

Good morning I am Josh Burnham and I'm the lead pastor here at Bethel. For all of our guests, those watching online, and all our covenant members, welcome! Why are days like today so important? Because we stand in the tradition of the Lord's community who have gathered regularly to worship for thousands of years. So, our gathering is a sacred gathering.

Today we continue a series in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah "the Lord saves" was a prophet in the Old Testament who lived at a precarious time. His nation was prosperous but Yahweh knew that **difficulty was on the horizon**. Even more, Isaiah was called to preach a message to people who would **hear but not understand** and his oracle would make them more blind and more deaf (6:10). As a living illustration, the prophet had **three sons**. The youngest was Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz "hurry to the spoils." **Even Isaiah knows that the youngest child is the most spoiled**. The middle was named Immanuel or "God with us." The eldest who we meet today was called Shaer-Jashub "a remnant will return."

Today's message is entitled "lessons from a stump." A stump is the leftover part of a once thriving tree, now cut down. This is not some catchy phrase, no this is a profound image that the Lord put into our minds here in Isaiah. A lush forest, the empire of Israel and Assyria will have so few trees remaining in their forests that even a child could count them (10:19). I coach U-6 futbol (what you Americans call soccer). **Every practice we play a skill challenge where the 4-5 year olds had to dribble into the cones and then pick the one up. After all cones are accounted for, I ask each young child to count their individual cones. It sounds like this, "1, 2, 3, 14."** So few trees will remain that even a child could count." Isaiah's imagery here is a stark reminder that God's community will face major destruction. Church wake up, "lessons from a stump."

"Lessons from a stump" (Isaiah 10:20-23; 11:1-3)

Conifer forests in the western US are home to a special habitat known as "snag forests" that contain some of the highest levels of animal and plant diversity and abundance of any forest type. These snag forests were created when patches of intense, high severity fire occurred within larger forest fires. This is what I would call "timber or severe mercies." Severity that has given way to abundance of life. Have you ever experienced a severe moment in your life? What if this severe trial was a way to snag forest of abundant life?

Why are timber mercies needed? If one only hears about judgement, hell, and destruction, you can lose heart very quickly. If you only hear of hope, good, restoration, there is a tendency to live as if matters of daily faithfulness and accountability don't matter. Isaiah gives us a unique combination of God's severe mercy + his redeeming love.

Timber Mercies (10:20-23)

1. **On that Day**. The Word of the Lord brings us a candid revelation, **God's righteous judgment always comes to his people first**. Israel was not exempt from the His sovereign pronouncements. Isaiah 9:14 demonstrated that the Lord cut off Israel's head and tail. In the NT, the seven churches in Asia were evaluated before all others.

James 3:1 says to the local church, [James 3:1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment.](#) If not careful of this truth, our forgetfulness comes across as off putting. It's easy to sound to others, "you will be judged!" What we need is to massage this truth (on that day) deep into our souls. You don't avoid judgement.

We all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). But, because of Messiah, we gloriously pass through into abundant life. So, we must not come across as judgmental. We should relay this message, God will hold us accountable for our sins and I/we will be judged first. So friend, I do not look at you with condemnation. Rather I plead to you out of love, turn to the one who saves and be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:21).! **Timber!** Israel-God's faithful will be righteous judged first, but has given you the ministry of reconciliation.

2. **Folly**- Israel found strength and security in Aram/Syria. Threatened by Assyria, the northern kingdom turned in hope to one who had for a century been an enemy. **Desperation** is no excuse to trust your **personal wisdom or strength**. How often do we rely upon wealth to be our security, talent, relationships, family, institutional church? On that day such folly, relying on anything but Yahweh, will be renounced. **Timber!! Find your reliance on the Mighty God.**
3. **Biblical faith is a community faith, it is not a mass faith (10:21).** Isaiah reminds us that it is not ancestry that assures anyone of salvation, only the mercy of the Lord. **Rom. 9:6**
[Now it is not as though the word of God has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Neither are all of Abraham's children his descendants.!](#) Faithfulness is always intentional and accountable, and often comes down to a handful. **Timber!** It's not who are you by **birth**, it's whose you are by **new birth** in Jesus.
4. **Sometimes the path of hope runs through a dark valley.** The remnant would return would walk through the land where justice overflowed (10:22). This is precisely the story of **Horatio Spafford** whose two-year-old son perished in the great Chicago fire and later who received a telegram from his wife that all four daughters had perished on a ship crossing the Atlantic. He immediately boarded a ship to see his wife and near the location where his daughters died he wrote these words: [and Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight the clouds be rolled back as a scroll, the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, a song in the night on my soul.](#) **Timber!** Sometimes the path of hope runs through the darkest valleys.

Now let's look at the stump, the Lord will not abandon you in the dark valley. You can learn some things by walking through a forest. But, some lessons are only learned through the stump. Israel, had been humbled.

Tender Mercies (11:1-3)

1. **There will always be a remnant (11:1; 10:21).** Remnant is a critical OT theme. Throughout time, God has provided a glimpse of His grace through creation. In the days of Noah, Yahweh flooded the entire earth but protected a remnant. Again, we are reminded about a remnant who will return and never again be drawn into thinking they can find security in foreign alliances. Isaiah reminds us that the church, **the true church, will always survive**. This is His promise- not even the gates of hell will prevail against the remnant. This remnant reminds us individually that those who have entered into personal covenant relationship with the Lord will be kept secure by Him. Who among us today is the remnant? **That God will hold us fast, is a beautiful tender mercy.**
2. **God works and grows when and where you least expect it.** I don't know where you grew up, but back home stumps don't bear fruit. Stumps don't grow. **Stumps were what you had to avoid when playing the tackle football out in the yard.** And yet, when least expected, the Lord says, "look at the stump of Jesse." Why not David? Most likely this is a critique against the current king Ahaz and a reminder that Jesse-king David's Father, from Bethlehem was least among thousands of villages in Judah. **Are you small? Watch God grow. Weak? Watch God.** **It's the message of the cross that is the power of God unto salvation.** This is the power of the Lord's tender mercies. **If we can use a stump, he can use you.** Remember, the Lord doesn't use bumps on logs- he uses humbled stumps. Where are you least expecting the power of **Christ to work today? What if that is exactly the stump that grows green?**
3. **The messiah was and is God's plan A.** Isaiah does not merely tell us that the Spirit of the Lord will be with this awaited Messiah. Rather, the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him and be Him. What happens at the baptism of Jesus? The Spirit comes down in the form of a dove. **John 14:6** Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.** **The Messiah is not a good story, He is the God story.** The incarnation, the cross is the full demonstration of God's love for you. If you ever wonder if the Lord cares about you, look to the stump of Jesse. Wow what a tender mercy.
4. **His Spirit changes everything.** The wisdom of the Lord is general and understanding is the power to see to the heart of issues. How often do we find Jesus reading the heart of people? Counsel is the ability to devise a right course of action and strength is the ability to see it through. True knowledge shows itself in a life of reverence to the One true God. Delight is from the noun 'scent.' To smell a pleasing odor means to delight in something (Gen. 8:21). If you have Christ you have the Spirit of the Lord. **Is His spirit in you?** The Holy Spirit is a tender mercy sent to provide everything you need for righteousness!

5. **Jesus restores all things (11:5-8)**. Jesus Christ will one day rule with complete and perfect righteousness. A righteousness the world has never seen. So perfect is the rule of the Messiah that one day wild carnivores adopt the eating habits of tame herbivores and the two live in harmony and peace. This language reflects the Garden of Eden before the fall of man where there was no hint of mortal hostility between humans and creation.

Our Response (Transition/play pad)

One day a shoot will grow from the stump. From the timber mercy of God flows his tender mercies.

Have you surrendered your life to this Messiah? He is the one who brings perfect peace into your life.

Are you looking at a place of destruction? Will you look to the branch who will bear spiritual fruit?

We must also prepare our hearts for communion.

Notes

The background to this verse is the Aram-Ephraimite alliance. Threatened by the rising power of Assyria, the northern kingdom turned for strength to one who had for a century been an enemy.

Into the scene of devastating judgment Isaiah introduces mention of the relief for the people of God that comes about through divine grace (Mackay, 277).

Keeping both emphases of hope and judgment before our eyes is difficult. Isaiah's constant attempt to keep the two in balance is a reminder of this. If the only word heard is judgement, people tend to lose heart. If the only word is certain hope, there is a strong tendency to "let up" in matters of daily obedience and accountability (Oswalt, 178).

Is. 10:20 On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no longer depend on the one who struck them, but they will faithfully depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

What can Christians learn from this? Surely we should learn that no nation is God. As soon as it begins to arrogate his place, it is marked for destruction (Oswalt, 180).

On that day such folly (relying upon non-Yahweh strength) will be renounced and the remnant will truly rely on the Lord (Motyer, 117).

Hence, grace breaks through! The promises of God have not failed (Young, 368).

21 The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God.

V.21 begins with an expression that is identical to the symbolic name of Isaiah's first son- Shear-Jashub "a remnant will return." Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is the youngest and Shear-Jashub the eldest of three sons. Immanuel was the middle child.

The Lord, before "that day" had come, provided prophetic hope through the name of Isaiah's first born. Before the people of the Lord could even see hope, the Lord promised it would arrive.

Rom. 9:6 Now it is not as though the word of God has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. **7** Neither are all of Abraham's children his descendants.

It is not their ancestry that assured them of their salvation, only the mercy of God (Mackay, 279).

The remnant, whose who have true faith in Yahweh, will never again be drawn into thinking that they can find security in foreign alliances in the way in which Ahaz had imagined (Mackay, 277).

Salvation had been promised, the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. If this is to be accomplished there must be a remnant (Young, 369).

The principle herein states is for the purpose of confuting a false reliance upon the promise. "The bold address to the patriarch has a striking effect. God, addressing a dead man, declares to the living what he had formerly promised" –John Calvin.

In other words, despite the fact that biblical faith is a community faith, it is not a mass faith. That is, faithfulness always is intentional and accountable, and that often comes down to a handful (Oswalt, 179).

The remnant also reminds that the church will survive. It is the bride of Christ, and Christians need have no fears. Also, if we have entered into a personal relationship with Christ, we can know that we will be kept by him (Oswalt, 183).

Return

The verb return stresses the active as distinct from the mental side of repentance: a turning round and coming back (Roberts, 117).

This root/return/ שׁוּב occurs over 1000 times in the OT.

22 Israel, even if your people were as numerous
as the sand of the sea,
only a remnant of them will return.
Destruction has been decreed;
justice overflows.

This verse picks upon the motif of judgment again in a graphic reversal of the ancient patriarchal promise that Israel's descendants would be as numerous as the sand of the seashore in Gen. 22:17 (Roberts, 170).

Note also that God refuses to call Israel "my people," but addresses Israel directly and refers to the northern kingdom as your people.

There is a somber side to the presentation of the return of the remnant. The pathway towards future restoration will be through many a dark valley (Mackay, 278).

23 For throughout the land
the Lord GOD of Armies
is carrying out a destruction that was decreed.

The destruction of Israel announced in 10:33-34 and in many other Isaiah's oracles from the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic War is not Yahweh's last word concerning Israel (Roberts, 177).

Here, for a second time, Isaiah extends to the remnant the hope of the royal Messiah. It is specifically a word of assurance for the dark day of the Assyrian threat but contains in itself clear implications that its fulfillment is for a time yet to come. Undated hope is a living, ever-present assurance for God's people, and it is at this point that the passage speaks as much to the church today as in Isaiah's time (Motyer, 120).

Isa. 11:1 Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

In Isaiah's day the prospect of the Messiah (the shoot) would sustain hope during the dark time of Assyrian domination (Mackay, 288).

The mention of stump or root suggests that Judah had been at least temporarily humbled by its Syro-Ephraimitic enemies, but the promise of new growth suggests that Judah will recover (Roberts, 179).

The mention of Jesse rather than David and Bethlehem rather than Jerusalem is probably understood as a critique on the current Davidic king Ahaz (Roberts, 179). Jesse lived in Bethlehem, and Bethlehem was least among the thousands of Judah.

Branch is from the verb ‘to grow green’ and hence means a sapling (Motyer, 122).

2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him
a Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a Spirit of counsel and strength,
a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

It is not merely saying that the shoot of Jesse will possess such qualities; rather, it is the Spirit of Yahweh who causes such qualities to exist in the Messiah on whom he rests (Mackay, 291).

Wisdom and understanding here does not refer to knowledge in general, but to knowing Yahweh (Roberts, 179).

Wisdom is the more general characteristic while understanding is more particularly the power to see to the heart of issues; the former is the reservoir, the latter the judiciously directed outflow (Motyer, 122).

Counsel and strength

The practical gift is the ability to devise a right course of action coupled with the personal prowess to see it through (Motyer, 122).

Knowledge and Fear

Here knowledge and fear are subordinate to the Lord. True knowledge shows itself in a life of reverence to the One true God.

The spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord in the Messiah, becomes, under his reign, the knowledge of the Lord filling the whole earth (Motyer, 120).

3 His delight will be in the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge
by what he sees with his eyes,
he will not execute justice
by what he hears with his ears,

Delight is from the noun ‘scent.’ The verb to smell a pleasing odor came to mean to delight in (Gen. 8:21). His delighting suggests that all his capacity for delight spends itself on this great object (Motyer, 123).

4 but he will judge the poor righteously
and execute justice for the oppressed of the land.
He will strike the land

with a scepter from his mouth,
and he will kill the wicked
with a command from his lips.

This verse singles out the poor and the humble, not because they are given preferential treatment even they are in the wrong, but because they are the ones most likely to suffer injustice in the Israelite judicial system (Roberts, 179).

- 5 Righteousness will be a belt around his hips;
faithfulness will be a belt around his waist.
- 6 The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the goat.
The calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf will be together,
and a child will lead them.
- 7 The cow and the bear will graze,
their young ones will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like cattle.
- 8 An infant will play beside the cobra's pit,
and a toddler will put his hand into a snake's den.

So just is the reign of the Messiah is that it will result in an idyllic situation in which young wild carnivores adopt the eating habits of young tame herbivores, so that the two may life together in harmony and peace (Roberts, 180).

This language strongly reflects the Garden of Eden before the fall of man where there was no hint of mortal hostility between humans and wild animals until after the transgression (Roberts, 180).

Illustrations

Application
