

Isaiah 11:1-11 Advent 2
A New World Coming – Righteousness and Justice
December 4, 2022
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Welcome to Week 2 in Advent and our series, 'A New World Coming' from the book of Isaiah.

Last week we looked at Isaiah 2 and that powerful image of World Peace in v4, *"They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."*

The theme of World Peace continues in today's reading from Chapter 11 using the metaphor of the animal world. Isaiah chooses a number of animals where -

- one is strong and the other is weak,
 - one is the hunter and the other is the hunted,
 - one is prey for the other and has every right to be afraid.
- Isaiah pictures these animals now living in complete harmony.

- V6 -The wolf lives with the lamb,
-the leopard will lie down with the goat,
-the calf and the lion will get on with each other and
-the cow will feed with the bear.

What's more one of the most vulnerable of human beings a little child is seen to be completely safe amongst these dangerous animals. In v6 a child will lead these animals that were formerly enemies and in v8 a child will be quite safe playing with snakes. *"The infant will play near the cobras den, the young child will put his hand into the Vipers nest."*

It's hard to imagine a world that looks like this. And it is just as hard to imagine a world where countries don't devour one another. Can you imagine a world where countries are always looking out for the interests of other countries, rather than their own self interest? But the Isaiah picture is about countries that were former enemies, now living in peace.

It is a beautiful picture of the new world which is coming.

Isaiah 11 gives us a lot more detail than last week on how this World Peace will be achieved. The chapter talks about a Godly figure who is going to come and set everything right. He is not named here as the Messiah but there is no doubt this person is consistent with the Messiah figure talked about elsewhere.

Chapter 2, *"He will judge between the nations"*,

Chapter 7 *"Immanuel"*,

Chapter 9 *"To us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders"*.

These passages are very familiar in the season of Advent. They of course point to the Messiah, God's anointed servant who will bring God's salvation, God's peace.

In Chapter 11 the Lord's anointed is described as *"A shoot from the stump of Jesse."* Jesse was king David's father. So this points to the fact that the Messiah will be from the family line of David and be a King.

The stump is the nation of Judah and it is a picture of a nation that has been cut down. It is a picture of God's people defeated and in exile. It is a picture of God's judgement on the nation for its sin.

But it is not just God's people who are judged, it is all the nations. If you look at the previous Chapter 10 you will see that the other nations, who have been used by God to judge Judah and Israel, will also have their day of reckoning. A similar image is used in v33 and 34. *"See, the Lord the Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low. He will cut down the forest thickets with an axe; Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One."*

So God's people will be judged.

The Pagan nations will be judged and especially Assyria who will take the people into exile.

But there is one enormous difference between Judah and Assyria.

-Assyria is felled never to rise again.

-Judah is felled to have a new life emerge from its stump. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse. And this Messiah will be one like the son of Jesse, King David. Yet one who is in every way superior to David.

Now I want you to think for a moment what makes for a great leader?

Who is the leader who can bring peace to a nation?

I want to suggest two qualities are essential for this type of leader. They have to be just, and they have to be powerful. And you need both. There can be no peace without both.

If the leader is powerful, but without justice, then they are just an autocrat or dictator. Someone like Vladimir Putin, or Joseph Stalin, or Mao Zedong, or Adolf Hitler.

Powerful men who have no sense of justice are just plain scary. It is not what makes for peace and history has surely shown that.

On the other hand if you have a strong sense of justice but are not powerful, then you're not in a position to see that justice is done. And once again this is not what makes for peace; at least not in the immediate situation. I think of people like Francis of Assisi, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or Aung San Su Kyi in Burma. All of these leaders have strong justice credentials but no political power so they were unable to bring about peace in each of their historical contexts.

Now the wonderful thing about the 'shoot from the stump of Jesse' is that he will rule powerfully with justice. Isaiah Chapter 11 presents us with just such a leader,

-Filled with the Holy Spirit v2,

-Delighting in the fear of the Lord v3,

-Judging with righteousness for the poor of the earth v3&4,

-Powerfully bringing together former enemies v6-9,

-Able to save a remnant of Judah and also attract the Gentles v10&11.

Let us look at this chapter in terms of these two great leadership qualities power and justice.

The Messiah, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, will be Powerful because the Holy Spirit will rest on him v2 and specifically it will be the Spirit of counsel and of might. This is an image of war - seeking counsel on the best strategy for overcoming the enemy and exercising military might in winning the victory. We're talking here about the spiritual battle because as we know Jesus strategy was the cross where apparent weakness was actually strength. At the cross Jesus won complete victory over Satan and all the forces of evil.

This is Jesus showing us clearly the Spirit of counsel and of might.

Next if you look at v 4b. *“He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”* Is that powerful enough for you? Be grateful that the context here is justice. The rest of v4 says, *“With righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.”* V4 Should fill us with great comfort because it means that the Messiah’s just judgement will be enforced. There will be no legal tricks, or bribes, or political manoeuvring, or ability to get out of jail. The wicked will not escape, the judgement will stick. This is a powerful Messiah.

And finally look at the outcome. Look at what this Messiah is capable of achieving. Versus 6 to 9, the picture of the animals living in harmony. This is a picture of creation restored, reconciliation and peace. He must be a powerful Messiah to achieve this.

Not only that but in verse 11 he will reach out his hand to the Jewish people living in exile in the neighbouring countries and gather them from exile and restore them in the land.

And the nations will rally to him as well v10. This is a very powerful Messiah who can speak into every culture, every ethnic grouping, every nation. So make no mistake this Messiah qualifies as a powerful figure.

My friends we need a powerful Messiah who can make justice stick. Because we live in a world where there is often little justice.

- Little justice for the Ukrainian people with Russian missiles raining down on them.
- Little justice for the people of Burma subjected to a brutal military regime.
- Little justice for the Uyghurs, a Muslim minority living in China.

We can be grateful for the justice system in our own country, however, that doesn't mean they always get it right.

- Juries have been known to err.
- Judges rulings have been challenged.
- And most recently and disturbingly the reliability of police evidence has been challenged. I'm sure you've all read about the forensic laboratory here in Queensland. This article in The Australian this week sums it up well.

Quote

Well isn't it good to know there is a new day coming when complete justice will be done. In v3 we read God's Messiah, *“will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.”*

And isn't this what we see Jesus doing as he walks on the earth. He sees into people’s hearts and he knows exactly what to say to either bring healing and consolation or to put his finger on sin and call for repentance. And sometimes he does both at the same time.

I think of the woman caught in adultery who is about to be stoned. Jesus puts his finger on the sin of her accuses and shows up their hypocrisy. He shows tremendous compassion to this woman as a victim but then still sends her off with the words, *“Go and sin no more.”* This is the mind and heart of a completely just judge. Imagine what it will be like when these sort of judgments are made in every messy, confused, sin stained human relationship. The image in verse 9 is powerful, *“for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”*

Isaiah 11 points to a Messiah who will rule over the new world which is coming. In Advent we especially think about this coming in two stages and there are hints of those two stages in Isaiah 11.

The shoot from the stump of Jesse speaks of a fragile beginning. A new life emerging out of the old. To me it's a powerful image of the babe of Bethlehem, so fragile yet so full of hope.

When Jesus is an adult the Spirit of the Lord does indeed rest on him in the ways described here in verse 2. It is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. All those things are so true of Jesus.

Then there is the justice spoken of in v3-5. Jesus is the one who has righteousness as his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist, executing God's justice in all his interactions. In so many ways the Gospel records fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah 11.

However, there is so much more still to be fulfilled when the Messiah returns. As Jesus promised there will be a second coming, a second advent. Only then will we see the final judgement and complete justice for those who have been trampled in this life. Only then will we see the lamb lying down with the wolf and true peace.

In the meantime, we are called to work towards this Kingdom that is coming. As Jesus taught us to pray, *"Your Kingdom come, your will be done; on earth as it is in heaven."*

Followers of Jesus are Kingdom people working to bring in the Kingdom now. This means working for justice - standing up for those who are unfairly treated in our world.

One organisation Lynda and I support is the Barnabas Fund. It works to support persecuted Christians around the world. Recently we were praying for five Christians in Iran who were arrested because of their faith. This is their story.

Barnabas Prayer Diary 2022 Nov 15

Locally we are trying to do something about homelessness. Some have expressed special concern for older women who have very limited financial means and are finding they can no longer afford their rents and are therefore homeless. I am personally concerned for those on low wages. I think there's something wrong when those on minimum wages are not able to afford a basic roof over their heads. Greater minds than mine are needed to work out the structural problems in our economy that allows that to happen. But Christians need to be taking an interest and praying for and working towards solutions.

These are some practical ways we can be looking out for the poor of the earth.

- It's about putting Isaiah 11 into practice;
- it's about doing what Jesus did in the gospels and caring for the poor and those on the margins.

We are to not only pray, 'Your Kingdom come,' but to work towards it.

We know that in the end it will only happen when the Messiah returns.

On that great day Jesus will usher in the new world of his Kingdom.

It will be a Kingdom of power and justice.

A remnant of Judah will be saved and a remnant of the nations will also rally to him.

The lamb will lie down with the wolf.

And on God's terms, with Jesus reigning as King in his Kingdom, there will be perfect peace.

Come Lord Jesus Come.