

Foretold

THE RIGHTEOUS BRANCH

PART 1

The Ruling and Reigning King

READ ISAIAH 11:1-10

INTRODUCTION

In the Old Testament we often see Jesus being prophesied in the allegorical image of a branch. The branch is always raised up from the Rod of Jesse and oftentimes will be described in great detail. We see no difference in these verses regarding the branch that will be sprouted out of Jesse. We see that the Branch will have the Spirit of the Lord resting upon Him. (Luke 3:22, John 1:32) These verses directly fulfill this particular part of the prophecy concerning Jesus.

Jesus, in the days of His Kingdom, will reign with all righteousness and truth. There will be no quarrels and no strife. He is God from before time began. He does not judge by hearing testimony or witnesses. He judges by that thorough, total knowledge that He has of each of us. The Bible says that “everything is naked and revealed before Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13). You can’t hide or cover a thing when you stand before the Lord. He looks right through you and He sees everything. In the book of Revelation we see that Jesus will rule with His Word and in righteousness He will judge. This shows us that He is the Ruler of all and that He will reign supreme throughout all eternity.

We do not see the world as God created it. We see the distorted, sinful world that lives after the desires of its own flesh. When we are praying to God that His will be done (Matthew 6:10) we are praying that His Kingdom be brought and that we would see His intentions realized. Our will no longer plays a part in anything but is put away, crucified, and we are to desire the things of God. He is the Branch that will spring from the root of Jesse and will rule over the world in a perfect Kingdom dedicated to Him and His glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There are many passages in the Old Testament that mention Jesus Christ coming as a “Branch”. Why do you think God uses this image? What are some of the other ways the Old Testament describes Jesus?
2. Read Luke 3:22 and John 1:32. Why is it significant that the Spirit descended on Jesus? What did the Spirit coming upon Him imply? If it was important for Jesus to have the Spirit, do you think that it is important for us to ask for His Holy Spirit? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the things that we can look forward to when Jesus is the ruler of this world? What aspect of that Kingdom appeals to you the most? Why?
4. What does it mean to “judge by righteousness”? Why do you think it is important that Jesus doesn’t judge by what He sees or hears?
5. Do you truly pray for God’s will to be done? What does that mean to you? How can you change your thinking to be more aligned with His will and not your own? What are some practical ways to start living for the will of God here and now?

WRAP UP

Jesus came in the form of an innocent child. He was raised in a rough world and lived a perfect life. He died and rose again on the third day. We are forgiven of our sins and saved if we confess and repent. That being said, Jesus is coming again to rule this world. He will be a righteous judge in that time and will not allow sin any longer. It is important that we are seen through the redemptive blood of Jesus and not turned away due to our sinful lives.

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COMFORT MY PEOPLE

PART 2

The Shepherd's Rod

ISAIAH 40:1-11 AND PSALM 23

INTRODUCTION

It is common language to refer to Jesus as a Shepherd in the Christian world. We also use the same type of language with Pastors and Elders (in these cases we call them “undershepherds”). In our modern world the word “shepherd” is hard to define as most of us have never been around one, much less studied them or their habits. Even if you do know something of modern shepherding, it looks quite different today than it did when these passages were written. Shepherds were not put in place just to watch sheep eat all day and sleep under the stars at night. They were much more than that.

A shepherd's job was to protect the sheep from wolves, bears and the elements. Many threats come out of the wilderness and the sheep have no way of protecting themselves. Jesus Christ does the same thing for us. He protects us from the enemy and the attacks that he brings. He shows us where to lay down and causes us to rest. There are times that we willingly head into a dangerous area and Jesus will chase us down and lead us back to safety. (Pastors and elders are charged to do the same) Psalm 23:4 is a very interesting verse when we look at it more closely.

Most of us are familiar with the fact that Jesus leads us through valleys of shadow and death. What may be news to us is that His rod and staff are to be a comfort. Again, shepherds carry these long staffs for a few reasons. Yes, they are for fending off the enemy and we should take comfort in that. But, they are meant for more. They carry those staffs to whack the sheep in the direction they want them to go. They also make the sheep rest. How? If there is a sheep that runs off and gets lost regularly, they will take their staff and break the leg of that sheep so that it can't run away anymore. After the leg is broken, they will set the leg and put the sheep around their neck and carry it for the healing process. It gives a whole new meaning to the phrase, “He causes me to lie down in green pastures.” Our Savior, Jesus Christ, will cause us to rest and lie down. Sometimes our Pastors and elders can do the same. It is not something to be resented but something to help us understand how much He cares for us. He is our comfort.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep mirror our relationship to Jesus? What about our relationship to the leaders of the church? How can we be better sheep?
2. What are some of the descriptions you use to describe God? Jesus? How do shepherds and Jesus blend? What are some of the characteristics that are not obvious at first glance?
3. When is a time that you have felt like Jesus was protecting you with His staff? How does it make you feel knowing that the God of the universe is protecting you from all enemies?
4. Knowing that there are “undershepherds” within the church, how does that change how you view your pastor or leaders in general? Does it change how we should pray for them? How can we help them with their tasks?
5. Have you ever run away from God to the point of Him needing to “break your leg”? What did you learn from that experience? How does that memory comfort you now? What does it mean to be comforted by God?

WRAP UP

Having a Biblical view of who God is so important to our Christian walk. He has placed Jesus Christ over us as our True Shepherd and church leaders as undershepherds. Sometimes, we want to fight the system and run away but He will not let us go far before He places us around His neck to enjoy His rest and comfort. He feeds us, takes care of us and watches over us. We truly have a God that loves us more than we could ever imagine.

Foretold

OUT OF BETHLEHEM

PART 3

God's Ways are not Our Ways

READ ISAIAH 55:8-9 AND MICAH 5:1-5

INTRODUCTION

In regards to Jesus, God chose to fulfill His will through some strange occurrences. Jesus, who is God, was not to come to the earth on a flaming steed wielding a sharp sword (not the first time anyway). He was going to be born. He became human and started off as a baby. In Luke chapter 2 we can see how Jesus wasn't even given the opportunity to be born in a house or room, let alone a hospital but He was born in a manger. Somewhere that animals eat and sleep. God also did not choose a "Mecca" where the Savior of the entire world would be born but, rather, a small, unknown town in Judah.

In Isaiah we read that God doesn't do things the way that we expect Him to do them. He is not bound by our minds and is not required to make sense to us. Oftentimes, God will choose the opposite of what makes sense just to show that He is God and can work without limitations. This small town in Bethlehem was to be the place that the Messiah would be born and come out of. He would use that town to change the world and does similar things in our own personal lives. We just have to be willing to be used by Him.

When God chooses to use someone, He is not choosing them because of their greatness or ability but because of their willingness to be used by Him. He does not look at our human abilities but our heart attitudes. When we desire to see Him work in and through us, we will humble ourselves and come to the understanding that without Him, we can do nothing good. (Romans 3:10) Once we have done this, then God can do miraculous things with the least of these. That goes contrary to how we would perform tasks though. We go for the strongest, brightest, most well put together people to be on stage or influencing others. That is because we do not see the heart of man, only their outward appearance. We have to understand that God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Knowing that God's ways are not our ways, why do you think that God chose a small town like Bethlehem to have Jesus be born? Was there more purpose than just needing a small town? (Hint: think about King David).
2. Can you think of a time that God has done something in you or through you that goes contrary to common sense? Describe how that felt and how you reacted to it.
3. Is humility something that we should make a regular, active practice in our daily walk with Jesus? Why?
4. Read Romans 3:10. Why was it necessary that Jesus came as a human? Why did He need to come in a humble manner and not just come to destroy and make pure?
5. Is it comforting or scary that God does not have the same way of doing things as humans? Why or why not?

WRAP UP

This world has been designed with one purpose and that is to give God the glory. Jesus had to come in order for anyone to be able to commune with the Father. He chose to come in meekness and not with trumpets sounding the first time. That was the first time. When He comes again, it will be with the trumpets blaring and the sword will be unsheathed. That day is a glorious day because we will see our Savior in all of His glory, ending sin in the world for good.

Foretold

IMMANUEL: GOD WITH US

PART 4

GOD WITH US

READ ISAIAH 7:14 AND MATTHEW 1:23

INTRODUCTION

Names are so important to us. We feel connected and valued when others know and remember our name. Names can also tell us something about the significance in the events surrounding the naming. In the Bible, the meaning behind names are of huge importance. The name Immanuel (im-ma-nu-AIL) first appears in Isaiah 7:14 as part of a prophetic word that Isaiah spoke to King Ahaz of Judah (the southern kingdom) at a time when Syria and Israel (the northern kingdom) had formed a coalition against Assyria, the region's greatest power. They wanted Judah to join their uprising. The prophet Isaiah counseled Ahaz to trust in the Lord rather than to appeal to Assyria for help against Syria and Israel, who were threatening to invade Judah for refusing to join them. Then he invited Ahaz to ask the Lord for a sign to confirm the prophetic word, but the unfaithful king refused, having already decided to place his trust not in the Lord but in Assyria. In response to Ahaz's refusal to trust God, Isaiah proclaimed:

Isaiah 7:13-14

13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Shortly after that Syria and Israel were soundly defeated, exactly as Isaiah had prophesied. Many years later the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by Babylon, its people taken captive.

Matthew's Gospel recalls Isaiah's prophecy, applying it to the child who would be born of Mary. The sign given hundreds of years earlier to a renegade king was meant for all God's people. In Jesus, God would act in a unique way, becoming a man to save the world not from the outside, but from the inside. Immanuel,

God with us, to rescue, redeem, and restore our relationship with Him. The truth of Christ's presence with us is so important that Matthew begins and ends his Gospel with the promises that God is with us.

Matthew 28:20

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does this title of Jesus reveal about His nature?
2. How have you experienced Immanuel — God being with you, in your life?
3. Read Matthew 1:23 and Matthew 28:20. Why do you think Matthew placed “God with us” as bookends to his gospel account?
4. How would your life be different if you began and ended each day with the firm belief that God is with you?
5. We believe that we are to be like Jesus. How can you be more like Jesus in the relationships you have in your life?

WRAP UP

More than a name, Emmanuel is a declaration of heaven meeting Earth: God with us in despair, struggle, and brokenness. At Christmas, God came to redeem people in need of a Savior and light the darkness with His love. As we remember and celebrate His coming, Jesus’ followers can live out His holy, loving presence into a broken world.