

“From A Cut-Down Hopeless Stump To A Shining Blossom”

(Isaiah 11:1)

First Wednesday in Advent, December 4th, 2013

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The longest list of clothing and accessories in all of Scripture (Isaiah 3:6-4:1) is from the book of Isaiah (an amazing book that is sometimes referred to as “The Fifth Gospel” for its powerful teaching on the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ). It is arguable that the most powerful descriptions of the person and work of Jesus are not even in the New Testament, but in the book of Isaiah. The descriptions of the clothing and accessories are not a random thing, but depict real evidence of what was going on among God’s people in the Kingdom of Judah (in which was the city of David, the holy city of Jerusalem; Judah is the same region which includes Bethlehem where Jesus was born). The clothing and accessories demonstrate Judah’s affluence and unfortunately, the idolatry and growing indifference to God’s Word (see introduction to *The Lutheran Study Bible*, p. 1084).

Here is a sample of what is described here in God’s Word in Isaiah (you can learn a lot about a person and for that matter, a culture, by the way one dresses or how the many people in a culture dress): ***“The Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents, the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. Instead of perfume there will be rotteness...”*** (Isaiah 3:16-24a)

Of course because we live in Southern California, the rest of the country already knows that we are different and it shows in the way we dress. So Cal is known for its casual and comfortable approach to dress, but we also live in a culture that is extremely invested in the body; and we also live in a culture where malls remind us of thirst for material wealth. Put all of this together and we have much in common with Israel at their economic zenith. But again, this isn’t mentioned in the Bible as a passing random historical note, but to show that with a pre-occupation in dress and physical appearance, often comes less time for God, the signs of false worship, and as said before, a “growing indifference to God’s Word.” What I personally try to remind myself of is that beauty is fleeting, and men are wise to remember that their muscles

shrink over time...tattoos can really look funny after a decade or two go by...and the Word of God says: "For [God] knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more (Psalm 103:14-16)." If this doesn't sober you up, then not much will.

Sometimes when we think of God's people in the Old Testament, we automatically leap to those images of suffering represented during the time of enslavement to the Egyptians or the time of war during the taking of the Promised Land, or perhaps we jump forward in time from these events to Daniel in the Lion's den and the exile God's people experienced in Babylon, etc. My point is that we forget that there was a time of great prosperity for God's people. We forget that there was a time when everything that the Lord said would happen in their inheriting an amazing land overflowing with milk and honey actually happened. God kept His promise and made them a great nation. You've heard of the glory of David and you've heard of the greatness of Solomon. This was the golden era of God's United Kingdom and even after the division of kingdoms separating the northern kingdom of Israel from the southern kingdom of Judah, there was still staggering remnants of great prosperity. And the people dressed like it. And they forgot about God.

In the first part of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah rebukes the sin of God's people and reveals their idolatry...again the basic sin problem: they forgot about God and started loving other things more than God. Remember Christians, idolatry isn't some strange sin that doesn't apply to us anymore. We commit idolatry – what is really the worst of all sins – when we love anything above God (which is just another way of putting our wills over God's will). I've mentioned to you before what Timothy Keller covers in his book *Counterfeit Gods*...in our world today and in our American culture, idolatry is committed through people loving success, power, money, and quote "love" unquote way more than God. For example, it is easy to see that many people are driven by success. They serve success, they bow down before success, because success will get them up first thing in the morning and drive them to work to the bone till late at night; marriages and families are sacrificed for the god of success...we love success in our country and it is so prevalent that we will do just about anything for this god. Idolatry is real.

Now what does this have to do with Isaiah 11? Well, it is the basis for talking about "stumps." Isaiah 11:1 says, ***"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."*** Stump language is the language of what happens when people lose their heads and start caring more about how they look and their success and their wealth and their bodies more than God. And as soon as they think that they are all that and a bag of chips, standing tall like a proud, beautiful tree saying, "Look at me! Look at me! I am

strong, I am sleek, I am beautiful, I am successful!" God says, ***"Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."*** (1st Corinthians 10:12)

Stump language is the language when God comes up to the proud, beautiful tree who is now bragging about life without God and God judges that tree. God takes an ax and chops it down and then what is left of the proud tree? Answer: A stump. That is what stump language is about. It is about what happens when people forget about God. They are left to be a stump. God chops down and what is left is desolate and hopeless.

Just prior to our text in Isaiah, God revealed His judgment against Assyria, the once proud, powerful nation that did not know the Lord. These are the two verses at Isaiah 10:33-34 leading up to Isaiah 11:1:

"Behold, the Lord God of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. ³⁴He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One."

Proud and beautiful Assyria was chopped down and became a stump. And here's the really scary and humbling part: once Assyria became a stump, that was it for Assyria. That nation NEVER made a come-back. Once it became a stump, it was nothing. It was game over. Kaput!

Then Isaiah 11 starts: ***"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."*** The people of God had once become so proud that they forgot about God and God judged them and they were reduced to a stump. Remember the great king of Israel was David, but his dad's name was Jesse...this verse at Isaiah 11:1 teaches us that David's great nation was reduced to a stump. But...and there are some conjunctions you really have to pay attention to...*but*...this stump didn't stay a stump and this is the Gospel for you and for me.

Sin is devastating; our sin is devastating; there is no standing up to it. It makes us game over. Kaput! It reduces us to stumps without life; without hope. Christians, real people who confess the name of the Lord have experienced this: the perils of stumps in their lives. Stumps when it comes to career; stumps when it comes to hope; stumps when it comes to relationships; stumps when it comes to health, etc. Sin has reduced us all to stump-status. Israel was there and of course like us, they deserved it, because they had rebelled against God; they had forgotten about God; exactly what we do in our despicable sin. We like them get all caught up in how to make our bodies look good, these same bodies that will turn to dust; we get all concerned about how to put our names in highlights when after a generation has past, very few

if anyone will remember our names; and none of us should be surprised that our little success empires that we give everything up for will eventually be taken over by someone else, etc. Sin turns us to stumps. But...and again there really are some conjunctions we have to learn to pay attention to...*but...*

This stump was God's stump. This stump was the stump of His people who had received His covenant; that had received His promise of grace. This stump, against all odds, against all appearances, against all properties of stump-ness, didn't just stay a stump. This stump all of sudden had life and hope and a future come up from it. Specifically the Word in Isaiah 11:1 says "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump...". This is a fresh green shoot. It is from the Hebrew word that means "to shine or blossom" (Delitzsch, Franz, *Biblical Commentary on The Prophecies of Isaiah, Volume 1*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965: 281).

This shoot or new green twig of life that shines and blossoms from the dead stump brings the invasion of new life with it. Already in the very same verse at Isaiah 11:1, it isn't enough to merely mention the shoot, but this new life impacts the roots: ***"and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."*** And not merely the roots, but the anticipation of fruit, that is the entire stump is being transformed into a new tree!

In other words, don't be deceived, don't be tricked, and don't be so discouraged that you stop seeing the forest of life that is beyond the tree that has to come down. You only thought that it was game over; you only thought – and thought wrong – that it was kaput! Not so fast.

The shoot from the stump of Jesse was and is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the King, the Savior of Israel and your Savior Christian. The King of Kings who came through the line of Jesse and David to save His people. When all was lost and when all seems lost, there is real hope in real life in a real Savior for His real people. And just as Judah was once decimated, but then restored and brought back to life, you who were once decimated by sin are being restored and have already been given eternal life! After being chopped down, after being judged, after being exiled, after losing everything...the shoot, the new life, the Lord of second chances and of thirds and fourths (70 x 7) and of unending grace lifted Judah up and brought her back, restored and forgiven. After you have been brought low by sin, chopped down by having no hope, Christ has covered your sin with His blood and has lifted you up in a new life!

Isaiah 11 is therefore also a picture of you and me in Christ. Never give up Christian, because the Lord Jesus Christ has not given up on you. You know the truth: "All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)." Point blank: this promise is not for sight, but for faith. If you rely on what you see, you

will do nothing but doubt, but if you believe, then you will see that God works through stumps. He is in the stump revitalization business; and He is the only One foolish enough to “waste His time” with such projects, but precisely because He is the Resurrection and the Life, His investment is no longer a waste of time!

There was once a tree chopped down so that a cross could be made from its dead wood; a horrendous cross representing excruciating pain and death. And if there was ever a tree that showed that all hope was gone, then this was it. But on that tree, a shoot appeared. The Savior of the nations, the Savior of you and of me shed His blood and that blood was full of the life of God. That life has been given to you Christian...that life and that blood continues to be given to you Christian in the Holy Sacrament...this new life is yours, hope is restored no matter what this world throws at you. You’ve been grafted into the shoot called Christ; and the shoot has taken over the roots and the roots have become a tree and this tree of life is where you abide. Hope has taken over; and “shining blossom” is now another way of describing you in Christ!