

"A ROOT OUT OF DRY GROUND"

Isaiah 53:1-6

Well, I pray you all had a blessed Thanksgiving and that you are looking forward to the Seasons of Advent and Christmas. Don't you just love this time of the year- the decorations, the excitement of the children? I love Christmas and especially I love Christmas Eve, in church, with all the candlelight and Christmas carols and scripture readings as we once again, celebrate the birth of our Savior.

As we turned on our Christmas lights at our house last Sunday night for the first time, I was thinking that the weather has cooperated recently to get your outdoor decorations up before the cold weather barrels down upon us. I have this annual ritual where I get out the big ladder to clean out the gutters and then, at the same time, put up the Christmas lights. When I have done this important maintenance project and decorating endeavor after it has gotten cold there have been some years I was pulling frozen leaves and ice out of the gutters and it felt like my fingers were going to fall off

and then trying to hang those darn lights, well, it was no picnic. Thank heavens this year was gentle on my hands.

Last Sunday I was off and we worshiped in a church where a series was just beginning as the pastor began preaching on the songs of Luke and the first song was the Song of Promise that we read about in Luke 1:26-33. Here we find the Angel Gabriel singing what is actually Psalm 89 where he is telling of the miraculous birth of the Christ Child. But I would suggest to you that if you would put our Christmas story told by Isaiah beside the Christmas stories told by Matthew and Luke you will hardly find any resemblance. As a matter of fact, our Isaiah Christmas story is probably unfamiliar to most of us, wouldn't you agree? I mean Isaiah, the prophet, never tells us of a star, he never mentions a hillside filled with sheep and shepherds, there is nothing stated about a stable with a manger. When you read Matthew and Luke's accounts of the birth of the Savior they sound for the most part, well, so picturesque; so nice and charming, if you will.

But Isaiah, in a sense, brings us to reality. I mean, Isaiah challenges us to make an adjustment, a shift, if you will, where we are forced to correct the charming, yes, even the distorted picture most of us have constructed in our minds. And yet when you take a closer look and begin to move beyond the simple, yet beautiful scene that we have in our minds and maybe in our churches, the real story is not so quaint. Now, don't get me wrong the manger was real, as were the sheep and the shepherds and the star. But that manger was not all cozy and warm. There was no hoopla and excitement in Bethlehem on that holiest of nights like there would be in London when a royal baby is born to the throne. I mean, think about it- Jesus grew up basically unnoticed and once He did enter into His 3 years of ministry He was neither widely welcomed nor accepted. Think about it- Jesus never really came onto anyone's radar screen until He was 30 years of age. That is a long time for a king to go unnoticed.

What I find so fascinating and amazing about the Christmas story is that Jesus survived the antagonism of King Herod. We read in Matthew 2:1-12 how King Herod tried to trick the Wise Men into finding out where the Messiah was to be born and then in Matthew 2:16-18 we read that when Herod found out he had been tricked he had all the children in and around Bethlehem two years and under killed. It is truly amazing that anyone would follow Jesus more than 2,000 years after His birth; that a Church would be established that is attributed to Him; that the redemptive story of His ministry would be known all around the world. Think of it- that this baby born in obscurity would become the most significant personality in all of human history- now that is a real story.

The prophet Isaiah spoke about Jesus Christ some 600 years before He was even born. Turn with me to Isaiah 9:6 where Isaiah tells us of the One who is to come in very majestic terms, for we read, "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and

he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” But then turn back to our passage for today where Isaiah gives us not so glowing information. For we learn in verse 3 that He will be “despised and rejected by others.” And in verse 2 we read that when He initially comes He will be “like a root out of dry ground” and right before this it says He will grow up “like a young [or tender] plant.” Here is the picture: a fragile little shoot begins to bud and grow on the edge of a stump that has been cut close to the ground. Once there was a big tree but it is gone. What remains is a small, tiny, tender sprout. If you would touch this sprout it might break off- so fragile, so vulnerable. And did you notice where this stump with its tender shoot is located? It is found in a barren, parched desert. How will this young plant survive the heat and the lack of water? If I were an odds-maker I would give it a 1,000 in one chance. You see this is Isaiah’s way of painting a reality picture where he tells us that the Messiah’s life would not be glamour and glitter but rather hard and unattractive.

There would be no mighty oak tree growing majestically in a place of prominence. And the chances of success, not to mention survival, by human estimations, would be next to nil. But maybe this is Isaiah's intention for he paints a picture where Jesus, the Messiah, would gain nothing from the soil in which He was to grow; the environment would not sustain His life; He would grow and survive in spite of it all and this small, young plant would eventually grow into such a beautiful, unbelievably stupendous tree that its very presence would make the barren desert livable.

There are two things I would like us to take with us today as it relates to Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. First, **Jesus was a Root in Barren Ground.** When you read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Gospels, you begin to see that Jesus derived nothing from His environment, His surroundings, His circumstances during His earthly life that enabled Him to successfully accomplish His mission. Let me explain- we read in Matthew, chapter 1 that Jesus was of the lineage of King David but by the time He

came onto the scene the kingdom and the crown had all gone. And so His natural, human descent was barren, it was dry ground. If Jesus had come from the long line of the Pharaohs or born into Cesar's family tree now that would have been glorious. His wasn't.

He was born a Jew- that gained Him nothing, really. Oh, it would have been respected in Jewish circles; to be born of Abraham's seed but Judaism was politically and religiously dead. Judaism was nothing more than ritualism and legalism which drained the life out of the faith. If Jesus had been born a Roman citizen He would have had protection and if He had been born a Greek, He would have been recognized as a great teacher. But a Jew- nothing but dry ground.

And then look at the resumes of the men He chose as disciples- tax collector, fishermen; common, ordinary, run-of-the-mill men who added nothing to His stature. Why not pick some influential politicians who could make a way for Him to Caesar?

Why not a well-known philosopher or a great orator to open up doors in Rome or Athens- but unlearned fishermen from small fishing villages? Dry ground again.

And then there was the time He came into this world- a time when immorality and idolatry were rampant, when the idea that there was only One true God was laughed at with all the Greek and Roman gods to choose from; and to eventually preach that loving one's neighbor was the only way. Folks, this was a stark, barren dry desert time to come into the world for such a tender plant to make it. And yet, and yet the Root survived and sprang up and grew and flourished. And even today, there is a stupendous tree and the influence of His life like that of a tremendous tree has branches that reach out from Palestine into the four corners of the world. And this magnificent tree, the one-time young plant, this root that grew out of dry ground, has cast the shadow of His very life to the entire world. And the Gospel that He preached, that is found in this very book, has ministered and

met the needs of literally billions upon billions of people who have lived in the hot, parched, dry, barren world.

Quickly, point #2- **Jesus can Grow Anywhere.** This root in dry ground, Jesus Christ, is a survivor, He lives forever and He can take root and blossom and grow in the most unbelievable places- and isn't that a blessing? And right here [point to my heart] is one of those places- **the human heart.** Think of us, the humans that we are. If there is no fertile soil, if there is no openness to Him He cannot grow. Oh, but to the heart that is open, for the one who is longing for hope and peace and purpose, for the one who is waiting and wanting a new beginning He comes. And He comes bringing conviction of sin, grace to repent, faith to trust, hope for tomorrow and the day after and the day after that, He brings life.

What does Jesus need and desire? Just some space, even a little space for Him to take root and grow and bring forth fruit.

And if Jesus can take root in our lives He will give us His all, He will give us what we need; He gives power because He is all powerful; He gives wisdom because He is all wise; He gives us the ability and wherewithal to love because He is love. What does my heart have to offer? Just a dry, waterless, barren desert. But when Jesus takes root in a person's heart He begins to grow and the one-time desert takes on life. There is change, there is hope, there is a beautiful garden that begins to grow.

Think of some of the barren places that we know of- how about a family that is broken by fighting or a marriage that is on the verge of divorce? With Christ at the center, with Him as the Root that can grow in the dry ground there can be healing and restoration of relationships. What about the person who is struggling with any one of the addictions? Can a young plant survive there? Yes, if Jesus has a chance to grow and work in that life a garden can prosper. And what about a neighborhood or city where there are drugs and prostitution and people living on the edge of

society? Can Jesus Christ take root there? Yes, and He has and He can.

And what about a nation where people have drifted from God and moved Him to the margins of their lives? Can Christ grow there? Yes, for we only need to read history how, in 16th century Europe the great Reformers like Martin Luther and others planted the Root, Jesus Christ, in a spiritually dark and deprived Europe and a mighty tree grew. And people like William Booth of London in 1865 started the Salvation Army and others started Christian movements that changed lives and changed cities.

We must never lose heart, my friends when we look out into a broken world. Can we commit or recommit our lives to plant the Root no matter how barren the place might be? Can we plant Him in the broken down neighborhoods of our cities? Can we plant Him in the stressed-out and financially maxed-out suburbs? Can we plant or replant Him in our lives, in those ugly places that are in need of the gentle touch of the Savior? Can we plant Him in our churches where new life and dedication are needed for His

message to go forth? If He is planted He will grow and He will bring about unbelievable as well as believable changes. Yes think of the driest places you know and pray that the Root that Isaiah spoke of will produce a shoot and thrive there. Give Him your heart today; give Him the dry barren place that needs the touch of the Savior. For He is the one who survives forever; He is the one who reshapes, and restores and takes the dry and the barren and makes the most desolate place a beautiful garden. A Root Out of Dry Ground? He can and He will. Let Him in and Let Him, this Advent Season. Amen.

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Introduction: Looking forward to the seasons of Advent and Christmas

Comparing our Christmas story from Isaiah to the Christmas stories of Matthew and Luke...

Isaiah brings us to reality... the real story is not so quaint

Isaiah 9:6

Isaiah 53, verses 3 and 2

Isaiah's reality picture...

Two things to take with us today as it relates to Jesus

First, **JESUS WAS A ROOT IN _____ GROUND**

Read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...

Jesus derived nothing from His environment, His surroundings, His circumstances that enabled Him to successfully accomplish His mission

Born a Jew...

His disciples...

The time He came into this world...

Point 2, **JESUS CAN _____ ANYWHERE**

He can take root and blossom and grow in the most unbelievable places- one of those places- **the human _____**

What does Jesus need and desire?

Think of some of the barren places that we know of...

Conclusion: Root out of Dry Ground? Let Him in and Let Him.