

Isaiah 11:10

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[0 : 0 0] Now let's turn together in God's Word to the first of our readings in the prophecy of Isaiah in your church Bibles. That's on page 696.

Isaiah chapter 11. And we'll read again one verse, verse 10. In that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him, and the place, his place of rest, will be glorious. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the shoot that came up from the stump of Jesse, the father of King David, and that he is the promised King of Israel and the Savior of the world.

But the majority of the people to whom Isaiah, this writer, belonged, and the majority of the people to whom Jesus belonged when he was born into this world, the Jewish people, the majority of them do not believe what I've just said. And one of the reasons they give is often put in the form of a question. Where is this world peace promised when Messiah—the title of Jesus, of King and Savior—when Messiah comes? Where is this world full of righteousness and peace of which the prophets speak? Why is it that Bethlehem, where both David and Jesus were born, is nearly always, even in our day—very much so in our day—is nearly always a scene of fighting and hostility, far removed from what you would expect in the hometown of the

Prince of Peace? Jesus of Nazareth and the Christianity he founded are, according to the import of this question, one of these questions, one of these questions, one of these questions, they're an utter failure, not a glorious success.

There was an American theologian, W.T. Shedd, in the nineteenth century, and in one of his essays, he writes about—not a biblical theme at all—but about a famous historian, a Scottish historian, a Scottish historian, a Scottish historian, Thomas Carlyle. Some of you may know some of his books, so they're not much read nowadays. A history of the French Revolution, a study on heroes, and so on.

[3 : 1 5] It must be said he was a bit long-winded, and most folk would find him heavy-going. And Shedd, talking about his writing, Thomas Carlyle's style, said this, The aspiration is infinite, but the performance is infinitesimal.

Now, whether that's true or not about Thomas Carlyle and his writings, it's certainly what many today, especially of the people to whom Isaiah and Jesus belonged, what they would say, that the aspiration connected with Jesus as Messiah may be very high, but the actual performance is pathetic, infinitesimal.

Well, of course, Isaiah, the writer of these words, and of many others like them, many prophecies about the great King and Messiah who was to come, Isaiah knew all about apparent failure.

He lived in a land where, although they were, supposedly, the people of God, where most of them were not living like the people of God. The country in which he lived was full of hypocrisy. The leaders were oppressors. There was an unworthy king on the throne, and he had quite a few run-ins with this king Ahaz. In fact, he's referred to in the chapter that I read from to the children. And Isaiah, far from talking all the time about peace and righteousness and blessing and prosperity and success, he had so often to announce judgment. You could just turn back a page or two, and you'd see it, for example, in many places. In chapter 7, verse 17, the Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any other, since Ephraim broke away from Judah. He will bring the king of Assyria, and there will be suffering, there will be destruction, there will be ruin, and so on. So, Isaiah, he looked around him, and he didn't see much peace. He had to announce judgment. And according to pretty strong

Jewish tradition, Isaiah himself ended up killed by those to whom he prophesied. Indeed, it's said that he died a particularly horrible death. But in spite of everything, in spite of that situation, in spite of the apparent, utter failure of his ministry in his day, and of most of the other prophets as well, he kept on proclaiming that there was a worthy king—not a king like Ahaz, but a worthy king—in whom there would be seen victory, success, and peace. And, of course, he told us these great words that we looked at with the children, for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder. Of the increase of his government and peace through him, there will be no end.

[6 : 51] And in spite of the appearances, in spite of apparent failure, Isaiah and his fellow prophets proclaimed it again, and again, and again, and again. This will happen. This will come. And that's what I'd like us to look at from this chapter, and particularly the verse I read. This concept, not of failure, but of success.

We look out on the world today, a world of trouble and suffering, a world where, in many cases, in our own nation and others that have known the Christian faith, it seems to be dwindling away, having less and less influence. And it would be very easy to do what the temptation was for Isaiah, to look around and say, hopeless. It's a failure. But we're going to look at success, and success in the words of this prophet who insisted that God was at work and would do great things. First of all, in this verse 10, Isaiah calls us to recognize success. Recognize that there is such a thing as success. And then secondly, Isaiah encourages us to proclaim success. Thirdly, he encourages us to extend success. And finally, to enjoy success. And all of it coming from the one whom he is prophesying, the child who will be born in Bethlehem, the Son of God who will be given to us as Savior.

First of all, then, Isaiah says to his own people and to us who see the fulfillment of his prophecy those 2,000 years ago. First of all, he says, recognize success. In that day, the root of Jesse will stand. And if we look back at verse 1, we see that this root is—there is a shoot that comes out of the stump of the stump of Jesse. From his roots a branch will bear fruit. A stump, of course, speaks of a tree that's been cut down. And that's exactly what had happened. The glorious tree that describes or pictures the empire of David and Solomon, a time when Israel seemed to be one of the leading nations of the world. That glorious tree had been cut down, and a poor, miserable thing was left in its place.

Israel was just a shadow of what it used to be. And Isaiah, for all his talk about victory and success and a great king, Isaiah looked around him. And he saw, for example, I'm reading from chapter 6 at verse 11.

It talks about the cities lying ruined and without inhabitant, the houses left deserted, the fields ruined and ravaged. And then it speaks of an exile, and that indeed took place, just as Isaiah had prophesied it would do. So, there is looking around a whole scene of disaster and destruction and of failure. The glorious tree has been cut down. There's only a stump. But the stump—and that again is said to us in chapter 6, the one I just quoted from—the stump nonetheless remains. You have that at the very end of chapter 6, the holy seed will be the stump in the land. And he's telling us that whatever the outward circumstances, then or now, out of that stump, just a stump of what was a great tree, there will grow a root, a branch, a flourishing branch, and all God's purposes will be fulfilled. And that, of course, when you read your Bible, you see it's the repeated history of Israel. Four hundred years of slavery, abject slavery in the land of Egypt. One generation of Israelites born into slavery, lived in slavery, died in slavery, and their children the same, and their children's children. And so, it went on from generation to generation to generation, and if ever it was a situation where failure was stamped on it, that was it. Ah! But there, in that situation, we're told of a basket floating in the River Nile.

[12 : 01] And in the basket, there's a baby. It looks as if it's abandoned, just like the people of Israel seem to have been abandoned by their God. But this baby under God will be the delivery, deliverer of his people out of that slavery. And the centuries go by. And after the Israelites are there in the land of promise, but after the great days of Joshua and those who succeeded him, we read of a time in the book of Judges when we're told that there was chaos throughout the land. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. And indeed, the book of Judges tells us of calamitous things that were happening in the nation.

But during that time—incredible! Who would have thought it? In a pagan land, the land where they worshipped idols just across the border in Moab, there was a girl, a young girl, and she met a young Israelite refugee, and they married. And she heard about the God of Israel. And in spite of personal tragedy and bereavement, Ruth was God's chosen instrument. She reached Israel. She married Boaz, and she was part of the line that led to the birth of the promised Messiah. Or again, as the years go by, there, much later, during another captivity, there in the land of Persia, the people of God, they are under threat of extinction. The death sentence has gone out from Haman, and every Jew, every one of God's covenant people is to be slaughtered. But there, amazingly, who would have thought of it in the royal palace itself, from where the decree had been issued?

There was another young girl, and God had His hand on her, and Esther, in God's mysterious providence, queen over the whole empire of Persia, and God's instruments to bring about deliverance to His people. And so, the centuries roll by, and we come to the time when Israel is once again under the heel of an oppressor. The Romans are tramping with their legions up and down the land of Israel.

Once again, there is oppression. Once again, there is suffering. And yet there, in just a little village, the village of Bethlehem, and in the most abandoned of situations, in that stable of which we know so well, there is another baby that is born. And through Him, failure is transformed into success. God's purpose is transformed into success. And that covenant is now being fulfilled in all the great, eternal purposes of God. But the world around, as it happens, is now being fulfilled in all the great, eternal purposes of God. But the world around, as it happened with Isaiah, as it happened at all these occasions that I've referred to, they looked on, and they turned their backs. And they said, No, this is not a king for us. This is not a Lord to whom we will bow the knee. The demands of Jesus Christ then and today were too hard. But for those with eyes to see, success was certain. The fresh shoots through Jesus Christ, who He was and what He did, the fresh shoots from that chopped down tree, from that stump of Jesse, they were coming and they were flourishing. And in Jesus Christ is fulfilled the great and glorious promise. He must reign till all are put under His feet. Of the increase of His government and of peace, there shall be no end. And I hope and pray and trust that you know that, that you know Him not just as the babe in Bethlehem, but as the Prince of Peace, who died for sinners, who rose again, and in whom and in whom alone there is lasting and real success and victory over sin and Satan. Well, Isaiah says, recognize success. But then he goes on to say, and here we're passing much more from his own day to our day, to we who know, to us who know, Jesus Christ, Messiah, and Savior. And so he says to us, proclaim success.

Notice how verse 10 goes on, in that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. A flag, a banner. And there's many a stirring story in the history of the world of battles where the flag, as it was raised, put heart into struggling shoulders. Our American friends will know it, the story put into verse, I think, by Walt Whitman, the troops in the American Civil War marching through this particular town, and the old woman who sticks the flag out of the window. And of course, it's the other side that are marching through, and the famous words that Walt Whitman put into poetry, shoot if you must, this old gray head, but spare your country's flag, she said. Quite apart from the politics of it all, there is the example of the stirring effect of the banner being raised, of hearts being encouraged, of struggling, weary souls being strengthened, a symbol of national unity, symbol of patriotic allegiance. But what Isaiah is saying is that in every case such as that, and in our case as a church of Jesus Christ today, that flag must be hoisted, it must be raised. A banner will be raised for the peoples. As Psalm 60 puts it, you have given a banner to those who fear you, that it might be displayed because of truth. And you and I today are called not merely to thank God for the success and the victory and the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ, but we are called to raise that banner of Jesus Christ. We are called to go forth, making known who He is and what He has done.

[19:10] We read the story of the shepherds and of how when they saw Jesus, when they recognized who He was, they went out, we're told, and proclaimed it to everyone around. I suppose many mocked them. They were amazed at what they said, how can this be so? And yet, they hoisted the banner. They proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ. And the challenge, surely, as we read through the Gospels and we see the same thing happening, the Samaritan woman who recognized in the midst of all our sin that Jesus was the Messiah, and we're told that she went back to her own people, to the whole town, and told them, is not this the Christ?

Or the man filled with—full of demons and Jesus' freedom, legion, and he went out, we're told, and in all that countryside he made known the good news of a deliverer, of a Savior. And so, two friends, the call comes to us, we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard. We must indeed, whether physically or not, but go into all the world and proclaim the good news to every people. So, Isaiah says, recognize success, centered on Messiah Jesus, proclaim success, success. And then he goes on to say that we should extend success. Now, that follows from what I've just been saying about proclaiming it. But notice what the text tells us. In that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him. Now, the reality for Isaiah, when he wrote these words, was very, very different. Most of his own people, of God's covenant people, most of them were hostile, let alone the nations. If the folks around him wouldn't listen to him, how could he expect that people in pagan nations and to the ends of the earth would ever hear his message? But as you read through this prophecy of Isaiah, and as he speaks again and again of Messiah, who is to come, there's a glimpse—and Isaiah, I'm sure, had the glimpse—of a banner waving, assaulted, yes, but waving not only in Israel, but to the ends of the earth.

Oh, it's true. And Isaiah had to tell about this, that as that banner was raised, it often brought hostility. It was often assaulted, as in battles throughout the world. Remember his words in Isaiah 53, where he talks about the one of whom he's prophesying, Jesus the Messiah, who when he came, he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and people hid their faces from him. He was despised, and they and we esteemed him not. But in spite of all of this, Isaiah sees beyond it. He sees above it. And again and again, he gives us this vision of extending the good news of Messiah Jesus far beyond the nations or the nation to which he belonged. Think of words well known to most of you in Isaiah chapter 60, there at the beginning,

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples. But the Lord rises upon you, and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Or again, in chapter 2, at verse 2, Isaiah says this, In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Many people will come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. And it goes on to say that the nations are hearing, and the nations are coming. But as he goes on, verse 5 in that same chapter, there's a challenge to each one of us who have received the good news of Jesus, who know him as Savior and Lord. He died making atonement for our sins. He rose for our justification that we might be right with God. By his Holy Spirit, he indwells us. We know day by day who he is, and we rejoice in him. But listen to this challenge. Come, O house of Jacob. Come, O church of Christ. Let us walk in the light of the Lord, in order that this banner might be extended and the message might be known.

[24 : 25] In other words, the church of Christ must always be a missionary church. And as we think of Bethlehem, and the babe in the manger, and it's so heartwarming to do so, we remember that from there there stems for us the challenge. As we have come to know God's grace through him to extend the borders of his kingdom to the very ends of the earth. The last thing that Isaiah talks about here, he's told us that we need to recognize success, we need to proclaim success, we need to extend success, but also, he says, let's enjoy success. Notice how the verse ends. The nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious, or his resting place. It's an interesting word that Isaiah uses here, which you find in various parts, both of the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's the very same word that you have in the book of

Numbers, where we read about the Israelites going through the desert, and they have the ark of the covenant, a symbol of God's presence among his people. And we're told in Numbers 10.33 that the ark of the covenant went before them to find them a place of rest. Same word that Isaiah uses. And again in Deuteronomy, God says, with a word of severe criticism first to his people, you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the Lord your God is giving you. Because as you read through the well-known passages, you discover, of course, that Israel failed. They did not find us. Yes, they went into the promised land, and there was great blessing. But they did not find for their constant experience that true rest that God had promised to them. And here's what the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament tells us in chapter 3 of his letter, "Their hearts are always going astray. So I declared," says the Lord, "they shall never enter my rest." And the glorious thing for you and me, we will find no rest outside of Jesus Christ. The famous words of Augustine so often quoted, that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. And this is emphasized by the writer to the Hebrews. And this is emphasized by the writer to the Hebrews. And this is emphasized by the writer to the Hebrews. And this is the glorious thing with which I close today. We who have believed enter that rest.

In Jesus Christ, of Bethlehem and Calvary, we know peace with God. We rest in Jesus Christ.

For this life and the assurance that when death comes, we shall enter fully into that rest. But as so often, there comes with a promise the word of challenge, because the writer to the Hebrews goes on to say, again in chapter 3, let us make every effort to enter that rest. Friends, many of you do know that rest, because you've put your faith in Jesus Christ. But if you don't, if you only know the nice stories of Bethlehem and not much more, may I invite you, may I urge you, make every effort to enter that rest of God through your trust in Jesus Christ. May God bless to us His own Word.