

The Branch

Isaiah 4:1-6

25 December 2022

10:30 Halifax

Introduction

Today, and for the next couple of weeks, we are going to take a break from both of our regular sermon series.

- It is good that we have this time of year when most people are off work and have a chance to visit or host family and friends who live abroad.
 - Students get a break from school, allowing families time together, and it breaks up our routine a bit.

The fact that we take a break at this time of year has its roots in pagan worship—those who wanted to celebrate the rebirth of the sun at the time of the winter solstice.

- It was not until some time in the third century that the church began to celebrate the birth of Christ in this season.
 - It is unlikely that He was actually born at this time of year, and the Lord certainly did not institute that His birth should be celebrated, but the custom of doing so in the winter spread rapidly once it got started.

Our Session has always been careful not to bring into worship things that God has not commanded.

- We do not want to overstep the bounds of authority that God has given us, and He has not given to His church the authority to institute holy days.
 - He reserves such authority for Himself.
 - That is the reason that we are not inclined to call special assemblies and especially not interested in introducing special ceremonies in connection with the birth of Christ.
 - Perhaps the most common complaint we find about the faithful from our Lord pertains to this matter of either adding or taking away from the worship He has appointed for us.
 - It is a constant theme in the Old Testament and continues right on into the New Testament with Christ and His apostles addressing it.
- However, since God has given ministers the authority to decide what they will preach on, so long as they preach the whole counsel of God from Scripture,
 - and since there are many examples showing that we are authorised (and encouraged) to preach special messages when there are circumstances or events that are dominant in our society or among our people,
 - I have very often preached sermons on the birth of Christ (a wonderful subject) and on New Years at this time of year and intend to do that this year.
- This morning, I will be preaching a sermon on the birth of Christ from Isaiah 4.
 - My guess is that most of you, hearing of preaching from Isaiah 4, would not immediately know what Isaiah 4 is about.

- You would likely know Isaiah 1 and Isaiah 6, and perhaps chapter 40 and 53.
 - And in relation to the birth of Christ, you might think of Isaiah 7, where the virgin birth is prophesied, or Isaiah 9, where we have the prophecy that begins “Unto a child is born, unto us a Son is given...”
 - But most of you would probably not know much of anything about Isaiah 4 and what it has to do with the birth of Christ.
 - I will tell from the outset that it speaks about Christ as the Branch of God that is to appear as a little sprout—an inauspicious little sprout breaking through the soil that is the source of eternal life for the nations.
 - It is not a plant with magical powers, but Jesus Christ the Son of God, who became flesh and dwelt among us—God with us.
 - We will see that this is so when we get into our passage.
 - But first, let me read it to you... Isaiah 4:1-6... the very Word of God, telling of the coming of Christ about seven centuries before it happened.

Give careful attention. Isaiah 4:1-6, the word of God. May God bless you as you hear.

Isaiah 4:1-6: And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, “We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach.”² In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; And the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing For those of Israel who have escaped.³ And it shall come to pass that *he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem* will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jeru-salem.⁴ When the Lord has washed

away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning,⁵ then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering.⁶ And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.

Thanks be to God for His holy and infallible Word that is believed and received by all those whom the Father has given to His Son.

- We will centre our attention on the *Branch* which is spoken of in verse 2.
 - “In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious... *etc.*”
 - Most English translations use the word *Branch*. You may have a translation that says *bud* or *shoot*, or something else, but we will stick with *Branch*.

I. The first thing we see is that the Branch appears “In that day.”

- In what day? This is significant.
 - A. Verse 1 shows us that the day in view is a day of devastation by judgment.
 - 1. It is a day when you have seven women wanting to marry one man...
 - not so he can provide for them, for they promise that they will provide for themselves,

- but so they can at least have children, which is the natural desire of women (very much suppressed in our day).
 - They also want to have legal status.
 - Despite their apostasy, the society was still structured to encourage family such that the representation of the household was in the father.
 - There were certainly things that were not done well—many things—but what we have, where we attempt to dissolve the family, is worse.
 - It is worse for children, it is worse for women, and it is worse for men.
 - Normally, in that society, the man would have provided for his wife and represented his family in church and state,
 - leaving her free to manage the home and look after the children under his leadership and protection—he would have taken full responsibility.
 - But things had so deteriorated that you have women simply wanting to be represented by him while they provided for themselves.
2. This is a way of describing the lowly status into which God’s people were brought when Christ came.
- In Isaiah’s day, they still had an independent kingdom with a descendant of David on the throne and free households.
 - Relative to such times, the time when Christ came was a time when they were under Roman rule, had to pay taxes to them, had to obey their laws, had to do things like travelling to their ancestral hometown to be registered for taxation, but the judgment reached its height in the Jewish wars.
 - These wars caused the number of men to be greatly diminished so that women were brought into this state where seven women wanted to marry one man,
 - insisting that they would provide for themselves—the men not being able to support them.
- B. Isaiah tells us that God’s judgment is what brought about this state of affairs.
1. From chapter 1, he speaks about how God was judging them and would keep judging them because, though He had cared for them, they had rebelled against Him.
- Though they were still going through the forms of worship, their worship was offensive.
 - It was meant to be a worship that was grounded in reconciliation with God, but instead it had become a way in which they tried to keep God from punishing them.
 - Isaiah tells them that it will be no use unless they repent and come back to God, not just in form, but in loving obedience and faith.
2. In chapter 3, he talks about how God is going to take away everything that made their society stable—
- Strong leadership will be replaced with weak, effeminate leadership.
 - And their wealth will be replaced with poverty and shortages.

- Military leadership, judges, elders, and priests will cease to be respected—
 - They will become like women and children who are not meant to be in charge—women because they have other important roles and children because they are not mature.
 - He explains that as those rejecting God, their prosperity had become vanity, where their women are focused more on drawing attention to themselves with the latest fashions, making themselves gawdy with excessive ornamentation.
 - The beauty of godliness that is adorned with beautiful works and care for others is replaced with cold, haughty looks and sensuality.
 - In verse 3:18, the LORD says, “¹⁸ **In that day the Lord will take away the finery: the jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents; ¹⁹ the pendants, the bracelets, and the veils; ²⁰ the headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; the perfume boxes, the charms, ²¹ and the rings; the nose jewels, ²² the festal apparel, and the mantles; the outer garments, the purses, ²³ and the mirrors; the fine linen, the turbans, and the robes. ²⁴ And so it shall be: instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-set hair, baldness; instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty. ²⁵ Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty in the war.”**
3. This is the backdrop over against which the Branch of the LORD will appear.
- It is like the black cloth upon which the jeweller displays his diamonds.
 - To put it without symbolism,
 - When we see our sin and its miserable consequences, it is then that we are able to see the beauty of Christ and His salvation.
 - In the day when the Holy Spirit wishes to show you the glory of Christ as Saviour, He first shows you the wretchedness of your sin and the horror of God’s wrath and judgment.
 - In that day, you are able to see the beauty of Christ.
 - What we have here in Isaiah is a picture of the whole period of judgement when God reduced Israel because of their sin. It began with the invasion of Assyria, was heightened with the exile to Babylon, was continued with the opposition of Greece and the oppression of Rome, and reached its climax in the time of the Jewish Wars that occurred just after Christ was exalted to be Lord and Saviour, but long before He was widely recognised.
 - It is about the time of His advent, His coming into the world to be Lord and Saviour.

TRANS> Let’s consider that as our second heading.

II. By calling Him the Branch, His inauspicious beginning is emphasised.

A. Children, do you know what and inauspicious beginning is?

1. It speaks of the beginning of something that does not look like it will amount to anything—it does not look like it will succeed.

- For example, you see a weak skinny chap that wants to be a world class power lifter. He gets started and he can barely pick up fifty pounds.
 - It is an inauspicious beginning.
- 2. Jesus had an inauspicious beginning.
 - a. When He was born, it did not look like He was going to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords.
 - He had poor parents who were from a backwater place called Nazareth.
 - His father was a carpenter, and Jesus was born in a cattle stall, with nothing but a manger—a feeding trough—for His bed.
 - It was a very inauspicious beginning.
 - b. Even after He began His ministry and drew large crowds, He had few followers that were really loyal—and almost none who had high places of influence.
 - The political rulers of Rome pretty much ignored Him.
 - The chief priests and the scribes of the Jews, His own people, spoke ill of Him and ordered Him to be crucified—and He was!
 - His followers were a fearful band of lowly fisherman who struggled to understand what He said.
 - After His death and resurrection, He had only a 120 who initially gathered at Jerusalem when all the Jews had come for the Passover.
 - Even after the 3000 were baptised at Pentecost and many more after that, it still remained a tiny minority among the Jews,
 - And though it began to spread to Gentiles, even then it was an inauspicious beginning.
 - c. So it is today in our own country that though the gospel reached almost everyone so that the great majority professed His name,
 - Many people think that the whole thing is fizzling out (which in a way it is) and will not rise again from its ruins (which is very mistaken).

B. Calling Him a **Branch** emphasises His inauspicious beginnings.

1. The Hebrew word that is translated *branch* here speaks of something that sprouts, a growth such as a bud or a shoot.
 - It refers to something that is just starting to grow—a bit of life springing up.
2. This is actually a part of a whole prophetic stream that refers to the Messiah in this way—some say that Isaiah 4:2 is the beginning of that stream.
 - In the time of Ezra, when the Jews did a Chaldee Paraphrase called the Targum, they translated they paraphrased the word Branch with the word Messiah.
 - Their teachers saw this as a reference to the coming Messiah.
 - Jeremiah, under inspiration, uses this word *Branch* to speak of the Messiah.

- In Jer 23:5, he says: **“Behold, *the days are coming*,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.”**
- He uses again in the same way in Jeremiah 33:15.
- Zechariah uses it twice as well.
 - The first time is in Zech 3:8 where he says: Zec 3:8 **‘Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.**
 - In the next verse, the LORD declares that when He does this, He **will remove the iniquity (sin) of the land in one day.**
- Another word with a similar meaning is also brought into this prophetic stream.
 - It is the word *nay’tser*, related to the word Nazareth.
 - It also refers to a sprout or a shoot and is also translated *branch*.
 - Most notably, it is used the Messiah in Isaiah 11:1: **There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.**
 - It was prophesied, of course, that Jesus would be a son (descendant) of David. Jesse was David’s father, so when it says that a branch would grow out of Jesse’s roots, it speaks of the time when David’s throne had fallen—as had long been the case when Jesus came...
 - It was as if the great tree of King David had been cut down to the roots, but there was still life in those roots—out of them this little shoot comes up—an inauspicious little shoot—a son born of the ruins of David’s house!

C. This is part of an even larger prophetic theme...that God saves by what is lowly.

- God will save His people through a Son that will be born to a woman.
- 1. This all began right after the fall, when, in Genesis 3:15, the LORD promised that the woman’s seed—an individual seed—would come and crush the old serpent, Satan, who had deceived the whole world and brought us into bondage.
 - In that ancient prophecy, God promised that He would separate a people out of the ruined human race to be His own people, and that they would be delivered by a Son born.
 - A mere stem, a branch, a bud that would emerge to save the world.
- 2. Time would fail us to do more than merely mention how the LORD made it a point to save His people out of great weakness—again and again.
 - We may think of barren Abraham to whom this child was promised and whose wife brought forth a child long after she was past the age to bear a child.

- We may think of Gideon who delivered Israel from an army that was way to big for them, and how He reduced them down to 300 so that they would see plainly that salvation was His doing.
 - And of course there was the LORD's deliverance out of Egypt when His people were powerless slaves in bondage to the mighty Egyptians.
 - Over and over again, the LORD teaches that it is not by human might nor power that He saves.
 - Salvation is His work.
 - It is by a little branch coming up out of dry ground, out of the ruins of the house of David, out of our ruined human race, that He will save the world.
3. How we need to remember that this is how the LORD works, as we see that, once again, the LORD has been pleased to reduce His church to weakness because of our sin.
- We see the church torn apart by schisms and ruined by false teaching, weak and desperate, barren, and in decline here in our land—
 - But God's promise will not fail. We can have boldness and confidence to stand with the LORD. Those who do will never be disappointed.

TRANS> But Isaiah does not merely call the Jesus a branch.

- Let's go on and look at what it says about Him!

III. Isaiah 4:2 shows us that the branch is God-made-flesh.

- I do not mean that it shows us that directly—as it does in the first chapter of John's gospel where it says “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,”
- but I mean that it tells us that in a prophetic way that becomes crystal clear once it is fulfilled.
- It says: **In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing**

A. We see here both the deity and the humanity of Christ joined in what seems weak.

1. As the branch of the LORD, He is an extension of God.
 - He is *the LORD* appearing in the world in weakness, a little sprout.
 - This branch that appears in the day of Israel's demise is truly God coming into the world to save His people from their sins.
 - He is Immanuel, God with us.
 - He is the Branch of God.
 - Remember that the word LORD when it is written with all capital letters translates God's divine name, Yahweh or Jehovah.
 - This name emphasises Him as the self-existing one—the uncreated God who made everything else.
 - And here He appears, as promised of old, in Bethlehem, to save His people from their sin—He whose goings forth have been from everlasting.

- But notice the parallel statement.

2. This branch is not only the branch of the LORD, He is also “the fruit of the earth.”
 - That speaks of Him as one who is a product of the earth—and so He was!
 - Yes, He was the LORD from heaven who came to save His people, but He was also born of woman, of her substance, with a human body and spirit, made under the law, to represent His people that He might save them.
 - From the beginning, God had said that He would be born of woman.
 - And of course woman was made of the man, and the man was made of the dust of the ground—man is of the earth.
 - Therefore, Jesus, who was born of the woman, was also of the earth.
 - He is both the LORD from heaven who has no beginning and the Son who was born to us of woman.

B. The Branch, this Sprout, this Child born, is glorious!

1. As the Branch of the LORD, He is said to be beautiful and glorious—
 - You can see that in verse 2 “**The Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious.**”
 - This inauspicious one is beautiful—a rare word that speaks of a gazelle—what is lovely to behold.
 - He bears the beauty that belongs to God—not revealed in this branch that had been revealed.
 - He is also glorious—the Hebrew word *kaw-bode* which means *weighty* in the sense of *honourable*.
 - It speaks of Him as substantial—surely so—for He is the most high God who has come to do His gracious work of salvation.
 - Those few interpreters who suggest that this speaks merely of crops give way too much to crops!
 - They are fine to have, but who would call them beautiful and glorious?
2. As the fruit of the earth, He is also said to be excellent and appealing.
 - **The fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing.**
 - The word *excellent*. This word is sometimes translated *majestic*.
 - When used of man, it often refers to arrogance and pride, but when used of this one who is God made flesh, it refers to true greatness.
 - He is what God made us to be—we are to be conformed to His image.
 - The word *appealing* speaks of that which delights—what is pleasing and, shall we say, delicious.
 - Who speaks with such beautiful wise and gracious words?
 - Who loves with such wholesome genuine love?
 - Who serves with such outpouring of self, with such blessing to those who are served?
 - He is altogether lovely—as Peter says, to us He is precious!

- Ps 89:6 (beautifully translated in our Psalter): **“Who with the LORD can be compared in all the lofty sky? And who among the sons of might is like the LORD Most High?”**

TRANS> There is a huge contrast here.

IV. This little Sprout is glorious in the same day that Israel is brought to ruin.

- A. The “day” in view here is not a twenty-four-hour day—it is generation of Jesus.
1. In that day, He was born, died, rose again and began a church that was small and despised in both Israel and the world.
 - Right up through the destruction of Jerusalem, the church was, as far as the world was concerned, a mere sect of Judaism.
 - It was only a tiny remnant in Israel that followed Christ, and at first, many of the Gentiles were already God-fearers who were associated with the synagogue.
 - My point is that going into 70 AD, and even beyond that, Christ was but a bud, a little sprout of life that most people did not regard.
 2. In that same day (in Jesus’ generation), God used Rome to reduce Israel to what is portrayed in verse 1—where seven women take hold of one man...
 - In a very real way, the day of judgment began in Isaiah’s day and reached its full fury in the generation of Jesus.
 - When He prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem, He said that the present generation would not pass away until these things had occurred.
 - Remember, if He had not been cut off and had lived to be 75, He would have been on earth when Jerusalem fell.

TRANS> What I want you to see here is that in the very same day that this branch appeared, God’s judgment fell upon Jerusalem.

- B. There is a great contrast here between “those who escape in Israel” and the rest.
1. For those who escape, the Branch (this little sprout) is glorious (v. 3).
 - a. They are the ones who are left in Zion—they live through the destruction.
 - Even those who were not actually killed in the judgment but remained opposed to Jesus as Messiah ceased to be a nation of God’s people.
 - Their temple was destroyed, and the future was with the remnant who escaped this judgment.
 - Yes, God spared them from physical destruction in the Jewish wars, but more importantly, they lived as His people.
 - b. They are called holy. They go into the future rejoicing in the Branch.
 - v. 3: **he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.**
 - c. They are recorded among the living in Jerusalem—they are God’s elect.
 - They are written in God’s book of life.
 - They were written in His book from before the foundation of the world.
 - They were appointed to salvation by Jesus Christ.
 - Jesus referred to them as ‘those that the Father has given Me.’
 - When Jesus prayed in John 17, He speaks of them as those that the Father had given to Him.

- John 17:6-7: **“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.”**
 - You don’t want to be left to make your own decision—if you are, you will make the wrong decision.
 - You want Christ to save you.
2. There is a washing and purging similar to Noah’s day (v. 4).
- v. 4: **When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning,**
 - In the great flood, God washed away the filth of the world and spared Noah by grace, making him and his household holy.
 - a. This washing in the generation of Jesus is called “a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning.”
 - It is a bath and a refiner’s fire that purifies the church, leaving among the living those who follow the Lamb.
 - b. Those left alive are those for whom the Branch is beautiful and glorious.
 - They cling to Him as the only Saviour.
 - They know that all their righteousness is as filthy rags but for His salvation.
 - They look to His saving work on the cross for the remission of sin and to His Spirit to give them life with God.
3. Indeed, those who escape go into the future with God. The Branch brings them to His Father.
- a. God’s presence is illustrated in our text by the pillar of cloud and fire at the Exodus (v. 5-6).
 - **Then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. 6 And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.**
 - b. The pillar shows us three things the God will do for those who have the Branch.
 - We may see three things in this.
 - 1) First, it tells us that God will reveal Himself to us—He will make it known that He is near to us.
 - The pillar of cloud and fire was a constant reminder that He was with them.
 - 2) Second, it tells us that He will guide us—
 - In the wilderness, God led His people by having the cloudy pillar rise and lead them where He wanted them to go.

- Today, it means that God will speak to us as His people through His word and will give us wisdom so that we may follow Him.
- 3) Third, the pillar of cloud and fire tells us that He will protect us.
- When Egypt pursued Israel, the cloud stood between Israel and the advancing Egyptians.
 - We are assured that He will not allow anything to separate us from Him.
 - The end of verse 5 and verse 6 say: **For over all the glory there will be a covering. ⁶ And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.**
 - If you have been brought to the Lord so that you are trusting in Him, if you have come to Him for salvation,
 - You can be certain, as I told you last week, that He will not fail to do the saving.
 - Eternal life is a certainty because the Father has given Him the responsibility to save you.
 - Trust Him to do it!

C. The Branch is not just for the escaped in Israel.

1. It says that this is done for those who escape in Israel.
 - And indeed, that is where Jesus began His work—with the remnant in Israel whom the Father had given Him.
 - But He commanded them to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to the nations—and He made it clear that His salvation for people from all nations, pouring out His Spirit on them the way He had upon those of Israel who were appointed to salvation.
2. Isaiah himself has already spoken gloriously of the effect that the Branch would have on the nations.
 - Back in chapter 2, he told us what would happen in the latter days, which refer to the days when the Messiah would come.
 - In 2:2, he says: **Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.**
3. The Branch is not just for those who escape from Israel.
 - He is also the Branch of new life for all who escape from among the nations.
 - He is the Branch of the LORD, God with us—beautiful and glorious.

- He is the Fruit of the earth, God made flesh—excellent and appealing.
- He makes us holy.
 - He takes away our filth and our guilt.
 - He brings us near to God to glory in Him, to be led by Him, and to be protected by Him.

Conclusion: The Branch is all the glory!

- How glad we should be that He has come.