

Prayers

Opening prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, save us from the sin of believing that if we are constantly doing things then you must be pleased with us. Draw us to one side and speak to us, Spirit to spirit. Show us what love really means, tell us again the truth about our salvation, and reveal to us both the sinfulness of humanity and the wondrous love of the Father. Restore our souls in the peace of your presence so that we may indeed serve You, and You alone. We praise You, Lord Jesus, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: COMPASSION

1. For yourself

Think about what it means to be someone in need of compassion, and prayerfully resolve to be compassionate towards others

2. For your friends and family

Pray about any situations that require you to act with compassion, and pray that you will always have the right attitude towards your friends and family

3. For the church and its work

Pray for any church meeting coming up; pray that God's people will be able to deal with business in a compassionate manner

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for those who govern your country, and pray that they will show compassion to those in need within your society and culture

Meditation

Almighty Father and Lord of all:

Stand guard over the words of our lips;
that we might speak the truth we know
and declare the Good News of Christ.

Stand guard over the thoughts of our minds;
that we might have a true discernment
to both know and do what is right.

Stand guard over the work of our hands;
that we might tear down Satan's empires
and build up the Kingdom of God.

Stand guard over the seeing of our eyes;
that we might turn from sin's temptations
and delight in the wonders of creation.

Stand guard over the direction of our feet;
that we might not wander away from truth
but walk in the footsteps of our Lord.

Almighty Father and Lord of all:

Stand guard over us, protect us now
So we may prove victory of our faith.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Isaiah 10:33-11:10

- ³³ Behold, the Lord GOD of hosts
will remove branches with awesome skill;
the tallest trees will be cut down,
and the lofty will be brought low.
- ³⁴ He will fell the thickets of the forest with an axe,
and Lebanon's majestic trees will fall.
- ^{11:1} A shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
- ² And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
- ³ His delight will be in the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear,
- ⁴ but he will judge the poor
with righteousness,
and give fair justice
to the poor of the earth;
He will strike the ruthless
with the rod of his mouth,
and he will kill the wicked
with the breath of his lips.
- ⁵ Righteousness will be a belt round his waist,
with faithfulness strapped around his thigh.
- ⁶ Wolf will live with lamb,
and leopard will rest with goat;
calf, lion and yearling together,
all of them led by a little child.
- ⁷ Cow will feed with bear,
their young will rest together;
Lion will eat straw like ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play by the cobra's hole,
and on the viper's nest
the young child will place its hand.
- ⁹ They will do no harm
They will not destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.
- ¹⁰ On that day, the 'Root of Jesse'
Will stand as a signal to the peoples
The Gentiles will seek Him out,
And His dwelling will be glory!

Review

This is a most wonderful passage of Isaiah. His powerful and inspirational prophecy is the third in a sequence of prophecies revealing God's desire to save his people. Earlier, Isaiah had said '*a young woman will conceive and bear a child ... called Immanuel*' (7:14), next, he prophesied that the child would be the king of God's people with royal gifts and power; '*a child has been born ... and he will be named Wonderful Counsellor ...*' (9:6,7). Now thirdly, Isaiah prophesies that this child of God will resurrect the rule of David

amongst His people and by means of the Spirit (11:2), rule in justice and peace, to herald a completely new creation!

Isaiah's prophecy in this text of the coming of the Spirit (11:2), the anointing of a new king 'from the stump of Jesse' (11:1) with characteristics of spiritual renewal (11:2), justice (11:3f.) and a new age of peace (11:6-10) are essential within the Bible. They bring together all that God has revealed to Isaiah so far and take a further massive step towards describing how God will deal with His sinful people, Israel, and bring them under the authority of His reign. At the beginning of our passage we find the same dire picture of advancing chaos and destruction (10:33f.) that we agonised over in yesterday's study, and suddenly we find that God acts with power and majesty to do this great new work with completely unforeseen consequences. Out of the 'remnant' of destruction, God finds sufficient to bring about renewal!

It is only now that we find out why we have had to endure more than a chapter's worth of agonising prophecies. We started chapter 10 reading about the advance of Assyria, coming to invade Israel and Jerusalem at God's behest, acting in judgement against the sins of the people, their injustice and religious apostasy. Then, we found that Isaiah's prophecy no longer described Assyria, but God. It was He who 'chopped down' the majestic trees of Lebanon in the manner of a mighty army (10:18,19). Assyria, like all nations, was only a tool in the Lord's hands; God was working through the apparently natural events of history to do His will, to judge His people so that He could begin His work of renewal. Once we see our way through the chock of Isaiah's frank analysis of history, we find his beautiful prophecies of God's work.

Sceptics suggest that the prophets spoke only about what they knew and with no knowledge of the future; for example, that Isaiah's words about the coming judgement of Israel were no more than what could have been said by any interested observer. However, no one else said these things, at least, no one who had the same influence as Isaiah to bring a message to God's people as a whole. The role of the prophet has always been to make known what others may think in private but are not empowered to proclaim, nor have the eloquence of the Spirit to touch the hearts of others.

Isaiah speaks here as a true visionary under the inspiration of God's Spirit. He reveals that God will raise 'a shoot from the stump of Jesse', in other words, a new King of God's people will come from the same stock as King David (see 1 Sam 16:1f.). The extraordinary feature of this prophecy is that Isaiah describes this King as full of the 'Spirit of the Lord', and doing the works of God on earth by His Spirit (11:2)! He represents God so completely that He will act with complete justice (11:3,4), wrapped around and completely identified with righteousness and faithfulness (11:5). But if this is not enough; Isaiah takes us yet higher, to the vision of an eternal reign in which the extraordinary brutality of the created world is absent! Animals and children, usually dangerous to each other will eat, will rest and play together, even a baby with a viper (11:8)! On God's Holy Mountain, says Isaiah, destruction will come to an end and God's rule will one day begin, and all will be drawn to Him (11:9,10)! Isaiah shows us a glimpse of God's glorious New Creation!

Going Deeper

Looking at its details, this prophecy gives us a list of the workings of God's Spirit (11:2), a description of complete justice (11:3-5) and a vision of glory (11:6-10), and it is no wonder that this passage has had much attention over the years from the Christian community. Today, our further study will explore these features of the text more fully.

Notes on the text and translation

10:33 Most translations begin 'the Lord God of hosts will lop off boughs with terrifying power ...' However, the Hebrew words are obscure. There is some evidence that the Hebrew verb in this sentence (usually 'lop off') does in fact refer to the actions of a tree surgeon who decides which branches to cut and which to leave using great skill; hence my translation.

10:34 The Hebrew phrase '... with an iron' is interpreted by most translators, with good reason, to be '... with an axe.'

10:34 The last part of this verse is awkward in Hebrew and some translations have 'and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic one'. Here, majesty really refers to the majesty of Lebanon's forests, hence my translation 'Lebanon's majestic trees will fall.'

11:2 The Hebrew text says 'a spirit of wisdom ...' rather than 'the Spirit of wisdom' However, the general sense of the verse is specific, so we believe that the word for 'spirit' is in fact used like a formal name, which is quite remarkable. For this reason, the translation says 'the Spirit ...'

11:4 You may be used to the phrase 'he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth', but there is good reason to think that the Hebrew word here, whilst literally meaning 'earth', could be mistaken for a word

for 'someone ruthless', and I have chosen to accept this because it makes sense in the verse and is parallel to the last line which refers to the slaying of the wicked.

11:6 You will be used to this verse written like this; 'the wolf will live with the lamb ...' However, there is no definite article in the Hebrew, and it is just as impressive a passage if you leave out the article, as in the Hebrew – it is just a matter of getting used to it!

11:10 Many translations separate this verse from the previous words, but these words complete the poem which began with the root from the stump of Jesse.

The Spirit, and a root from the stump of Jesse

Isaiah had already been given a word from the Lord about a 'stump' (6:13) on the occasion of his call and he asked the Lord to explain what he had to say. What the Lord showed him then was a picture of trees cut down and burned after God had completed His judgement on His people. This probably explains why Isaiah described God's coming to judge the earth as like the lopping down of trees (10:33,34 see also 10:18,19), but when the Lord called Isaiah and gave this vision, He added the enigmatic words; 'the Holy Seed is the stump' (6:13). So, when we put together all the prophecies Isaiah was given about how God would save His people, we can now see how they all combine to give a powerful description of God's choice of a child who would one day save His people. The 'Holy seed' (6:13 – meaning 'holy descendant'), the child 'Immanuel' (7:14), the 'child to be born to be King' (9:6) and now the 'shoot from the stump of Jesse' (11:1 – meaning a descendant of David)! Isaiah did not call this person 'the Messiah', but within a generation or two people certainly did, and all of these prophecies of Isaiah soon came to be regarded as part of the revelation of God's coming Messiah. The plan of God's salvation, no less, was being revealed to Isaiah!

Two key characteristics of the Messiah are revealed in this prophecy. Firstly, he would be a descendant of David. This revelation linked God's saving plan into the ancient covenant passed on from Abraham (Gen 12:2,3 etc.) through to Moses (Ex 19:5, 13:32 etc.) to Joshua (Josh 9:16, 23:16 etc.) and thence to David (2 Sam 7), the man God used to found the first Kingdom of God's people on earth. From his descendants would come one who would found a new Kingdom of God on earth and in heaven!

The second characteristic of the Messiah was that he would be filled with the Spirit of God, identified here in a unique way as possessing the qualities of 'wisdom', 'understanding', 'counsel', 'might', 'knowledge' and 'the fear of the Lord'. It is tempting to list these alongside the great 'gifts of the Spirit' found in Romans 12:6f., 1 Corinthians 12:4f., and Ephesians 4:11f., but although there is some overlap with these well known gifts, we should really think of these particular spiritual gifts as belonging together uniquely to the Messiah, to Jesus. Jesus taught with profound wisdom, yet understood people with great compassion; He gave firm and wise advice (counsel) and acted in power (might) to heal and deliver people; He displayed a comprehensive knowledge of His Father and acted in complete obedience to His will ('fear of the Lord'). Isaiah could not have seen how these qualities would come together, but by prophetic utterance, he was used by God to pass on to us this deeply spiritual understanding of the nature of the Saviour!

Justice and a New Creation!

It is remarkable that Isaiah went further than this incredible prophecy, but we should be extremely grateful that he did! Firstly, Isaiah homed in on the one essential feature of the Messiah; he would be scrupulously just (11:3-5). The vision Isaiah has given us is clear; true justice belongs to the spiritual realm of God's moral law, and it is not relative to what people see around them. God has fixed the moral code of the universe before civilisation, and contrary to popular opinion today, it is not a matter of human experience, or of what we see or hear (11:3), so God will therefore always be impartial. However, having set this foundation stone, the vision goes on to talk about the kind of justice always required by people in practice, from ancient times to today; justice which is 'fair', in particular for the poor (11:4). Remember, Isaiah's first prophecies had expressed his shock at injustice amongst God's people (1:12,13).

For some reason which is not clear in the prophecy, this talk about justice led Isaiah straight into a stupendous vision of a future in which God ruled in justice and authority. God led Isaiah to visionary places no-one before had been, and the result is an amazing piece of prophetic literature, beautiful and powerful, utterly beyond our time and completely impossible for this world. Isaiah saw something of what Paul saw eight hundred years later when he was transported in a rapturous vision (2 Cor 12:2,3), and the apostle John saw when he described his vision of the coming Kingdom of God (Revelation 21:1f.). The one feature of this Kingdom which separates it from all we experience in this world is that it is a peaceful place. In his vision, Isaiah described things we know; animals, children, eating, resting, and yet they all lived together in total peace. Emphatically, Isaiah spoke of his conclusions; 'they will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain'. That is true peace in the Kingdom of God!

Finally, in a prophetic statement which few have realised is an essential prophecy of God's mission to the whole world, Isaiah declared that when the 'Root of Jesse' (the Messiah) came, the Gentiles would 'seek Him out!' (11:10). How Isaiah could have had the boldness to prophesy this eight hundred years before the

time of Jesus is astonishing. No-one since the time of Abraham had shown any interest in what God would do with the whole world, and the history of Israel was largely introspective. As we will increasingly find out, the prophecies of Isaiah changed that perspective dramatically. Isaiah showed that God used foreign nations and powers to do His will, and He intended to bring His salvation and justice to all nations as well as His own chosen people!

Discipleship

Application

It is wise to use this passage of scripture with understanding. The incredible revelation of the Spirit of God at work in the Messiah is stunning in itself; you could say that this anticipates the baptism of Christ! Isaiah certainly had a glimpse into the very heart of God's purposes, seeing both the Son (as the child he prophesied about) and also the Spirit. There are few other places where you could say that the Old Testament examples the Trinity! As I have suggested above, the characteristics of the Spirit in this passage are best interpreted as the special gifts of Jesus, but this does not mean that they are not relevant to us today, for we are the 'Body of Christ' in the world, commissioned to do His work, and therefore intended to display these characteristics. Not, as I have indicated, as some personal gift, but as gifts of His Body, the Church; together, this is what we should aspire to demonstrate as God's people.

There are many things within this passage which may catch your eye, but there is one which I suggest warrants our serious consideration. People often ask 'what will heaven be like?' They may sometimes find it hard to envision the future Kingdom of God. But there is plenty of evidence in the New Testament to support what Isaiah says here, which is that God's complete and New Kingdom of Heaven which will come when Christ comes in Glory, will be like what we experience now, but everything will live together 'in peace'. We know that biologically, everything that lives does so because something else dies; that is a fact of science which characterises this world. The miracle of God's re-creation will be that the world will exist not on the basis of death but of life, and especially, 'peace'. We cannot work out how that can be because we do not have any way to understand this; that is why it is a miracle. However, it is one which fills my heart with joy and keen anticipation! Our Lord God has planned a home for us in heaven which is glorious!

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group what we can we learn about Jesus from this passage of scripture.
2. Do the descriptions of justice in this passage tell you all you would like to hear about true justice, or do you think there should be more?
3. How helpful do you find it to think of the future Kingdom of God as described in this passage?

Discipleship challenges

- *Make a list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit you believe God has granted to you. Do any of them resemble the work of the Spirit in this passage? If so, how, and how do these gifts connect with the well known gifts described by Paul in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4?*
- *Go for a walk and spend time thinking about the vision of God's glory in this text. In addition, take time to pray and ask the Lord to establish justice in your land.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, save us from becoming so wrapped up with ourselves that we do not give time to You or to listen to You. Bless us with a heart which longs to hear Your voice and do Your will, so that in the security of Your love we may become effective servants in Your Kingdom. AMEN
