

The Story of a Shoot

Prologue – The Stump

Today I want to tell you a story, the story of a shoot. You know what a shoot is; it's a baby plant or a sprout or a branch or a twig or a sprig – it's a tender, little, baby plant – a shoot. This is the story of a shoot. It's a lonely shoot, because it grows up and begins its life surrounded by death. Usually shoots grow up out of a healthy plant or tree. But not this shoot. This shoot grew up in an unlikely place; it grew up out of a dead tree stump.

You see, long before this story of a shoot begins, there once was a huge, beautiful, dignified tree with a long, rich history. God himself had planted this tree, and every branch on this tree told a story. The oldest branch told the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Another branch told the story of Noah and the flood. Other branches told the stories of Abraham, Moses, the Exodus, Mt. Sinai, King David, King Solomon, and the temple. You see, this tree represents the Jewish kingdom, God's Old Testament people. And for many centuries this tree stood tall and proud, until the Assyrians lopped off several branches, leaving the tree half dead. And then the Babylonians came with a chainsaw and cut this great tree right down to the ground, to rot and decay. The grandeur of the Jewish kingdom was reduced to nothing more than a dead stump. And it looked like that's where the story would end.

Chapter One – The Shoot-King

But this isn't a story about that tree, that stump. No, that's just the prologue to this story. Today I want to tell you the story of a shoot. Chapter one. **Vs. 1.** New life, a new beginning! Deep in a crevice on the surface of this stump, a shoot begins to grow. It's only a few inches tall, not very strong. But it is growing! This stump wasn't dead after all. It looked dead, but this little shoot is drawing life from its ancient roots, growing up in its place.

And if this stump represents the kingdom of the Jews, then this shoot must be the King of the Jews. That's why this stump is called the "**stump of Jesse.**" Jesse was the father of the Jew's greatest king, King David. And from Jesse's stump another king would come. But he would start small, seemingly insignificant, like a tender, little shoot. Chapter one.

Chapter Two – The Gifts

Chapter two. **Vs. 2-3a.** As this shoot grows up into his role as king, God's Holy Spirit comes upon this new king and gets him ready to rule. Just as sunshine and rain come down from heaven to make little shoots grow into healthy, strong plants, so also God's Holy Spirit comes down from heaven on this king and showers him with gifts. "**The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding**" – he would be a wise ruler; he would know just what to do for his people. "**The Spirit of counsel and of might**" – he would know just how to comfort and counsel and advise his people; and when they were weak, he would be their strength. "**The Spirit of the knowledge and fear of Lord**" – he would have such a close relationship with God his heavenly Father that he would actually be called the Son of God. **Vs. 3a;** he would love the Lord and the Lord's people. These are the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit, showered down on this king like gentle rain on a tender shoot. And many years later, John chapter 3 would say: "**The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit**" (34). A limitless supply of blessings from the Spirit are growing this shoot, getting the king ready to rule. Chapter two.

Chapter Three – The Reign

Chapter three. **Vs. 3b-4a.** This little shoot isn't so small anymore; it has branches and leaves; it's tall and strong. The king has begun to rule. And this king is a judge. He's a just judge, who helps the poor and needy and vindicates the afflicted. **Vs. 4b-5.** This is the judge "**whose sandals [we are] not to carry, [whose] winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire**" (Mt 3:11-12). Or as Psalm 98 says, "**He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity**" (9). This king is a judge, and someday all people must stand before him for judgment – including us, which is a terrifying thought because I know that I do not deserve to stand before the one whose belt is righteousness and whose sash is faithfulness. And neither do you. But remember, **vs. 3b** – which is good, because when he looks at us and listens to us, all he sees and hears is sin! But this judge is looking and listening for something else. He's looking for faith in the Lord; he's listening for the heartbeat of trust in the promises of God. And so, "**When the Son of Man comes in his glory, ... he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats**" (Mt 25:31-32), those with faith in Jesus and those without. That's how he will judge the world, someday, but not yet. Right now, the shoot is grown, and the king ruling. Chapter three.

Chapter Four – The Peace

Chapter four. The shoot is now a full-size tree, coming up out of the stump of Jesse. And surrounding this tree is a curious scene: animals, wild animals, and children, playing together. You never would have expected to see this anywhere else. But under this tree, under the rule of this king, things are different. **Vs. 6a**; wolves and lambs don't mingle together; but they do here. **Vs. 6bc**; ferocious carnivores, side by side with gentle livestock. **Vs. 6d**. Would you let your little children play with lions? That's what's happening under this tree. **Vs. 7a**; cows eat grass; bears eat meat; but together they're having dinner under this tree. **Vs. 7bc-8**; makes you grimace just thinking about it, especially if you're a parent. You'd never let your kids play with venomous snakes. But it's okay here, because here things are different. Under this tree, perfect peace reigns. This king is the "Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6).

"**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him**" (Rom 15:13). "**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid**" (Jn 14:27). This is the same peace we heard about last week, the "swords into plowshares" and "spears into pruning hooks" peace (Isa 2:4); it's the "**peace of God, which transcends all understanding [and] guard[s] your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**" (Php 4:7). You can see the peace here, as little children and wild animals play together. And **vs. 9**. And when our hearts are filled with the knowledge of the Lord, with the gospel of forgiveness and grace through the death and resurrection of this shoot-king, then we will have peace. Chapter four.

Chapter Five – The Tree

Now we've finally made it to the last chapter, chapter five. We've seen the first tree cut down, and a baby shoot grow up out of its stump. We've seen this little shoot receive gifts from the Spirit, grow into a tall tree, and become king. And as king, we see him using those gifts to help his people and establish peace. Now, in this last chapter, we read, "**In that day the Root of Jesse,**" the very same rootstock from which that first tree was cut and from which that little shoot began to grow, **vs. 10a**. So now we've come full circle, and that little, baby shoot is now a huge, beautiful, dignified tree, towering into sky, it's branches spread out, fully leafed, with its roots embedded in stump of the Jewish kingdom. But now **vs. 10ab**. This tree is for the whole world; this king of the Jews is for everyone. And while it's true that many people reject this king, everyone who does believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, this Messiah-Savior, this shoot-king – they, we, are all gathered together under this tall tree and in its shade find peace and grace.

Epilogue – The Rest

And that's where the story could end. But there's just one more page in this story – the epilogue. **Vs. 10c**. His resting place will be glorious. "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest**" (Mt 11:28). "**In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you**" (Jn 14:2, NIV84). "**Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory**" (Jn 17:24). His resting place will be glorious. And there in heaven, with King Jesus, that shoot that grew up out of the stump of Jesse, **vs. 10c**, because there the story of the shoot has no end.

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD — ³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

⁶The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸The infant will play near the cobra's den, the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. ⁹They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.