

SONGS OF PRAISE! ISAIAH 11+12, SELECTED SERMON

Isaiah includes some intriguing titles for Jesus in today's lesson. He's referred to as "a shoot from the stump of Jesse", "a Branch", and "the Root of Jesse". Isaiah's referring to Jesus, the Messiah who would come and bring hope to our darkness. That's the essential message Isaiah communicates: **Jesus brings hope and light to our darkness!**

Who was this prophet, known as Isaiah? Isaiah grew up in Jerusalem, probably a member of the royal household, with access to the king. He was married and had two sons. He lived during a period in which Assyria ruled as the reigning superpower of the Middle East. Over the past few years we've seen many maps of Iraq. Picture in your mind northern Iraq and you can envision the location of Assyria. Isaiah had a very long life and ministry, spanning some sixty years!

As Assyria became stronger, the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah weakened. Much of their problem stemmed from rampant sin. They worshipped foreign gods, did not practice God's law, their leaders were corrupt and everyone lacked compassion for the weaker members of their society. Consequently, their morals suffered and the country grew weak. Eventually, the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and forced many Jews to leave their homeland. In order to survive, the southern kingdom of Judah made alliances with foreign powers like Egypt. But they too eventually fell to the Babylonian army.

God sent Isaiah to speak to his people in the midst of this dire and serious situation. Isaiah provided some good news to his people. He told his people that the root of Jesse whom we know today as Jesus, would come and bring **hope and light to our darkness!**

Isaiah provides a timely word for us, today, in our country. Many find themselves unemployed or underemployed, we're still fighting two wars that have taken an enormous physical and emotional toll on our military and their families and an incredible financial burden on our country; our government has been borrowing money at unprecedented levels, we're struggling to rebound from a great recession and many seem to be turning to various forms of addictive behaviors as an escape from reality. To make matters worse, there seems to be a spiritual malaise that has come over our country. One would think that difficult times would stimulate people to seek the Lord and develop and practice their faith but that doesn't appear to have happened in the current milieu.

What about you? Are you struggling to keep your job? Have you been working to extricate yourself from mounds of credit card debt but it doesn't seem like your making much progress? Perhaps personal or family problems seem overwhelming to you. Maybe you've been battling depression, loneliness, or an anxiety disorder.

Regardless of how dark and bleak your life might seem today, we have hope as God's people for **Jesus brings hope and light to our darkness!** Isaiah includes some additional information about Jesus, which reveals his special, divine status and calling. What makes Jesus unique?

1. The Spirit of the Lord rests on him. (Isa 11:2-3)

Isaiah states clearly that the “Spirit of the Lord will rest on him”. We know that the Spirit of God rested on Jesus. Turn to the passage in the New Testament where we read of Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist, **Matthew 3:16-17** “**As soon as Jesus was baptized he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”**”.

The Spirit of God inhabited Jesus before his baptism. So, what exactly happened to Jesus at his baptism by the Spirit? I love the analogy Dale Bruner uses in his commentary on Matthew. He writes that it’s like the Spirit had lived with Jesus in street clothes up to his baptism but when his baptism occurs, it’s as if Jesus gets dressed up because he has something special to do. The Spirit anointed him for his special, three-year ministry.

Please turn back to Isaiah 11. Isaiah describes the Spirit of the Lord with three couplets: first, the Spirit’s described as “The Spirit of wisdom and understanding”. By this couplet, Isaiah indicates that the Spirit of God will give Jesus special intellectual gifts for ministry. The Spirit’s also called “the Spirit of counsel and of power”. This couplet refers to the practical and tangible side of ministry. Jesus used spiritual power to heal and perform miracles. He depended on the Spirit for counsel as he debated with the Pharisees and taught in the Temple. Finally, we read of the “Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord”. Knowledge and fear of the Lord refer to Jesus’ relationship with God. He has intimate knowledge of God and respect and honor of him! I love vs. 3, “and he will delight in the fear of the Lord”. Jesus will love honoring and respecting God the father!

Jesus ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit! Today, as he makes intercession for us at the right hand of God the Father, he continues to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This same Holy Spirit who provided a special anointing on Jesus 2,000 years ago can fill us today as well! The Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus as a dove and He comes down upon us today also. When we truly place our faith and trust in Christ, He gives us his Holy Spirit to be our helper, counselor, teacher and guide. The Spirit of God can bring light and hope to our darkness, much as Jesus did 2,000 years ago. If you’re battling some kind of darkness today in your life, whether it’s your job that has you depressed or a broken relationship or a dashed dream, ask the Spirit of God to fill you with his light and hope!

I love what Jesus told the disciples in the last verse of **John 16**. Jesus had just finished a rather long discourse on the Holy Spirit and Jesus said, “**I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!** In the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome the world with all of its troubles, trials and problems!

2. Jesus stands as a banner for all nations! (Isaiah 11:10-11)

Isaiah states that Jesus will stand as a “banner for the peoples and the nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious”. The word for “banner” in the original is the word, *nes*. It means standard, ensign, signal or sign. A banner served as a rallying

point, which drew people together for some common action or for the communication of important information. Banners could be raised on a signal pole as a point of focus or object of hope. In referring to Jesus as a banner, Isaiah means that Jesus' life and ministry will operate as sign of hope for a dark and broken world.

When Neil Armstrong first walked on the moon, he and his colleague, Edwin Aldrin planted an American flag. They left a plaque on the moon, which stated, "Here men from the planet Earth set foot upon the moon. July, 1969 AD. We came in peace for all mankind". Both the American flag and the plaque served as banners. They served as rallying points for the American people.

In Jacksonville we often see banners displayed over California Street. During Christmas season the town has a banner proclaiming, "Victorian Christmas". We sponsor a banner in the weeks preceding Easter, advertising our Easter worship services for the town. We seek to communicate information, and an invitation for the town to join us.

I found some cute banners or cartoons, which we'll put up on the screens for you.

Jesus' life and ministry serves as a banner for all nations, not just the Jewish people. Isaiah writes of "the peoples" and "the nations" in vs.10. This same care and concern for all nations continues today.

In vs. 11, Isaiah states that the Lord will "reach out a *second time* to reclaim the remnant that is left of my people". This statement raises several questions. First, what's "the remnant" Isaiah refers to? Thousands of Jews were dispersed after the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom of Israel. A century later many more were dispersed from the southern Kingdom of Judah when Babylon defeated them in battle. In times of war, many people leave the areas being contested. Many Jews fled from Israel to Egypt, modern day Syria and Jordan and other areas. This was the first dispersion.

What's the second time Isaiah refers to in vs. 11 in which he states that God will "reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant?" The second time Isaiah refers to means the time of Jesus. The message of Jesus, the gospel of the kingdom will reach far beyond Israel! God will seek to gather his people together from people groups scattered throughout the world through the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, Jesus still stands as a banner for all nations! The gospel has spread to more people groups today than in any time in history.

3. Jesus' presence among us causes us to give thanks and praise! (Isaiah 12:1-6)

Isaiah speaks of the Lord's anger in chapter 12. God's angry at the people's sin. God calls them a "sinful nation" in chapter one. Listen to **Isaiah 1:4** "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him".

But we read at the end of **12:1** that God's anger has turned away and the people have experienced God's comfort. The word in the original for "comforted" means "one who has a severe burden to breathe again". Isn't that an interesting way of understanding "comforted"? A severe burden to breathe again! It's like a HUGE sigh!

In vs. 2 Isaiah makes a great statement of faith. God has been his strength, his song and has become his salvation! In vs. 4-6 we read of a wonderful song of praise. This song of praise includes thanksgiving, praise, and proclamation!

This song of praise exalts God. The Jews of old and we today can praise God because **Jesus brings light and hope to our darkness!**

Norman Wood of South Hamilton, Massachusetts wrote about a memorable Christmas experience he had on Christmas day, 1944.

My outfit had flushed the Nazis out of a small town in Alsace-Lorraine only 2 days before. We were dug into a field skirting the town, just 1,000 yards from the Rhine River and the infamous Siegfried Line. It was a snowy morning with lead-gray skies and I buttoned the top button of my heavy overcoat so the wind-blown snow wouldn't get down my neck. It had been daylight for nearly 2 hours as I walked toward the village, yet no smoke rose from the battered chimneys and there was no sign of activity. No gleeful cries of children greeted this morning...could it really be Christmas? Could war kill the spirit as well as the body? I glanced through the frosted windows of the houses I was passing. I halted abruptly at what seemed to be an odd sight in the midst of so much destruction. I saw a Christmas tree fully decorated and around it were two women and three little children. One of the women noticed me, so she raised the window and invited me inside. Though the house wasn't warm, it did provide shelter from the icy wind and blowing snow...and the sight of that Christmas tree warmed me from the inside out. One of the women offered me cookies and a hot drink, which I thankfully accepted. "Today is Christmas" she said. "We are very happy you have driven the Germans from our peaceful town and we are thanking God on this day. This is surely a merry Christmas for us. The thankful people of our little town are asking you Americans to please accept these baskets of fruit and nuts so that your Christmas will be happy, too." There, in the corner were some bushels of apples and pears and nearly a bushel of nuts. Each villager had contributed what little he or she could. When I left that house to get to my post, I thought deeply about those kind people. By all physical signs they had seemed crushed and beaten. Their homes were torn apart, their food supply nearly depleted and they had been subjected to Nazi discipline and hate. Yet, they still cherished the spirit of Christmas and humbly gave their thanks to God. The streets no longer looked so desolate and unfamiliar to me. They were part of a quaint village that suddenly seemed so very much alive. I realized then that this December 25 would be the most gratifying Christmas Day in my life".

Jesus brought light and hope to that little French village in WW 2, a village which had suffered greatly through four years of deprivation, loss and warfare. Those villagers could have easily wallowed in self-despair but they chose to respond to their dark and bleak circumstances in a more positive way! Christmas, the time Jesus entered human history and brought light to our darkness, gave them great hope!

Jesus can bring light and hope to your darkness today as well! Regardless of your circumstances, Jesus can give you hope and light! Simply invite him to shine his light into your dark circumstances, relationships, home, wherever you need his hope and light! As his light shines in your darkness, may your hope be re-kindled and renewed. Let us pray.