so contain it."

Indeed, hope is powerful. So, is its absence.

Consider the last time you felt hopeless. Didn't everything seem harder? Didn't it feel exhausting and deeply discouraging? Wasn't it infectious with others? Hopelessness breeds hopelessness. But the reverse is also true, and it's vital to what Christianity is all about.

With hope, endurance is impossible. With hope, we don't bounce back and forth depending on the circumstances. With hope, we fight despair. With hope, our lives are not ruled by fear. But there's more.

Hope is so important that we will search for it wherever we think we can find it. We can easily place our hope in the wrong things. And when that happens, the Bible has a term for it: idolatry. It's when the desires of our hearts or the pressures of life push us to put our hope in something other than God.

This is why so much of the Bible contains prophecies about the future; it's why the book of Revelation is in the Bible. Biblical promises about the future aren't meant to merely satisfy your curiosity, they're meant to fuel your hope.

So what fuels spiritual hope in your life? One source (for sure!) is the simple reading of the Bible. With the start of the school year, we wanted to provide another thirty-day reading challenge to encourage you to read your Bible more and with others. So, I designed a thirty day reading plan for the book of Isaiah. I'd like to challenge you to spend less time watching the news, scrolling through social media, listening to podcasts, or looking at stuff on Pinterest. Sadly, I think some Christians today are being disciplined more by their favorite cable news host, podcasters, and bloggers than they are by their own Bibles and, in some cases, their own churches. Let's be sure that we're pointing our hearts in the right direction so we can place our hope in the right source!

Isaiah 11-12 was written for that very reason—to encourage God's people to place their hope in the right person and the right place. And this leads to worship and praise.

The previous chapters of Isaiah highlighted the coming destruction by the armies of Assyria. By divine command, Israel what amounts to a national "leveling." Judah will face a similar judgment at the hands of Babylon a few hundred years later.

But the question at hand is this: when hardship comes, where do we look for hope?

In our text today, Isaiah points the people of God to a person, a place, and their praise which serve as the foundation of their hope. All of this is connected to what they need when life falls apart and how God provides for them.

Person: You Need a Righteous Savior (vv. 1-5)

The hope of Israel and for the world is in a person, a ruler, and a king. This promised future king is none other than Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of this promise. The spiritual hope for the people of God who are facing hardship is a righteous savior.

Many of the descriptions that we'll look at would be the kind of qualities valued generally by human society. But the first description is unique to Christianity. The visual image is of a stump. Not a majestic and powerful tree. Not a flourishing cedar. The tree has been cut down. There's no glory in a stump. It's a symbol of what used to be—a visual marker that something bad happened here.

Isaiah calls this the stump of Jesse. Since King David's father was Jesse, it's clear that Isaiah is connecting this scene to God's promise that someone from David's lineage would reign over God's people (see 2 Sam. 7). Don't miss the intended message: God keeps his promise in ways that may not make sense. God works through ways that confound human expectations. The powerful armies of the earth may cut down the nation to a stump, but God isn't "stumped." He has a plan to fulfill his promise.

Notice the divinely inspired qualities of this person in verses 2-5. Verse two says that the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him. God is not only going to fulfill his promise; he's going to empower this person.

For those of you who know the New Testament, you may recall that at Jesus's baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove before a voice said, "This my son with whom I am pleased" (Matt. 3:13-17).

Notice the character of this leader. The Spirit of the Lord provides:

- wisdom and understanding – the ability to perceive and apply things correctly
- counsel and might – knowing what to do and the ability to carry it out
- knowledge and the fear of the Lord – a remarkable level of spiritual discernment

But there's more! This divine empowerment leads to a rule marked by true, biblical justice:

- a love and passion for what God thinks ("fear of the Lord;" v.3)
- a judgment beyond what is seen or heard (v. 3)
- an application of biblical justice for those who are often exploited or unfairly treated (i.e., the poor and the meek; v. 4)
- an absolute enforcement (v. 4)

With all the talk and debate about justice, two things stand out here. First, this is a biblical starting point for what true, biblical justice is. Secondly, there's going to come a day when Jesus will bring true justice. I can hardly wait for that day! In the meantime, we should do our best to love our neighbors by doing whatever we can in the places God puts us to advocate for biblical justice. Whether it's our neighborhoods, our schools, our businesses, our courts, or our legislatures; people who long for Jesus to come are those who work hard to love our neighbors well.

But the hope of this text is that our best man-made systems, our best intentions, and our best leaders will fail us. We need a leader who wears righteousness and faithfulness as a belt. In other words, we need a righteous savior. And we have one in Jesus! He's our king. He's our Savior.

The hymn writer Wilbur Chapman (who was born in Richmond, Indiana, in 1859) captured this truth like this: "friends may fail me, foes assail me; he, my Savior, makes me whole."¹ He's a leader who not only is righteous but can make you righteous. Jesus is the Savior we need.

Place: You Need a Peaceful Home

Human beings inhabit places. These locations define us. They are a vital part of our story and our longings. That's one reason why you ask people where they are from or where they grew up. It's also why certain places or vistas create a sense of comfort.

We long for a peaceful home.

Verses 11-16 describe that place. A future home where the reign of the Savior creates a world marked by everything that's right. Before we look at the details, it's important for us to remember that God's

¹ https://hymnary.org/text/jesus_what_a_friend_for_sinners

plan for redemption is not just the saving of individual sinners. That certainly is a central part of salvation. However, sin has affected the entire created order. Creation groans under the compromising infection of rebellion against God (Rom. 8:22-23). In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis describes the world under the spell of White Witch over Narnia as “always winter and never Christmas.” Or as we sing in the song “Joy to the World” –

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

The hope of the gospel is that Jesus comes to set individual people free from the curse of sin, and he comes to set the entire creation free. There is a day coming when God will reverse the curse. And we are given glimpses of this in the Bible so that we can have hope.

Verses 6-9 describe the kind of other-worldly peace that will characterize the reign of Jesus. Now, this opens up a long-standing debate here between Christian brothers and sisters about what is described. If you want to know about the various positions, you need to take one of our classes on theology. But I will summarize it briefly. Nearly everyone agrees that this text describes something in the future versus a spiritualized fulfillment now. Some Christians believe this is describing the New Heavens and the New Earth in Revelation 21. Other Christians, including myself, think this is describing the events in Revelation 20 called the Millennial Kingdom—a one-thousand-year reign of Christ which includes the regathering of Israel. Regardless of your view, the message and ultimate vision are the same.

The reign of Jesus creates peace.

What does that look like? It changes the animosity within the created order. In verses 6-8, we read about a wolf and a leopard dwelling with a lamb and a young goat. Defenseless calves and lions are lying down together and little children are leading them. In the fields are cows and bears grazing together, and babies play around the poisonous snakes.

Verse 9 provides a glorious summary! No more hurt or destruction. The knowledge of the Lord will cover this realm like the water covers the sea. And verse 10 tells us that this will be a global kingdom, something described in Revelation 7 as people from “every nation, tribe, and peoples and languages.” The vision here is a global one, and this promise was part of Paul’s passion to reach the Gentiles in Romans 15:12.

Verses 11-16 specifically address that nation of Israel. Remember that the people of God are faced with divine discipline under Assyria and Babylon. The nation will be conquered, and they will live in exile. But the hope of this future home involves the ending of their displacement and their restoration. They will be called out of the foreign nations. God will not forget about his people. He will bring them home.

Additionally, the inter-family tension between the tribes of Israel will end. Verse 13 talks about the ending of the historic strife between Ephraim and Judah. Commentator Gary Smith says, “the people will give up their feelings of inferiority, jealousy, superiority, and acts of war.”² Instead of working against each other and fighting with one another, they will work together (v. 14).

People will get along, love each other, and work together. Don’t you long to see this? I was reading an article this week, and the writer made this comment and connected it to history:

The fact is that intense epidemics and grim public-health crises don’t generally result in social renewal. Because they make us fearful of those around us, they tend to drive us apart and to bring out the worst in us.

He referenced the Great Plague in Athens in 430 B.C. “. . . although it brought out courage and virtue in some Athenians at first, over time the epidemic coarsened civic life. People became afraid of one another and abandoned all propriety to protect their families. “The catastrophe was so overwhelming,” Thucydides (an Athenian historian) writes, “that men, not knowing what would happen next to them, became indifferent to every rule of religion or law.”³

We long for a peaceful home, the ending of hostility, and people living in love—don’t we? Well, the message of the Bible is that one day Jesus is going to create it. Life isn’t always going to be this nasty, divided, and painful. There’s coming a day when peace will be in the air we breathe under the reign of Jesus.

We long for a peaceful home. Christian hope is rooted in a person and a place. But it leads to something more.

Praise: You Need to Worship

Isaiah 12 is a hymn of praise. It serves as a mini conclusion before turning to prophecies about Babylon. And it also captures the emotional posture that Isaiah wants his readers to embrace. He records a song about how the people of God will respond to this future reign of Jesus. But he offers it here as part of the motivation for hope.

To say it a bit differently: The graciousness of God in the person and place lead to praise. When you “get this,” it makes your heart soar!

Verse one looks to a future day when this song will be sung. And the first offering of praise is due to the realization of God’s turning from discipline and judgment to mercy and deliverance. The text says that God was angry with them. Let me remind you that Isaiah is a book written to God’s people because they are trusting in the wrong things, their hearts are far from God, their worship is fake, and there’s a gap

² Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 276–277.

³ <https://gfile.thedispatch.com/p/fear-and-loathing-in-the-time-of>

between what they say and how they live. This disobedience appropriately makes God angry. After all, sin is destructive, and it violates the holiness of God. Sin should be hated! It should make us angry.

But in the hymn, we find that the people are rejoicing because God's wrath has come to an end. The people of God rejoice in the comfort that God is providing. Additionally, verse 2 celebrates God's deliverance through salvation. Notice how God-centered this text is: "God is my salvation. . . God is my strength and my song. . . he has become my salvation." The focus is clearly upon who God is and what he has done. It leads them collectively to great joy as the congregation celebrates God's grace to them (v. 3).

Their praise, however, is meant to be declared broadly. Verse 5 commands that God be praised because of his glorious works. Additionally, this praise is designed to be proclaimed over all the earth. The grace of God with his people is meant to be a platform to display his glory. God's people worship and praise their Savior as a statement to the entire created realm. When you understand God's kindness, this level of praise springs forth.

This text concludes in verse 6 with a crescendo: "Shout! Sing for Joy!" But notice why. They are to praise God not only for his deliverance and his graciousness but also because the Holy One of Israel is in their midst. God is near. He's close. He's personal. He is with them. God's people can't help themselves when this is at the forefront of their minds.

Do you know that all human beings are involved in worship? We are divinely wired to have affections, to love, and to praise things. This issue is not if you worship but what you worship. What makes you happy? What do you love? What do you praise? Answering these questions is very instructive and revealing.

Christians are captivated by the grace of God. It's what rescued us from ourselves, and it is what gives us joy. The grace of God is what gives us hope. That's why we sing! Because the person (Jesus) came to deliver us from our sin, and he's coming back to take us to be with him at his place.

Why Is This in the Bible?

This text was written to confused, fearful, and grieving people. God knows that we need to understand the story under the story. Hope comes from this redemptive trajectory. It reminds me of 2 Peter 3:10-13.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet.3:10–13)

There are implications when we read this kind of biblical truth.

- Since I'm hoping in a future home, I can turn from idolatry and anxiety in this age
- Since I'm hoping in the person of Jesus, I can live for his glory and model his humility
- Since I am hoping in God's grace, I can trust that God is going to supply everything I need
- Since I'm hoping in God's mercy, I can pursue obedience, kindness, and love for my neighbor
- Since I'm hoping in God's kingdom, I can do whatever I can to fulfill Jesus's prayer: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
- Since I'm hoping in God's promise, I can have a joy that is out of reach of painful circumstances, broken people, or fierce opponents
- Since I'm hoping in God's plan, I can be at rest, releasing my expectations that rob me of contentment

Hope is stronger than fear.

And the Christian's hope is based on the righteous reign of Jesus.

So, shout and sing for joy, College Park Church! For great in your midst is your Savior named Jesus.

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