

**ISAIAH 11:1–10.** (EHV)

A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse,  
and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.  
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.  
He will be delighted with the fear of the LORD.  
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
nor will he render decisions based on what he hears with his ears,  
but with righteousness he will judge the poor,  
and he will render fair decisions in favor of the oppressed on the earth.  
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath from his lips he will put the wicked to death.  
Righteousness will be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his hips.  
The wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat,  
the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together,  
and a little child will lead them.  
The cow and the bear will graze together,  
and their young ones will lie down together.  
The lion will eat straw like the cattle.  
The nursing child will play near a cobra's hole,  
and the weaned child will put his hand into a viper's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD,  
as the waters cover the sea.

This is what will take place on that day. The peoples will seek the Root of Jesse, who will be standing like a banner for the peoples, and his resting place will be glorious.

Last week we heard about the mountain of the LORD, the holy Christian Church. We talked about the greatness of that mountain, how it goes beyond all the other religious mountains and hills on the face of the earth. All the other religious mountains are always in the process of being established on the sweat, blood, and works of those who dwell there. But Jesus's mountain, his Church, has already been established by his own sweat, work, and blood. No more work needs to be done. All those who dwell there are at peace with God and at peace with each other.

Today Isaiah focuses us more on the One who rules on this mountain. It is, after all, because of him that his mountain is so great. The One who rules on this mountain, Jesus, is a ruler beyond compare, a ruler beyond all other rulers, from every conceivable angle.

**1.**

Since we're working our way toward Christmas, let's work backwards in our text, so that we finish with its Christmas thoughts last.

“This is what will take place on that day. The peoples will seek the Root of Jesse, who will be standing like a banner for the peoples, and his resting place will be glorious.” The first thing that makes Jesus a ruler beyond compare is his entirely unique citizenry. The empire ruled by every other ruler is just that—one empire or one nation. No one has ever succeeded in ruling a mix of people from every nation and people on earth. There would simply be too much diversity and disagreement.

But Jesus does. Isaiah says his mountain has people on it from all the nations. And listen to how his citizens are described: “The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together, and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze together, and their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the cattle. The nursing child will play near a cobra’s hole, and the weaned child will put his hand into a viper’s den.”

Most of you have learned about the food chain at some point. There are predators and there are prey. There are hunters and there are the hunted. There are strong and there are weak, bold and timid. The one is out to attack, and the other is constantly on the defense. But there is no predator and prey here. All the animals live in peace.

As with many prophecies, there is both a *now* and a *not yet* aspect of this prophecy. As for the *not yet* aspect, this certainly is a beautiful description of the peace of heaven. You could even use these verses to prove that there will be animals in heaven, though they won’t be exactly the same as the animals here on earth. But the context makes clear that Isaiah is primarily describing the reality *right now* in the Christian Church of the New Testament.

These different animals remind us of the different mix of people on the earth. Historically humans have been categorized as having four temperaments—sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholy. The sanguine person has an optimistic and positive outlook on life. The phlegmatic is typically unemotional and even-keeled; he seems to have the same disposition in good times and bad. The choleric person is emotional; he has a short fuse and is easily irritated. And the melancholy person always seems to be sad, or at least never seems to be really happy.

Humans have also been described as having different types of personalities. For instance, there is Type A and Type B personality theory—Type A being high strung and aggressive, and Type B being more easygoing and laid back.

But all of these dispositions and types get along in the Christian Church. The members celebrate their differences and use them to the advantage of the Church. For instance, the Type A member is constantly leading people, especially the Type B members, to analyze what’s going on in the Church and to look for opportunities to introduce new ways to communicate the gospel that might connect with more people. The Type B helps the Type A to be cautious and realize that there might be nothing wrong with the current methods, and that maybe Type A just needs to take a chill pill.

The point is: They all rally around the same banner—Jesus. They all want to use their personalities and gifts in harmony with the personalities and gifts of others to glorify Christ and make his salvation known in the best possible way.

How can such different people get along? “The lion will eat straw like the cattle.” There was a time when lions actually did this—in the Garden of Eden. Well, I don’t know if lions actually ate straw, but they didn’t eat meat. Death was the wages of sin. Before sin, there was no

death, including the death of animals. Now, I don't know how exactly the fall into sin affected our bodies so that now we and many other animals actually *have* to eat meat, or get the nutrients that come from meat, in order to survive. But meat was not on any man or animal's menu before the fall into sin.

But how does Jesus portray life in his kingdom? "The lion will eat straw like the cattle." Since Jesus has removed sin by his death on the cross, that means that he has also removed its wages, death. That is why he could tell Martha, "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

The members of Jesus's kingdom, diverse as they are, work together for Jesus' glory because he removes their greatest problems—sin and death.

## 2.

Continuing backwards, the next thing we come across that makes Jesus a ruler beyond compare is his scepter. "He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, nor will he render decisions based on what he hears with his ears, but with righteousness he will judge the poor, and he will render fair decisions in favor of the oppressed on the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath from his lips he will put the wicked to death." Jesus's scepter, his instrument for ruling and governing, is his Word.

Because we can only judge people on the basis of evidence seen, heard, or otherwise encountered with the senses, there is always a margin of error in our justice system. Sometimes innocent people get convicted, or even worse, executed, and sometimes guilty people go free.

But that has never once happened on King Jesus's mountain. His word searches hearts, judges hearts, works on hearts, changes hearts, so that all his judgments are completely just. If someone has to leave the mountain, it is because God's word has exposed his unbelief. Sometimes it looks like someone should stay off the mountain, like many thought about Zacchaeus and other tax collectors, but God's word works faith in Jesus in their hearts, and so Jesus's blood covers over their sin. Sometimes people look like they should be on the mountain, like the Pharisees, but God's word uncovers their selfishness and hypocrisy.

There is no one who can sneak into the holy Christian Church, or accidentally get shut out. Everyone who is there should be there, because Jesus in his grace has brought them to his mountain by his Word. Everyone who is not there should not be there, because they have rejected the scepter of Jesus's word. They do not want his kind of justice. Those who are on his mountain when they die will go to his even greater mountain. Those who are not on his mountain when they die will go to the valley of burning. Everything is just and right.

Notice who in particular benefits from Jesus's justice. "With righteousness he will judge *the poor*, and he will render fair decisions in favor of *the oppressed* on the earth." On earth, the poor are the ones who tend not to get justice. We tend to give "justice" only to those from whom we can get something in return.

Jesus rules in such a perfectly fair way with his word that even the poorest can find justice with him. And they are the ones who need his justice—those who realize that they are spiritually wretched, poor, blind, and naked without him because of their sin. Jesus takes their punishment on himself and judges them on the basis of his own merit, not on the basis of theirs.

## 3.

Continuing to work backwards, we see that Jesus is a king beyond compare because of his incomparable gifts. “The Spirit 1) of the LORD will rest on him: the Spirit 2) of wisdom and 3) understanding, the Spirit 4) of counsel and 5) might, the Spirit 6) of knowledge and 7) the fear of the LORD. He will be delighted with the fear of the LORD.” In the first chapter of Revelation, John talks about the seven Spirits before God’s throne. He is not saying that there are seven Holy Spirits, but he is talking about the Holy Spirit as Isaiah describes him here, in a sevenfold way, in all of his glory and perfection.

Jesus has the full measure of the Holy Spirit in all his perfection. Just to cite a few examples, we see the Spirit of power on him when he casts out demons and calms the storm. We see the Spirit of wisdom on him when the Jewish leaders ask him whether they should pay taxes to Caesar or not, and he says, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Matt. 22:21). He knows what to do and how to rule in any and every situation, so that nothing he does can be second-guessed or questioned.

How can he be so perfect? “He will be delighted with the fear of the LORD.” The idea behind the Hebrew of this verse is actually that Jesus delights in the fear of the Lord by smelling it, and accepting it as a sweet-smelling fragrance offered up to himself. He can only accept the fear of the Lord as an offering to himself, if he himself is the Lord. And that is what he is.

The fear of the Lord is a twofold offering. Jesus himself said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). That’s God. We should fear God because he has the power and the right to throw us into hell.

But the Bible also talks about standing in awe of God—a kind of fear not motivated by his ability to punish, but by the knowledge that he won’t. This is the greatest fear of the Lord, the awe and respect we have for him because we trust that he will not punish us in hell, but give us what we do not deserve, heaven, because of his frighteningly awesome love for us. He demonstrated this love by sending his Son to live and die for us, and now to rule for our good.

Jesus certainly deserves our fear, since he is the Lord, since he rules with such unsurpassed gifts for our good.

#### 4.

Finally, we arrive at the beginning, where Isaiah points to this King’s humble beginnings.

Many people like to hear the story of Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln came from fairly humble beginnings. He was born in a one-room log cabin in Kentucky. His family later moved to Indiana, where Abe eventually took up his frontier working responsibilities. He basically taught himself by reading, and he was humble enough to give his father all his earnings until he turned twenty-one.

We like hearing about Abraham Lincoln’s humble beginnings, because it makes the fact that he became president of the United States, and everything he accomplished as president, such as abolishing slavery, that much more impressive.

Well, Jesus’s beginnings are even humbler. They are the humblest of all. “A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.” If you go to the genealogies in Matthew and Luke tracing Jesus’s ancestry back to Jesse, the father of David, the last name you might recognize is that of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, who was the governor of

Judah after the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon. Yet there are ten generations between Zerubbabel and Jesus, and all of those men are no-names. Jesus's family tree was a family stump by the time it got to Mary. There was nothing left of the glory of the royal blood of Jesse and his son David.

Yet out popped this little shoot, a slender branch, from this stump. Jesus's first crib was an animal's feedbox. The first to pay homage to him as King of the universe were humble shepherds. His earthly parents were regarded as depraved deceivers by many for insisting that Mary's child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by an illicit relationship. Not long after Jesus was born, his family had to flee with him for their lives. This Jesus, growing up from the most humble origins and a generally despised family, became the mightiest ruler of them all.

He is the mightiest, but since he had the humblest beginnings, he also has an incomparable attitude. The lowliest human can approach him. King Jesus will listen. He will understand. He will help.

Behold the beyond! Don't just behold the establishment beyond all the mountains, but also behold the king who made that establishment and rules that establishment, King Jesus. He is a king beyond compare, a king with the most unique citizenry, the most powerful scepter, the greatest gifts, and the most humble beginnings. That's the King whose birth you are preparing to celebrate. That's the King who rules your hearts by Word and sacrament now. That's the King whom you can't wait to meet when he comes again. Amen.