

“The Stump of Judgment?”—Isaiah 11:1-3

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Stump of Judgment?”, is Isaiah 11:1-3 → *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide disputes by what His ears hear.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Are you a “tree hugger?” A “tree hugger” is a person who sees the awesome beauty of trees and strives to protect them. Their sentiment may be expressed in this poem written by Joyce Kilmer entitled “Trees.”

I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree.

A tree who's hungry mouth is pressed
against the earth's flowering breast.

A tree that looks at God all day and lifts her leafy arms to pray.

A tree that may in summer wear a nest of robins in her hair.

Upon whose bosom snow has lain and intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.

Even with such a poetic picture of trees, I have to admit that's not what I think of when I look at trees. When I look at a tree I see a lot of leaves to rake up in the Fall—more work! When I see the beautiful robin's nest “in her hair” I see all the bird doo on my deck wondering if I'm going to be the next target! In fact, because of the mess these trees make, I don't feel much like a “tree hugger.” Instead, I'm ready to take out the chain saw and pronounce judgment!

Well . . . think about it a minute. Whenever you look at a stump what comes to your mind? Did somebody get irritated with the tree and cut it down? Did it have to be cut down because it contracted a disease? Was it causing damage to property and “the day of judgment” finally came? Either way, the stump is evidence of judgment.

Through the prophet Isaiah the LORD spoke about a stump in our text. Here *the stump* is a picture of both judgment and humility. It was very fitting that God should talk about His actions amongst His people with the picture of a *stump*.

He says that *a shoot . . . shall come forth . . . from the stump of Jesse*. In the context, the LORD had just declared judgment on the Assyrians who were enslaving God's people at this time and had almost wiped them out. Using the tree picture in Isaiah 10:33-34, the LORD promised to “cut down” the prideful

Assyrians by lopping *the boughs with terrifying power; the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One.* It's a picture of God's judgment on the Assyrians, whose country was known for its stately cedar trees in Lebanon. The *lofty* ones picture the kings who were oppressing God's people and upon whom God's judgment would fall.

John the Baptizer used this same picture in his preaching as he prepared people to meet Jesus. When the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to John as he was baptizing, he confronted them about their hypocrisy and lack of repentance. He used this same type of judgment language in Matthew 3:10 → *Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* Notice John used this picture of judgment in connection with the coming of God in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ and the judgment which would take place during His earthly ministry.

Our text refers to it as *the stump of Jesse*. Who's Jesse? Jesse represented humility. Despite the fact that his clan and his family were rather insignificant amongst God's people, God picked Jesse's son, David, to be the king of His people Israel. Reference to Jesse immediately connects us to King David.

During David's reign as king of Israel God promised him in 2 Samuel 7:16

→ *Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever.*

However, during the ministry of Isaiah almost 300 years after God made this promise to David, the northern kingdom of Israel ended with the fall of Samaria in about 722 BC. Then, in about 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah ceased as an independent kingdom with the fall of Jerusalem. God's people were no longer a self-governing nation with a king ruling over and guiding them. How were God's people to understand this promise to *established* David's kingdom *forever*, when all was falling apart?

The reference actually extended beyond the physical kingdom of Israel in the Promised Land. The LORD was referring to a kingdom that He would establish with His people extending into eternity!—*Your throne shall be established forever*. While reference to David would have been the more natural connection for people, referring to Jesse focused on Judah's place as a small tribe rather than on the fact that they were a royal tribe. You see, in the midst of God fulfilling His promise in a "stump" that looks dead—that has all the characteristics of judgment—He was going to bring about the humble birth of His Savior Who would live a humble life and would humble Himself to the point of death on a cross where He suffered God's judgment for your sin.

Yet, He was the King of kings!

The *stump* referred to in our text is also pictured as producing something which has hope and promise for the future. The *stump* can also represent new life instead of death. In verse 1 it says: *a Branch . . . from His roots . . . shall bear fruit*. This *Branch* is then spoken of as a person Whom God will send from Jesse's family line, upon Whom *the Spirit of the LORD shall rest*. He would be One through Whom God would work by the power of His Holy Spirit! It is a specific prophecy concerning the coming of Jesus Who rules by His grace in the hearts of believers by His Holy Spirit's power, working through the Means of Grace—the Word and Sacraments.

The Spirit reveals to us the knowledge of God—both His judgment upon our sin as well as His forgiveness through faith in Jesus. The Kingdom is established in you as the Spirit applies the work of Jesus to your hearts and lives, as stated by Paul in Ephesians 3:16-17, where he prayed that God would *grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*.

Even the humility of this *Branch* is seen by the humble surroundings into which Jesus was born. It is especially intriguing when you consider that Joseph and Mary were of the royal family to whom the promise had been given in the Old Testament Scriptures. It doesn't seem quite right that Jesus

was born in such humble surroundings and poor conditions. This too pictured the humiliation of this Servant-Savior as He accomplished the salvation of all people by taking upon Himself the judgment of our sin through His suffering, death and resurrection!

What do you think of when you see a stump? Do you see death and rotting? Or do you see hope? It's a good description of our own Christian lives. It's a description of how we understand our relationship to the LORD. In Jesus, what looked like a stump of judgment—what looked like a dead stump—was actually an object of hope, grace and new life!

Many people consider a relationship to the LORD as living under the constant guilt of God's Law with no hope. They are like a dead stump of judgment, feeling God's judgment upon their sin and its accompanying guilt constantly. They refuse to trust in Christ who removes the guilt of our sin. In the stump they constantly see death and not the prospect of new life.

Jesus came to make sure that you would have life by dying on the cross, a tree of judgment. In His resurrection from the dead you can have new life! You don't have to run from Him when convicted of your sins. Instead, you can bring those sins to Him with the prayer: "Lord Jesus, bring forth the shoot of new life—the power of Your forgiveness—in my life today! I want to live under Your grace and power!"

This judgment on sin happened many times through the earthly ministry of Jesus—a judgment of the heart, the “ax” at the root of all sin. Verse 3 of our text says: *He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide disputes by what His ears hear.* Jesus doesn’t need to judge by mere outward appearances because He can look directly into your heart and reveal its true nature. John 2:25 says Jesus *needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man.* He came to deal with the sinful heart by putting *the axe . . . to the root of the tree*, in order to make you see your sin and your need for Him so that you can be forgiven saints in repentance and faith!

The stump is not just a stump of judgment but a stump of new life and hope in Jesus Christ in His eternal peace and rest! It’s a peace and new life that you can experience only by **faith in the *Branch*, Jesus Christ!!** You can trust Him because it is He Who has taken the judgment of sin—your sin—upon Himself! By faith in this *Branch* you experience new life and not just judgment upon you because of your sin. You can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and look forward to this new life which He has given you now and which is yet to come! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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