



Sermon – 12/17/2023
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered

Isaiah 11:1 – 10

Genesis 1:26

John 15:5, 11

Luke 2:10

Romans 15:12

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to Isaiah chapter 11. We're going to be in Isaiah 11:1 this morning. And if you're a guest joining us for the first time, welcome home. We're right in the heart of our Christmas series, all building to next Sunday, a week from today is Christmas Eve. Ready or not, here it comes. We're going to be gathered here Christmas Eve at 5:00 PM for a family-friendly candlelight Christmas service. I hope you'll bring all your family and friends along with you for that important day so that we can set our hearts in the right place before celebrating the birth of Jesus on Christmas Sunday. And what we've been doing over these last few weeks is looking at Isaiah, this prophet of old who spoke about the future of one who was to come, a Messiah, a deliverer, a Savior. And we've seen all sorts of themes emerge from these promises. We've seen them talk about the hope of Christmas and the peace of Christmas. And this morning, we're going to see him unfold the joy of Christmas. The way that God brings joyful hope to jaded people. So, where can we find that joy today? We see it unfold right here in Isaiah beginning in chapter 11 and verse 1. Let's follow along now. Let's see what the prophet has to tell us about where to find joy this morning. He says,

¹There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from its roots shall bear fruit. ²And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wickedness. ⁵Righteous shall, righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

You may have never heard the name Isaac Watts. But he was a childhood prodigy. For you child, children in the '90s like me think Doogie Houser but only a hundred, three years ago. He was this prolific child who learned an abundance of things at a young age. He knew four languages by the age of 13. He grew to master many skills in many areas. But amidst all of the things that he became an expert in there was one thing he never learned to master. That was how to deal with the ridicule and the criticism and the harshness from others about his outward appearance. You see, Isaac stood, even as an adult, only five feet tall. He was rail thin and pale with a massive head. It was almost like an orange on a toothpick. And people would mock him all the time: criticize, condemn. And it got so bad that even while he was pastoring a church, he had what we would probably call today a mental health crisis that culminated in a mid-life crisis. He left his pastoral work. He retreated to himself. But in that transition, born out of great difficulty, something remarkable happened. He threw himself into his deepest passion, which was writing poetry, writing songs. And from that point forward, the Lord unlocked an amazing gift in Isaac Watt's life. And from that that period forward, he became a prolific hymn writer for the church. He wrote over 600 songs, some of which we still use hundreds of years later today. One of those songs we're going to sing at the very end of our service today after this message. It's a song of joy. I wonder if you've ever heard of it. It's called Joy to the World. This man of deep sorrows is the one that God used to write the most well-known song about joy of all the Christmas carols. I don't think that's an accident. God uses broken people to breathe hope and life and joy into broken people. And I can't help but wonder this morning, are there any of you that are stepping into this time together carrying burdens like Isaac? Maybe you feel the sadness of the fact that your family will be somewhere else and you're going to be alone this Christmas. Maybe it's the sorrow of that first Christmas since the big breakup. Maybe it's the discontentment that comes when you're seeing on social media what everybody else is going to be doing or getting for Christmas because comparison is the thief of joy. Or maybe if we're being honest, it's just an apathy, a numbness. Like I'm done with Christmas. Can we, can we move on? If I hear one more jewelry commercial on the radio I'm going to scream. That kind of rage. Where do we turn in moments like that? Where do we find our hope? Where do we see our joy? See, the world will tell you that you should find joy in your circumstances. That joy comes through just the situation around you. But Isaiah 11 paints a different picture. That our joy doesn't come from our situation but the promise of a Savior. That joy doesn't come from good luck but good news. And if any people needed good news, it would have been the people of God in Isaiah 11. We've seen the last few weeks how they are oppressed from all sides. They've got enemies who are closing in on them. The king of Assyria is coming to attack them. And we see these highs and lows. It's like a roller coaster of complications that they're facing. And in one of those moments of deep despair, God meets them and helps them see the picture of a promise that fuels their joy so that the joy of the Lord can be their strength. And what we're going to see this morning is that Christmas brings true joy to troubled people. And the way that that true joy unfolds is that God brings joy in the world so that He can bring joy for the world so that we can send joy to the world.

So, let's see how this picks up now in verse 1 with that first idea that bring, Christmas brings joy in the world. I know there's many of you who have done a white elephant gift exchange before. Raise your hand if you've ever been a part of one of those. We just had one of those with our life group Christmas party and there's nothing that builds Christian community like getting together and stealing gifts from each other. It just builds those bonds. And there were even people who wanted the grapefruit. I ended up with a Kleenex box with \$20 dollars that was, that was taped to it. There you got all sorts of gifts. But when you get a white elephant gift exchange, your focus

is on what the gift is, not on who gave it. Think about how that's different than when you're at your best on Christmas morning. You gather around with the family and before you shred that gift open, what does grandma always say? Look who, look who's names on the card. Don't forget to read the card first. And it's because a gift has more meaning when we remember who it's from. And before Isaiah unpacks the joy of Christmas through a promise, he points us to the fact that the joy of Christmas comes through a person. That God in His joy gives joy to His people. That the way that joy comes to us is God sends joy to us in the gift and in the birth of His Son. You see, the King of heaven isn't born in a palace. The priest of eternity isn't born in a temple. Instead, the son of Isaiah 11 is born in a manger. And from that dirty, filthy, messy place, joy enters into the world, and it changes everything. So, think about how this joy comes into the world. You see, first in verse 1 that Christmas brings joy into the world through a stump. The verse 1 says,

¹There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

And so, Isaiah speaks to this unexpected joy from an unexpected source. I mean, Israel has been in battle with their foes. Their foes, they probably fear as if they're massive oak trees filled with power, and they've looked out on the scenes of the wreckage and the rubble of the battlefield. Perhaps, they've been surrounded by trees that have been knocked down. They can picture what it looks like to see stump after stump where the enemy army has come upon them. And yet there is this word of hope from Isaiah that joy is coming from a stump, the most unexpected of places. Now, how many of you by show hands are fake Christmas tree people when you decorate your house and how many of you are real Christmas tree people, okay? We're a fake Christmas tree family. Whether you're real or fake, my guess is none of us when we gather up together on Christmas morning, are going to walk into living room and see all the presents laying next to a tree stump. Nobody would do that. It would miss the moment. It would seem as if it's robbing Christmas of the joy and the festivity and the pictures that are there. That's how unexpected this image is here. A stump, a symbol of death, is now the source of joy. How could this be? Well, it's because this is a particular kind of stump. Look back at verse 1. A stump of Jesse. This is one who's continuing in the line of King David, the son of Jesse. That line that has been in rebellion against God, who's turned their back on Him. It seems as if the hope of the promise is dead. But from the midst of that death will become life, will come hope, will come joy. And that joy shows up in the life of the people of Israel and it radiates down even to us today this Christmas. But notice now in verse 2, you'll also see how Christmas brings joy in the world through the Spirit. So, listen how he speaks about the Spirit of God here when it says,

²And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

So, when you get this image of a stump, all you can think about is death. But as we've seen that path to death is the source of life and the indicator that life has come. That joy is ahead. Is this coming Promised One will come with the Spirit of God resting upon Him. That's why it's no surprise that when Jesus starts His earthly ministry, He quotes from a parallel passage in Isaiah 61 and claims the fact that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him. That where the spirit of God is, the presence of God is. And where the presence of God is, the peace of God is. And where the peace of God is, the joy of God has come. And what kind of spirit rests upon this promised one? We'll look back at verse 2. It's a wise spirit. That's why it says they're in the middle, of the spirit of

wisdom and understanding. It's a powerful spirit. That's why right after that, it says the spirit of council and a might. And then it's a faithful spirit. That's why the end of the verse says the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. See, the spirit of the Lord rests upon the Messiah so that the joy of the Lord can rest upon us. But notice how it keeps going in verse 3. We notice how Christmas brings joy in the world through a Savior, and not just any kind of Savior. A victorious King. Get a picture of this beginning in verse 3

³And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Now, notice back at the beginning verse 3. Do you see that word delight there? If you like to mark your Bible, circle that. That's that picture of joy that we're talking about. This delight in the Lord. This delight in the fear of the Lord. This one that will come. He comes in joy at the mission that he has. He comes with the delight in the Father who sent Him. There is a joy in the mission. But this coming one, as we see in verses four and five, doesn't just come to bring joy but also to bring judgement. That judgment of a conquering king. A judgement that comes with righteousness. A judgement that comes as a warrior. That's why in verse 5 you hear those echoes of the full armor of God in Ephesians 6 when it speaks of that faithfulness and that righteousness as a belt holding all things together for this joyful warrior who brings judgement. Now, you might be looking at this passage and wondering in this part, how does this relate to me today? What difference does this make in my life? I was talking to a dad this week who's got a college-aged daughter. She's got some, going through some really difficult times. Struggling with depression, other mental health challenges that's manifested itself in an eating disorder. And he got a text from her this week that said, "Dad, I'm just tired of it all." Tired of it. Maybe you find yourself in a similar situation. You're tired of the disappointments. You're tired of the frustrations. You're tired of the guilt. You're tired of the shame. And underneath it all, if we're being honest, you're tired with God. And some of you need to hear this this morning. That you may be angry with God, but God is not angry with you. In fact, He loves you so much that He sent joy into the world. Because of that love for us to make a way where we could be made right, where the broken could be healed, where the angry could be set free, where the tired could find rest. And it comes through this promised one here, where who brings joy into the world. But let's keep going now. Look down with me beginning in verse 6. There's a second thing I want you notice here that Christmas brings joy for the world. For the world. So, notice how it starts there.

⁶The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

It's not every day that somebody getting a traffic ticket makes national news but that happened last year out in Phoenix. There was a woman who was driving in the HOV lane, the High Occupancy Vehicle Lane and she was driving on her own but she wanted to create the appearance as if she had another passenger with her. And the cops were watching cars go by and they noticed

something unusual about her car and they pulled her over. And I think we've got a picture of her and her passenger that will pop up on the screen right here. It was a SEUSSpicious passenger, if you will. She had the Grinch riding along with her trying to create that appearance, trying to gain the system. And as I was looking at that picture this week, I couldn't help but wonder, while you might not have the Grinch riding in the passenger seat of your car, how often is he riding in the passenger seat of our hearts? That joy stealer, that thief of contentment, that one whose heart is three sizes, too small. He constantly is showing up in our lives through the bitterness and the frustration and the discouragement. We lack joy. And the reason that we lack joy so often is because we're living this difficult life in a broken world. And when this part of Isaiah speaks about how Christmas brings joy for our world what it's showing us is how Christmas restores and recovers God's design for all of creation including our own life. It gives us a renewed sense of purpose that can restore the joy that we have when we live out God's design. So, what does that picture look like? Look back at verses 6 and 7. We see how Christmas brings joy for the world by restoring God's design for creation. So, he talks there about these predators and this prey. That's why when you go to the zoo in Houston or Fort Worth or elsewhere, they keep different animals in different compartments, protected. Because if you let them all out, the predators would eat the prey. And you've got these pictures here of these ravenous beasts, the bears, the lions, the wolves. Then you've got this picture of this precious prey in danger and at risk, this cattle, this ox, this lamb, this goats. And the image here is that these animals, who because of the brokenness that entered through the curse of sin, are now at odds and at war and in rivalry with one another. That where that rivalry exists now, there is coming a time in the future where that will cease, where peace will come, that the lion will lay down with the lamb, that the wolf will be at peace with the ox. There's this image here of a restoration. That what was lost in Eden when that forbidden fruit was eaten by Adam and Eve is now restored. That Christmas doesn't just change the world within us, it's also one day going to change the world around us. But look right after that down in, at the end of verse 6 and on to verse 8. We see how Christmas brings joy for the world by restoring God's design for us. So, notice how verse 6 ends. It says,

a little child shall lead them.

And then down in verse eight,

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

And I just want to say upfront, there's no snakes that have been brought into the church this morning. We're not that snake handling type. When you see this image here though, you get this picture of like, how could this be? The most threatening of animals, the one that we often had the deepest fear of, that the young child is leading it, that it's playing with it, there is some picture of restoration taking place here and what is it? Well, notice up on the screens, the language it's picking up from Genesis 1:26. Remember when God speaks the world into existence, He speaks a purpose and a design over humanity in our relation to the creation around us and it goes like this.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

And when I hear that through the lens of this Christmas story that is foretold in Isaiah 11, I just can't help but notice the fact that the very first people in this world who were told the Messiah was here were shepherds. What were those shepherds doing? They were doing their best to live out Genesis 1:26. To take dominion over the livestock. God appears to them and makes this promise known and it's a promise of restoration. It's a promise of recovery. It's this picture that Isaiah 11 is capturing for us in this idea that even a child will lead them. It's not the greatest of humanity with the most power that will have the authority over the creation. It is all of humanity even down to the smallest of us who will be able to live out this rule in the days ahead because of the joy that God brings through Christmas.

Now, fast forward with me 8 days. You're going to be gathered up with those that you love in a house somewhere opening Christmas gifts together. And after those Christmas gifts are done and dad makes sure all the trash is picked up and thrown into the trash bag, the kids are going to scatter to play with their toys. And imagine they go down the hallway to the other side of the house and you peer around the corner, you hear them playing quietly and you look around, you look through the doorway and you're expecting maybe they're playing the new Xbox game or with those new Legos or those new dolls. But instead, you see one of the youngest children there is playing with a snake. Imagine the fear. Imagine the concern. Imagine the desperation and your desire to rescue them. My guess is you wouldn't see that in that moment and say, "You know what? Just last week, we heard this sermon about how the young child will play with the snake and they're just applying the Bible to their life." We wouldn't do that. And the reason is because we know that even though this promise is here it hasn't yet been fully realized. That the hope of Christmas comes not just in the fact that Jesus fully defeats satan and the brokenness of creation through His death and His resurrection, but that one day, Jesus will return. He will make all things new. He will restore all things to His design that He's had for us from the beginning and that's the point at which this will become a reality. And part of life for you and me is spending time every day fighting for joy in a broken world. See, because you and I, we can't safely play with the serpent in this broken world. And what's true for us physically is also true for us spiritually. The Bible tells us that satan, that serpent of old, he is seeking someone to devour and to destroy. He leads us astray through temptation and deception. He comes alongside our sin and condemns us through accusation and that snake is at war with your joy.

So, how do we find joy this Christmas? Jesus gives us an answer in John 15. You'll notice it on the screen, this familiar image that He's the vine and we're the branches. I want you to notice what he says in verse 5 at the start of that and then verse 11 towards the end. Notice how it unfolds here. He says,

⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

And then down in verse 11, it says,

¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

So, think about the picture when you put Isaiah 11 next to John 15. The stump of Jesse has now become the vine of Jesus. The man of sorrows has now become our source of joy. And how is it

that we fight the good fight for joy in our life against an enemy who's constantly trying to kill, steal, and destroy it? The answer's right there in verse 5. To abide in Christ, to remain in Him. If you're not really sure what that means, to abide, picture this imagery of a vine and its branches and the fruit that comes from it. The only way the branch grows, the only way the fruit blossoms is if it abides or remains or depends on the vine. Not relying on itself but something outside of itself to provide what it can't provide on its own. That joy, that joy that we see there in John 15:11 where it says, that your joy may be full. And when you look back at Isaiah 11 and you see this imagery, it should give you hope for the things that are robbing you of joy right now. Think about it. If the God of the universe, one day will bring about a reconciliation amongst the creation where the wolf can lie down with the lamb. That's the kind of God that can bring reconciliation in the broken relationships in your life. And if one day, the God of the universe will bring a restoration to where the young child will have dominion over the serpent in the future, then you can trust that God, that He can provide you victory today against the serpent who is seeking to destroy your joy. See, Christmas brings a joy for the world but there's a last thing that we need to notice here at the end of the passage in verses 9 and 10. It's the way that Christmas brings joy to the world. And how does that joy come? Notice what it says there in verse 9.

⁹They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

You'll notice here in Isaiah 11; we get a different picture of how to find joy than what the world normally gives us. The world will tell you that your joy comes through good luck. That the happier your circumstances, the happier your heart. And the problem with that picture of joy is that what defines our joy can ultimately destroy it. When things are good, I'm good. When things go bad, I'm done. My joy is gone. But Isaiah 11 is echoing the rest of Scripture to give us a different picture of the path to joy. That it doesn't come through good luck but good news. Not through our circumstances but a Savior. And what we find here is that joy that comes to us is a joy that should be passed through us. It's a joy designed to be experienced by the whole world. And in this final section of this passage. We're going to see the answer to the question, who is the gift of Christmas meant for? Who is intended to receive the joy of Christmas? And what we'll find here is that Isaiah 11 is going to show us that joy is designed to bring, that Christmas is designed to bring joy to the whole world. So, notice what he says there back in verse 9, that Christmas brings joy as we share the Gospel with the whole world. That's why it says,

⁹They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Just take a moment with me now to picture in your mind's eye your favorite body of water. Maybe it's that ocean spot that you go to on vacation. Maybe it's that lake you went to with the family, with your family growing up. Maybe it's that pool that you put in in your backyard in COVID. And you can picture that body of water and everywhere you look there, the waters are covering that body, that sea, that lake, that pool, that's the image that Isaiah is giving here. That there is coming a day, and Lord may it come soon, that the glory of God is going to cover the face of the waters, it's going to cover the face of this earth, that all people will know and experience that glory. So that as Paul says in the New Testament, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every

tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. That's the joy that we're called to take into the world this Christmas. His glory is coming. It will be known amongst all people, and He invites us in to making that joy known to the whole world. But down here in verse 10, you also see how Christmas brings joy as we share the Gospel to a broken world. Since the brokenness that is here, when it says in verse 10,

¹⁰In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

What he's telling us is this promised one is going to step into the brokenness, into the darkness, into the curse of sin, into the shame and guilt in our heart, and all over this broken world. And He's going to bring a word of peace, a word of hope, a word of joy to all the nations. That's why this exact verse right here in Isaiah is picked up in Romans 15 when Paul is talking about, in verse 12, of how the Gospel is designed not just for the people of God in Israel but that God had always intended to take it to all nations. He cites this verse and says this in Romans 15:12

¹²And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”

So, what's Paul saying here? That this forgotten stump that this overlooked root will take root in the ground, it will build this flourishing vine. And that vine will grow so full that it's branches will extend beyond the people of God, Israel, to all the nations, to Gentiles just like you and me that this is our hope. That's why when that angel appears to the shepherds in Luke, we remember in Luke 2:10 what he has to say to them. And if you don't remember it from your Bible, you probably remember it from Charlie Brown Christmas when Linus is up there and Luke 2:10 tells us,

¹⁰ “Fear not, for I behold, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

All the people. That this joy of Christmas, God designed it from the beginning for all of us to have the opportunity to experience it. For all of us to be in need of it. And think about why that's true. When God creates the universe, it a joy-filled place of perfection. But when sin enters into the world, it shatters that joy, it shatters that relationship. And what does God do? He sends joy down to us in the gift of His Son who takes on flesh at Christmas, who suffers as a man of sorrow acquainted with grief. But yet through for the joy set before Him, He goes to the cross. He despises its shame so that He can make a way for you and me to be made right with God. And if you've never experienced the joy of Christmas this season, today is that day of salvation for you. The happiness, the pleasure that you've been looking for everywhere else has already been offered to you as a free gift. Will you receive it? I don't know if you've been noticing over the last few weeks since we launched our NEXT Initiative that right over here to my left and your right, we've got this 100th anniversary puzzle. And each Sunday, in the response song, we've had a different family in our church go up and place a piece of that puzzle. You'll notice in the response song that Denny and Jackie Crutcher will be doing that this morning. And the reason that we're doing that is to help us count down the 100 weeks to our 100th anniversary. As a reminder visibly to us that God is calling all of us to be a piece of the puzzle of what Isaiah 11 is speaking of here of bringing joy to the world. And our heart at this church is that every one of you would live on mission. It's one of the reasons we've been having you turn in prayer cards each week for those that don't yet know

Jesus and we invite you to bring those down if you still got more to pray for when we grab our Lord's supper elements in just a minute. It's one of the reasons we're going to do Gospel training coming up in January to equip you with that. It's one of the reasons we're going to do our combined English and Spanish language worship service on New Year's Eve. All of these things are intended to fuel us to be front door missionaries who live out Isaiah 11's call to take joy to the world.

We make that joy known through us because of what God has done in us. That's why it's fitting we're going to come to the Lord's supper here at the end of this passage. Because on that night that Jesus gathered His disciples, that might have been one of their last moments of joy together before the events unfolded that led to the cross. And as we take that bread and we eat it as a representation of His broken body, it's a reminder to us that His body was broken so that our joy in Him might be restored. And when we take of that cup that represents the new covenant in His blood, we remember that His blood was poured out so that our joy in Him may be filled. And you're invited to this family meal if you're following Jesus as a baptized believer. And we're going to ready our hearts now by going to the Lord in prayer. And preparing for Him to move in this moment.

Lord, as we come to you, we recognize all the ways that we fall short, the way our hearts are prone to wander. And as we're about to sing, Lord, in this song, Joy to the World, let every heart prepare Him room, I pray that it starts with each of us. That we would prepare room in our hearts to follow You, to follow You with hope, to follow You with joy, and to follow You with the peace that surpasses all understanding. Lord, even now, ready us for this moment. As we set our eyes to what's coming on Christmas Day, may we fix our eyes not on a moment, but on a Messiah because He is the one who is our source of joy. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.