

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge  
Sermon- Isaiah 11:1-10  
Sunday, December 4, 2016

## Interpretation

1. As many of you know, my degree from the University of Pittsburgh is in English Literature. This was a very bizarre degree to study for because I had professors across the philosophical spectrum teaching us how to interpret the classic works of the English language.
2. I remember one of my American Lit classes which had an older woman as a professor, and she cared very much what the authors were trying to convey, if anything, in their writings. I had several professors who didn't bother knowing anything about the authors or their backgrounds, but simply interpreted the texts through the lens of their modern day political and philosophical views.
3. I had one professor who was from India who was teaching English Lit. We spent half of the semester studying James Joyce's *Dubliners* and she interpreted the whole book of short stories in light of her 20<sup>th</sup> century post-modern feminism, which was adapted from her background in Hinduism. The next semester I took Irish Lit from a professor who was from Ireland, and James Joyce was one of the focal points of the course. He spent as much time explaining who Joyce was and why he wrote as he did looking at the text with us. It was amazing how dramatic an understanding there was in the text between the two professors.
4. Interpretation isn't always easy. Often, we approach texts with no understanding of the position of the writer. Other times it is easy to make a text say what we want it to. In studying Shakespeare in college, it was clear that he was a gay feminist, a Christian, a married heterosexual, a post-modernist, a classicist, and any number of other things- usually based on the position of the person interpreting his works.
5. Obviously, I have made a big deal about how we read and interpret the scriptures over the past six and a half years that I have been here. But that doesn't mean that the task of interpretation is easy. Among the more difficult parts of the bible to interpret are prophecies. Prophecies can be multi-layered, and even have multiple intended fulfillments.
6. Looking at Isaiah 11, we have a prophecy that is fulfilled in stages, especially when we consider how it relates to the prophecies preceding it. Isaiah had three main messages. The first two were that God would pronounce judgment on both Judah, the southern kingdom, and Israel, the northern kingdom, by sending them into separate exiles. Then the third message was the one of salvation where God would have mercy on his people and do the work necessary to restore them.
7. [1] There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
  - a. There is much just in this one verse. In chapter 10, Isaiah spoke of the northern kingdom being destroyed like a forest being removed. There is a sense of finality in that image, so God provides them hope here in verse 1 by saying that a branch will grow out of the stump of Jesse- which is the House of David in the southern kingdom. The destruction won't be a total annihilation because God will spring forth a new forest by starting with one little branch- Jesus, the Messiah and offspring of David.

- b. There is hope not only because this branch will sprout, but because it will bear fruit. Fruit is what produces seeds, so it is what will assure that the forest of God's people is regrown. But fruit is also the biblical symbol for righteousness. This new king, the Messiah, will come and bear good fruit of the kingdom that the kings of Israel and Judah have failed to produce for centuries.
8. [2] And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. [3] And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
    - a. This Messiah will be empowered by the Holy Spirit and will have the perfect attributes that the other kings of Israel failed to have, specifically the fear of the Lord, which he will delight in. This doesn't mean that he will be terrified of God, but, instead, that he will live in joyful obedience to the Lord; living out faithfully what the rest of humanity has failed to do.
  9. I don't think it is difficult to pick up on the fact that Jesus is this Messiah, and thus, is the fulfillment of this prophecy. That doesn't mean that the prophecy has been fulfilled, however. This is a multi-layered prophecy is fulfilled in stages.

### The multi-layered interpretation

1. When I interned as a chaplain at Shadyside Hospital, one of my supervisors was Jewish. He liked to challenge the interns on our Christian views, and this was a passage he pointed to. How could Jesus be the Messiah if all the things in the passage haven't come true yet.
2. It isn't uncommon for these Messianic prophecies to have layers of fulfillment. Jesus has come, and he is the shoot from the stump of Jesse that has born the fruit of righteousness and planted the seeds of a faithful people of God. He fulfills the requirements of the moral character as outlined in Isaiah 11. But he hasn't accomplished all the messianic tasks yet.
3. He has not yet judged the earth, killed the wicked, or made it to wear a child can place his hand down in the hole of an asp without being bitten. Certainly, we haven't reached the point where "they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain."
  - a. These are things that we are still waiting for, but based on the character and promises of the Messiah, Jesus, we know that they will come.
  - b. We are in the season of Advent. Advent is a multi-layered season of anticipation. We look forward to the celebration of the birth of Christ in our celebrations; but our gazing upon the first advent of Christ is a means of reminding us of his second advent, when he will come and establish his rule here on earth.
  - c. Just as we understand Advent to be about the combination of what has already happened and what is to come- the already and the not yet- we also look at prophecies such as this one in Isaiah the same way.
    - i. The Messiah has come once and now we wait with eager anticipation for his final return and the consummation of his kingdom. Then we will see an end to death and they shall not hurt or destroy in all his holy mountain. Then we will see the fullness of the glory of the Lord revealed in his Son, our savior, Jesus Christ.