“The Wolf Will Live with the Lamb,” Isaiah 11:1-11 (Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 22, 2024)

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. **2**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. **3**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, **4**but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. **5**Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

**6**The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. **7**The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. **8**The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. **9**They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

**10**In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. **11**In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

***“This is the Word of the Lord.” “Thanks be to God!”***

Many Americans look at the current political scene and feel hopeless. Surveys show that overwhelmingly Americans look at the candidates they must choose from in the coming election and say, “Is this the best our country can do?” And that’s not just true in the United States. In many countries, faith in government is at a low ebb.

We are tempted to think that we there once was a golden age for politics, that things used to be better. But if you read newspaper articles from thirty, or fifty, or hundred years ago or more you learn no one ever thought they were living in a golden age for government. The Presidential election of 1800, between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, is known as “America’s first ugly election,” and if you read some of the things Adams’ people said about Jefferson and vice versa, you’ll understand why. It will sound eerily familiar to the kind of politics practiced today.

Disappointment in those who old political office is as old as the offices themselves, but the rot isn’t confined only to the level of government. It’s not as if Congress is dysfunctional but our personal lives are just fine. No, we all have broken relationships that can’t seem to be reconciled, broken promises that let us down, and broken health that never mends.

But in our passage for today the prophet Isaiah writes about a golden age, not in the past, but in the days ahead. God gave him the ability to see, far into the future, the reign of a king. Isaiah didn’t know the name of the person about whom he prophesied, but we do. Isaiah had a glimpse of the future, and he saw the reign of Jesus Christ.

We know Isaiah’s talking about Jesus because in the New Testament Jesus is repeatedly referred to as the son of David (in fact, he’s called that in the first verse of the New Testament, Matthew 1:1) and David was the son of, or came from the stump of, his father Jesse, as we read in the first verse of Isaiah 11.

Isaiah writes about Jesus. We believe as Christians that Jesus Christ was a man born into the world about two thousand years ago, but he wasn’t only a man. He was also God. Fully man and at the same time fully God. No one can fully explain how God united the divine and human natures in Jesus, but that doesn’t mean it’s not true. To me, it’s obvious that when God gets involved in the world, he’ll do so in ways that aren’t entirely within our comprehension.

About two thousand years ago this man Jesus died for the sins of his people to reconcile them to their God, whom they had disobeyed, was buried, was raised from the dead, and then ascended into heaven in his resurrected human body. What Isaiah saw and what’s recorded in Isaiah 11 is what will happen in the future (both Isaiah’s and ours) when Jesus Christ returns to earth from heaven: he’ll establish his kingdom on earth as it already is in heaven.

I want to show you two things about that future kingship of Jesus Christ: *first, that Jesus is the perfect king.* *Second, that Jesus is the peaceful king.* I will be kind of teachy in the first part of the sermon, but I hope to bring it home with some application at the end, so hang in there.

First, Jesus is the perfect king. Isaiah tells us about some of the characteristics of Jesus and I think you’ll see that, if they are true of him, then he’s the kind of king that all of us (whether we self-consciously identify as Christian or not) would want to rule over us.

*First, Jesus is perfectly wise.* Few things are more discouraging than to have someone in leadership in an organization of any kind, whether it be a country, a business, a school, a church, or even a family, who can’t make a decision.

Have you ever worked with like that? With this kind of leader, you know you have to be the last person to meet with him before the decision was made, because whoever meets with them last will win. It’s no good meeting with him a week prior to decision time, and getting him to agree then, because someone else will come along and change his mind. This kind of leader has no convictions of his own. He constantly flip-flops because he doesn’t want to offend or is afraid of making a mistake.

Jesus is not like that. He’s not indecisive. Nor can he be deceived. “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear … ” Isaiah 11:3b.

It’s not just that Jesus is his own man and won’t get snowed by those around him. Rather, he will always make the right, the just decision, and *everyone around him will recognize that.* This text is saying that when Jesus is your king, even if he rules against you, against your interests, you will acknowledge that he’s right, because you will see it for yourself.

*Second, Jesus is no respecter of persons.* “[B]ut with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth …”. Isaiah 11:4a. Don’t read this as if Jesus will “judge the poor” in the sense that he will condemn them. What this verse means is that Jesus will judge *for* the needy, he will put things right and make life just for the poor.

No matter what type of work you do, it’s tempting to give extra, special attention to those who have money and power. It is all too easy to show favoritism to someone if you think they can write your business or your organization a big check, and in turn ignore those who can’t.

But not Jesus. Ephesians 6:9 says that there is “no partiality [or favoritism] with” Jesus. He’s not blinded by wealth and power. He sees past all that and treats everyone as special, important.

*Third, Jesus has perfect personal integrity.* “Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.” Isaiah 11:5.

In the language of the Old Testament, a “loincloth” is that piece of clothing worn closest to the body. We’d call it underwear. In other words, Isaiah is saying that if you strip away everything external to Jesus and get down to his very core, his essence, what will you find? ***Righteousness*** and ***faithfulness***. ***A man who can be always be trusted to keep his promises.***

*Fourth, Jesus has perfect authority.* I love the end of verse 4: “[A]nd he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.”

When the President of the United States gives an order in his position as the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and he unleashes the force of the military, powerful things can happen as a result. But the emphasis is on the word “can.” Just because the President gives an order doesn’t mean it will be obeyed, or obeyed effectively, or that the results of obedience will be what the President intended.

But verse four tells us that when Jesus speaks his words always accomplish their purpose. His speech is unlike any other. His words are like a rod striking the ground to cause an earthquake, his voice like a sword destroying his enemies. Jesus doesn’t give orders for someone else to do something; his words execute his plans, and by them his law and will are enforced.

The result of Jesus being the perfect king is that second, he is the peaceful king. Let’s read Isaiah 11:6-8: “**6**The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. **7**The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. **8**The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den.”

From these verses we can see several things about what will happen in the world when Jesus begins to reign “on earth as it is in heaven”: *first, he brings peace in nature*. Here we read that one day nature’s most relentless predators (wolves, leopards, lions, and bears) will exist peacefully with their natural prey (lambs, goats, calves, and cows).

What would happen if today you stick a wolf in a cage with a lamb? Will they cuddle up together and take a nap? No, the wolf will have veal cutlets for dinner. Predators will eat their pray; that’s the way nature works. But one day the leopard will take a nap with the goat.

Isaiah prophesies about snakes in verse 8. I don’t even like walking through tall grass with tennis shoes on. I want boots and snake guards. Therefore, I can’t imagine any sight more terrifying than seeing an infant playing near a cobra coiled to strike.

Yet when Jesus returns a rattlesnake will be a baby’s pet, because there will be no harm nor destruction on all his holy mountain.

Jesus will bring peace in nature when he returns, *and if that’s how Jesus will tame wolves and lions and snakes,* ***what do you think will happen to you?***

Because *second,* when Jesus comes to reign as king, *he will bring peace between people.* Take just a moment and think about some of the conflict in your life. Maybe it’s in your marriage. Maybe it’s with your parents or with your children. Maybe it’s at work or with a business partner. Maybe it’s with someone who used to be your best friend and now you haven’t spoken in years.

This conflict hurts you. It’s cost you sleep, made you sick to your stomach, and given you gray hair. But the promise of Isaiah 11 is that when Jesus returns as king, his peace will heal many, if not all, of the broken relationships in your life. There are people ***you can’t even look in the face right now*** (you see them in Walmart, and you turn and go down a different aisle to avoid them), but one day you’re going to be walking around in Jesus’ kingdom with them and everything will be fine.

Two people who both love the Lord Jesus Christ can, because of the brokenness of this world and the sin in our lives, get to the point where they don’t talk anymore. It happens all the time. But if Jesus will one day make it safe for a baby to play with a cobra, he will also repair those relationships.

*Third, Jesus will bring peace to different peoples.* “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. **10**In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. **11**In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria [modern-day eastern Syria], from Egypt [which means northern Egypt today, nearest the Mediterranean Sea], from Pathros [southern Egypt today], from Cush [Sudan], from Elam [Iran], from Shinar [Iraq], from Hamath [Damascus], and from the coastlands of the sea.” Isaiah 11:9-11.

In the Old Testament, God only worked through one group of people, one ethnic group: Israel. The Jewish people, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

***But the promise here is that one day all nations will be God’s people.*** In the Old Covenant, God’s place was Mount Zion, the hill on which the temple sat in Jerusalem. But one day all the earth will be “holy to the Lord” (Zechariah 14) along with all the people in it. That’s Revelation 7:9-10, where the apostle John wrote, “I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, [not just Jewish people, but all people, including Gentiles like me and, I’m guessing, most of you] standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10**and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Currently, there are at least two conflicts going on in the world that could escalate to the point where I could see the United States being forced to get involved: China’s pressure on Taiwan and the Philippines, and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. There may be more, and those of you who keep up with the news better than I do may be able to name them.

But when Jesus returns from heaven to establish the kingdom Isaiah foresaw, we won’t have any more of those conflicts. No more American soldiers dying in wars. In fact, no more need for soldiers at all! In Isaiah 2:4 we read, “He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks [in other words, tools for fighting turn into tools for farming]; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Now, let’s do some application. A completely understandable reaction to what I’ve taught this morning would be, “This all sounds great, J.D., all this about a perfect king who will one day put everything right in the world, ***but I’m hurting now.*** I need help now. My heart is broken now. So, I’m glad that whenever Jesus returns he’ll take care of everything, ***but what good does that do me today?***” That’s a fair question.

I have two responses to that reaction: *first, if you are confident that one day everything will be perfect, and that on that day you’ll say, ‘I wouldn’t change a thing,’ it will give you strength today.*

I had a different career before I became a pastor, and I was very unhappy with the job I had, to the point to where I was getting physically depressed. But after about a year in that position I began to feel, through a series of circumstances, that God was leading me to apply to seminaries with the goal ultimately of going into pastoral ministry. ***And I was confident this was what God wanted me to do.***  I’ve only been that certain of something two or three other times in my life.

For a bunch of reasons, I couldn’t immediately quit my job and make this change. It took over a year for various things to fall into place before we could do it.

But the confidence that I was going to thoroughly enjoy what God was calling me to do that gave me strength in that last year of my job. I went from dreading going to work to looking forward to it. I appreciated my job more, I was a better employee, and I got better at my job because of that confidence.

And, thankfully, I was right. I’ll never forget that first night my wife and I and our then five month old son spent in our little apartment at seminary. It was one of the best nights of my life ***because we’d finally made it.*** This thing I’d been hoping for and praying for and working for finally happened. And now, looking back on that time when I was so unhappy, I can honestly say, “As hard as that was, I wouldn’t change a thing.”

I don’t know if you’ve ever been that certain that something in your future would bring you that kind of satisfaction, and then it turned out that you were right. That is a wonderful gift. But of course nothing on earth can ***permanently*** make you happy. Going to seminary and becoming a pastor was the right move for me, but the high of those first few months at seminary didn’t last. It’s been repeated several times, but it wasn’t permanent. The best career, or the best romantic relationship, or the best family, or lots of money, won’t fulfill you forever.

***But your life in Christ’s kingdom will.*** When Christ reigns on earth, there will be no more conflict, hunger, or pain, only peace, plenty, and pleasure. And on that day, you’ll look back on your life and you’ll say, “I wouldn’t change a thing.” ***To the degree you know you will feel that way one day, to that degree you’ll find strength right now in all circumstances***.

*Second, we will see that our sufferings now, no matter how severe, are but light and momentary.* In 2 Corinthians 4:17 Paul talks about his confidence when he says, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison …”. He’s saying, “No matter what I go through on earth, it’s nothing, nothing, compared to the glory that awaits me when Christ returns.”

Earlier this year Joni Eareckson Tada published an article called “Worse Than Any Affliction: Why I Refuse to Grumble” [or complain]. Many of you know Joni’s story. In the summer of 1967, she dove into shallow water in Chesapeake Bay and broke her neck. For fifty-seven years she’s been in a wheelchair. She’s had some use of her right arm (she could feed herself with it), but late last year, after a couple of hospitalizations, she lost even that. Now different women must come into her house each day to cut up her food, lift a fork to her mouth, and feed her.

But this is what she wrote. “The Christian who wallows in complaining is tempted to believe that God might leave him, that God isn’t always helpful in times of trouble, or that divine grace is lacking for every need. He’s increasingly suspicious whether God’s word is always trustworthy. He feels that suffering is not worth what little eternal benefit it earns … I’m sure you’d agree that suffering naturally contains the seeds of complaining … Did I have a right to complain? Actually, I possess no real rights. I laid them all at the foot of the cross, agreeing with [1 Corinthians 6:19–20](https://ref.ly/1%20Cor%206.19%E2%80%9320;esv?t=biblia): “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” The Son of God was ripped to shreds, and then hung up to drain like a bloodied piece of meat on a hook. And if this is what Jesus endured to rescue me, I refuse to dignify any sin [including complaining about my suffering] that impaled him to that cursed tree. ***I will not coddle anything that helped drive the nails deeper.*** I relinquished my right to complain so that I might glorify Almighty God through my hardships. Anything less shrinks my soul.” And then she referenced 2 Corinthians 4:17.

If anyone can say her sufferings aren’t light and momentary, if anyone can say she’s the exception to the rule and God has given her more than she can handle, it’s Joni. Fifty-seven years in a wheelchair and counting. But in that article she said, “I cannot provide a better service to the people around me, including the girls who help me in the morning, than to not complain.”

If Joni can be sure that Christ’s kingdom is more than worth the suffering she’s been through in her life, and if she can draw strength from the future to face today, ***don’t you think we can too?***

Friends, we have a perfect king in Jesus Christ. One day we will see him face to face and live in the golden age of his reign. Fix your eyes of faith on him. Long for and pray for his coming. And if you do, you’ll find him providing for you now. You’ll find some of his peace and plenty and pleasure as you wait his return. As Isaac Watts puts it in one of his hymns: “The hill of Zion [that’s life on earth] yields a thousand sacred sweets before we reach the heavenly fields or walk the golden streets.” PRAY