

Isaiah 11:1-9

In the book of Daniel, God gave the prophet Daniel a visionary dream in which the pagan empires that dominated the ancient world, one after the other in historical succession, were represented as wild beasts. The Babylonian Empire was represented by a lion with eagle's wings and the Medo-Persian Empire was represented by a bear, devouring the ribs of its victim. The Greek Empire was represented by a leopard with four wings and four heads and the Roman Empire was represented by a dreadful beast with iron teeth. These empires were represented as beasts because they were in the final analysis beastly. Their basic character was like that of ravenous beasts with insatiable appetites, like that of vicious beasts which overcome their victims with the raw red power of tooth and claw, like that of cruel beasts which show their victims no mercy.

Isaiah ministered a few generations before Daniel during the rise of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian Empire was the pagan world empire, which preceded the Babylonian Empire of Daniel's day. Though the Assyrian Empire predated Daniel's dream and was not represented in it, it too was beastly. It was in this context, the historical context of the rise of the beast empires that Isaiah prophesied a coming day when the wolf will dwell with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the young goat.

Before we examine this remarkable prophecy, let us first review the earlier verses we looked at last week. This prophecy here in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah opens with a message of humiliation combined with a message of hope. In the opening verse, the house of David and the kingdom of Judah are represented by the stump of a hewn down tree. This stump represents the kingdom of Judah after the Babylonians had conquered Judah and had destroyed Jerusalem and had deported the people. The kingdom, which had risen to glorious heights under the reigns of David and Solomon was at point in history reduced to a vanquished people and a defeated nation. Though God's people would return from the Babylonian Exile and reestablish the city of

Jerusalem, their earthly political kingdom would never again attain anything approaching its former glory.

We see the continuation of this lowly humiliation hundreds of years later in the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, the prophesied Son of David. He was born in a stable, and His mother laid him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals, because there was no room for them in the inn. This humiliation reached its lowest point when Jesus, the Son of David, the King of the Jews, was crucified on a cruel Roman cross.

The prophet Isaiah, however, sees hope. Out of the stump of Jesse will arise a Branch - a Shoot - with new life. After the humiliation will come exaltation. At the time of Jesus' baptism the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of a dove to gift Him and empower Him for His ministry as Isaiah here prophesied. And on the third day after Jesus' death and burial, God raised Him from the dead with a glorified resurrection body. Forty days later, Jesus ascended up into heaven, and God seated Him at His right hand. The resurrected Son of Man came to the Ancient of Days on the clouds of His ascension. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. Thus, Jesus began the reign that Isaiah describes in verses three through five:

3 His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; 4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.

That describes the rule of Jesus at the right hand of God the Father today.

That brings us to our passage for today where Isaiah begins to discuss the consequences, the results and the ramifications of the rule of Jesus.

The big picture in this vision is where we start. The wolf and the leopard are two wild beasts, two carnivorous animals and two meat eaters. The lamb and the young goat are two helpless domesticated animals who have no means of defending themselves. One would expect the wolf and leopard to kill and devour the lamb and the goat. Instead we read that the wolf peaceably dwells with the lamb, and the leopard lies down with the young goat.

The prophet continues to paint his picture, and adds three more animals to his mural: a calf, a young lion and a fattened ox. I can't improve upon the description of this animal trio by commentator Edward J. Young:

...."With respect to the tame animals, the calf is the weakest and hence the most accessible to the lion. The fatling is an ox that has been fattened and so is particularly desirable to the lion. Between them is the young lion, which neither seizes the weaker calf nor longs for the fatter ox. "

We now have a total of seven animals whose peaceful and harmonious relationship represents the transforming work of the Prince of Peace. The Messiah, who has been anointed with the sevenfold Spirit described earlier in our text, unites these seven animals in a miraculous fellowship. The Messiah, like Noah before Him, redeems not only humanity but also the animal world, and unites both domestic animal and wild beast in the ark of His salvation.

The prophet goes on to tell us that the little child leads these seven animals as a shepherd leads a flock. The child, who is weak and inexperienced and ignorant, successfully leads this group of natural enemies in a common direction. We sometimes use the metaphor of herding cats to describe an impossible leadership task. Herding cats is child's play compared to this herding of a wolf, leopard and lion together with a lamb, a kid, a calf and a fattened ox. This visionary picture of a child shepherding this motley band of assorted beasts is certainly an allusion to a miraculous accomplishment,

The prophet continues to paint his idyllic picture. We learn that the external harmony is rooted in an internal transformation. A carnivorous bear grazes in a pasture with a cow, and a carnivorous lion eats straw like an ox. The venomous snake and the poisonous viper become so harmless that the nursing baby and weaned child are safe in their presence.

8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.

That is the picture the prophet has painted for us.

Let's now go to our second point, which is the content of this picture, by which I mean its meaning and significance. What Isaiah has painted for us here is a picture of paradise restored. Before man's fall into sin, all animals were vegetarians. In God's original good creation, there was no need to kill another being for sustenance. God had designed all life for sustenance through vegetation.

Genesis 1:27-31

27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

29 And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.

30 "Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so. 31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

In the world which God originally created and which God pronounced very good, there was no law of the jungle, no survival of the fittest, no "nature red in tooth and claw," to use the words of the poet. Every sentient being, human and animal, was a vegetarian.

Perhaps I should stop here and make it clear lest there be any misunderstanding that I am not arguing that we should be vegetarians today. After the flood, God established the seasons, an order that is to continue to the end of history, and God gave humanity permission to supplement their diet with meat. This permission also will continue to the end of history. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus ate the Passover lamb. In one of His resurrection appearances, Jesus ate broiled fish. We can be vegetarians in this life if we choose to be, but we also need to remember that eating meat in this life is certainly not sinful.

Let's continue now looking at the world as God originally created it. There also was no death of any sentient being in God's original good creation. It was not until after Adam's sin that death entered the world.

Romans 5:12 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned -

As a result of Adam's sin, death entered the world and death became the common experience of all beings. This entrance of sin and death into the world affected all of earthly creation. The ground was cursed. The world's very ecology was changed as represented by the appearance of thorns and thistles. To use Paul's language in Romans chapter 8, the creation was subjected to futility, which is a loss of original vitality and fruitfulness. The creation was enslaved to the bondage of corruption, which refers to death and decay. An ecology totally consistent with life was replaced with an ecology involving both life and death. Certain animals became carnivorous and began to base their sustenance upon the death of other animals.

Isaiah is painting here in chapter 11 a picture of paradise restored, a picture of the restoration of a consistent ecology of life, a picture of a world freed from the bondage of corruption, a world delivered from death and decay, a world no longer subject to the futility of the curse which had descended upon it.

Another characteristic of the world before the fall was the harmony between

humanity and the animal world. When God created Adam, God gave him dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God also brought every bird of the air and beast of the field to Adam for him to name them. This implies that Adam studied the animals to give them names appropriate to their natures. Also, Adam's giving names to the animals symbolized Adam's lordship over them. All the evidence points to a harmonious relationship between Adam and the animals before the fall.

After Adam's fall into sin, there arose an enmity between humanity and some of the animal world. This enmity is best represented by the effect of the fall upon the serpent, the creature which Satan had used to invade the sanctuary of the garden of Eden. God specifically cursed the serpent and changed it into a creature that travels on its belly through the dust of the ground which God had cursed. Some serpents became poisonous and deadly in the new ecology of death. The prophet paints a picture of a day when the serpent is again harmless and at peace with humanity. Again this is a picture of paradise restored.

We have looked at the canvas and its content. Our third and last point is its Consequences, by which I mean a consideration of the fulfillment of this prophecy. We learn from verse 9 that this prophecy is fulfilled when the earth is filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. We can then expect this prophecy to find its perfect fulfillment at the return of Christ when God's people are delivered not only from the power of sin but also from all remnants of indwelling sin, when this world is freed totally from the curse, when God's people are given glorified resurrection bodies and all of creation is raised to anew, more spiritual level of existence. Only in this context when it here is no remaining sin can there be perfect peace in its fullest manifestation. Wherever there is sin, there will be some degree of conflict and enmity. Paul describes this coming day of perfect deliverance for us in Romans 8:19-22:

Romans 8:19-22 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself

also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

We cannot be sure, but perhaps this new creation, like the original creation, will include animals who are all at peace with humanity and whose nature is totally consistent with the ecology of life. The word “new” in new earth implies continuity as well as discontinuity. It implies the same earth with a qualitative newness about it and not a new and distinct second earth, just as Jesus’ resurrection body was the same body with a qualitative newness and not a new and distinct second body. Perhaps a part of this continuity will be an animal population on the new earth freed from the effects of the curse and raised to a new level of glory along with the rest of creation.

This prophecy will have its perfect fulfillment in the next age when everyone will know the Lord from the least to the greatest, to use the language of the new covenant prophesy in Jeremiah

31. This prophecy will have its perfect fulfillment in the next age when the earth’s human population will consist solely of redeemed humanity in a glorified state. That is when the knowledge of God will truly fill the earth as the waters cover the seas.

This prophecy can also have a partial fulfillment in this age to the degree that where the nations (some tribes and villages have and so on) receive the Gospel, there is a partial fulfillment proportionate to the sanctification of society at any point in history.

In Leviticus 26, there is a description of the blessings and curses of the Old Covenant. When God’s people fulfill the obligations of the covenant and live in accordance with God’s law as a rule of life God blesses them as a father rewards his obedient children. One of the blessings listed is deliverance from evil animals:

Leviticus 26:6

I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land.

When God's people sinned against the Old Covenant, God chastens them as a father chastens his disobedient children whom he loves. One of the chastisements listed is affliction from wild beasts:

Leviticus 26:22 22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate.

A specific example of such judgment is what happened when a group of youths mocked God's prophet Elisha. Elisha cursed them and two female bears came out of the woods and mauled⁴² of the disrespectful youths who had mocked God's servant and thus had taken God's name in vain. The third commandment says that God will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

It is also possible that this prophecy has a metaphorical fulfillment. Because of the fall into sin, the image of God within humanity has been thoroughly distorted. Fallen man is still in the image of God in terms of possessing abilities which are creaturely reflections of God's abilities. Fallen man still thinks and communicates and creates and governs and fellowships. Yet fallen man in his unredeemed state has lost the moral aspect of the image of God. Fallen man no longer uses his gifts and abilities in submission to God and in service to God for the glory of God out of gratitude to God. Fallen man is self-centered and immoral. In this sense, fallen man is beastly. A part of salvation is a restoration of the image of God through a new creation:

2 Corinthians 5:17 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

To the extent that God introduces peace into the hearts of humans, they also start to live in peace with one another. We see this in the early church when the common experience of salvation through Christ bound together Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in a fellowship of love. In secular society, Jews and Gentiles hated each other and were hostile to each other. In the body of Christ, they were at peace.

Only Christ can transform people and make them into a new creation. He can restore the image of God within us in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. He can make us at peace with God, and He can make you at peace with one another. As we preach the Gospel and exhort people to look to Him in faith, to look to Him for salvation He will save those whom he has called to be His own. He will write His royal law of love on their heart with the indwelling of His Spirit and He will make them a new creation in Christ Jesus.