

The Advents of the King

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 December 2018

Preacher: Alasdair I Macleod

[0 : 00] Well, I didn't expect to be here this evening. Those of you who get the Wednesday email might have noticed that Sunday evening had to be confirmed.

And that's because Derek had somebody down to preach tonight. But that person didn't have themselves down to preach tonight. So we all got a panic-stricken email during the week. Derek basically eventually said, can anybody do anything on Sunday evening? Even at this late stage, some flag-waving will do.

So I thought I should offer, and that's why I'm here. So please turn to Isaiah chapter 11.

I want to look at Isaiah 11 verses 1 to 10.

[1 : 01] I'll just read the first two or three lines. Page 575. 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.

Now you may have heard it sung, I've heard it sung for 55 years. It's the most wonderful time of the year.

And I think it is, the time when once again we say it's a wonderful life. I didn't know what to preach on, but I realized that it's the first Sunday in Advent.

And Advent is the season when, of course, we remember, especially that the Savior has come in His first Advent, but also that the same Savior will return in His second Advent.

So I want tonight to think a little about these two comings, and both of them are in this passage of Scripture. And in between them, if there's time, I want also to reflect on a crucial ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who is so important here, and in the prophecy of Isaiah, and in the life of Jesus.

[2 : 36] So taking my cue from the word wonderful, three things. A wonderful king, a wonderful spirit, and a wonderful world.

So first of all, a wonderful king. If you have a Bible, we're looking at verses 1 to 5. Now, God had led His people to expect that one day a very special king would come.

Now, these people knew about kings. They knew about the good and the bad, and sometimes the ugly. And even the best of their own kings were flawed.

But they had a hope, a royal hope, a messianic hope. And here is one of the passages that nourished that hope of a coming king.

And like all of these passages, it was to be fulfilled in Jesus, of course. Now, it begins here with a shoot from the stump of a tree.

[3 : 50] It doesn't sound like much, but this is a king. Now, Isaiah has already introduced us to this king. You remember in chapter 9, we're told about a royal child who will transcend what could be said about any other king.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end, and so on.

And also, before that, in chapter 7 and verse 14, there was the famous prophecy of a child born of a virgin, and she will name him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

So think about it. In this little section of Isaiah, chapter 7 to 12, this little shoot is the third promise of a coming child like no other, a royal child, and history will turn on his birth.

We also read here about the stump of Jesse. The shoot will come from this stump. Now, Jesse was the father of David, the most famous of the kings.

[5 : 29] Now, the royal house of David has been failed. It's now just a stump, and it looks so unpromising.

And people might have asked, what has happened to God's covenant promise to David? Second Samuel 7, the promise of David's house and David's throne being established forever.

But the royal line is nothing but a tree stump. But Isaiah is saying fresh growth, new growth, is going to emerge from that stump, from that line.

And describing this shoot as from Jesse suggests that he's being portrayed as a new David, as the ideal David.

And I think also saying from Jesse takes us back to David's humble origins in the little town of Bethlehem.

[6 : 34] This king too will have humble human beginnings. And a branch, well this shoot is going to grow to maturity, it's saying.

It's as if the prophecy looks at a shoot and then fast forwards to focus on the picture of a branch full of fruit.

And it's saying, rich fruit is going to be seen in the life of this king. And we may come back to this theme of fruit later on.

And then verses 2 to 5 tell us a little about this king and his reign. And these verses belong as a unit.

Verse 2 is showing us how the king is equipped for his role, as he endued with the spirit of the Lord and endowed by that Holy Spirit.

[7 : 35] And then verses 3 to 5 illustrate how that plays out in the actual reign of the king in the exercise of his role.

And I'll try to explain these things. So first of all, verse 2. We're told first that the spirit of the Lord will rest upon this king.

And then for many centuries later, in John chapter 1, John the Baptist would bear witness to Jesus as the one on whom he saw the spirit descend and remain.

And then what Isaiah does is list six qualities in three pairs. The spirit of two things, the spirit of two things, the spirit of two things.

The set of giftings is attributed directly to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And in this context, all of these giftings have to do with his exercise of kingship.

[8 : 40] So I hope you're still with me. So I'll go through each pair in turn. First of all, wisdom and understanding. The spirit of wisdom and understanding.

I think this is wisdom and understanding for government. Remember the great king Solomon, that very wise king, beginning of his reign, 1 Kings chapter 3.

And he asks for just these qualities. God says in verse 12, Behold, I give you a wise and understanding mind. The same words that are used of Solomon are being used here.

We're being told that this king is the ultimate Solomon, the really wise and discerning king. He will have all the wisdom possible from the Holy Spirit.

And in every situation, he'll have the kind of discernment needed to know exactly what to do in that situation.

[9 : 49] This is all from the spirit. Look at the contrast with the king of Assyria in the previous chapter 10 verses 12 and 13.

God will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria. And the boastful look in his eyes, for he says, By the strength of my hand I've done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding.

Such a contemporary boast by the kings and presidents and prime ministers of the world. I do it by my wisdom and my understanding.

This king will do it by the wisdom and understanding given by the Holy Spirit. And then the second pair, counsel and might, the spirit of counsel and might.

Now, this may mean not what you would expect these to mean, but this looks like counsel and might for war. The same words counsel and might are used later on by Isaiah in chapter 36 and verse 5, translated in the SV as strategy and power, specifically it says for war.

[11 : 12] Counsel and might or strategy and strength for war. Because remember, these people are looking for a king, and kings had military responsibilities to defend the people and to defend the territory.

Now, we might say, but is this not the one of whom we read in chapter 9, who's the prince of peace? Yes, but in the same verse, he's also mighty God, which really means warrior God.

So he's both warrior God and prince of peace, because peace and salvation will only come after victory in battle.

And one day this king will see all evil defeated, judged and destroyed.

So he's a warrior king, counsel and might for war. And then the third pair, knowledge and fear, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

[12:21] You see, kings were meant to offer credible spiritual leadership. God wanted his kings to know him and fear him and rule the people in his name, so that when people looked at the king, they weren't thinking this is a hypocrite, but they were thinking this is the genuine article.

This is somebody who knows the Lord and who fears the Lord, and this king is being described in these terms. He will know the Lord in an intimate, personal way, and he will fear or revere the Lord in such a way that he lives for the Lord in every area of life.

This king, you see, is going to have spiritual integrity. He will be the real spiritual deal.

You can see how these people would have thought this is going to be the most amazing king. This really will be an ideal David and an ideal Solomon, an ideal everyone else, all rolled into one.

This will be the perfect king. Now, I want to take another two or three minutes on verses 3 to 5.

[13:46] These verses begin by repeating and emphasizing the last idea, remember, the fear of the Lord. So it says, His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

The word delight here comes from the word for scent. So it's saying the king will find the fear of the Lord a fragrant thing.

When he gets a scent of what the Lord wants, he will just want to do it. When Jesus got a scent of the Father's will, he loved it and did it as his pleasure.

So what I want you to see in verses, middle of verse 3 to verse 5, is that these verses are illustrating in turn how each of the three pairs of qualities, you're still with me, three pairs of qualities that we looked at, this is now showing how each of these three play out in the king's actual rule.

Now, there's not time to explain that from the rest of the Bible and defend that interpretation. So I'll just read them to make that point.

[15:05] So we're going to read a line from verse 2 and then the relevant bit in 3 to 5. So go back to the spirit of wisdom and understanding. The king will have the spirit of wisdom and understanding.

So middle of verse 3, 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.

So it's saying in the exercise of his rule, the king will show how wise he is. He won't just go by external appearances or by hearsay, but he will do in every case what is right and fair and wise.

Then go back to the spirit of counsel and might. The spirit of counsel and might, end of verse 4, and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips, he shall kill the wicked.

Remember, this is the warrior king. He's strong and the end of verse 4 is actually, I think, jumping to look at the second advent and it's picked up in 2 Thessalonians 2.

[16:25] And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

So the warrior king who has counsel and might for war, he will be able to deal with any enemy and he will one day have the last word over every enemy.

Then back to the end of verse 2, knowledge and fear. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, verse 5, righteousness shall be the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

That's saying this king is good and he'll be shown to be good in the way that he rules. He knows the Lord and he fears the Lord so he lacked in righteousness according to the standards of the Lord and he lacked in faithfulness loyal to the Lord and loyal to his people and loyal to his task.

Now let me make one other point connecting the things I've just been talking about. Verse 2, what the king is. And verses 3 to 5, what the king does.

[17:45] These are completely consistent. What he is, he does. And what he does reflects what he is.

There's no dissonance between them, but there is perfect harmony. I think this is very, very important. As Thomas might say, really, really, really, really important.

His acts reflect who he is. Our leaders often act, I'm sure, out of character in different places and with different people.

But this king never acts out of character and his character is perfect. This king is always the same, always himself, in himself, and in what he does.

But I can put it this way, Jesus is Jesus all the way. Wherever you meet Jesus, wherever you hear Jesus, wherever you see Jesus at work, whatever you read of Jesus 2,000 years ago, whatever you'll know of Jesus and the new heavens and the new earth, Jesus is always Jesus.

[19 : 06] There is no contradiction in him. There's no two-facedness in him. Jesus is Jesus all the way.

And in the Gospel, we are offered a king who is totally worthy of our trust. He's the wise king of this passage.

He's the strong king of this passage. He's the good king of this passage. And for me, in a sense, reading the Bible and coming to church and living the Christian life is a daily saying, help me to trust more in the wisdom of Jesus and in the strength of Jesus and in the goodness of Jesus.

Tell me more about Jesus and show me more of how wise he is and how strong he is and how good he is so that I will pay homage again to the king who is wise and strong and good.

Many people view history as a game of thrones. Well, it's a game that every human throne and every demonic throne will lose.

[20 : 27] The previous chapter here, the end of 10, has ended with judgment on pagan rule, specifically the arrogant, cruel, evil empire of Assyria, portrayed in verses 33 and 34 as the felling of a forest raised by God.

Every such tree will fall, but the tree that came from a little shoot, that tree will stand and bear fruit forever.

This king, our king, Jesus the king, he is king forever and forever, a wonderful king.

Now secondly, we were going to look at a wonderful spirit. We were going to think about the spirit in chapter 11 and at the beginning of chapter 42 and at the beginning of chapter 61.

Look at them for yourselves. Three prophecies, one of a king, one of a servant and one of a preacher. And in each case, he is anointed by the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 40] I was going to take you to the New Testament and see how all these prophecies play out in the life of Jesus and think about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the humanity of Jesus.

But there isn't time to do that, maybe some other time, but I'd just like to suggest one thing to you. If you look at 11 and 42 and 61 and reflect on them, learn to say thank you to the Holy Spirit for what he did in the human life of Jesus as you read the Gospels.

Jesus depended every day that he lived on the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit. So say thank you, if you've never done it before, say thank you to the Holy Spirit for what he did in the life of your Savior.

Jesus would have said thank you to the Spirit every day in his ministry. And we should thank the Spirit for what he did in the life of this king. The Spirit of the Lord really did rest upon Jesus.

So let's come thirdly to a wonderful world, verses 6 to 10. These verses are pointing us to the second advent, I think, the king bringing in his new world.

[23 : 11] In the way it's pictured, it's clearly meant to be seen as a reversal of the fall. Paradise was lost, paradise will be regained.

But I believe it's paradise regained plus. It's not simply a return to Eden. This is much bigger and better than Eden ever was.

I want to say to you that this is, first of all, clearly a very physical world in these verses, for verse 6, a very physical world.

It's pictured as a world, of course, of peace and safety. You can read a similar passage in Isaiah 65 from verse 17, where the same kind of language is used of a new heavens and a new earth.

But just note the physicality of this world with all kinds of creatures. Wolves and lambs and leopards and goats and calves and lions and fattigoths and cows and bears and lions again and the cobra and the adder or the viper.

[24 : 24] I mean, just a whole list of them. But now there is peace, where before there was hostility, no longer are these animals being classified as predators and prey, no longer is nature red and tooth and claw.

Verse 6, our girls used to remember for years a minister who came and gave a children's talk one time and said, would you hug a wolf?

Oh, no. Would you hug a lamb? Oh, yes. So still, 30 odd years later, they referred to this minister. He doesn't know this as hug a wolf, hug a lamb.

But there it is. You will be able to hug a wolf or a tiger or lion or anything else. So it says. End of verse 6, now a little child can lead the animals.

A child can exercise the dominion of Eden over the animals. In verse 7, it seems that all the creatures are now herbivores.

[25 : 32] Kathy tells me we would all be vegetarians there. She was right all along. In verse 8, the things that used to remind of the serpent and sin will be harmless.

The pictures of an infant or toddler going off and somebody says, where's he gone? And someone says he's gone to play with the cobras. Well, that's fine then. So the beginning of verse 9 is saying this will be a world without hurt or harm.

They shall not hurt or destroy. Now, is all this meant to be taken literally? I'm not sure, for example, you see the language of babies and children.

Will there be nursing babies and nursing mothers and so on in that new heavens and new earth? I don't imagine there will be. But I think it is a picture for these people in this world's terms of an otherwise unimaginable for them future.

I want to make this point, even if this is not literal in all its details, it is still a very physical picture. Now, people will say to me, you can't take all of this literally, so they say, well, it's not going to be that physical.

[26 : 59] That's not the way to read it. It may have some symbolic elements or picturesque elements, but it's still a very physical picture of a physical world.

And I believe that the new heavens and the new earth will have trees and flowers and birds and animals on a new earth.

Romans 8 were told the creation itself, this creation, will be set free from its bondage and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Christians, we have a physical hope of us in new bodies, in a new world, in a real place on a new earth, living to the glory of God in our bodies.

And presenting these bodies as living sacrifices every day in a physical world, full of variety and beauty to be enjoyed forever.

[28 : 08] So this is a picture of a very physical world. But also it's a picture of a very spiritual world. The blessings of verse 9 flow from the fact that the Lord is known.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. That's why I can say they shall not hurt or destroy.

Hurt or destroy there isn't just a reference to the animal world. The picture is much broader than just that. It's saying no one will cause harm to anyone or anything else ever again.

If you have been hurt this week, that will never happen in the new world. If you have hurt someone this week, that will never happen in the new world.

That will be gone. All the hurts will be gone forever. Never again will you hurt or be hurt. And this is going to be true.

[29 : 17] It says in all my holy mountain. The holy mountain is a term for Zion, where God dwells in a special way. But here it seems to refer to the whole of creation.

And I think what it's saying in a symbolic way is that the whole earth will be like the Lord's hill. The whole earth will be his dwelling place, his Zion, his Eden, whatever words you want to use.

God will be everywhere and holiness will be everywhere. Everything, everyone will be holy to the Lord.

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, full of people in other words who know the Lord. And we will all enjoy perfect personal communion with the Lord.

And you notice that will be true as the waters cover the sea. It will be true as widely and as deeply as the waters cover the sea.

[30 : 22] And I see all of this being fulfilled in the second advent of the Lord on a new earth where everyone, everywhere in that world knows the Lord.

And where everyone, everywhere in that world is filled spiritually to their capacity, a very spiritual world.

Before we move on finally to verse 10, I want you to tie these two things together. This is a very physical world and a very spiritual world. There's some Christian tradition that will push these things in opposite directions.

But we are not dualists, biblical Christians are not dualists who for example think that matter is bad. And heaven and the new world are just about soul or spirit or spiritual things.

In a sense everything will be physical and everything will be spiritual in complete harmony and balance. A very physical and a very spiritual world hold these things together in harmony.

[31 : 33] In a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness will be completely at home. Finally verse 10, verse 10 returns to focus on the King.

You can see that verses 10 and 11 begin with the phrase in that day. So verse 10 is rounding off this section showing the nations rallying to the King.

Verses 1 to 10 belong together, in that day they'll rally to the King. But then verse 11 also begins with the same phrase. I think verses 11 to 16 are giving a complementary picture of what happens in that day.

As the Lord gathers his scattered people, you can see the pictures from, as verse 12 puts it, from the four corners of the earth. It's portrayed as a new exodus.

If you look at the end of the chapter, the remnant that remains of his people. As there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

[32 : 41] They were called people exited Egypt as people exit exile. So God will gather his people from all over and bring them all together on that day.

I'm tempted to say that in that case at least, exit will mean exit. The King himself is the signal. The root of Jesse will stand as a signal for the peoples.

It's not that the King holds a flag or a banner. He is himself the banner. He is the one who draws the nations at saying to himself.

Remember, he had to die to do this so that this might be done one day, John 12. And I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

He was going to die for the world and he did it. And one day he will gather his people from all over the world. And in this age of gospel mission, he is beginning to gather his people from all the nations.

[33 : 59] This verse is saying that there's only one savior for the whole world. The one who was lifted up to die to draw the nations. The one who is preaching the gospel through his people to draw the nations.

The one who will at the last day stand as a signal for all the nations. There is only one savior for the world, Jesus, the King.

And there will be only one savior for the world. On that day, Jesus, the King. There is also just a detail that some people don't like to push too far, but I'd like to push it as far as it will go.

Remember, the King was a chute from Jesse in verse 1. In verse 10, he's called the root of Jesse. Verse 1 was saying he springs from Jesse's line.

Verse 10 is saying he's the root of Jesse, so Jesse sprang from him. He undergirds his own family tree.

[35 : 09] Because, of course, he is the eternal divine Son, as well as the human being, born at Bethlehem.

Revelation 22, Jesus says, I am the root and the descendant of David. So humanly speaking, he emerges from David's line, but he's also before David.

He precedes David, and he also proceeds from David. You see, merely human categories cannot adequately account for the identity of this King, who was before David and who emerges from David.

Clearly, he is both God and man. Who on earth can this be pointing to? There's only one possible identity there.

And then it says, his resting place shall be glorious. It's the language of home. The King will come to stay, to rest, to be at home.

[36 : 29] He will be perfectly at home on that day on this earth. He will be perfectly at home with his gathered people in a glorious place.

And they will be perfectly at home with him in glory. People are spiritually homeless. And this is saying that you only come home when you come to Jesus.

And one day we will all only come home when we come to the place prepared by Jesus for us. If I can quote the great American philosopher, Dolly Parton, who I saw in an interview recently talking about her songs that make people feel homesick when they haven't experienced what the song is talking about.

And she's saying, is it funny how folks can be made homesick for a place they've never been? I thought that was really profound.

Homesick for a place they've never been. One aim of the Gospel, you see, as we speak it to other people, is to make people feel exactly that.

[37 : 51] And to make them feel homesick for a place they've never been, but a place that is their real home where they can be one day with Jesus himself.

Or as another philosopher, Augustine used to speak of, our hearts being restless till they find their rest in God. That's what this is speaking about.

They're spiritually homeless and maybe restless and they don't know why they're restless. We only find our resting place when we find spiritually our resting place in Jesus.

And one day we'll find our proper home with Jesus and His people in this world forever and forever. In the great promise of chapter 33 and verse 17, remember this verse in the Advent season.

We've seen something of it in Jesus coming the first time. We will see it perfectly fulfilled when Jesus returns finally. 33.17. I think it's one of the most beautiful and powerful and deep verses in the whole Bible.

[39 : 06] Your eyes will behold the King in His beauty. They will see a land that stretches afar.

Your eyes will behold the King in His beauty. They will see a land that stretches afar and it will stretch afar forever.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You that You have indeed come, that as we read these promises of the advent of a King, we know that the King has been born, that He has lived and died and risen again, that our King is exalted at the right hand of the Majesty and High, that we bow tonight before King Jesus, our Savior.

But we thank You also that we live with another horizon, that there is a second advent, that the King will return, that He will finally deal with all that hurts and harms, and He will bring in a new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell, and where we will be at home, because His resting place will be our resting place, and it will all be glory in Emmanuel's land.

So help us now by faith to behold the King in His beauty, and to see spiritually a land that stretches afar with all the potential of the Gospel, and help us to look along for the day when we and all God's people will be together in a new and perfect and heart-free world where we will see physically the King in His beauty, and we will know that the world we're in will last forever and forever, and will satisfy us endlessly in Him.

[41 : 08] Hear our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.