

The Branch of Life

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When you climb out on a limb, it's important the branch is sturdy and alive, not rotten. If it's weak, it won't hold your weight and snap you fall. I want to show you a Branch this morning that can bear all your weight, that never snaps, and is so sturdy it can support the weight of the world. In Isaiah 11 we see a Branch superior to all other branches in three ways: its vitality, sturdiness, and fruitfulness. Vitality wise for life, sturdy to hold us up, and so unique its fruit changes the world.

Vital Branch

This passage continues the botanical imagery of the book. We've seen the mountain, the seed, and now the Branch: "**There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit**" (11:1). Here we've got a kind of origins story. Shoot, branch, and root are all genealogical terms. It's family tree. A lively green shoot springs up from a charred stump. A sign of life. Where's the shoot coming from? The stump of Jesse. Who's he? Well, Israel has been waiting for a king like David; he's the one who slew Goliath and lead Israel into decades of majestic rule. Guess who David's Dad was? *Jesse*. What does the family tree show? *This Branch is rooted in the genetic code of the greatest Israelite king*. He comes from good stock. Isaiah is saying this Branch-King is so alive, so sturdy, so life-giving that we can put the weight of the world on him. The "Branch" is part of an age-old prophecy, promising a great King who will ascend the throne of David to rule the world in peace forever (2 Sam 7:13; Jer 23:5; Zech 3:9). **He's the future**. Fast forward eight centuries, and on cold, Christmas night, Jesus is born "in the city of David" and "of the house and lineage of David" (Luke 1:27,69; 2:4,11), wrapped in clothes and placed in a manger. The genealogies check out. Jesus is the Branch, the *greater* David come to rule the world in total wisdom, justice, and peace. The prophecy come true. As awesome as that sounds, there's a part of us that rejects the idea of a king. Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, William and Catherine visited America this week. The British are humble enough to embrace royalty. They tend to be more educated and know their place on the world stage. But not Americans. We have a president and a democracy where everyone has a say. And then there's Austin, where everyone's president. No one gets special attention. We all have the same amount of authority, so you can bus your own table thank you. We hold our cynical lanterns up to all authority. Made for a king, we rage against it, but not without reason. After all, there are no good kings. David slept with Bathsheba, Clinton didn't inhale, Bush lacked good "strategery," and Obama's hope turned out more audacious than he bargained for. History repeats itself. Every politician, every pastor, every king is imperfect, *but so are you, so is everyone else*. The cynic must turn his light inward before he can enjoy the light outward. Our rules and power aren't enough. We can't be kind or tolerant enough to make all things right. We need a King who has the power to revitalize us from inside out, a shoot of life from a lifeless stump. Isaiah tells us the better Branch is here, a greater David, whom you can put all your weight on and he won't buckle or go corrupt. His genes make him vital and *sturdy*.

Sturdy Branch

We all put our weight of meaning on something. We think to ourselves, if I have this certain kind of life, it will be good. And, it may change over time, but the point is we all put our weight somewhere. Some of us put it on **reason**, our ability to think, evaluate, assess. This plays out different ways. You may use reason to **plan** out success. If I take this career path, go to this school, get this job, move into this city or niche market, then I'll be set. I'll enjoy my work, make a good living, have some fun and money to retire. I recently met an executive coach in premier coaching organization that works exclusively with CEO's. I was curious what I could learn about building a great organization, so I asked him what he focuses on with these paragons of success. You know what 90% of the issues are? Holding marriage and family together. **He told me that most CEOs have made it professionally but blown it martially.** Money, success, and notoriety aren't enough to stand on. Their career plan ruins the family. The branch they're standing on cracks and then snaps. Have you put the weight of your life in the wrong place? Your strategic planning, your ability to chart a course through life? It's not enough. And if you're honest, a lot of that can be planning for self glory, great standing among peers, to go public, to be seen as great. Verse 2 shows us a greater glory and wisdom: **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.**" The Spirit came upon leaders in the OT to fulfill different tasks, but rested like this on none of them. The Spirit knows the mind of God (Rom 8:27). He gives Jesus God's very wisdom and understanding. His **wisdom** is greater than NY Times bestseller list, the Internet, and all universities combined. *He knows the meaning of life, but you have to seek him to get it.* He also has **understanding**. This is the ability to see to the heart. You might see through authorities and bad business plans, but Jesus sees through you; he knows your desires. Our bent to self glory. His "**counsel and power**" refer to military strategy, the ability to devise a plan for victory, win, and run up the flag. He can do it every time. The picture that emerges of this Spirit-endowed leader tells us *Jesus has everything it takes to rule the world and your life: wisdom, strategy, & power.* But the most important ingredient is "**the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.**" How does Jesus have fear of the Lord, if he is the Lord? He's not like an Austininte. He has high regard for his heavenly Father, not looking to overthrow him or to exist independent of him. **Knowledge** here means relationship; Christ knows and respects the Father, which is why he lives in line with him, all the way to the manger and the cross. See beneath all the wisdom, strategy, and power, Jesus has the quality that sets him apart from all other kings, humility. It enables him to rule redemptively; to come to earth and suffer for us. So how do you come under his rule, stand on his sturdy branch? **Humility.** You have to be humble enough to say, "I put my weight in the wrong place. My branch, my reason, my power isn't enough." **Humility isn't just the first step; it's what allows you to return to the greater Branch over and over. The most humble people I know get the most out of life.** People come up to me after sermons and some want to chat or debate and some want to grow. I'm always surprised by the people who say, "I got so much out of this message on humility/fatherhood" because they're typically a model of humility or fatherhood. But humility enables them to grow, to leap to a more sturdy branch because they don't have to prove themselves. They're grateful someone's told them the branch they were standing on

was about to break. But **proud** get upset, says who are you to judge my branch. *Humility is reasonable*, realizes the peril, and that their friend is trying to save them, and jumps to safety. Only the humble enjoy Christ's sturdy rule.

Fruitful Branch

We've looked at the Branch's vital wisdom, his sturdy plan, now his fruitful reign. [Verses 6-9](#) describe the King's rule as fruitful enough to create a world of unprecedented peace, where children lead lions in safety (can you see them, putting on a leash and walking them around like stuffed animal?). Babies play around snakes without being harmed. We can't imagine this kind of safety. Mothers are constantly aware of danger, their antennae is up all the time because peril is around every corner. Dads not so much. When I was a new father, I let our son crawl around on the floor when studying. I looked down to see him vomiting in a weird way. Then I realized he had stuck his finger in light socket on floor. Not a good dad, definitely not a good king. Verse 16 describes a special family of people. Some tend to put the weight of life on **family**. You think, if I can just get married, have kids, keep them safe and raise a tight family where we're all loved and supported, then no matter what happens I'll have made it. I'll die happy if I can stand on the legacy of a good family. Family is a great value; the Bible shows us a time when we won't even have to worry about infants being hurt. *But* when you put your *weight* on family, you're stepping out on a branch that will eventually snap. Families are little incomplete communities. Children need more examples that mom and dad can give. Parents need more meaning that children can give. Sociologist Robert Putnam did a study across America on communities that thrive the most and he found that the best communities had a goal other than being a good community. Same is true of families. **The best families exist for something other than family.** The film *Interstellar* follows a father-daughter relationship. Dad leaves daughter to save the world. They are separated across the vast reaches of space and time. What keeps him going in his mission? His longing to be back with his daughter, reaching out even from a fifth dimension. But when he's finally reunited with her, the scene is awkwardly short, and he jumps in a ship. Why? Because he's off to something greater. He abruptly switched family for interstellar travel. **Is there a thing we can exist for that won't ruin everything else?** Verse 10 says there's [a day coming when the root of Jesse will stand as a signal for all the peoples—of him nations will inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious](#). What's he saying? **A day will come when all peoples will exist for one thing all the time—the glory of God, for his notoriety, his fame, his rule, his order, his way of living.** They've grasped God is wiser, sturdier, and more life-giving than any plan or goal they can come up with. As a result, he stands as a "signal" for all people. The word means banner. It's a picture of people from all cultures who have given up finding meaning in the family crest, and chosen to find meaning in Christ. They come under the banner of the Branch. They embrace the knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He is their wisdom, their meaning, their glory. When we humbly accept his reign, lasting family emerges, a family comprised of all peoples who will dwell on the mountain of God, where there is unprecedented peace and joy, where no one is hurt or destroyed. You were created to come under his banner, not your own. You're made for a King, a perfect king. Jesus is the better Branch, the greater David, the perfect King. He can hold up your weight, fulfill your longing without ruining everything else. Here's how. You have to get the corruption out of you, remember

everyone's corrupt. You have to kneel at the manger, and confess the venom of self glory in your veins. You can't have "the knowledge of the glory of God" until you do. Then, look in the manger and ask the baby to draw the venom out, and he does, at the cross Jesus takes the serpent's bite for you. And then he puts sin and evil to flight as he rises in resurrection glory, signaling a whole new world. **Jesus takes all the corruption, and restores all the glory, to this world and to your humanity.** Now the child plays with serpent, the lion lays down the lamb. It's a peace of total human flourishing. *No other king can do that. Jesus is the one branch that doesn't break, the one thing that, when you put him on top, doesn't ruin everything else.* But you have to be humble enough to kneel, to leap to his Branch. Will you put your weight on him? If you do, you'll get his vital wisdom, sturdy meaning, and life-giving grace right. Then, When Branch-King returns, his flag will be raised, his banner rippling in the wind, will be a signal to all that the King has returned, the age of peace has begun. The humble will enter the mountain of joy.