JESUS, A SHOOT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE

December 13, 2015

Isaiah 11:1-10

Key Verse: 11:1

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

Merry Christmas! Today’s passage is a message of hope to the Israelites whose nation was rapidly declining under the rule of their godless kings. Our time becomes more and more godless and secular. In this trend of the world many Christians seem to drift away from their faith, losing Christ in their hearts. Franklin Graham said, “The evangelical church today is too accepting of sin and ducking the vital moral issues of our age, and rather than influencing our culture by the gospel has become influenced by the permissive culture in which we live in” In this situation it will be meaningful that through the study of Isaiah 11 we may renew the meaning of Jesus’ birth and find a new hope for ourselves, for our church and for the world.

**First, Jesus, the person and his ministry (1-5).** Verse 1 says. “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” This verse is Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the humble birth of Jesus made around 700 years before his birth. Have you ever seen the stump of a tree? Whenever I pass through a road near Hart House artificial turf field at U of T, I see this stump of a tree. How does it look? The stump looks desolate and lifeless. We can hardly imagine that a shoot will come up from the stump. Yet, it all depends on the root; if the root is dead, it is really dead and a shoot will never come up, but if the root is alive, it’s alive and a shoot will come up from the stump. When a green shoot comes up, it makes all the difference, from desolateness to a new life. In the history of Israel David’s kingdom was once glorious. However, at the time of Isaiah it was almost vanished, soon being exiled to Babylon. The king Ahaz, called the house of David (Isa 7:2), did not trust in the LORD their God, God Almighty, but a foreign god (2 Kings 16:10). That was the cause of the nation’s misery. The nation looked totally hopeless like a deadened tree. Yet, in a prophetic vision Isaiah says: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” For he knew its root was still alive. Here the root refers to the promise of God given to David flowing from the promise to Abraham, further back from the promise given at the time of man’s fall (cf. 2 Sam 7; Ge 12:2; 3:15). Isaiah put his hope in the faithfulness of God who would fulfill his promise. God indeed kept his promise around 700 years later, and let a shoot come up from the stump of Jesse. This shoot denotes the Baby Jesus born in the line of Jesse, who was the father of King David.

Why then is it described “from the stump of Jesse” instead of “from the stump of David”? David was the greatest king of Israel, and his kingdom was glorious. But his family background was humble with a nameless and ordinary man named Jesse who lived in Bethlehem. (2 Sam 7:18). It was God who made David’s house glorious. And now from that humble origin God would raise new King, as he raised King David, though the two would not be comparable. A shoot is also tender and weak. So “a shoot from the stump of Jesse” reminds us of the humble birth of the baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger (Lk 2:7). It also reminds us of his humble life. Isaiah 53:2 says, “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of the dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” This was how Jesus looked like, far from how the Hollywood movies often depicts him. So only those whose hearts are humble can see this humble baby Jesus and welcome him.

And verse 1b says, “from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” It is written in Isaiah 4:2, “In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious,..” (cf. Jer 23:5; 33:15). The tender shoot will grow into a branch which bears fruit. And the fruit would be beautiful and glorious as the fruit that will last (Jn 15:16), fruit of eternal life in people, one after another, and fruit of the restored kingdom of God, Paradise. We will see this in the following verses.

Look at verse 2. “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—” While verse 1 describes the human, historical background of Jesus, verse 2 does his spiritual aspect. According to the Bible a person is defined and characterised by what kind of spirit one has. Here “the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him.” He would be filled with the Spirit of the LORD. So the whole divine nature would be in him and this Spirit of the LORD would enable him, who grew like a tender shoot, to carry out the messianic ministry. In the New Testament we see that the baby Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in virgin Mary (Mt 1:20). And at the time of baptism the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove (Lk 3:22). This was God’s anointing him with the Holy Spirit and power (Ac 10:38; Lk 4:18; Jn 3:34).

It is interesting that after the Spirit of the LORD mentioned, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, and the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD are stated. The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding are written together. Jesus is full of wisdom and understanding, especially in helping a person. Often, people say, “You don’t understand me!” even between husband and wife, parents and children, or between friends. But Jesus, who is full of the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, completely understands each one of us, and can guide us with his wisdom. Jesus is also full of Spirit of counsel and of power.

There are so many people with so many problems. Each of them needs counsel, that’s why psychologists or psychiatrists or other counselors are in great demand in our time. Even on the same floor of our Bible Centre, there are 3 psychotherapy counselling offices. On the other hand, peoples’ problems are often diagnosed just as chemical unbalance problems and treated with medications. Many celebrities and people in power and intellectuals secretly take drugs. I do not try to undermine psychology or drug industry. My point is that our problem is more than just mental or physical or chemical unbalance problem. The deeper and fundamental problem of human being is a spiritual problem, because God created man as a spiritual being. We need spiritual counsel and spiritual treatment as well as physical treatment. Jesus who is full of the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, truly understands us and counsels us with God’s wisdom. He is the Wonderful Counselor. (Is 9:6) He also heals us and restores us with his power.

A woman lived a wild life going through many men until she had five marriages. To her townspeople she was just a sinful immoral woman, going too far. No one even tried to understand her. Even she could not understand about herself. But Jesus understood her and her problem that she was thirsty for true love. Jesus understood that she was longing for the true object of her love and worship, but messed up with husband problem, because she was looking for one among men. She was not hurt or felt offended, talking with Jesus, but opened her heart more and more to him. Finally Jesus revealed himself to her, “I who speaks to you, am he.” When she received Jesus as her true object of love, the living water overflowed from within her. Jesus’ deep understanding and counsel healed her sick soul, and changed her to be a passionate gospel worker to all her village people.

There was also a man of standing, firmly established with a high position, great learning, wealth, fame and religious zeal. He was the object of envy to all people. But his heart was dark. No one could imagine how such a successful man felt in his deep heart, let alone trying to counsel him. But Jesus understood him exactly, and counseled unambiguously, “You must be born again to see the kingdom of God.” Finally the man could find true hope of mortal mankind at the death of Jesus on the cross.

I was a fatalistic and fearful young man ruled by a spirit of timidity. My voice was like a mosquito sound, far from speaking out clearly and confidently before the audience like this. But Jesus counselled me with his words of truth, and healed me, driving out the spirit of timidity with his power. It is truly Jesus himself who has enabled me to stand before God and before people without fear as you all see. I know a woman who suffered with a depression problem in her youth. But Jesus counselled, healed and lifted her up to be a wonderful missionary. I also know a young man who was lost in his immoral life style. Jesus has counselled and restored him to grow as a sincere disciple of Jesus. I do not have time to tell about all the people Jesus counselled and restored. Jesus counsels with God’s words of truth. Jesus heals and restores with his mighty power. The greatest power was displayed when he through the Spirit of holiness was raised from the dead defeating the power of sin and death, and thus declared to be the Son of God. We thank and praise Jesus for raising M. Tim Park with his resurrection power from his near death situation with leukemia.

Look at verses 2b. “the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” Here, the Spirit of the fear of the LORD means the Spirit of deep love for God and obedience to him. With the Spirit of the fear of the LORD, Jesus prayed at Gethsemane, “Father, take this cup from me, Yet not what I will, but what you will.” and obeyed God the Father to the point of death on the cross. Also, with the Spirit of the fear of the LORD, Jesus taught his disciples to fear God only. Verse 3 says, “and he delights in the fear of the LORD.” It is amazing to note that fearing God was Jesus’ joy.

As we have studied, the Spirit of the LORD was the very nature of Jesus’ person and the source of power to carry out his messianic work.

Now, verses 3b-4 describes Jesus’ ministry, mainly about his judging ministry. Here judging means administering righteousness and justice. Look at verse 3. “He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.” What people see and hear are important as evidences in making judgment. Yet, when people depend on just by what they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, there is still possibility to make a wrong judgment. But Jesus’ judgment or decision is not based on those physical senses. He, who is full of the Spirit, knows all about man, in and out—his heart and thought. He is not deceived by the duplicity of any man (Lk 20:23). Above all, he never fails to see one’s inner motive, and never fails to hear one’s inner cry. The Supreme Court decision may distort the truth and dismay people. But Jesus’ judgment is faultless and prefect.

Look at verse 4. “but with righteousness he will judge the needy; with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.” Jesus judges to defend and protect the needy and the poor with righteousness and justice, while he judges and punishes the wicked. Here the needy and the poor mean more than physical sense. They are spiritually needy and poor hearted people. Also, the wicked are not just in moral sense, but the proud rejecting God. To do his ministry of justice, he doesn’t need any jurisdiction system, nor any police or military power. His word itself is the sword of judgment. He will strike the earth and slay the wicked with the power of his word.

Look at verse 5. “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” This is a very meaningful description Righteousness and faithfulness belong to Jesus. Jesus, the person, is righteousness. He is full of righteousness. As we studied, his judgment is righteous. The wicked and the evil cannot stand before him. But the question is, “Who can stand before his righteous judgment, since according the Bible there is no one righteous, not even one?” (Ro 3:10) But he is faithful as well as righteous. He is faithful especially in his love. Jesus in his faithful love bore our sins and God’s righteous judgment and died on the cross in our places as the Lamb of God. He cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When a young man was touched by the message of Jesus’ crucifixion, his spiritual eyes were opened to see himself and cried out, “I killed Jesus.” Indeed, you and I killed righteous Jesus on the cross because of our sins and unrighteousness. But he endured the cross for us in his faithful love. In such a way, he became our righteousness before the holy God. That’s the climax of his messianic ministry. We need to be clothed with his righteousness as our belt by faith. And in this grace of his righteousness we can dwell in his faithful, and unfailing love. His love never fails; he is the same yesterday, today and forever. What a marvelous work of God through a shoot from the stump of Jesse who became the Lamb of God!

**Second, Jesus’ kingdom of peace (6-10).**  In verse 5, we thought of Jesus’ righteousness and faithfulness. And according to Isaiah 32:17, “The fruit of righteousness will be peace…” Because of sin, man became enemies of God and had no peace with God. That is why there is no true peace in man’s heart and in this world. But Isaiah 53:5 says, “He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him; by his wounds we are healed.” Jesus brought us peace with God through the punishment he received. At the time of Jesus’ birth, a great company of angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests” (Lk 2:14). According to Isaiah 9:6, he is called the Prince of Peace. And when Jesus entered into Jerusalem in the Passion Week riding on a donkey’s colt, the whole crowd of disciples praised God in loud voices, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Lk 19:38). This revealed Jesus as the King of peace. Let’s see his kingdom of peace.

Look at verses 6-7: “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.” Wow! How do you feel when you read this passage? It describes the kingdom of perfect peace, the kingdom of the Messiah, Jesus. The wolf, the leopard, the lion, and the bear represent the predators, while the lamb, the goat and the calf are the prey. This world is full of conflicts. Nowadays, people are afraid of terrorists’ attacks or gun-shooting. I heard that Toronto is also on the list of their potential attack. Where is a safe zone on the earth? But in Jesus’ kingdom, there will be perfect peace. For the beasts such as the lion will eat straw like the ox. The lion we know now can neither chew nor digest straw like the ox. But the lion in his kingdom eats straw like the ox. It implies the complete change of the lion, becoming a new creature. Indeed, when God created the lion as well as all the beasts, all of them just ate the grass. Therefore, there was no killing or blood shedding in the Garden of Eden. It was the Paradise, the kingdom of the perfect peace. But because of man’s fall, the Paradise was lost, and the world became a battle ground, the place of the survival of the fittest and strongest. But in his kingdom, each creature will be restored into the original state, thus there will be the complete restoration of peace. All people, even those who are like wolf, leopard or lion, will be restored as pure and innocent children of God through Jesus. Look at verses 8 and 9a. “The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.” This describes there will be no evil, no existence of Satan in his kingdom. In the Garden of Eden the devil came in the personified form of a serpent. But there will be no such a thing in the restored paradise. Do you like this kingdom, and hope to be there?

Then, how can this be possible for each of us? Look at verse 9b: “for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” We learn that the key to this kingdom is the knowledge of the LORD. What does it mean? The knowledge of the LORD does not mean just knowing information about Jesus. It means to know him personally. Jesus said in John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” When we repent and believe his gospel and accept his love personally, we come to know him and become a new creature. Then his kingdom of peace starts in our hearts. Nowadays, peace is world-wide issue. But it is ironic that our secular education system tries hard to remove the knowledge of God from students, even from kindergarten children in all possible ways. As a result, young people are going farther and farther from knowing God, while all other information and knowledge cover the world as the waters cover the sea. However, the true world peace cannot be achieved by the pursuit of G20 or gun-control or any other solutions. We must not forget that the key for the perfect kingdom of peace is the knowledge of the LORD. Therefore, we must go back to the Bible, and hold firmly to the gospel truth. We may grow in the knowledge of the LORD personally, and also spread it in season or out of season, until the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. There is no other way of restoration, personally as well as world-wide. That’s our only and true hope in Jesus Christ, and for his perfect kingdom.

Look at verse 10. “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples, the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.” We cannot see root. But a banner is visible to people. The Root of Jesse hidden and will be visible to all people of the earth. He will stand as a banner for the whole world. I have a colleague named Mohammed. As a Moslem, he prayed to Allah five times a day with his many life problems in his youth. He could not get the answers of his prayer from Allah. Then he heard of Jesus and began to pray to God in Jesus’ name. To his surprise he could experience the answer of his prayer one by one. More than anything, he tasted deep peace when he looked at Jesus on the cross. He became a Christian. When I met him in my workplace, he was full of joy and peace. After hearing his story, I asked him, “Why don’t you change your name to Christian name?” He said, “I want to keep my name Mohamed, for it is my testimony that Mohamed is a Christian.” In Christ Jesus there is no Moslem, no communist, no capitalist, no democrat as Paul said, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythians (uncivilized), slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Col 3:11). In that day, all people of the nations will rally to Jesus and find true rest and peace in him, and become one in him. Thus his kingdom will be glorious. Since Jesus was born as a shoot from the stump of Jesse, this kingdom began and will be completed when he comes again.

We thank and praise God for the birth of Jesus as a shoot from the stump of Jesse but full of the Spirit of the LORD. In his righteousness and faithfulness, he became the Lamb of God and made us righteous. Thus he brought us his peace and his kingdom of peace. May Jesus be born into each of your hearts newly at this Christmas and fill you with his peace and hope for his glorious kingdom. May we live with uncompromising faith and steadfast hope in him until he comes again and stands as a banner for the whole world! May we grow in the knowledge of the LORD continuously in the New Year!

Joshua Lee