

Sing for the Root of Jesse

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is Isaiah chapter 11, which you can find on page 697 in the Bibles in front of you. The branch from Jesse.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse. From his roots a branch will bear fruit. 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 knowledge and fear of the Lord.

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, 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 and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

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 the little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, the young will lie down together and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

[1 : 21] The infant will play near the cobra's den and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. 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.

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. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel. He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth. Ephraim's jealousy will vanish and Judah's enemies will be destroyed.

Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile towards Ephraim. They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west. Together they will plunder the people to the east.

They will subdue Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them. The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea. With a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the river Euphrates.

[2 : 41] He will break it up into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals. There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.

This is the word of the Lord. All right, good morning. Thanks, Katrina, for reading, Martin, for leading, and for all of you for being here on a particularly wet Glasgow morning.

I know a number of us got soaked by the rain as we came in. Let me pray for us as we start. So, Father, we pray that you'd speak to us by your word now.

We pray that we'd be a people who sing a happy song, make a joyful noise, as we look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. And as we start, I wonder how you feel about Christmas being in the city. Maybe you've wandered around Merchant City, and you've looked at the Christmas lights there.

[3 : 48] Maybe you've braved the throngs on Buchanan Street, and you loved being in the crowd and the buzz. Maybe you're just a bit exhausted by it all, and all the frenetic busyness of this time of year in the city.

Maybe you've been down to Glasgow City Mission, and you're saddened by the poverty and the problems that are in the city.

And my guess is that for a number of us, particularly as we approach Christmas, we might not be feeling like those happy, heavenly city dwellers who are singing at the very end of our passage this

morning in 12 verse 6.

I'll just read it for us. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One in Israel. We might not be feeling like that.

Is that you this morning, I wonder? And as we come to the climax of this first section of Isaiah, it's perhaps helpful to look back and quickly recap what Isaiah's purpose is.

[4 : 55] Remember that Isaiah is a prophet who lives in a city, and he brings a complaint from God against that city. So if you've got your Bibles open, just turn back to chapter 1 and look down at verse 21 of chapter 1.

And Isaiah writes there, And the issue here is that the city, the city that had God's temple in, the symbol of God dwelling with his people, has abandoned God, and it has prostituted itself to foreign gods who were really no gods.

But that's not the end of the story, gratefully. We read in verse 26, Isaiah says, I will restore your leaders as in the days of old, your rulers as at the beginning, and afterwards you will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.

And here we read of how God is going to transform that city into a faithful city. And that's Isaiah's agenda in his book, is to tell us how the faithless city will become the faithful city, to show what God is going to do in the world to solve the problem of sin and rebellion, even among his people in Isaiah's day, and to explain to us how it is that we can become like those heavenly city doersers at the end of our reading, who sing those wonderful praises to God.

And we remember the immediate context in Isaiah that is in the chapters that we've been in the last couple of weeks, is that Isaiah's in the middle of a prophecy of judgment and salvation against God's people.

[6 : 54] And we've seen that the instrument of judgment there against the Israelites has been the Assyrian army, and that they have come because they've been invited by the faithless king of God's people in Judah, Ahaz.

And then what we've seen is through this judgment, Isaiah has promised a great salvation coming in the birth of a child. And we remember that Isaiah is a prophet, and that is he is God's spokesperson who foretells the future in the light of how God has revealed himself in the past to effect a change in God's people in the present.

The other thing to remember as we look at Old Testament prophecy, and particularly at this passage this morning, is that we can have multiple fulfillments by not just looking at one event in history.

That event could be speaking of several different events at different times which are developing fulfillments of the same prophecy. So when Isaiah says, in that day in this passage this morning, sometimes he's speaking about the near future for the people of his first hearers in that day.

But sometimes he's speaking to us today who are living in the now between Jesus' first coming and his second coming.

[8 : 22] And sometimes he is speaking of a great not yet when Jesus returns. And so he might be speaking of three different events in the same prophecy.

And the great encouragement for us as Christians living in the now is because we can look back and see how God has fulfilled his promises in the past, we can be sure that he will fulfill them in the future.

And what we see in our reading this morning is Isaiah widens the scope from the immediate history of Israel at that time, of the invading Assyrian army, to way beyond us, to show us God's eternal purposes.

And through showing them to us, Isaiah is encouraging us to join with those heavenly city dwellers in singing for joy. And so in this passage, we're going to see four great reasons why we can sing for joy.

And the first one there is sing, for the root of Jesse is the spirit-filled ruler in verses one to five. And our reading really starts with God's people at their absolute lowest.

[9 : 42] The Assyrians have been through and they've axed and they've torched the land. And in verse 32 of chapter 10, they stop short, mere spitting distance from Jerusalem.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem can hear the Assyrian drums drumming. And then in the midst of the utter defeat, among the smoldering stumps and carnage, Isaiah predicts God will send deliverance.

But not just any deliverance, a shoot from the stump of Jesse. And you may remember, as Martin told us at the start of the service, that Jesse is David's father, David whom God had promised he will place an everlasting king who would rule on his throne forever.

And so Isaiah is predicting that in the midst of this greatest defeat, when things look at their worst, will come the greatest victory imaginable. The coming of great King David's greatest son, the man Jesus.

And Isaiah here in this passage, rather than showing us the baby in the manger who will celebrate in a couple of weeks' time, and rather than pointing back to Jesus who died on the cross, who was crucified, resurrected, and ascended, he paints a picture of Jesus who's totally sovereign and in charge.

[11 : 02] And the first thing that we see here is that the root of Jesse, Jesus, unlike King Ahaz, who is unfaithful, is anointed by the Spirit of the Lord in verse 2 there.

You see, unlike Ahaz's rule, his rule will be marked by wisdom and understanding. He'll be wise enough to make the right decisions and compassionate enough to have empathy for the weak. Isn't that the kind of ruler you'd like to have at the end of next week? His rule will be marked by counsel and might. He'll have a plan, and he'll be able to get it done.

His rule will be out of knowledge and reverence for God. And the mark of his rule will be delightful service and sacrifice to God out of love and admiration for God.

He'll delight in the fear of the Lord. And then Isaiah goes on to say in verse 3 that the root of Jesse, he'll not judge by what he sees or hears with his eyes or decide what he hears with his ears.

[12 : 10] And we remember that the great fault of Ahaz and the people in Isaiah's day was that they were, rather than trusting the Lord, so often they went by what they saw.

And so often what they saw turned out to not be what they'd hoped for. You see, King Ahaz, he'd seen the Assyrian army, and he saw a great rescue from his enemies.

They looked very impressive. Lots of chariots, lots of horses, lots of grisly foot soldiers. You can imagine Ahaz's advisors. You'd be mad not to ask for them for help.

Look at them. And it's the same for us today, living in the now. In that many ways, we're tempted to go after what we can see.

And we look for that job promotion. And we look for a relationship that will make things better. We look for ideal family life. And we look for a perfect Christmas, rather than trusting in the unseen God in faith.

[13 : 16] And when we place our hope in those things, the things that are seen, the Assyrians, we shouldn't be surprised when they turn out to be tyrants and enslavers.

And what we have seen in Isaiah so far is that God subverts this idolatry of the scene by telling Isaiah in chapter 6, verse 9, that great commissioning verse that God gives Isaiah, go tell those people.

What is Isaiah to tell them? Be ever hearing, but never understanding. Be ever seeing, but never pursuing. And because the spirit-filled root of Jesse lives by faith and not by sight and hearing, he, unlike Ahaz, can hear God's commands clearly.

But notice also what that spiritual restoration brings about in verse 4. And that's a new concern for justice and righteousness.

But with righteousness, he'll judge the needy. With justice, he'll give decisions for the poor of earth. And what this looks like for us living in the now is that if we don't have a heart for change, a new spirit living in us, a new master, then no matter what we say or think about social justice, we'll end up exactly like Ahaz.

[14 : 44] And notice also the spirit-filled root of Jesse, how he brings about this justice. At the end of verse 4, what does he say? He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. In the breath of his lips, he will slay the wicked.

He brings it about by his word. And I guess what Isaiah is saying to us in the now is that if we really care about justice, if we really have a heart for the poor and the downtrodden, then we would listen to the root of Jesse and take his word seriously.

And the picture that Isaiah paints for us is that because the spirit-filled root of Jesse restores the spiritual and moral order, so the creation is restored.

And that's what we'll sing about in our second reason that Isaiah gives us. Sing for the root of Jesse renews his creation. Verses 6 to 9 there. And just look at verse 6.

He states, The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the goat. And Isaiah is speaking to the people of his day. But he's speaking in the language of the not yet.

[15 : 54] He's speaking of a future time, of what the world will look like when Jesus returns and makes all things new. And it seems like a total reversal of the fall in the Garden of Eden.

What do we read in verse 8? The infant will play near the cobra's den and the young child will put a hand into his viper's nest. And recently, I was sent a picture.

It's a bit of a... I don't believe I have this illustration. But a friend sent me a picture of how they tried to kiss a snake. Why you do that, I've got no idea. And the photo is basically just blood and swollen face and that kind of stuff.

And the moral of the story is snakes are dangerous. And so in this picture of the reordering of creation, it's astounding, isn't it? Of snakes playing with babies.

Imagine putting a snake in the crash at the back. Only in the new world. And it's better than we could ever hope for. And elsewhere, Isaiah goes on to speak of this evading, of this recreating, of the desert coming into bloom, the land scorched by God's judgment being brought into full bloom, blooming like the Garden of Eden, but even a better.

[17 : 14] I wonder if you can imagine that. And then notice what brings about this radical transformation. Verse 9. They'll 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.

So the new creation will be a paradise of total peace, of total harmony, but also a place that is filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

I wonder if you've been following the election. One of the great things that has come out in this election is the climate change. So one recent poll had it that 27% of people are going to vote according to economic policies and 27% of people are going to vote according to climate policies that politicians have.

But Isaiah says that if we want to see creation rarely bloom, then we must back Jesus. See, politicians debate climate change.

Jesus restores all things to better than they were. And then I wonder if you notice from this passage who this glorious new creation is for.

[18 : 30] And this is the third reason that Isaiah gives us to sing in this passage. Sing, for the root of Jesse is a banner to all nations, verses 10 to 16.

So how is it that we can be changed to be part of this new faithful city? And the key verse in our reading and answering this question comes in verse 10 that Tricia prayed for us.

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. And the picture here is of the root of Jesse, of Jesus, being raised up like a banner to which people will flood to, will rally to.

And a banner in a battle is the place that troops rally to. It's the place of command. It's the thing that people show allegiance to. And maybe you've gone to an old church and you've seen the old battle colors, the banners hanging out of the back of church there.

And Isaiah says that as we are drawn to the root of Jesse, so what will we find? We will find rest. Remember how God, after he created the world on the seventh day, he rested.

[19 : 46] Why? Because his work was complete. And so, Isaiah's talking about the utter completion of all things, the end. And the resting place in the Old Testament is also the place where God dwells with his people in the most intimate of settings, the holy of holies.

And then verse 10, what does it also say? It says, this place will be glorious. And glory is really just a fancy way of saying everything that makes God, God will be there.

So that place will be flooded with what God is, with God. And the promise that Isaiah gives here for us, and for all those who trust in the Lord Jesus, is that they will find total rest in God in the most intimate and glorious way possible, in full communion with the Lord of the universe.

and so where we see Jesus, we see God, and where we submit to the root of Jesse, we enter into rest. But notice also where this remnant will come from in verses 11 and 12.

And we see exiles coming from Israel and the scattered people of Judah, but we also see, what do we see? People coming from the four quarters of the earth, people from all over the earth, trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 13] All the Gentiles, all the non-Jewish people in the world, being brought from all over the earth into God's kingdom. Notice also that it's a kingdom of unity at the end of verse 13 there.

where we have, where he writes, Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah nor Judah hostile towards Ephraim. Remember, those are those two historically fighting, divided kingdoms of God's people. And here we see them united. So as we sit here this morning in the now, we're worshipping the Lord Jesus, so are countless others from all over the globe in unity, worshipping the same Lord Jesus, even in the most remote, far-fung places.

And as we sit here, we're really a strange bunch of people. I'm sorry to tell you that if you don't notice that. We're from all over the globe, aren't we? We've got Ugandans, we have Iranians, we've got folk from China, from Chile, even a South African, a Scotland even.

and we've all been united in our love and obedience and worship of the Lord Jesus. In the very same manner that God rescued His people out of Egypt, out of slavery by great miracles, through the Dead Sea, lighting up a highway in the desert by day and by night.

[22 : 44] So in verse 15, we read of a second exodus that the Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea with a scorching wind He'll sweep His hand over the Euphrates.

He'll break it into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals. And God, with the waft of His hand, will dry up that great river of the Euphrates, the lifeblood of the Assyrians for the people then, into streams so that they can paddle across in their slippers, their sandals.

and He'll create a great highway for the remnant of His people, a sure footing to bring them home and into His kingdom.

Isaiah's not simply talking about a change of address here, but a change of heart orientation, about God bringing all people from all over the world into the kingdom of the Son He loves, both now, as we tell our friends about Jesus, inviting them to carols at Christianity Explorers in the New Year, chatting, debating, answering their questions, clearing a path for them to come into God's kingdom, but also in the not yet of that great day when Jesus will return and bring all those who trust in Him into His faithful city along that great and glorious heavenly highway.

The marvelous thing about all of this is that none of this is deserved and this is the fourth reason to sing. Sing, for the root of Jesse gives you words to sing of salvation and we're in chapter 12 here, verses 1 to 6.

[24 : 30] And in chapter 12, something funny happens in that verses 1 and 2 are addressed to you, singular, but verses 3 to 6 are addressed to you, plural.

So in verses 1 and 2, we are called to embrace the words personally, individually, as an act of personal salvation.

I will praise you, Lord, although you're angry with me, and quite rightly, because of my sin, but I will praise you because your anger has turned away and you have comforted me.

You see, what makes you a member of the returning remnant in Isaiah's thinking is that they are characterized by people who know that God is justly angry with them because of their sin and rebellion and faithlessness.

And they know that each of them has to shoulder their own guilt. They cannot blame anyone else.

And that the first step into God's eternal city is to say, I'm sorry, Lord, for my sin that I have rebelled against you.

[25 : 38] I don't deserve the least of your mercies. Please won't you accept me, not because of the things I have done, but on the basis of your son, the root of Jesse.

And unless you take that step, you won't be a Christian and you cannot be right with God. But here is the marvelous thing. I wonder if you noticed it going on in chapter 12 in the first verse.

Your anger has turned away. You have comforted me. Isn't that a wondrous thing to hear? And that's why the root of Jesse has come. But notice also the trust that the person in God's new heavenly city shows.

Surely God is my salvation, verse 2. I will trust and not be afraid. And that is the hope that Christians hold. That's the thing that Christians can say.

They can totally trust God even in the midst of the greatest fears. As we sit here this morning, there's lots of things to be fearful about, aren't there? We think of Brexit.

[26 : 43] We think of the election. We think of global warming. We think of our pension, our finances. We think of stock markets. We think of family illness.

We think of friends struggling. We think of Christmas coming and what that might mean for us. But in all of these, Christians remain confident and unafraid.

Why? For the Lord, the Lord himself is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation.

And that's the great battle cry for the Christian, isn't it? The Christian trusts the Lord entirely with their life and their salvation. And then notice finally, as I was thinking, is that there cannot be a transformed community unless individuals are transformed.

And you can't be rescued, a rescued and transformed individual without becoming a part of God's transformed city. And so the you, the singular, becomes you plural in verse three.

[27 : 50] And notice the great promise that God gives his people in the heavenly city in verse three. With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isn't that something to sing about, to rejoice in?

And it reminds us of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And with such great promises and with such a great salvation that God gives us, notice there that God gives them the words that they are to sing.

We have a great reason to shout, proclaim, make known the glories of God to our friends and families and neighbors, particularly at this time of year as we remember Jesus coming in flesh among his people.

And that's what God calls us to in the final verses of our reading in verses four to six of chapter 12. To join with his heavenly city dwellers in singing his praise.

[29 : 01] Just count how many times that he uses words to do with proclaiming. Praise, proclaim, make known, proclaim, sing, let this be known, shout aloud. And in that day we will sing and proclaim and declare God's glories even as we now declare his glories here.

And to whom do we declare his glories? Well, verse five, to all the world among the nations. And what is the message that we're to proclaim? Sing to the Lord for he has done glorious things. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the holy one of Israel among you. Great is the root of Jesse, great King David's greatest son, Jesus.

Let's pray. So Father, we thank you that you give us the words to sing. We thank you that you call us to sing. We thank you that you bring us into this great salvation.

Please give us the courage and confidence to sing boldly. and wherever we go this week and whatever we do to remember that great salvation and praise you in all that we do.

[30 : 13] In Jesus' name. Amen.