

Isaiah 11:1-11

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[0 : 00] Please turn back to Isaiah chapter 11, page 575. Every time we have a winter clock change, I feel like it catches me out.

! I feel like I'm surprised again this year by how early it gets dark every day. I feel like that bit of the day when you don't need lights on either in your house or in your car just is really, really brief. Some of you will go out in the morning in the dark.

You'll come home from work in the evening in the dark. You'll see very little natural light during the day. And it feels a bit like at this time of year, the darkness is chasing us. And it begins to win the race at about quarter to four every afternoon. It's that time of year.

And I think it's fair to say that at the moment, that darkness that we see all around us feels like a reflection of the moral state of things, certainly in our nation. There's conflict.

You look at the news, there are people that are arguing and fighting. There's the cost of living. There's celebrity scandal, it seems, at every turn. And now we have a House of Commons that have voted for assisted suicide. It feels a bit like whichever news tab you click. The physical darkness at this time of year is illustrating the moral darkness that seems to be all around us. And yet, we've begun to celebrate Christmas. We've started to put up our trees and think about gifts and begin to wrap them.

[1 : 50] Certainly, many of the women amongst us have started to wrap them. I've got another 20 days. The thing that we're doing at Christmas in many ways is through the traditions and through the things that we do, we're trying to overcome the darkness. If you think about it, we put up lights, lots of them on wire wrapped around the tree, or we light candles, or if you're that way inclined, you put a giant illuminated sleigh in the window of your house. We associate this season in lots of ways with lights that brighten those long evenings. We also, of course, look for ways to overcome the societal darkness as well. We party, and we purchase, and we pretend for this season. And for a moment, it feels a bit like things don't seem so bad. The darkness gets chased a little bit because we've been able to cover it. But then the season passes, and we realize the darkness is still there, and we're not sure if it was worth it after all. But Christians recognize that the lights that we put up and the celebrations that we enjoy at this time of year in this season of Advent are entirely appropriate.

They're not a waste of time. Advent, we said last week, the word means coming. The season takes our attention to the coming of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. That's why we put up lights at this time of year. We're looking to the one who is the light of the world. And there are two aspects to this.

We look back to that first Christmas, to His first coming, His first Advent, and we look forward to His promised return. We anticipate His second Advent. And when we're gathering in the mornings in December on these Sundays, what we're doing is choosing texts that the Bible helps us to see, both that we look back and we look forward. They're shining a light, these texts, into the darkness. And the great news is that it is a light that doesn't get packed away in January. It's a light that doesn't just make the harshness of life a bit easier to bear for an evening or two or a few days during this season.

And Isaiah 11, page 575, it might be one of the best texts, actually, to help us think with this dual focus, to both look back to Christ's first coming and to look forward to His coming again. In the earlier chapters of Isaiah, the prophet has exposed the faithlessness of God's people. And he said that He's going to bring judgment. A divine judgment is coming that will come through the neighboring Assyrian armies. But despite this, God says, I'm not going to leave you. He will not give up on His people, the house of David. And we're told that He will bless them. He will bless them through one of David's offspring. And back in chapter 9, in another well-known Advent text, we're

told explicitly that God will shine light into their darkness, and there will be a deliverance from that oppression when His King brings in His eternal kingdom. That's the promise in chapter 9. And here in chapter 11, we're being told more about that King. We're being told more about the King and about the salvation that He will accomplish as His kingdom is established. So, that's what we're thinking about this morning. When the darkness that's all around us, whether it's the physical darkness of this time of year, or it is the cultural darkness that we feel pressing in around us, here are two cast-iron reasons for hope at this time of year. And the first is very simply this, point number one, the King. The King. You see, out the other side of God's judgment, both on His enemies and the faithfulness of His people, here we are in Isaiah chapter 11, God is saying He will do a new thing. Verse 1, There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

[6 : 00] It's the horticultural imagery, but the reference to Jesse, King David's father, is significant because it shows us that this promise goes back beyond David. The legacy of the sons of David at this time was bad. Isaiah chapter 7 reminds us that they're going to incur judgment.

So, it's important to see here that we realize God is promising not another son of David, but another David, another king that has the anointing of God on his life.

The faithless line of kings will be replaced by one who is altogether superior, and this will be seen in two striking ways. That's what these verses show. They show the king here.

First of all, we see his wisdom. Verse 2, look at verse 2. And here's the one who has promised, Old Testament kings were anointed with oil and were described as the Lord's anointed. But David was special, and he was anointed not simply with oil but with God's Spirit to empower him for the special role that he would play in the life of Israel. And Isaiah is taking that pattern to describe the one who is to come. He will be covered by, he will be clothed in the Spirit of the Lord, and the power and the presence of the Spirit will be made known in the wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord that will mark him and mark his life and rule.

Now, we know from Proverbs 1 that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And we would expect one who is perfectly filled with the Spirit of God to possess that wisdom. But what do these other descriptions actually mean? Wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord.

[7 : 54] Well, the theologian Alec Mateer in his commentary on Isaiah says this, Wisdom and understanding are judicial and governmental attributes in Deuteronomy 1 and 1 Kings 3.

Counsel and might are rendered strategy and power for war in Isaiah 36 verse 5, suggesting the ability to devise a right course of action coupled with the personal prowess to see it through.

And the Spirit-given knowledge and fear of the Lord implies a distinctive relationship with the Lord and a life conformed to that relationship, end quote. In short, what he's saying is this, this anointed, Spirit-filled King will be able to perceive things accurately, make the right decisions for the good of God's people, and execute what needs to be done to bring those plans to pass.

This is the wonderful counselor of Isaiah chapter 9, perfect in mind, heart, and action, perfect in mind, heart, and action, thoughts, feelings, and the ability to execute those.

Now, isn't this the King that we're waiting for? It's always tempting to think that you're living at a unique time in history, to think that we have it particularly bad.

[9 : 16] However, it does seem that these are strange days politically. It does seem that there is a particular dearth of wise leadership around.

And in all of our uncertainty and concern about that, we are longing for oversight from someone who has this kind of wisdom. One who knows the right thing to do.

One who has the power and the aptitude to make it happen. One who is full of the Spirit of God and who only ever does what is good. That is the King that we're waiting for, isn't it?

But isn't this the King that we have? The kingship in David's line that Isaiah sees here finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke makes it most clear that Jesus comes as the Son of the Most High, who is given, quote, the throne of his father David, Luke chapter 1, verse 32.

And when the angel speaks to the shepherds in Luke chapter 2, the good news of great joy is, When you read the beginning of the Gospels and you watch the ministry of Jesus unfold, he proclaims the good news of the kingdom.

[10 : 49] He releases those who are held captive to demonic forces. He heals the sick. He even raises the dead. He is demonstrating his divine power at every turn. Even the most cursory look at the earthly ministry of Jesus shows that he is the one Isaiah's prophecy is describing.

This King that we long for is the King that we have. But we don't just see his wisdom. Isaiah also highlights, look at verse 3, his justice.

He says, and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord, and 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. We're not just told about his character and what he'd be like. We're also told about how he will act. And unlike earthly kings, he won't just judge on the basis of what he sees and what he hears, but because of his divine wisdom, his judgment will exceed all earthly categories. And do you notice his eye is especially on the poor and the meek, verse 4. He will bring justice, a justice that lifts them up. We sing, He knows our needs. To our weakness is no stranger. Behold your King. He is, as one theologian says, a King in whose hands the concerns of the weakest will be safe. The state, certainly in our day, may leave the vulnerable terribly exposed, but the Lord Jesus will uphold their cause.

But his justice isn't, do you see, just positively for the weak. Isaiah goes on to say that for the wicked there will be justice of another kind. Their hearts will be laid bare, and their deeds will be seen for what they are. And with a word from this King, verse 4, they will be destroyed.

The righteousness and faithfulness which underpinned the character of God would be seen in this King, verse 5, as he brings justice to the earth. So, if his wisdom showed this King to be the wonderful counselor of chapter 9, his righteousness and faithfulness that are expressed in his justice show him to embody those other titles in Isaiah 9. He is the mighty God and the everlasting Father.

[13:29] Isn't this the King that we're waiting for? When we look around and see the poor being exploited, and we see the wicked seemingly prospering, we see corruption and exploitation are rife, whether it's in Westminster or in the BBC or whichever big you would like to choose, big pharma, big tech, big agriculture, whichever one, take your pick. Don't we long for a ruler who will bring justice, who will drive out corruption, who will put exploitation behind us once and for all. As our hearts break, as we live in a land that permits the legal killing of thousands of unborn lives every year, and it seems we're accelerating towards the right for this to happen at the other end of life, don't we cry for justice to be done. We're waiting for this King. The longing of our hearts is a longing for this King to come, one who is perfectly wise and one who is perfectly just. But isn't this the King that we have?

When Jesus announced at the beginning of His ministry that the kingdom of God is at hand, He then proceeds to show us the character of this promised King. He meets the weak and the needy and the outcast with love and compassion, while at the same time confronting those who use their power to exploit others and to keep them from the kingdom altogether. He is tender with the broken. He is tough with the wicked. Jesus Christ embodied the righteousness and faithfulness of God to each individual. And this is a pattern of the final judgment that He will one day bring. We're told that Acts 17, the apostle preaches, God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed. And of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.

The hope of Advent is that in the one born in the manger that first Christmas, we have a King who is full of wisdom and justice, and that King is coming again.

The question for all of us is, are you trusting Him? Are you trusting Him? Only those who have put their faith in Him will experience His justice for their good.

If we have to stand before Him unforgiven, His justice demands that we are cast off forever. With all that I have within me, I want to plead with you to trust Him for the salvation that He brings this morning. If you haven't done that yet, you can do it right now. You can do it in your seat.

[16:09] Turn to the King who is wise and just. As your soul longs for this kind of integrity, He is the one to whom you must turn.

You can only find it in Jesus Christ. He is always right, always good, always fair, always true. He is the only ruler that we can trust. So, recognize and embrace this King.

But Isaiah doesn't just describe the King. He offers a second reason why we can have hope in the darkness. Point number two, the kingdom. The kingdom. There's the King, but there's also a profile here of the kingdom that He will bring in. The nature of the kingdom that Christ brings. Verse 6, 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. This is where Christmas ultimately takes us. This is the end goal of the Christmas story. The rule of God's King will bring this peace. And just look at these reversals, the reversals that will take place in the lovely sense of harmony that he describes here. The wolf at once devoured the lamb. The leopard, it would gobble up the goat. The lion, it would lick its lips at the sight of a fattened calf. They're all at one with each other. Mortal enemies will happily dwell together. Indeed, these powerful animals will once again acknowledge humanity's proper dominion over them. Do you see that? Such that they will look to the leadership of a small child. Imagine the littlest toddler here this morning. Imagine them just toddling around, leading a leopard behind them. And they won't even need, they won't even need a rope. They'll just say, hey, Leo, over here, come on, let's go. We're going out this way. And the leopard will follow along. And when you look at them as the leopard walks along behind them, and you see them putting their hand then in a snake's den, verse 8, you won't need to panic. You won't need to worry at all. Snakes will no longer be deadly for the human race.

It is a picture of global cosmic peace and harmony. This reference to the Adder's Den here, it may just be continuing the imagery of how opposites, how enemies are reconciled in the kingdom, but I think actually it's alluding to something bigger.

[19:08] You see, last week, you remember, I talked about the enmity that exists between our first, that has existed since our first parents' sin, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Humanity's great enemy is the serpent. And here is Isaiah alluding to how that will be taken away. Indeed, how the fruit of that enmity, death itself, will also be defeated in this great reversal. You see, Isaiah here is depicting the transformation of the whole created order.

It is a restoration of the harmony of the Garden of Eden. I recently watched a policeman stopping busy traffic on a busy road near where we live, and it was very dramatic. He stepped out into the road. He pointed at a car. He put his hand up. The car stopped. He then walked across another lane, pointed at the car. The driver could see him. He put his hand up. He put his hand up. And the car stopped. That's the image that we get here. The king has stepped into the darkness. He has pointed at the darkness in our broken world. He said, no further, and it has stopped. He has halted the progress of that darkness. Jesus Christ, the king born at Christmas, isn't just the baby in the manger. He isn't just a reason for some cultural celebration, some feel-good songs around a piano or an organ or wherever you go to your carol services.

Jesus Christ, the king born at Christmas, has brought in this kingdom where he has halted the progress of darkness and will one day push it out completely. And look how far that will reach. Verse 9, 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. The way Isaiah puts these phrases together, it seems clear to me that God's holy mountain is equivalent to the earth, which is full of the knowledge of the Lord. The restoration that God is bringing will one day reach from shore to shore. Every single square inch, our sin and its effects, in our experience today, our sin, it has an effect, it has its fingerprints over every thought, over every action, over every relationship that we have. And the bottom line is that that sin, with its effects that go to the very, very end of everything, it will in the end take us to the grave as its due payment. But through this King, the Spirit-anointed Messiah, God removes this curse.

[22:10] He removes the enmity between us and Him. He removes the enmity between us and each other. He removes the enmity between us and the created order. And He is renewing the whole earth.

Here's Alec Mateer again, when the true order of creation is restored, the whole earth is the Lord's hill, indwelt by His holiness. And the way that Jesus brings this great reconciliation and transformation about is ultimately through His sacrificial death. The Apostle Paul tells us that God is pleased, Colossians 1 verse 20, to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross. You see the cosmic perspective that Paul has there? All things reconciled to Him in heaven and on earth, making peace. The peace that this King will bring, how does He bring it? Through the blood of His cross.

It isn't the manger that ultimately brings this deliverance. It is the cross. His death has secured this kingdom of peace for all who have put their faith in Him. And it will grow, the kingdom will grow and grow and grow to fill the whole earth as this King is proclaimed to the nations.

Now, of course, we do still wait for the consummation of these plans that Isaiah describes, which comes at the second advent, the second coming when Jesus returns. But don't lose sight of this. Don't lose sight of the fact that through His perfect Spirit-anointed life, His sin-destroying death, and His life-giving resurrection, Jesus has already accomplished a definitive act of restoration. That is, if you are in Christ by faith, if you have put your faith in Jesus, you are a new creation, and you belong to this new world and this new kingdom. And that means that when you feel the darkness snapping at your heels, whatever way that is expressed, when you suffer and when you struggle and when you look around you and you think to yourself, what on earth is going on in this world? How could it get any darker morally?

[24 : 31] We can persevere. We can persevere with certainty that God is making all things new, and this isn't the way it will always be. Those broken relationships will not always be like that. The physical suffering will not always exist. The societal pain and darkness, it will not always be there. It is on the clock, a day is coming when it will cease altogether. And Advent reminds us of this. That's why this season is so important. In all our pain and all our sadness and confusion and fear, the one born at Christmas offers us real light in a dark world. It's not just make-believe. He has real light to give us in a dark world because He is coming again to bring His children home. And of course, we're the privileged ones because we can have much more certainty of this than the faithful few to whom Isaiah was speaking because we have seen Jesus. We have experienced the pouring out of His Spirit, and we have witnessed the gospel spread. We have seen these promises begin to be fulfilled in ways that they didn't.

And so, we can be cast iron confident that this is a solid hope on which to base our lives. So, put your lights up. Light your candles. Celebrate the season with joy. Not to hide from reality like so many try to do at this time of year, but to embrace the reality of all that God is doing as He's bringing in His kingdom. Let's pray.