

To End All Wars?

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: 11 November 2018

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] The reading today is from Isaiah 11 verses 1 to 12. It's on page 697 of the Church Bibles. 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 the 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 power 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 a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 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 water covers 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks Ruth for reading. You can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful as we turn to God's word. Let's pray and ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, who sent the Lord Jesus Christ to proclaim peace to all nations, we pray that you will speak to us now, that you'll give us ears to hear your voice, heads that can understand what your spirit is saying to us today, and hearts that are willing to change so that we live lives that please you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we're taking a step away from our normal sermon series today, with it being this special remembrance of 100 years, and just I was reminded of Robert Harris's novel, which is a bestseller at the moment, *Munich*. He tells the story about the trip to Munich in 1938 of the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, who went to meet Adolf Hitler, trying to broker peace and avoid war. The Nazis had invaded Czechoslovakia, and the Great War had ended only 20 years earlier, and yet suddenly, having longed that that would be the war to end all wars, Europe was plummeted into fear again that there was going to be conflict. And almost overnight, schools were having to give out gas masks, and people having to think again about the chaos of what might come. Robert Harris starts his book with a quote from a historian, 19th century historian, F.W. Maitland. It says this, we should always be aware that what now lies in the past, once lay in the future. See what he's saying, that we need to learn from history, recognizing that for some people it wasn't history, and things change quickly, that could happen today. And of course, conflict goes on all around the world today, and we are drawn into it against the Islamic State, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and even though we might feel the security of big distances between Glasgow and Syria, Glasgow and North Korea, we live in an age of terrorism and chemical weapons and cyber warfare, so that conflict a long way away can potentially cause horrendous suffering here. So where do we put our hope for a peaceful world? Well, the reading that we just had from Isaiah, Isaiah was a prophet, speaking and then being written down, around 700 years before Jesus came, so about 700 BC. And this man, Isaiah, was given messages from God about the future. Some of his messages were about the quite near future, and so as things came about, as he had predicted them, they authenticated his prophesying that this was a man who knew things about the future that he could only know if God had told him. A lot of his prophecies were specifically about the coming of Jesus, and have been fulfilled in Jesus' coming 700 years after Isaiah came. And some of Isaiah's prophecies looked beyond that to the distant future that is still future for us today, and we're still waiting for some of those promises to be fulfilled. And as you read a section like this, you find that it flips between promises that were fulfilled in Jesus' coming already, promises we're still waiting for in him coming again. Now this chapter is a great one to go to on a day like this, because it was written at a time when the Middle East was recovering from, or would be recovering from, catastrophic war.

The war hadn't actually happened yet, and was predicted in chapter 10, the chapter we've just had. God's people at that time were living as a nation state around Jerusalem, and the picture being used to describe the war that was coming their way in chapter 10 is like imagining deforestation, a forest that's been chopped down, as though the nations and the empires and the political powers of that time are like trees that are devastatingly deforested, and there's just wasteland left.

[6 : 41] But in the midst of that picture of devastation, God then promises that a wonderful hope is coming. Hope for them then, that's just as much for us today, something for us to set our hope on, the offer of hope for us. So if you just have a look at verse 1, that's where this tree language comes from, verse 1. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a branch will bear fruit. So you're picturing the remains of a forest, and it's a very particular tree stump that has a shoot coming up from it, and the stump is the stump of Jesse. It's very significant that, because Jesse was the father of King David, Israel's greatest king. He was the political and religious spiritual leader of God's people, and he loved God, and while he was king, Israel enjoyed a golden age. They enjoyed blessing from God. So these words, they look forward to the future from 700 BC, and through Isaiah,

God is promising that he's going to send another king in the royal line of David, who is the green shoot of hope for a world ravaged by war. So we're going to think, as we look at the prophecy, about the promises God makes to us through his chosen king. We see the wisdom and justice of the king, we see the peaceful reign of the king, and then the costly invitation of the king. So first of all, the wisdom and justice of the king. In verse 2, he's given the spirit, the spirit of God.

Verse 2, the spirit of the Lord will rest on him, and when we see that, when we see that impact, his mind, his actions, and his heart. So first of all, his mind, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding. He knows what to do, this king. Then his actions, the spirit of counsel and of might. He does what is right as king.

And then his heart, the spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord. And the God who made us is revealed in the Bible as a good God, a God who loves justice and mercy. And so it's good news to hear what makes this king so happy in verse 3. It's that he will delight in the fear of the Lord. That what delights him is not to displease God, to do God's will. And that leads on to a picture of the justice that this wise king is going to bring. So he's not impartial in verse 3. He sticks up for the marginalized, if you see that in verse 4. With righteousness, he will judge the needy. With justice, he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He slays the wicked in verse 4. He brings judgment where appropriate.

And in verse 5, he's clothed with righteousness and faithfulness. And the reality is that we all long for this kind of leadership for our world. We know that we need a world where the leaders rule with justice. We've just been praying like that for an end to oppression, where people are given a fair hearing. And we long for leaders also to have wisdom, to know what to do. If you just think about the way history now remembers Tony Blair and the decision to go to war in Iraq and how that decision is scrutinized by so many. Or the American response to 9-11. Was it right? Was it wise? Was it foolish?

[10:09] People agonize over the decisions that are made. I was reading earlier this year about Winston Churchill's decision in 1940 to sink the French Navy. And what an agonizing decision that was for him.

Even among people who all wanted the same thing. He was given reassurances that the French Navy would be sailed away, away from Europe, and could never fall into German hands. And he took the decision in the end that he couldn't trust that advice. And he sunk the French fleet. Very controversial.

And when he explained his decision in the House of Commons in Parliament, he sat down at the end of his explanation and tears were rolling down his face. So burdened by the decision he had to make, he didn't know if it was the right thing to have done. And historians have spent decades since thinking about that decision. We don't just need righteous leaders, although they do need to be righteous. We also need wise leaders who know what to do. And here through Isaiah, God promises us a leader in the royal line of David who's going to govern with righteousness and wisdom. And where is it saying to look for that leader? We look in the line of Jesse, that royal line of King David.

Now that's why when you get to the New Testament, the second bit of the Bible, second section of the Bible that's written after Jesus came, the first thing you get to is the gospel according to Matthew, one of Jesus' followers. And before he gets you to Bethlehem, to a stable, to stars, to wise men, to shepherds, he gives you a family tree, a genealogy. Why does he do that? He needs us to see that Jesus is in the line of David. That's why we sing these carols at Christmas. Once in royal David's city, Jesus was born. And we sing to you in David's town this day, is born of David's line, a saviour who is Christ the Lord. And then Jesus, aged 30 years old, went into the synagogue in Nazareth. And the Bible reading that was chosen for that day in the synagogue, a bit like we have a reading in church, was from Isaiah. It was a different section of Isaiah, but again about the spirit-filled, anointed king who was going to come. And Jesus opened the scroll and he read the reading from Isaiah and he sat down.

The reading said, the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And as he sat down, everyone's eyes were fixed on him and he said, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

[12 : 54] He was consciously explaining, these promises were about me. And he lived the life described here in verses 2 and 3 of Isaiah. Nobody could find any fault with him. Nobody can think of the thing Jesus should have said or the thing that he should have done.

He delighted in fearing the Lord so that even when doing the right thing cost him his life, he went to the cross and prayed for his enemies. And the New Testament writers explained to us that when God raised Jesus from the dead, he did it as a demonstration to the whole world that this was his chosen king. That's why we're given the prophecies so that we know this, these aren't wild claims of miracles out of the blue. Isaiah promised the virgin birth, promised where Jesus would do ministry, where he would be from in the north of Israel, that he would die, that he would rise again.

And the eyewitnesses were willing to die for their testimony that they'd seen Jesus alive again and the tomb was empty. So that's our king. What will God achieve through this route of Jesse, this king? That's our second point. The peaceful reign of the king. This is what God says to us about the world under the reign of this king. Verse 6. The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf and the lion and the yearling or young fall together and the little child will lead them. What's going on? Well, it's poetry. I take it that what's going to happen when Jesus returns will be beyond our imaginings. And it may well be that animals behave differently in light of the new world order that Jesus brings, that the world is currently frustrated and it will be liberated by Jesus coming. But the language of the animals here is pointing us with poetic image towards a world where humanity has no fear anymore. It's a place of peace.

the animals don't fear one another. They don't harm one another. Instead of the lion and the wolf and the leopard being a threat, you picture this little child leading them like household pets, domesticated animals. He goes on in verse 7. The cow will feed with the bear. Their young will lie down together and the lion will eat straw like the ox and destructive forces are taken away. So he says the infant will play near the cobra's den and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. See what he's describing?

A place where we have nothing to fear anymore, where there's harmony and peace. Today we might add that viruses and bacteria are taken away. They're not enemies anymore. Verse 9, he says, they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain. So friends, the Bible's very clear that the world today is not the way that God designed it. It's under a curse and we're seeing here a promise that one day that curse will be lifted. And I guess if we were out there on Gibson Street or Park Road today and we were talking to somebody about these promises, many people around us would agree that this is the world that we all long for. We long for a world like this. But what we might, what people out there might expect a bit less and be a bit more surprised by is that the clear highlight of the restored world is that we know God. That comes in verse 9. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. We were made to know God, not just to know about him, but to know him personally, to live our lives in relationship with him. And the world of peace that we long for is going to come when Jesus Christ reigns in righteousness and wisdom. And when that day comes, all of mankind will know God personally and truly. So friends, what a day to dwell on promises like this. Just imagine a future where there's no fear anymore because our children are never in danger. Imagine a world where there's no risk of war again, no fear of terrorism, no airport security, no refugee crisis, no concentration camps, no disease. When Prime Minister David Lloyd George spoke a hundred years ago today, he said, at 11 o'clock this morning came to an end the cruelest and most terrible war that has ever scourged mankind. If we just think about that four-year war, 65 million men volunteered or were conscripted to fight. There were an estimated 40 million casualties with 15 to 20 million people died. From Scotland, the number of Scots men and women that's going to be projected today on the Scottish Parliament building was 134,712. In the novel *Birdsong*, Sebastian Fawkes tries to depict what would have happened at the Battle of the Somme and he talks about them reading out the roll call of men at the end and the silence because so many of them weren't there.

[18 : 18] And let me just read what he says as he describes them reading out the names and nobody answering. Names came patterning into the dusk, bodying out the places of their forebears, the villages and towns where telegrams would be delivered, the houses where the blinds would be drawn, where low moans would come in the afternoon behind closed doors and the places that had borne them, which would be like nunneries, like dead towns, without their life or purpose, without young men at the factories or in the fields, with no deep sound of voices in the inns, with the children who would have been born, who would have grown and worked or painted, even governed, left ungenerated in their father's shattered flesh, leaving their homes to put up granite slabs in place of living flesh.

And we know today, don't we, as war goes on, that it is a horrible thing, traumatizing the soldiers who come back, traumatizing the children and families affected who arrive here as refugees.

And we must learn from history, we must learn that humanity on our own cannot bring a world of peace. It was the great lesson humanism had to learn in the 20th century.

H.G. Wells was a great humanist in the interwar period, the science fiction writer. He wrote a book called Outline of History in 1920, hugely optimistic about humanity and how we could educate ourselves out of war. By 1945, he wrote a book, A Mind at the End of Its Tether, and he said this, Homo sapiens, as he has been pleased to call himself, is played out.

We have to accept that we cannot put our hope in ourselves to bring the world of peace we long for. And Isaiah invites us here to hear the God who made us promising something that sounds too good to be true, doesn't it?

[20 : 14] The world we all want. This is chapter 11. Back in chapter 2, Isaiah broke off at another point and described what the world will be like. He said, he will judge between the nations, that is, God will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Now, in our culture, as you can see from that UN statue of the man beating his sword into a plowshare, that's become the language of folklore, a longing for a future where there would be peace.

It's a dream that history shows could never become a reality with human strength. But here in the Bible, we find that these words were originally a promise from the God of all this, the God who made us.

A promise that we might have forgotten today was a promise, but still stands for anyone who will accept it. But how do we put our confidence in that promise? How do we know it will happen?

[21 : 22] Well, because when Jesus walked the earth, we caught a glimpse of the world we all want. When fishermen were fighting for their lives in a boat, accomplished fishermen, but desperate, and they said, teacher, don't you care if we drown?

Because the storm was so furious. And he got up and just spoke to the wind and the waves, and they were calm again. It was completely calm. When a man with leprosy came to him on his knees, and Jesus just reached out and touched him and said, be clean.

And the leprosy left him. When a synagogue ruler, Jairus, came and fell at his feet before Jesus, and in desperation said, my little daughter is dying. And Jesus said he would come to the house.

And on the way, people came to greet them and said, don't bother the teacher anymore. Your daughter is dead. And he went into the room with Jairus and three of his followers. And he said, little girl, get up.

And she rose. And she ate. He brought people back from the dead. In the same way, we might just wake up a little girl from being asleep. It was just a glimpse.

[22 : 27] While Jesus was there at that house, there were people dying all over the world. But for a short time, the future broke into the present when Jesus walked the earth. To demonstrate for us that this future that Isaiah promises here, it's no pipe dream.

It will come. Jesus has the power and the will to do it. And all our longings for a different world are because we were made for another world. A world that's coming.

But the problem for us is how are we going to get there into this world that's going to be so perfect? For the truth is we long for peace. But in our own lives, we cause conflict.

John Lennon, in his great song, Imagine, called us to imagine a world without war. Imagine all the people living life in peace.

But his son, Julian Lennon, said this about his dad. He said, I have to say that from my point of view, I felt dad was a hypocrite. He could talk about peace and love out loud to the world, but he could never show it to the people who supposedly meant the most to him, his wife and son.

[23 : 35] How can you talk about peace and love and have a family in bits and pieces? No communication, adultery, divorce. You can't do it, not if you're being true and honest with yourself.

I don't say that to get at John Lennon. I say it to say, aren't we all a bit like him? That we look in despair at the nations in conflict, but the people in charge are just the same as you and me.

And in our own lives, we're not the people we ought to be. We've all caused conflict. We've all had relationships where we've been partly responsible for them going wrong. So we dream of a perfect world, but the truth is that if Jesus brought it and put any of us in it, we would spoil it.

How can God let us in to the perfect world? Well, that's our third point this morning. We've seen the justice and wisdom of the king, the peaceful reign of the king, thirdly, the costly invitation of the king.

Just look back up at verse 4 in the passage, and we find Jesus has to judge wrongdoing to put things right. Verse 4, halfway through, Isaiah says, He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth.

[24 : 44] With the breath of his lips, he will slay the wicked. So what does this king do if we, his people, have done wrong? Well, there's another prophecy before Jesus came, looking forward to Jesus' death from another prophet, where God said this, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

The shepherd was another way of describing God's king. I will strike my king and the sheep will be scattered. God's saying that he would strike down his own king. Why would he do that?

So that his king could be struck down instead of his people. So that at the cross, the rod of God's judgment struck the earth to pay there for all the wrong that anyone who trusts in him has ever done.

Later in Isaiah, he looks ahead to the cross, and he says the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And it's life-changing to know Jesus died for you like that.

Today we're remembering sacrifice, and it's profoundly moving, isn't it, to know that people gave their lives for us, for freedom. As the epitaphs show when it says, when you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today.

[26 : 04] And there were six men from here in the First World War who never came back. They're over on the memorial to my left. Just imagine today from our midst, from our congregation, six men who we know and love, went away to safeguard our freedom, and never came back.

Leopold Fawcett, John McGovernie, Charles McCurdy, Alan Bowie, William McNeil, William Morrison. Men who gave their futures up so that we could have a future here.

And it points us towards that ultimate sacrifice at Calvary. Jesus coming into the world to serve and suffer and die in our place so that the earth could be struck with the judgment of God and it fell on him instead of us.

And the night before it happened, he says to his followers, greater love is no one than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends. And now that means the great invitation is wide open.

If you look at verse 10, in that day the root of Jesse, that's the family of Jesse, will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him and his resting place will be glorious.

[27 : 14] That word resting place is another word for home. Jesus calling us to his new world of peace and saying to us, come home, come to my home. His name today is lifted like a banner high over the world by God.

And in Scotland, many today overlook it. Committed as we are to materialism, to secularism, we miss that there could be a God of all this inviting us to come back to him and have a hope for our lives that lasts beyond the grave and transforms our everyday.

And while we overlook it, all over the world today, in China, in Latin America, in Africa, the nations are rallying to him under that banner. He's the banner of verse 12, if you have a look.

God will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel. He will assemble the scattered people of Judah, that's the people of God, from the four quarters of the earth.

This great gathering of mankind that's being promised and the invitation to be part of it reaches to us today to turn back to God through Jesus. Ask God to forgive your sins and give you a fresh start and be given this wonderful hope.

[28 : 27] And for those of us who have accepted his reign in our own lives, Jesus calls us to be like him, that we as a church will be those who work for righteousness in our world today because we know that we have a righteous king who is coming and that's what pleases him.

So like him, in verse 3, let's be people who show no partiality when we deal with others. We treat every man and woman and child as equal.

Like him, in verse 4, we should strive for generous justice, that we'll stand up for the poor and the needy of our world and our city, that while we wait for him to bring his kingdom to earth, we go out looking to shine the light of his righteousness and justice and faithfulness in whatever ways we can.

And wherever we get the chance, we point people to his name because it's the banner that God has raised above the nations today. And we invite others to share the hope we have for when he returns and we rally to him and his resting place will be glorious.

Let's pray together. Amen. 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.

[30 : 04] Lord Jesus, we praise you that you are the just and wise king for promises fulfilled in your coming. We thank you for the glorious hope you give us of a world where righteousness dwells forever, where we know God intimately and enjoy peace without fear and without destruction.

Thank you that by your death you have made a way to invite all people to join in that hope.
May our understanding of that glorious future deepen that you would enable us to live
lives today marked by our confidence in your glorious future.

For the glory of your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.