

# The Irresistible Banner

Isaiah 11:10-16

*Halifax: 12 July 2009*

## **Introduction:**

Last week,

- we looked at Isaiah's description our most excellent Saviour whose birth he prophesied.
  - There is so much we learn of Christ from this dear prophet!
- We saw several ways that He would be just the Saviour we need...
  - We saw that He would come to His covenant people in a time when they were greatly humbled—when the house of David was fallen to its humble origins—
    - and that He would enter into that humiliation—even to the point of bearing the curse for all His people that He might lift them out of it.
  - We saw that He would be furnished, in His human nature, with the fullness of the Spirit of Jehovah—
    - so that He would lack nothing to carry out His work.
  - We saw that He would be characterised by a delight in the fear of the Lord—
    - so that all He did would be motivated by His desire to glorify His Father and lead His people to see that glory—

TRANS> Truly, He was just the right person to be our Saviour!

- And we also saw the marvellous work that our most excellent Saviour would do.
  - That He would rule us with perfect justice and wisdom in God's ways...
    - so that all who submit to Him would be made beautiful...
    - so that all who reject Him would be cut off by Him and brought to judgement.
  - We saw that He would bring forth righteousness and covenant faithfulness for us—
    - that against all opposition, He would (as our representative) obtain righteousness for us—even enduring the temptation of Satan and the cross.
  - And we saw that He would restore paradise for us—
    - paradise in which peace would prevail and in which God would be fully known...
      - as illustrated by vicious animals made sweet and harmless...
      - and described as the “knowledge of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea...”
        - Stage by stage, He brings the world from where it is now to this glorious end!

TRANS> It is all so glorious!

- What a terrible thing it would be if there should be such a Saviour,
  - but there should be none in the earth to regard His work—none to come to Him to be saved—none to receive Him.
- Was it not true that even when Isaiah spoke these words,
  - Israel (His own people) was in desperate rebellion against Him?
  - Had Isaiah not already prophesied that Assyria was going to crush them and that only a tenth would remain?
  - Do we who live now not know that after Assyria struck,
    - the Covenant people were then struck by Babylon and carried into exile for 70 years?
    - And do we not know that even when a few were brought back to rebuild Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah,
      - it was but a meagre beginning of their restoration?
      - and that they remained in a pitiable, weak condition even to the coming of Christ?
      - And that even to this day, the remnant that survived the Assyrian attack has had far less than what could be described as a glorious restoration?
- Indeed!
  - But Isaiah speaks here of a complete restoration of Israel in Christ!
  - He describes it as something that the Lord Himself will surely accomplish!
  - In effect, he tells us, as Paul puts it in Romans 11:26, that “all Israel will be saved.”
    - and in the context, it is very clear that Paul is speaking of ethnic Israel, for that is the very point of his discussion—
      - Paul is talking about what will happen to “Israel after the flesh,” and how the Lord has not forsaken them even though He has turned to the Gentiles.
  - Isaiah is telling us that the salvation of Israel will most certainly be brought to completion at last because the LORD Himself will accomplish it!
    - He does not bring forth our glorious Saviour for naught!
      - He will give to Him the people that He has promised to give Him.
      - He will be true to His Son.
      - Salvation is His work and He will do it.
        - That is what Isaiah shows us in verses 10-16.

**TRANS> Consider in the first place that:**

**I. It is God who sets up Christ as a banner for His people.**

- In verse 10, it says:
  - Isaiah 11:10: "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people.

A. A banner is a rallying point...

1. When there was a great battle, the troops would become scattered—
  - and so it was necessary for their leader to raise up a banner or ensign so that they would know where to go to regroup...
  - They would gather together again under the flag that identified them.
  - So by setting up a banner for the people,
    - the Lord is giving them something that clearly stands out—
      - something that will show them where He is so that they might easily find Him and come to Him.
  
2. And I want you to notice that the banner Isaiah refers to is a person—even Christ!
  - He is called **the Root of Jesse**, which we have already seen to be the fallen house of David...
    - The house of David under the judgment of God...
    - The house of David out of which Christ was to come forth as a sprout.
    - When God sets it up as a banner,
      - it is the Root of Jesse with Christ sprouted forth.
        - How do we know that?
          - Because Isaiah describes to us when the Root of Jesse will be set up.
          - He uses the words “in that day”
            - and the day he has been talking about is the day when the Branch has grown out of the root of Jesse.
  - So this root of Jesse—is now referred to as an individual person—
    - The translators are right to refer to the shoot as *Him*...
      - For the Gentiles shall seek *Him*.
      - And *His* resting place shall be glorious.
  - It is, no doubt, the One Isaiah had been speaking about who is filled with the Spirit and who delights in the fear of the Lord and rules in justice and destroys the wicked and obtains righteousness and restores paradise for God’s people!
    - Not only is Jesus going to do all this work...
      - but God is going to set Him as a banner to the people!
      - A banner to which His people will come!

TRANS> And I tell you,

B. This root of Jesse was indeed set up as a banner for the people!

1. He was set up in the very deepest part of His humiliation—as the one bearing our sins on the cross...
  - John 3:14 says:
    - John 3:14: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,"
    - And then in John 12 when certain Greeks come declaring "we would see Jesus,"
      - Jesus declares to them that He must first die and then He will be the One who will draw the nations to Himself...
        - John 12:32: "'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.'"
      - And John explains that He said this, indicating by what death He would die.
        - They will not see the value of Christ until they see that He has been crucified for the sin of the world...
          - They will come when they hear the preaching of the cross for the remission of sins.
2. You see how Isaiah predicts this very thing in verse 10...
  - He declares here in verse 10 that the Gentiles will seek Him.
    - Paul quotes this very verse in Romans 15:12 to show that Christ would draw the Gentiles to Himself.
      - They will come to Him who alone is able to save them...
        - and they will turn from their idols and their deceptions and their dreams to be saved by Him.
      - They come to the cross.
        - They respond to the preaching of the cross by which Christ is lifted up as a banner among the nations.
  - Even though He was set up first of all for His own people Israel,
    - Isaiah tells us that it is the Gentiles who will see Him...
      - They will see this banner and they will come over to His side!
      - They will see that the cross is the only way for the human beings to be reconciled to God and they will come...

- Israel was blinded in part when Jesus came, but the Gentiles (or the nations) sought Him.
- The **seeking** that is spoken of here is not a groping of one who cannot find what He is looking for...
  - It is rather a coming with joyous zealous commitment to obtain what has been given!
    - This is the only way to seek Him!
    - It will do you no good to endlessly search!
  - God has not hidden this banner—this way to come to Him...
    - Christ has been publicly set forth for all to see who are honest about their need for forgiveness.
      - If you are honestly looking for forgiveness,
        - once you see the cross, you will come have no where else to go.
        - You will come to receive life.

C. Isaiah tells us that the resting place of this banner is glorious!

1. The resting place is the place where this banner is set up...where he dwells...
  - Jesus dwells in the midst of those who come to Him as lifted up on the cross for salvation...
  - He promises that among them, He will make His abode forever.
    - In Psalm 132, He describes His resting place as in the midst of His people who keep His covenant:
      - He says:
        - Psalm 132:12-14: If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I shall teach them, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore." For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: "This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it."
  - The banner, which is Christ Himself, rests forever in the place where His people gather to Him and lift Him up as their banner...
    - They carry Him as their banner by the faithful preaching of the gospel—the preaching of the cross—and by the administration of the sacraments...
2. Wherever this is done is a most glorious place...
  - For Christ is there and He pours forth the Holy Spirit among the people to give eternal life to them and to their children.
    - It is a glorious place because it is...

- a place where God is truly known!
- a place where lives are changed!
- a place where there is complete forgiveness of sin.

TRANS> And now having seen that God is the one who sets up the root of Jesse to which the nations come,

- I want you to see that the reason they come is because God draws them...
  - Oh yes, they come because they see that the banner is the way of forgiveness and the way to eternal life—
    - they see their need of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ and they come with eagerness to obtain forgiveness and salvation...
    - But the reason they see all this—and the reason they come when they see it—is because the Lord gathers them...
      - Not only is it God who sets up Christ as a banner among the nations...

## II. It is God who powerfully gathers His people unto Christ.

A. First we are told that He “sets His hand a second time” to gather them.

1. To “set His hand” means to exert His power to do something...
  - as we would say, “to put our hand to the task.”
  - And of course when **God** sets His hand to do something, He does it.
    - When He sets His hand to recover His people, He recovers all that He has chosen.
    - In Romans 11, Paul pointed out that God reserved the elect so that there were those in Israel who were saved because they were elect:
      - Rom 11:5: Even so then, at this present time [he says], there is a remnant according to election...
    - In verse 7 he explains:
      - Rom 11:7: Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it
      - Those who come to Christ come because God brings them.
  - The task to which God has set His hand, according to Isaiah,
    - is the recovery of the remnant of those who survived the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions.
    - Many families had been cut off by these invasions, but God purposed to restore the remnant.

2. And notice that Isaiah says that the Lord will do this “the second time.”
  - There will be two times when He will gather the remnant that is left.
    - a. When was the first time?
      - Some say that it was when He delivered His people from Egypt,
        - but that was not the recovery of the remnant that was left...
        - That was the deliverance of all the people.
      - I would suggest, for a number of reasons, that the first time was when He delivered them under Ezra and Nehemiah...
        - a time yet future to Isaiah and his contemporaries.
        - That was the first time for the recovery of the remnant that Isaiah has been speaking about in his prophecies...
          - the remnant of the Assyrian and Babylonian exile.

TRANS> What then is the second time to which Isaiah refers?

- b. The second time is at Pentecost...
  - and not just on the day of Pentecost, but in the first century as God gathered the elect from Israel.
  - I say this for the following reasons...
    - 1) First, because the time specified is the time when the Root of Jesse is lifted up as a banner.
      - As we have seen, this refers to the time when Christ was crucified and then preached for the remission of sins...
        - That did not begin until Pentecost,
          - and it is at that time that we read how many Jews from all over the world heard and believed.
    - 2) Second, because the gathering is more extensive than it was in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.
      - Under Ezra and Nehemiah,
        - it was primarily a gathering from Babylon,
          - but the gathering Isaiah speaks of is from
            - “Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea.”
          - The islands of the sea includes the coastlands of the Mediterranean—Greece, Italy, and Spain—where the Jews had been scattered.

TRANS> Third, I think the second gathering was that of the first century

3) Because the New Testament writers often speak of the gathering of the Jews of the dispersion...

- For example, Peter addresses his first epistle in this way:
  - 1 Peter 1:1-2: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.”
- This second ingathering was not a physical return to the land,
  - but a true return to the LORD—to Christ crucified and risen again for the remission of sins.
  - It was the gathering of dispersed Israel into the New Covenant.

TRANS> But whatever of that...

B. The main point is that those who come to Christ come because the LORD **gathers** them to Him.

1. It is His work that causes them to come—His effectual call of them.

- Verse 11 says He stretches forth His hand to **recover them**...
- And then verse 12 we are told that the Lord **assembles** them and then that He **gathers** them.
  - The two words are virtually synonymous...
- God is the one who set up Christ crucified as the banner by which we must be saved...
  - And God is the one that gathers the outcast of Israel and the dispersed of Judah to Him.
- It is His powerful work that brings them to Christ from the four corners of the earth—
  - literally, the four wings of the earth, a phrase commonly used to refer to the entirety of a garment...

2. Learn from this that those who come to Christ are drawn to Him by God’s irresistible grace.

- They come only when God gathers them...
  - When He opens their eyes by His Spirit to see the beauty and the glory and the life-giving power of the banner that He has set up...
  - and then draws them to Him.



- Jesus said,
  - Joh 6:44: No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;
- It is the LORD who draws them by the power of His Spirit...
  - He draws them such that they are unable to resist—
    - How could they when he shows them the salvation that is to be found only in the cross?
    - And when He removes their stony heart and gives them a heart that is not stubborn?
  - Christ is lifted up and they are drawn to Him.
    - They can no more resist than a cart can resist when it is drawn by a horse,
      - or than a bucket in a well can resist when it is drawn by a rope.
    - Jesus said:
      - Joh 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.
- They cannot refuse.
  - The banner has an irresistible attraction to them.
    - Nothing can keep them away...
- Have you been thus drawn to Jesus Christ?
  - If you have not, I urge you to hear the call of God to come.
    - Look at the banner and see how wonderful it is!
    - It is Christ offered up as a sacrifice for sin!
      - You need Him—you must have Him—
        - He alone will reconcile you to God!
        - He alone can give you the remission of sin and eternal life.
  - And if you have been drawn to Him—if you have come...
    - then do not boast!
    - Know that it is God who has drawn you...
      - You were too blind and too stubborn to come even though Christ was openly crucified and you learned of Him...
      - If you have come, you have come because God drew you...
        - Be humble and give thanks.

C. See the great effect that God's gathering has upon both Jew and Gentile...

- In comparing what Isaiah says here in chapter 11 with what Paul says in Romans 11,
  - we are shown the plan by which God operates to gather in His elect people.
  
- 1. First, we are told that the Gentiles will come.
  - Verse 10 says that when this banner is set up, the Gentiles will seek Him—as we saw—come to Him for salvation...
  - And in verse 12, we are told that the banner is set up for them—for the nations.
  
- 2. Then, after this, we are told that God will gather in the Jews—
  - There was a gathering of them at Pentecost and in the first century and there has been a trickling influx of them to Christ throughout the centuries...
    - But for the most part,
      - the gospel has had its greatest impact on the nations...
    - This seems backward because Jesus was sent to Israel first,
      - but Paul explains why it is so in Romans 11:25.
        - Addressing the Gentiles, he says:
          - Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
    - God, in His unsearchable plan, has blinding Israel as a judgment and is calling the Gentiles ahead of them...
      - but once the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in, He will gather Israel—all Israel—
        - as Paul goes on to tell us in verse 26-27:
          - Rom 11:26-27: And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."
      - This total ingathering of Israel was something that Paul saw as yet future to his own day.
        - And it seems that it is yet future to us in our day,
          - for no such ingathering as this has yet occurred...
          - Israel as a whole has not yet been “turned away from ungodliness” by the Messiah.

- And is this “turning away of ungodliness” not what Isaiah refers to in verse 13 when he speaks about the envy of Ephraim departing—
  - and the melting of the ancient hostilities among the Jews?
  - Can we say that division and envy have departed from Israel as long the great mass of the Jewish people reject their own Messiah?
    - Was the envy of Ephraim not that they rejected the house of David?
    - Was it not envy of the same sort that led the Jews to crucify Christ?
      - Even Pilate knew that they had delivered him because of envy.
  - This great and final ingathering of the Jews has not yet occurred and it will not occur until God has first brought in the fullness of the Gentiles.
    - That is the order that God has established.
      - And not think, as some do, that the Jews will be restored to Old Covenant that is now obsolete with the coming of Christ.
        - Not at all!
        - They are brought to Christ the banner—
          - Christ the one who has been lifted up as crucified!
          - Christ who alone can save!
        - God will gather Israel to Him and to no other!
          - They come to the banner.

TRANS> And my brothers and sisters, after all Israel is gathered...

3. Then there is an even greater outpouring of God’s mercy to the nations!
  - Once Israel is gathered to Christ and ungodliness is turned away in Israel...
    - Then the united people of Israel will have a powerful effect upon the Gentiles so that even more of them will be brought to Christ!
  - That is what Isaiah is talking about in verse 14 using military language!
    - Isaiah 11:14 says of restored Israel:
      - Isa 11:14: But they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines toward the west; Together they shall plunder the people of the East; They shall lay their hand on Edom and Moab; And the people of Ammon shall obey them.
    - The plunder of the nations will be the giving of their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ;
      - and the obedience of the nations will be their obedience to the gospel.

- Paul argues,
  - If Gentiles were brought in because Israel fell,
    - how much more will the Gentiles be brought in when Israel is restored!
  - He says:
    - Romans 11:12: Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!
  - And in Romans 11:15, he says:
    - Romans 11:15: For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

TRANS> Do you see the great encouragement for us in this?

- As we labour to spread the gospel today,
  - we are bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles...
    - and once that is accomplished, God will stretch out His hand to the Jews...so that all Israel will be saved
    - and once that is complete,
      - He will pour out even more grace to the Gentiles.
      - The end result will be that the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!
        - This is what we are working for!
        - God has commanded us to make disciples of all the nations.
          - He would have Christ to be known everywhere!

### **III. Take heart! God will do the impossible!**

- He will not fail to accomplish all that He has promised!
  - We will not receive encouragement about His promises by looking at Barna reports about church growth or by looking at Newspaper headlines.
  - We will grow discouraged if we do that.
  - We must rather look at what God tells us in His word!
    - That He set up Christ as the banner for the nations and that He is going to gather them to Himself.

A. In verse 15 the Lord tells us that He will remove the barriers that keep His people from Him...

1. He describes these barriers as the tongue of the sea of Egypt (the Red Sea) and as the River (the Euphrates)...

- These were the natural barriers that kept Israel first in the land of Egypt and then in the land of Babylon.
    - And listen to what the LORD says about these:
      - Isa 11:15: The LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; With His mighty wind He will shake His fist over the River, And strike it in the seven streams, And make men cross over dry-shod.
  - He will so dry up such barriers that His people won't even have to take their shoes off to cross over!
    - They won't even get their feet wet.
    - He will do the impossible!
2. Now of course this refers back to what God had done long ago in Egypt so as to say that He will do such things again.
- a. What is significant about Egypt was that the people were helpless.
- God's people were in desperate bondage to the Egyptians—
    - serving them instead of God.
  - And God tells us in His word that He had actually raised Pharaoh up and made him strong in order to demonstrate His power by bringing him down.
  - He let His people feel their weakness and bondage—
    - They could not get out when God called them...
    - When Moses first approached Pharaoh, Pharaoh flexed his muscles even more and showed them his power over them...
      - The people despaired—it seemed impossible for the Lord to deliver them.
- b. But you know what happened—
- The LORD sent plague upon plague to Egypt until the whole nation was almost destroyed...
    - and Pharaoh finally agreed to let them go.
  - But no sooner had they got away than Pharaoh changed his mind and sent his army after them...
    - There was poor, unarmed Israel with the Pharaoh's army coming from behind and the red sea as a barrier in front of them—what Isaiah calls the tongue of the sea of Egypt...
      - The situation was, as far as Israel was concerned, impossible!

- c. But they quickly learned that what is impossible with man is not impossible with God...
    - He parted that sea and let them cross over on dry ground...
      - And Isaiah tells us that in the future He will do an even greater thing and dry it up altogether!
        - He will destroy if it is in the way of His people coming to Him.
- B. Our God graciously shows us His glory by showing us how desperate our condition is...
1. We are so full of pride after our fall into sin that we need to be taught this while we are in the earth...
    - We must see how desperate we are...
    - We must see that we cannot save ourselves...
    - We must see that the very Son of God Himself had to come and had to die on the cross...
  2. God is pleased even to arrange history in such a way that we are brought into impossible circumstances...
    - so that we can learn that He is LORD when He delivers us!
      - These are lessons we must have to be fit to spend eternity with Him...
      - And these are the lessons He continues to teach us in this fallen world.

TRANS> Oh my friends, don't you see?

3. Nothing, but nothing! can keep God from gathering the world to Himself.
    - a. There is no heart too hard and stubborn that it cannot be melted...
    - b. There is no sin too great that it cannot be forgiven...
    - c. There is no confusion too deep that it cannot be resolved...
    - d. There is no lust too gripping that it cannot be broken...
- C. Our gracious God makes a highway between His people and Himself so that they can and will come to Him...
- Verse 16 says:
    - Isa 11:16: There will be a highway for the remnant of His people Who will be left from Assyria, As it was for Israel In the day that he came up from the land of Egypt.
  - 1. Yes, even Israel, as hardened and as blind and as stubborn as they are will come...
    - And so will the nations before God is through with them!

- He will stretch out His mighty hand and gather them in when it looks to us like it could never happen!
  - His sheep will hear His voice and come to Him...
  - With confidence we may sing:
    - Ps 72:11: Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him.
    - Ps 72:17: His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed.
    - Ps 82:8: Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations.
    - Ps 86:9: All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name.
    - Ps 110:1-3: The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power;

2. Do not lose heart my brothers and sisters!

- The LORD will do what seems impossible to you.
- Let us pray with all confidence, even in hard times—especially in hard times.
  - Israel gave up on God when the bondage of Egypt increased... but He brought them out...
  - Then they gave upon on Him again and again in the wilderness... but again and again He delivered them...
  - You must not give up on Him.
    - The LORD will do all that He has promised.
- Let us go forth with the gospel with all confidence....
  - There is no need to change the message or to try to dress up Christ in the clothing that will appeal to the world!
  - No, it is for us to set Him forth as the crucified one—God will gather in His elect to Him.
- Let us suffer with confidence that our sufferings will not be in vain...
  - We fill up the measure of Christ's sufferings by our own suffering,
    - leaving a testimony to the world that we love Him more than our comforts—more than life itself...
    - showing the world that God's grace sustains us and that we have a much greater hope than the hope of this world.
- Let us be humble, knowing that we were drawn by His irresistible grace...

- We have nothing to boast about—
  - It is not of many who wills, or man who runs, but of God who calls.
- Let us be thankful that our God reigns and that He will accomplish the good things that He has promised...
  - Nothing can stop Him.
    - He is the One who set up the banner and He is the one who will gather all Israel and a great multitude no one can number to Him.
    - Blessed be His glorious name forever and forever!
      - Christ is the Irresistible Banner.
        - Lift Him high and gather to Him!