

*My Strength and My Song: Isaiah 11-12*

Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church

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It's wonderful to sing together, to sing beautiful songs of praise to our Savior. Sometimes life feels like just a bunch of noise. Annoying racket. Some events jolt us like a siren. Other things make us cringe like fingernails running down a chalk board. But the songs of God's people lifting their voices to Him in thanksgiving and praise, is such a healing and hopeful activity. And it's something we will do forever together. Just think of it.

As we sang just a moment ago, "How marvelous, how wonderful! And my song shall ever be: How marvelous, how wonderful is my Savior's love for me!" Our text this morning speaks of the Lord as our strength and our song.

And we desperately need Him to be both. We need His strength to sustain us. We need Him to be the song in our hearts, especially when the world's noise and life's trials make us weary.

In 1993 there were 3 missionaries in Columbia who were taken captive by terrorists. And nobody was able to determine what had become of them. For years the families of these men didn't know if their loved ones were dead or alive. It wasn't until 2001, after 8 years of waiting, that it was concluded: they had, indeed, been killed. The Columbia rebels had kept them alive for about 3 years, but then killed them in a moment when they were about to be discovered.<sup>1</sup> Dan Germann was the director of New Tribes Mission in Columbia at this time, and he shared about the way in which they prayed for this situation, and how their prayers changed over time. At first, they were obviously praying very fervently that God would bring these men home safely. Later on they began to pray, "God, even if we never know what has become of them, you will still be God." Dan said, "There is a very special sense of awe at who God is and how sufficient he is when the miracle doesn't happen, but the wonder of his sufficiency is still present."<sup>2</sup>

That's when God, and God alone, is your strength and your song. Maybe you have felt that way this week. Let this be an encouragement to you. God will be your strength. God will be your song. And when you realize that, truly, you have no strength of your own . . . When you realize that, truly, this world has no

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.worldmag.com/2001/11/the\\_buzz](http://www.worldmag.com/2001/11/the_buzz)

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Ray Ortlund, Isaiah, page 124.

good song to sing . . . That's when we will whole-heartedly be clinging to Him. And that's a very good place to be.

Well, let's dig into some of these verses now in chapters 11 and 12. There's a lot here, and we won't cover everything. But here are 4 things I want to focus our attention on. First, the shoot from the stump of Jesse. Second, the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth. Those are both in chapter 11. And then thirdly, from chapter 12, Gospel thankfulness. And fourthly, also from chapter 12, contagious praise.

Let's start at the beginning of chapter 11 with this prophecy of a shoot from the stump of Jesse.

### **A Shoot from the Stump of Jesse (11:1-10)**

Isaiah 6-12 is the larger section that we're in right now, that we're coming to the end of this morning. You remember chapter 6 describes Isaiah's profound vision of the Lord and his commissioning. "Here am I! Send me." But then his assignment is not what he would have expected or desired. His will be a ministry of proclaiming a message that will be met mostly with hard-hearted rebellion leading to destruction. In chapters 7, 8, and 9 Isaiah delivers warnings of judgment, admonitions to trust in the Lord, and also these amazing promises of a coming Savior, a baby born to a virgin, a child who will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." All of that in its original context was spoken to Judah, the southern kingdom, where Isaiah lived.

But in 9:8 the attention shifts from Judah in the south to Israel in the north. So the rest of chapter 9, and chapter 10, and chapter 11 are addressed more to the northern kingdom of Israel (also referred to as Ephraim). There are references to Assyria's invasion of Israel, but then later Assyria will fall.

Look at the last verses of chapter 10, which describe the high and haughty Assyria which will be brought low. Read verses 33-34

Picture a forest that is no longer a forest. You would not have been able to see from one side of this forest to the other because of the dense trees. But now it's all open. Now it's a field of stumps.

That imagery provides the backdrop for this picture of the coming Messiah as a small shoot sprouting up from the stump of Jesse. So out of a desolate place new life emerges. For this is a branch that will bear fruit, as verse 1 says.

Read 11:1-10

Three things to notice here briefly.

### 1) Son of David

Verse 1 and verse 10 both make references to Jesse, who was the father of David the King. This shoot from the stump of Jesse, this root of Jesse, will be the coming Messiah from the line of King David. He will be the One to sit “on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it . . . from this time forth and forevermore” as 9:7 said.

### 2) Spirit-empowered

We also notice here in chapter 11 that this coming Messiah will be empowered by the Spirit. Verse 2 says that “the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.” This was shown in such a tangible way at Jesus’ baptism. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and came and rested on him (Matthew 3:16). And Jesus was empowered by the Spirit throughout His ministry.

### 3) Perfect fear

A third thing to notice here is the perfection, the righteousness, of this individual, and how that is manifested even in His fear of the Lord. Last week we reflected quite a bit on the fear of the Lord. Lest any of you still think of that as a somewhat negative thing, consider that Jesus was the One individual who has ever walked the face of this earth with a perfect fear of the Lord. And because He feared the Lord, He was fearless when it came to those who opposed Him, those who wanted to kill Him, those who did torture Him and put Him on a cross. Jesus wholly submitted Himself to the will of His Father, and it was His joy to do so. Look at verse 2-3. See the connection between delight and the fear of the Lord. That reminds me of **Hebrews 12:2, that we are to look to Jesus who is “the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”** That doesn’t mean the cross was pleasant. Not at all! But Jesus delighted to do His Father’s will, knowing what would be accomplished—the salvation of sinners like us unto the eternal praise of our gracious God.

Thus we can observe Jesus Christ as the One who accomplished our salvation. He is the perfect, sinless, righteous One. And we can also look to Him as our perfect example and model for how we should be seeking to live by faith in the fear of

the Lord, and the joy and delight that we should experience in the fear of the Lord.

### **The Knowledge of the Lord Covering the Earth (11:6-9)**

I love verses 6-9. I can't sort out for you the details of different eschatological viewpoints that differ on when exactly this will be fulfilled. I'm not going to get into that this morning, whether this is metaphorical for something that's begun to happen even now, or if it's a reference to the millennial kingdom, or looking all the way to the eternal state. I won't settle that for you today. But I love the picture we have here of a future time when there's going to be peace, when the things that scare us and threaten us will no longer present the slightest danger.

The description that startles me the most is in verse 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." That is terrifying to think about, in the fallen world we live in.

I remember as a kid visiting a snake zoo. I have an aunt and uncle and cousins who live in Brazil, and one time when I was in middle school my family took a big trip to go and visit them. And there are a handful of things I remember to this day about our time in Brazil. One was eating at an authentic Brazilian steakhouse, which was amazing, especially as a 13 year old growing boy who had an appetite like a horse. The waiter would keep coming around with various meats on a skewer, and I would nod, and they would put more steak or chicken or pork on my plate. It was great.

Another thing I remember is visiting the snake zoo. I've never been to any place like it. I've been to the snake *area* of other zoos, like our very nice zoo here in Pittsburgh. It always creeps me out just a little bit. But this place in Brazil was an entire zoo of nothing but snakes. We were outdoors peering over a concrete wall down onto an area that seemed like the size of a football field, and there were all kinds of snakes slithering around over grass and rocks and over each other. I still don't like the thought of it. And then after 30 minutes or so of walking around this wall and looking at all the different snakes, we were on our way out and my uncle grabbed my arm and said, "Watch out for that snake." Out of the corner of my eye I saw something green stretching across the sidewalk, and I just about jumped out of my skin. It turned out it was garden hose. My uncle was playing a trick on me. He got me good.

But imagine the day—not that I’m necessarily taking these verses exactly literally—but imagine a day when the moms group could go to the snake zoo and let their toddlers play in the same area as cobras and pythons and boa constrictors. That’s a world very different than our own. What is that telling us? It’s telling us the effects of the Fall, the evidences of the curse, are going to be undone. The enmity and strife that plays out even in the animal kingdom, is going to be no more. That’s a day to look forward to, my friends.

That will also be a day when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Back in chapter 6 the seraphim declared, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And we recognized that to be both a present reality and a future hope. We see God’s glory going forth now, but we also long for that time when the knowledge of Him will fill the earth like the waters cover the sea. It makes me think of that great passage in Philippians 2 that talks about Jesus Christ’s humility and sacrifice on the cross, and then it ends by talking about His exaltation. **“Therefore God has highly exalted [Jesus Christ] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9–11, ESV)**

Similar to Isaiah 11:9, we’re getting a glimpse of the culmination of history. There will come a time, Jesus will return, and everyone will recognize Him as Lord. This is not universalism. This doesn’t mean everyone will be saved. By that point it will be too late. The time to repent and believe and be saved is now, in the time before Christ returns. But when He does return, everyone will know who the Lord is and will acknowledge Him as such. That will be true of unbelievers who will then be cast out of His presence forever (see 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). And it will be gloriously true of believers who will spend forever communing with Him, worshipping Him, knowing Him better and better for all eternity.

This vision of the future is motivating for us in various ways. It should motivate us to oppose the effects of the Fall even now. Not that we’re going to play with snakes. But inasmuch as it depends on us, we can pursue peace with one another rather than giving into the sinful temptation to argue and fight and tear each other apart. Verse 9 of our text says, “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain . . .” We can pursue that now. We can pursue Gospel peace. Among believers there should be a

foretaste of that future day when there will be complete peace. We know that we can't have *complete* peace now . . . we're still so prone to sin and we live in a fallen world. But as we're being sanctified there should be clear evidences of peace-making, evidences of reconciliation, evidences of the curse being reversed, enmities should melt into edifying encouragement of one another.

Another motivation here is to be involved in spreading the knowledge of the Lord now! Oh, how we should long for more and more people to know Him as their Lord and Savior. How we should long for our neighbors and co-workers and unbelieving family members to bow the knee now, and confess with their mouth now, and put their hope in Him and be saved from their sin.

It's exciting to be connected to this mission both far and near. We've been talking recently about Caleb Gibello who is raising support to move with his family to Papua, New Guinea to preach the Gospel and plant churches in areas where Christ is not known. And we're connected with others as well who are living in the Middle East, in South Africa, in Kenya, in Romania, who are preaching the Gospel and planting churches so that Christ's name will be known.

And we see encouraging things locally as well. When I came here 10 years ago, it didn't seem like there were very many like-minded churches in the area. But in recent years there have been several that are popping up in different areas of the city. And I praise God for that.

I was part of a meeting this past week that opened my eyes to more of the history of church planting efforts in the Pittsburgh area.

David Waltz has been the Executive Director of our state Baptist convention for 23 years, and he's retiring at the end of this month. So a group of pastors from this area met together on Wednesday over at Pittsburgh Baptist Church to have lunch with him and to hear from him about his tenure in this position and the transition to new leadership. And I loved hearing him reminisce about his many decades involved in ministry, starting with his childhood as a pastor's kid. David's dad was the first pastor of Pittsburgh Baptist Church, which was the first Southern Baptist church anywhere around here. His family moved here to the area in 1959. David was 7 years old. And he was telling funny stories about the simple bowling lane that used to be there in the church basement, and a time when he had marbles in his shirt pocket that fell out in the middle of a church service when he leaned over to reach for something. He also recalled how he would drive with his

dad as his dad would go and preach at various church plants for an early service and then make it back to PBC to preach at the later service. Five churches were planted that way in the early '60s, in different parts of the region.

David graduated from Mt. Lebanon High School, went on to college and seminary, served as a pastor for 12 years in another part of PA (I forget exactly where), and then he has been working in this role with the state convention for the past 23 years, helping churches to cooperate in various efforts, assisting struggling churches, and seeking to lead us all in this vision to make the Lord known throughout Pennsylvania.

And one last thing about David. It was also moving to hear him speak about the young people in our congregations, and who knows what God might call some of these kids to do with their lives. David was just the squirrely kid who was losing his marbles and distracting everyone. But God called him to a life of Gospel ministry and service to the church. Not that that's the only way to be involved in Gospel ministry and service to the church. It's not. There are many, many career paths you could choose, and use that career strategically for expanding the knowledge of the Lord. Kids, I challenge you to think about that. And adults, let's pray for the next generation in this church, that God will raise up a great number of young people who will be inspired to go and tell this region, and this world, about our Savior.

### **Gospel Thankfulness (12:1-2)**

Chapter 12 is the conclusion to this section of Isaiah that began in chapter 6. Now that we've heard warnings of judgment and also promises of deliverance, there is this song of praise to conclude. There are 2 pieces to it, and the shift from the first part to the second part you might not notice unless you consult the notes in your Bible. At least in my Bible, probably in yours as well, there's a little number next to the word "You" in verse 1. And when I look down underneath the text, that note says, "the Hebrew for *you* is singular in verse 1." Then when I go to verse 3 there's another number next to the word "you," and the note says "the Hebrew for *you* is plural in verses 3, 4." So if there was a Pittsburgh Standard Version it could make this very simple by reading "you" in verse 1 and "yinz" in verses 3 and 4.

The point being, there's a development in this song from personal Gospel thankfulness to corporate contagious praise.

Read Isaiah 12

Let's think, first of all, very personally, about Gospel thankfulness. Do you resonate with this song? Do you recognize that the Lord was angry with you for your sins? But His anger turned away, and He has become your comfort. How did that happen? Well, He has become your salvation. He has worked to bring about deliverance for you. The just and gracious God has made a way for you to be spared from His own wrath. And that is through His Son, Jesus Christ. Verse 2 says, "I will trust, and will not be afraid."

What Good News this is, and we ought to be very grateful. By trusting in Jesus Christ we have gone from God's enemies to God's friends. Now we're comforted. Now we have no reason to be afraid. We have joy in the fear of the Lord, and we need not fear anything else. He is my strength and my song.

These words of Gospel thankfulness use some of the same language as Moses' song in Exodus 15, right after they miraculously crossed the Red Sea on dry ground and God delivered them from the Egyptians.

What have you been delivered from? What do you have to sing about? When we think about God's anger being turned away from us, and now we have comfort in Him, He is our salvation, He is our strength and song, this puts everything in a new perspective.

**Ray Ortlund writes, "Have you transitioned from being frustrated with a reluctant God who isn't cooperating with your agenda to being comforted by a God who is lavishing you with grace upon grace?"**<sup>3</sup> Gospel thankfulness could change your entire outlook on the coming week, and the next week and the week after that. Gospel thankfulness can move you from being discouraged and disgruntled to being utterly delighted in what God has done for you in Jesus Christ.

And if you're not yet a believer, trusting in this Savior will change the rest of your life and eternity. I was listening to a fascinating interview this week. Marvin Olasky, the editor in chief for WORLD magazine, was interviewing Abigail Santamaria who wrote a book about Joy Davidman. Joy Davidman was the woman who married C.S. Lewis. And it sounds like quite a soap-opera story of how they ended up together. But I just want to share about how Joy came to know Christ. Her first husband, Bill Gresham, was a troubled man. He was a gifted writer, but a troubled soul—depression, anxiety, nightmares, alcoholism. The biographer says that today he would be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress

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<sup>3</sup>Isaiah, page 120.



disorder after being in the Spanish Civil War. Joy was an atheist, and in 1937-38 “had almost a religious conversion to communism,” as the biographer describes. She had written that “there’s only one final beauty, to stand on your feet, and only one ultimate weakness or ugliness, to fall on your knees.” But that changed one night when her husband called her on the phone from his office saying that he was having a nervous breakdown and couldn’t leave but knew he couldn’t stay there either. He hung up the phone. She was terrified, not knowing if he was going to hurt himself or what was going to happen. But in that moment she found herself on her knees praying. Her husband returned and was OK. It was at that crisis that her atheism evaporated. All of a sudden, she believed in God. And eventually she came to faith in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

If you don’t have a song to sing . . . If you can recognize that you don’t actually have any strength of your own . . . bow the knee to this gracious God who offers to be your strength and your song. Trust in Him.

### **Contagious Praise (12:3-6)**

Finally, we turn to the corporate aspect of this. The “you” in verses 3 and 4 is plural. As brothers and sisters in Christ, all of us who have been changed by this radical grace, as we join together in thanksgiving and praise, there’s something contagious about that.

Do you remember that show *Candid Camera*? They would film random people and play jokes on them, and then walk up and say, “Smile, you’re on *Candid Camera*.” I haven’t seen that show in a long time. But I remember one series of clips they played where one of the *Candid Camera* folks would sit down next someone on a bench in the mall or on a park bench, and the *Candid Camera* actor would begin to laugh. They were reading something and would just begin to chuckle or maybe to laugh hysterically. And the strangers next to them would begin to laugh too. The laughter was contagious.

A better illustration is that YouTube video that maybe you’ve seen of the hallelujah chorus food court flash mob. Everyone’s sitting there eating their lunch, when a woman with a cell phone to her ear stands up and begins singing, and then another guy with a sweatshirt stands on his chair and pipes in, and then a couple over here begin to sing, and others. Of course, it was all planned out ahead of time. Dozens of beautiful voices all

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<sup>4</sup>WORLD magazine, March 5, 2016

joining together in this great song of praise. And by the time they finish, the rest of the folks in the food court are cheering.

It should be our prayer that our corporate witness to the world would be contagious, that our lives together praising God would get the attention of unbelievers around us. Not that we want them to cheer for *us*. We want them to celebrate with us what God has done. Do you see this in verses 4-6? As we proclaim that the Lord's name is exalted, as we sing praises to Him, we want this to be known in all the earth.

This ties right in with what we were seeing in chapter 11 about the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth as the waters cover the sea. That's what we're longing for. That's what we want to be part of, watching God work through His people to extend the knowledge of Him, and the joy of knowing Him, to the ends of the earth, to all the people groups of the world.

May He be our strength and our song this week. And may the world see in us the miracle of that strength which is not our own. And may they be caught up into the joy of the beautiful song which He has instilled within us. The song of His salvation.