

## Down to Earth: *Hope*

### Isaiah 11:1-10

I want to speak today about hope, that biblical word that means something so much different from what we mean when we use the word “hope” in our world. We often think of hope as being very uncertain. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines hope this way: “*To want something to happen or be true. To long for something good that may never occur.*”

As an example, you may ask me, “Pastor, will we meet our budget this December and provide seed money for relief efforts too?” I can only answer, “I don’t know – but I hope so.” But, God does know. Therefore, when God says something will happen, it does happen. So, when we wait for a good promise from God to happen, we call it hope. Hope placed in a promise from God is not uncertain. So, **this is biblical hope**: *Holding on to God’s promises with confidence because we are convinced that someday God will fulfill what he has promised.* And that brings us to the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent weekend of 2017.

### What Advent Is

*The season of Advent is about living day-by-day in a sometimes-very-difficult world anticipating the fulfillment of God’s promise to come into our world and into our lives to make all things right.* So, at Advent, we remember the first incarnational coming of God into the world through the infant Jesus. That, of course, took place over 2,000 years ago. He came to begin a work in our world, one that makes forgiveness of sin and eternal life available to all. That’s something you can experience right now by placing faith in Jesus.

But, God has also promised to make everything right in your life and in the world. And, that promise has not been fulfilled yet. So, at Advent we also remember that God will again enter personally into this world. Jesus will come again to complete the work he has inaugurated. So, we live with that hope -- knowing that God has made that wonderful promise -- but has not fulfilled it yet.

In this Advent series called “*Down to Earth*”, we want to think about how hope comes down to earth as we await the coming of Christ. And nowhere in the Bible is that point made more clearly than in Isaiah 11.

### **Setting**

The prophet Isaiah lived over 700 years before Jesus was born. Most of the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah that we sing about in our Christmas songs come from Isaiah. At the time that Isaiah lived, the Jewish people were divided into two nations, Israel to the north and Judah to the south. <http://www.bible-history.com/maps/Map-Judah-Israel-During-Period-Kings.gif>

The big superpower threatening both Israel and Judah was Assyria, a nation with an egocentric dictator committed to taking over the entire Middle East with a military plan that sent him right through Israel and Judah. Isaiah was called to be a prophet at a very young age -- just 18 years before the northern nation, Israel, was overrun. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah prophesied that Judah also would be defeated and left as dead as a stump. And, it happened -- over a century later -- just as God had promised.

But Isaiah consistently lets us know that God had a plan and would someday rescue his people. In fact, in ch.10, Isaiah foresaw that the oppressive Assyria would also be judged and also left like a forest of stumps. The stumps in Assyria would never come back to life. But, for God’s people, something different will happen. We see it in **11:1**: “***A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.***” <https://saunteringpilgrim.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/art-01-shoot-from-stump.jpg> From there, Isaiah goes on to tell us that the little shoot will grow and ultimately change the entire world. That was the future hope that they were to hold onto while they were carried away from their own country.

Today, we begin to remember that 2,000 years ago a little boy was born with no big status as the world thinks of status -- into a lineage of a failed ancient dynasty, i.e., the house of the David. Through what this child does, hope is offered not only to Judah but to the whole world. Let’s look at what Isaiah the prophet foresaw about this “shoot”, this child.

### **What This Child Will Be like – When he comes, God comes (11:1-5).**

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse... The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him (11:1-2).*

Jesse was King David's Father. When David was king, God had promised him that the Messiah would come through his family line. Jesus was born through that family line. So, throughout the history of the church, all Christians have been convinced that Isaiah's prophecy of a "shoot" coming up out of the stump of Jesse is pointing to Jesus.

Is 11 doesn't tell us everything about Jesus that we might want to know, but what it tells us is significant. If you want to follow Jesus and represent him well, each characteristic Isaiah mentions is indispensable:

**1. What God is, Jesus is -- *The Spirit of the Lord rests on him...* (11:2).**

God is characterized by understanding and wisdom as well as might -- and so is Jesus. That means Jesus has both knowledge (i.e., he knows what to do) and might (he is able to do what he wants to do). This is what gives us hope. Jesus has come in keeping with God's promise with wisdom and strength. We who follow him are asked to live with the certain hope in this imperfect world that he will accomplish what he was sent to do.

**2. As God sees, Jesus sees -- *He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears* (11:3).**

We are, by nature, people who judge others based on external matters -- like how people dress, what color their skin is, or how successful the person may appear to be. One thing you will recognize quickly when you read about the life of Jesus was that he did not judge people on external things. He entered into anyone's life who would come to him. Jesus offered a new way of life, a new community of faith and a new future to all who would follow him. Jesus did not see people as the world generally sees people. So, let me tell you today that Jesus has the same "eyes" today. Jesus sees you as valuable, so valuable that he came to give his life for you. He sees you as you can be if you will place your faith in him. He sees you not only as you are now but as you will be when he's completed his work in you.

**3. As God is always just, Jesus is just -- *With justice he gives decisions for the poor of the earth...* (11:4)**

In Is. 11, Isaiah prophesies that Jesus will make all things right in this world. That's what this word "justice" means, the righting of wrongs. The main focus of this child's work, Isaiah prophesies, is that he will give special care to those who are poor and downtrodden. He'll do this by entering in to situations in which there is great need and distress and will use his awesome authority to change things.

It was not until the 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas day that we see to what lengths God would go to in order to fulfill this prophecy. Jesus was born into a poor family and then visited by poor shepherds. When he was dedicated, his parents could only bring two pigeons as an offering, the gifts of the poorest of poor. (See Luke 2:24.) When he ministered, he fed the hungry, healed the sick and forgave and transformed the tax collector and prostitute.

And, the only one who possibly could know how to do all this and has the power to do it has to be God. Essentially, what I see Isaiah saying in these verses is that when this "shoot comes forth out of the line of Jesse", it will be God himself. Therefore, when Jesus came, God came. So, **when Jesus comes into your life, God comes into your life. When Jesus returns, God will be coming to complete his work -- to fulfill his promises. That is Advent hope. It's hope that is not uncertain.**

**What This Child Will Do -- He will bring a divine revolution (11:6-10).**

*The wolf will live with the lamb... (1:6). The lion will eat straw... (1:7). The nations will rally to him... (1:10).*

When I say that Jesus will bring a divine revolution, what I mean is what Tom Wright speaks of in his book, *The Day the Revolution Began*, i.e., that **Jesus did not simply come to save our souls. He came to revolutionize our lives and remake the world he created.**

Is 11:6-10 describes what the world will be like when Jesus finishes his work. The main thing the prophecy says is that the **Messiah will bring perfect shalom, the Hebrew word for all things being the way they should be.** These verses are all about everything that is broken being brought back together. Isaiah gives us nine beautiful statements of all things being restored -- the wolf living with the lamb, the cow and bear grazing peacefully side-by-side in a field, and even the child playing right by the hole of a cobra. Can you imagine it? A Mom will place her small child next to a cobra and say, "I'll be back in a little while. Have a good time together, you two!" And it all is summarized in **v.9**: "*They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*"

Notice that the language is about animals being reconciled to one another by this child. **V.6** tells us “*the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together*” – all led by this little child who will be born. And, this surely will happen with animals!

However, most rabbis and Christian Bible scholars agree that Isaiah’s prophecy about animals is really pointing to a fact that we all know, i.e., that **people need to be made right with one another and with the world**. In other words, the Bible isn’t just painting a beautiful word picture of the way things someday will be with all these animals being at peace. No, it is saying that, when we become those who by faith follow this child (v.6), we too must change. We need shalom too. Jesus came to end the brokenness among human beings too,

I’ve been thinking about how Isaiah might tell us that following Jesus should change what is happening in our world. Isaiah spoke of animal predators. Today, **Isaiah might say that:**

- The predators who have had the power in our society to harass and abuse women – as we are reading about in the daily news – will no longer do so;
- That someday we will see the baby boomer and the millennial singing both hymns and hip hop – and doing it together;
- That the young black man who had been warned by his mom about the dangers he should expect to face from law enforcement will be seen dancing with the policeman who has been warned in his training about a very different kind of danger – and the two will be playing soccer together;
- That the immigrant will be dining with the agent for homeland security;
- That the CNN anchor will be having tea with the Fox News anchor;
- That Elizabeth Warren will be writing tax legislation with Ted Cruz!

These kinds of things seem to be impossible. But, **this kind of reconciliation will happen for all who come to Christ – though only for those who come to Christ**. Jesus will tear down the walls that separate us.

I call this a divine revolution. **So, notice that animals will have their very natures altered. V. 7 says that the lion shall eat straw like the ox**. A carnivore will become a vegetarian! That means that Jesus will absolutely transform things. For us, Jesus intends to change us from the inside out. He will turn sinners into saints. He comes into our lives to begin to change us until you and I are fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. God promises this will happen. But, it has not yet happened, has it?

So, this is the hope that comes down to earth at Advent. It’s promised – but it has not yet been fulfilled. We’re now living in an in-between time. We’re between the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Jesus to begin his work and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus to complete his work. **God’s message at Advent is an encouragement to us all to wait with hope in this world until Jesus returns and finishes his work and, as we wait, to allow Jesus to do his life-transforming work in our lives**.

Do any of you remember that I spoke about Isaiah 11 one year ago, during Advent 2016? When I did, God used his Word in one of our member’s lives. So, I did an interview with her this week that I want you to see:

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*I’m now with our Pastor to Young Adults, Annie Neufeld. I’ve asked her to help us think about how the belief in a future hope might guide and sustain our lives in the present – when we may not be feeling very hopeful. Annie, I talked about this message of a future hope speaking into people’s lives in a hurting world last Advent season when you and Josh were worshiping in one of our Saturday evening services. Afterward, you let me know that the Lord had spoken to you. What was the context of that and what do you remember hearing?*

Yeah, so at this point in time last year I was 8 weeks pregnant, excited about adding another little human to our family of 3. But then, a year ago this week, I learned that I had miscarried and we had lost the baby. This was right at the beginning of Advent, a season that seems to be all about expecting a baby, hoping for a baby, waiting for a baby. Which was honestly, infuriating to me. I couldn’t get excited about the birth of baby Jesus because I was so deeply mourning the loss of my own baby. I couldn’t dive into the themes of Advent that involve waiting and hoping and living in expectation because I was miscarrying—which is itself a long process of waiting, but the waiting was excruciating, not hopeful. But then one night Josh and I were sitting in the worship service on a Saturday night, and you started talking about how the promises of God were fulfilled in

some sense with the birth of Jesus on Christmas, but that they are ultimately fulfilled when Christ comes again in the end to make all things right. What we celebrate at Christmas is just the beginning of God's victory, which will be fulfilled in the end when Christ comes again in glory. This re-focus gave me a window into Advent and Christmas that was incredibly helpful. It didn't take away the pain, but it helped me find God in the pain.

*So, a loss like you experienced often leads to a loss of hope. I'm guessing most of us listening in right now have experienced that. How does a message like the one we read about in Is 11, written so long ago, introduce hope into those times in our lives when we feel the pain of loss?*

You know, I still don't understand the loss of our babies—we lost another child right after that in March—2 miscarriages in 4 months. It still doesn't make sense to me, and I'm not sure I always **felt** hopeful in the midst of it. But I **lived** in hope. My actions were hopeful and faithful, my actions and my prayers and my decisions were based on hope, even if I wasn't feeling hopeful every day. Which I imagine was part of how Israel felt when these words were written—that maybe the people of God couldn't drum up the emotion of hope while they were in exile, but they would take the next faithful step every day. And then the feelings of hope and hopefulness came later.

*You are at a different stage of your life this Advent Season. What message would you like to pass on to our church family about the meaning of Advent?*

Yeah, so I am in this strange place now of being pregnant yet again. I am about 6 months along now, and the baby is healthy and growing and all seems to be going well. And in this Advent season I am able to understand the meaning of Advent in new ways. During Advent, we are celebrating this idea that we live in an in between space—that Jesus has come into our world and brought his Kingdom, he has initiated his victory—but the battle isn't over. We are still plagued by death and our own failures and the messiness of life. But we also see glimpses of God in the midst of it all. Which is very much like pregnancy. This baby is real. I can feel her kicking. She is making herself known to me every day—especially after I eat a spicy meal. We are making plans for when she does get here, changing the way we think about the future and how we live in the present—I eat differently, walk differently, I have pregnancy brain and am very forgetful. We see glimpses of her all the time. But she's not really here yet. We have to wait for her to fully arrive. Which is what we experience in Advent—During this Advent season, we remember that we are in this in between space. God is making himself known, we get glimpses of him, we feel his presence, we make changes in our lives in light of his Kingdom. But we also have to wait for him to make all things right. That's the meaning of Advent.

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All this brings us to communion today. It's the time we both remember what this child had to do to save us, and that he will return to complete what he started. As we read in 1 Cor 11:26, when we participate in communion, "we remember the Lord's death until he comes." So, today, perhaps you are in a situation like Annie and Josh were in, i.e., having something happening in your life that is very hard, so hard that you have little hope. Will you remember that Jesus is still at work and make a new commitment of faith in him. I pray you too will find faith in the promise that Jesus will make all things right.

Also, before coming to the table, take time to confess your sins. But, maybe, the sins you have to confess are the same ones you had to confess the last time you came to the table. Come anyway. Remember that Jesus is not finished with you yet. If you confess your sins, he will be faithful and just and will forgive you and cleanse you. This is the message of Advent. This is our certain hope.