

All Saints Talk for 28 April 2024

Tom Yacomeni

The Power of Godly Vision

'Spirit-filled Vision'

Isaiah 11:1-10

The Branch from Jesse

11 *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*

2 *The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—*

3 *and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.*

*He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;*

4 *but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.*

*He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*

5 *Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

6 *The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.*

7 *The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

8 *The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.*

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.*

10 *In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations
will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

Today is the fourth week of our sermon series all about the power of Godly Vision. Last week Callum spoke from Isaiah 7 and the story of a terrifying alliance of neighbouring kings that threatened to invade Jerusalem. Isaiah told King Ahaz ‘if you don’t stand firm in your faith you won’t stand at all’, and as is often the case in the Christian life, hardship comes before hope. God disciplines those he loves and faith only grows through being stretched and work-hardened. But just like the safety rope that gave Callum assurance in his abseil down the tower, God gave Ahaz assurance that even if Judah fell, all would not be lost. Even if the mighty tree of Israel was felled to the ground just leaving a stump behind, even that would not be the end of the story for the people of God.

So this is where we pick up the story today, with a vision of new way forward in Chapter 9. And Isaiah starts with these words: ‘A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.’

This whole visionary passage is not talking about a physical tree but rather a fresh branch from an ancient family tree, someone who would bring salvation, growth and new life to the apparently barren situation. This is one of the clearest prophecies in the Bible about the lineage and line of Jesus.

Jesse in the Hebrew scriptures was a sheep farmer from Bethlehem and the father of King David. The name Jesse means ‘King’. The Angels announced to the shepherds on the hillside ‘Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.’ Jesus was not only descended from Jesse and David through Mary and Joseph, but he described himself as the true vine, with us his followers as further branches bearing fruit in a whole new Kingdom era.

So what follows in today’s passage is a vision of what this new kind of leadership would look like, and the kind of fruit God is looking for in his people. Since we are stewards and recipients of the Kingdom of God, this passage is just as much about our mission today as it is about the messiah that was to come.

In the verses that follow Isaiah describes four ways the Messiah would bring fruitfulness to a barren world, but what makes all the difference is the first he begins with: The Holy Spirit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD

There are lots of people and organisations with an amazing heart and passion for peace, love and justice in the world. But the difference that sets Jesus and in turn his followers apart is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

World leaders have a tough job, particularly at the moment. Some of the problems we face can seem totally insurmountable. So each national intelligence service will be working flat out to produce sufficient information to inform decision making. And so they should – it is important work. But Isaiah says that Godly leadership is entirely different: The Messiah ‘will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears’

Instead what we need is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is thought that St John picked up on these verses when he wrote about the ‘sevenfold Spirit of God’ in Revelation 4v5. ‘From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God.’

Seven is a perfect number of completion in the Bible, eg. seven days of creation, seven feasts of Israel, Jesus’s seven miraculous signs, seven trumpets, seven seals and the list goes on. But what Isaiah describes here is the sevenfold manifestation of the Spirit, beginning and ending with Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord.

One of the ways you can tell if the Holy Spirit rests upon you is because there is an compelling desire in you to discover and follow God’s will in any given situation. Jesus said ‘I only do what I see the Father doing’. In the same way to be Spirit filled is to have an ongoing dialogue with the Lord about what is going on and allowing Him to steer your actions and response, not according to human convention but according to wisdom from above. The church should be the wisest institution on the planet! Pray for the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul talks about the Gifts of the Holy Spirit which enable the body of Christ to build the church and serve the world. He also describes the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness etc. which is the outcome of acting according to God's will. We desperately need the Holy Spirit to rest on us just as He did on the Lord Jesus. We need to invoke and practice the gifts of the Spirit to enable the church to grow and flourish. Then we will see the fruit of the spirit developing naturally, like grapes on a vine that swell and ripen in the light of the sun. So over these next 3 weeks from now until Pentecost we want to call 'All Hands on Deck'. This means seeking the Lord and discovering the spiritual gifts and ministries He has given us. We are entering a new season of great opportunity but also great need. We need to be ready to pull together, especially in prayer. We are calling a meeting on Wednesday May 8th at 7pm at Rachael's house for those who might be willing to join the prayer team and be willing to come alongside people in crying out to God for healing wholeness and the filling of the Spirit.

In Isaiah's vision, what follows from the sevenfold Spirit of God resting on Jesus and his Church is a radical love for the lost, the lonely and the poor. Verse 4:

⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

40 years ago Bishop David Shephard published an influential book called 'Bias to the poor' after becoming Bishop of Liverpool and seeing the city suffering economically from the collapse of manufacturing. He was spurred into action after hearing some Government ministers talking of leaving Liverpool to a 'managed decline', but he believed that the Bible shows that God has a particular concern for the poor and needy and so should we. He advocated for social welfare, and the redistribution of wealth but He believed that 'social and political changes must go hand in hand with people being changed from inside out'. Frank Field who died last week lamented continuing inequality in the UK despite years of campaigning and initiatives. The problems of inequality and growing division will only be addressed when the influencers look to God for their decisions.

The outcome would be the 3rd thing in Isaiah's vision: Inexplicable peace.

Isaiah describes an extraordinary scene of radical peace, where the normal natural state of predator and prey has been suspended in favour of peaceful coexistence.

The picture language Isaiah uses upends our ordinary expectations of the food chain and survival of the fittest.

⁶The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat

Impossible pairings in a normal sense and verses 6 7 and 8 all include references to infants and children being safe.

Instead of the curse on Adam's offspring brought about by the fall, the coming of the messiah would eliminate the power of sin and death.

⁸The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

Jesus defeated sin and death when he died on the cross and rose again. It is like he removed the poisonous fangs of death for us.

Which leads to the final wonderful image of the Kingdom of God under the messiah's reign – a glorious rest. Who's up for a bit of glorious rest?

Eternity with God is a place of Glorious rest.

The same word for rest is used in Psalm 23 when it says 'He leads me beside still waters'. Stillness and rest on every side from storms and trauma.

It all starts with the filling of the Holy Spirit and the impartation of true Godly wisdom. It means we won't just use our human rationale to judge what is going on but instead seeing the world from God's point of view. The spirit of God inspires radical justice and a supernatural peace, leading us at last to glorious rest.

This is the vision that the people of Weston need to hear. Justice peace and rest for the soul. But it starts with us letting the Holy Spirit come to rest on us, just like the dove descending on Jesus at his baptism.

Let's not grieve the Holy Spirit or fend him away, but instead welcome Him to come and fill us today.