



# Sermon Growth Guide

**December 4, 2022**

**The Great Rescue - The Plant**

**Isaiah 11:1-10**

**Key Verse:** Isaiah 11:1 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

**Big Idea:** God has a plan, not to extract us from this world, but to save us and use us to redeem this world.

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## Foundations

Today is the second Sunday of Advent as we continue in our sermon series, ***The Great Rescue***.

This Advent, our sermon series spins around ***The Great Rescue*** as told throughout Isaiah. Some presume Christmas is mere ornaments and reindeer. God's people proclaim a different message: Christmas celebrates the arrival of Jesus the Messiah, God inaugurating His rescue plan of redemption by sending Jesus to conquer sin. Heaven's invasion has come; the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Did this Great Rescue come up out of thin air, with no warning? Unlike any event in human history, the arrival of the Messiah was foretold for thousands of years. Generation after generation, the clear and consistent word was echoed: One is coming who will rescue.

Today we are in Isaiah 11, and we discover that a shoot has begun to grow out of a stump. The stump is from the family tree of Jesse, and we know that this isn't just an agricultural metaphor. The branch, we learn, is a person. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on this person. And He will bring salvation to the earth.

Open your time in prayer, thanking God that He brings new life out of dead stumps. Check in with each other on how this first week of Advent has been. Anything new or different this week? Have you sensed your heart more open to the Lord?

## Understanding God's Word

Read Isaiah 11:1-10 out loud together. What words or phrases stand out to you? Who is this person Isaiah speaks of? Describe what he is like.

Read Isaiah 11:6-9. What is remarkable about this “world” that Isaiah describes? By the end of this passage, the “stump of Jesse” (vs. 1) becomes the “Root of Jesse” (vs. 10). What's the difference between a stump and a root? What is Isaiah indicating in this shift?

## Applying God's Word

In a sea of prophetic judgment, this chapter in Isaiah is hopeful and encouraging. Isaiah indicates that someone is coming who will set things right. We can't fix our world, but this One can and will. How does this chapter encourage you in the midst of the heavy events of our city and world right now?

Are there any “dead stumps” in your heart or in your relationships that you want to ask God to bring to life? Remind each other of the good news of Jesus and that it is His job to restore, renew and revive what seems hopeless.

## Witnessing God's Word

Pray for your neighbors and your neighborhoods. Is there some way you can be a “root” of encouragement to someone who needs it?

I have a plant in my office now. Not a plastic one, a real one. What are the odds that it will live? What do you think? How many of you believe I can keep that plant alive? Oh, that's nice. I appreciate your positive perception of your pastor. You should probably ask my assistant, Elizabeth. It was looking pretty puny after Thanksgiving break! We should put odds on whether it is still alive by the time we have our Annual Congregation Meeting on January 29. The plant is our image today. The green shoot breaking up from the soil. We have a stump in our front yard. The prior owners increased the curb appeal by cutting down a tree in the front yard, but the stump remains. And somewhere in there it still believes it can be a tree because every spring the little shoots emerge out of the dark mud.

What a mess we are in, friends. Aren't we? What a mess we are in. We need the hope, the green shoots. We are studying Isaiah all Christmas season. Even Christmas Eve will be a passage from Isaiah. I think you'll recognize it. It gets sung every year around this time. Isaiah is a rich book, and powerful. Isaiah tells the whole story, God's great story of salvation, God's plan to redeem the world: **The Great Rescue**. The name "Isaiah" means "Yahweh is Salvation." God is our salvation. God has a plan, not to extract us from this world, but to save us and use us to redeem this world. See, the Great Rescue is not an extraction, it's an insertion, an incursion. God is entering into the world to save, to redeem, to set things right. And we need Him. What a mess we're in.

Last week we looked at Isaiah 1. If you missed it, Isaiah 1 outlines **The Peril**, the

sickness, the mess. In our rebellion from God and our sinful turning away from Him, we have become a twisted shell of humanity, sick through and through, wounded and bloodied, walking through life like a body beaten, an open sore from head to foot. "Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores" (Isaiah 1:5-6). Sin leaves us a wreck, unsound. I describe it as looking at a car wreck on the side of the road. There's one still on I-25. The car is totaled and you can only hope the driver is OK. You look at that twist of metal and glass, and you can kind of tell what it was meant to be, how it was meant to be helpful, how it had a place for a person to survive in there, to live; but right now it's a twisted wreck.

That's our world in rebellion against its Maker. That's us in rebellion against God. That's how it is right now. A twisted wreck. How else would you describe the Club Q shooting? How else would you describe the birthday shooting in our city that left seven dead last year, or the Planned Parenthood shooting, or the New Life shooting in 2007 or the Boulder King Soopers in 2021? Or how else do you describe the earthquake in Indonesia that left 310 dead last week? Or how about the thousands of unborn lives lost to abortions each day, indiscriminate bombing in Ukraine, or the violence of tyrannical governments suppressing free protest, or whatever else? There is something wrong in this world and it needs fixed. And we can't fix it. All our feasts and altars and special

ceremonies, Isaiah 1 says—they won't do it. The peril is too great, and it runs right through our own hearts.

What is God's plan? What will God do? The story of salvation begins with this: there is a God, our Creator, who cares for us in our distress, who answers us when we call, who will not allow His people and His world to continue forever into self-destruction and corruption. God intervenes. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit" (Isaiah 11:1). A plant. A shoot. A new branch of life emerges. I wish I could survey all the plant images in the Bible for you, all the horticultural illustrations. Jesus used a lot. A plant comes from a seed. A seed falls down into the soil from above. It comes down and enters the mud and mess. It dies, then it cracks open and extends new life, strong and pure and powerful, and persistent—isn't it? Persistent! Have you ever seen a tree growing out of a rock on the side of a mountain? A flower emerging from a crack in the sidewalk? Persistent. And new life emerges. New possibility. New hope. New fruit from the plant.

Isaiah sees, by the power of the Holy Spirit, some 700 years prior to these events, Isaiah sees that this shoot or seedling is actually a person. "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and He will delight in the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:2-3). Worship, reverence, and honor to God will be His bywords. Just to be around Him will be to feel the Spirit of the Lord. Wisdom and understanding, counsel

and might, He will ooze with these. Get close enough and they will rub off on you. To watch Him walk through this world will be to watch things starting to get put right. "He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist" (Isaiah 11:3-5). He won't be fooled by appearances, or swayed by tricky arguments, or driven by the winds of culture this way and that. "He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth." How powerful is the Word of God. When He speaks, all the ridiculousness stops. Just stop! Cease! Be still! Hear the Word of the Lord.

God sends a person and things start getting put right. What if we had to fix it all ourselves? What if it was only up to us to make all of this right? God sends a man. But what man can do all this? Only God can pronounce right judgment, stop wars, bring justice, cause even the animal kingdom to pivot to peace. Only God. What is this Root of Jesse? What is this shoot from the stump? This seed that comes down from heaven? It is God Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a pastor in the fourth century named Athanasius. You remember Athanasius, don't you? Athanasius of Alexandria. He's one of my favorites. He wrote a treatise called "On the Incarnation." That's the technical term for Christmas. God put on flesh,

incarnated, in Jesus Christ. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Well, how does that work? Athanasius said think about a painter, an artist. They make their work, maybe on a plaster wall or a piece of wood, and over time it starts to fade. In fact, the materials start to fall apart, the wood corrodes, the wall cracks. What should the artist do? Toss it out? No. Restore it! But what if the corruption is too deep? Athanasius said, imagine if the artist could climb into the work itself, imagine if the maker could actually step into the painting and start to restore it from the inside. That’s what God has done! That’s what God did in the birth of Jesus! That is the plant, the insertion, the Root of Jesse. An artist would want to do that but couldn’t. God can do it and does!

“Having mercy upon our race, and having pity upon our weakness, and condescending to our corruption, and not enduring the dominion of death, lest what had been created should perish and the work of the Father himself for human beings should be in vain, he takes for himself a body...he takes that which is ours...he prepared for himself in the Virgin the body as a temple, and made it his own... delivering it over to death on behalf of all, he offered it to the Father, so that... as human beings had turned towards corruption he might turn them again to incorruptibility and give them life from death, by making the body his own and by the grace of the resurrection banishing death” (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*).

That’s it. That’s the plant. God enters His own creation to restore and redeem

from the inside out. That’s why Jesus came. That’s why Jesus died. That’s why Jesus rose again, and with His resurrection was the inauguration of His restoration project, His redeeming work, what He called the Kingdom of God. “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them...They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious” (Isaiah 11:6,9-10). **The Great Rescue** has begun.

Yes, we are in a mess. O, what a mess we are in! Our ceremonies and sacrifices, our rituals and, frankly, our imagined and manufactured sacralities, our readings and gatherings and candles and altars will not fix the mess we are in. But there is a God who cares for us; who rescues us in our distress. He has come in His Son Jesus. Because He entered our corrupt flesh and bone, we can enter into eternal life with Him. The bread we take at this table, and the cup we lift and drink, they remind us of the Word who took on flesh, of the broken world that can be renewed, and of the feast on the holy mountain that is coming. The rescue has begun, and the Rescuer will not fail.