

“The Glorious Branch of the LORD”

Isaiah 4:2-6

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*² In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious,
and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.*

³ And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, ⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. ⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. ⁶ There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain. – Isaiah 4:2-6, ESV

In That Day . . . (Isaiah 2:12)

Our society is populated by two kinds of people when it comes to thinking about time and days:

1. Nostalgists think back to “the good old days,” when things were better, so much simpler, purer, etc.
2. Visionaries look ahead to days to come when things will surely be better. They envision a time when we have no more nations and wars and technology solves all of our problems and we have colonies on the Moon and Mars, etc.

Those given to nostalgia tend to have a dim and pessimistic view of the future, as they see the trajectory of history as one of decline from order to disorder, from decency to indecency, etc. Those given to visionary aspirations of the future tend to have a dim view of the past, looking down on how simplistic, crude, backwards, prejudiced, and ignorant people and society were in the past.

One common problem with both of these types of thinking is the tendency to think of human history and civilizations merely in human terms, focusing on either the goodness and potential of human beings or else on the corruption and selfishness of human beings. Both of these perspectives have a small enough slice of truth in them to be able to furnish examples and anecdotes to support their claims: Things were, in many ways, simpler and less outwardly morally degenerate in the past, but also, we do have more advanced technology now, and many people in the past were horribly prejudiced and ignorant.

Neither of these perspectives, though, is looking up to ask what God’s plan is, nor are they really looking around at the present for evidence of that plan unfolding. They are secular perspectives, locked into a this-world and this-reality-only point of view, ignoring the divine altogether.

When we forget that the LORD God of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is, in fact, the sovereign Lord of history, and that He has a plan that overrides and supersedes all human plans and failures, the Word of God reminds us of the truth, and so often, Scripture does so with the words “*in that day.*” And so, our passage today begins with “*In that day, the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious.*”

This isn't the first time we've seen this kind of expression in Isaiah:

Earlier, in Isaiah 2:2, we had a similar expression: *"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains."*

2:11 says, *"The LORD alone will be exalted in that day."*

And then, in 2:12, we had the proclamation: *"For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty."*

And verse 20 then said, *"In that day, mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship."*

Are all these passages referring to the same day? Yes. Chapters 2-4 of Isaiah form a single oracle or a single prophetic sermon from Isaiah, and these all refer to the same day. The Old Testament contains the expression *"in that day"* 64 times, and 42 of them (or over 2/3 of them) are in the Book of Isaiah.

So, what is this day? Well, in short, it is the promised day when the LORD will decisively act in judgment and in salvation.

Earlier this week, in our 300th daily devotional, we covered the Battle of Jericho, a day in which the LORD decisively acted to judge the inhabitants of Jericho and to begin to give the long-awaited promised inheritance of the Land of Canaan to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 500 years had passed since the LORD made His promise to Abraham, but the judgment of Jericho was the salvation of Israel as God kept His covenant promise to them. We saw then that the regular pattern throughout Scripture is that God brings salvation to His people through judgment on sin.

Often, when the Bible uses the phrase *"in that day,"* it is a reference to the Great Day of the LORD, the final Day of Judgment, when, in the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *"the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."* (ESV) In that day, we will rejoice in the consummation of our salvation, even as the world endures the consummation of their well-deserved judgment from God.

And so, 2 Thessalonians 1 refers to the same coming day as the day *"when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed."* (2 Thess. 1:7-10, ESV)

But *"in that day"* is not always specifically or only a reference to that singular final day. Sometimes, it is a reference to a day within history when the LORD acts decisively to judge sin and deliver His people. As we unpack this short passage together, we'll see what God through Isaiah is communicating to us here about *"that day."*

I. The Branch of the LORD

“In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious.” Besides the obvious question of “In what day?”, we might also readily ask “Who or what is “the branch of the LORD?” Isaiah 4:2 is the first time “the branch of the LORD” is mentioned, but it is not the last time. This same branch is mentioned again in greater detail in Isaiah 11, and then again in Jeremiah 23 and 33 and in Zechariah 3 and 6. So, the Branch of the LORD is mentioned twice each in three of the Old Testament prophets. And then, I would argue that the seventh significant mention of the Branch of the LORD comes from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself in John 15.

I’m going to quickly give you the five other Old Testament texts on the Branch and make a few observations about each:

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
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.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. – Isaiah 11:1-3, ESV*

Here we see that the Branch comes forth from the stump of Jesse, which means that He will come forth after the Davidic dynasty has been cut off, cut down. He will be anointed by the Holy Spirit with wisdom, understanding, and great power, and He will delight in the fear of the LORD. About 600 years after the last Davidic king was removed from his throne in Jerusalem, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him from heaven in the form of a dove.

Peter would later tell Cornelius the Centurion about “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses.” (Acts 10:38-40)

And now, the two references from Jeremiah, which are very similar to each other, from Jeremiah 23 and 33:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’ – Jeremiah 23:5-6, ESV

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell

securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' – Jeremiah 33:14-16, ESV

Here the Branch is called “*a righteous Branch*” and is even called “*The LORD is our righteousness.*” On the day of the Branch, justice and righteousness will be executed, and God’s people will be saved. In Romans 1:17, Paul says that the Gospel “*is the power of God for salvation for all who believe because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.*” And I Corinthians 1:30-31 says “*Christ Jesus [has] become to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*”

The LORD is our Righteousness in Jesus Christ, specifically because of His death and resurrection, His atoning sacrifice of Himself and His victory over sin and death forever.

And now, for the two references in Zechariah:

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

– Zechariah 3:8-9, ESV

Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”’

– Zechariah 6:11-13, ESV

In both of these passages, the LORD is talking through Zechariah the prophet to Joshua the High Priest in Jerusalem after the return from Babylon. Joshua has the same name as Jesus, the name that means salvation. Joshua and his fellow leaders are told that they are a sign of the coming Branch, and that this coming Branch will be a faithful high priest, but He will also bear royal honor and will build the Temple of the LORD, and He shall make peace and reconciliation for God’s people.

Jesus fulfilled every aspect of these prophecies as well. He is High Priest over God’s people. He rules as the promised Davidic king who sits at God’s right hand as King of kings and Lord of lords, bearing royal honor. He is building His church, which is the new and living Temple of the LORD. And He has made peace by His sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 10:19-23 tells us:

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled

clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” (ESV)

So, we can see the marvelous truth that Jesus is clearly the Branch of the LORD, and that He perfectly fulfills all the prophecies about the Branch. But when is the day when He will be “*beautiful and glorious*”? Well, one of the expressions Isaiah uses to describe the exalted glory of the LORD is “*high and lifted up*.” In Isaiah 6, which we’ll be looking at in a couple of weeks, Isaiah sees “*the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up*.” Then, in Isaiah 52:13, at the beginning of the most famous and wonderful Servant Song of Isaiah 53, God says:

*Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be **high and lifted up**,
and shall be exalted.*

And then, the rest of this Servant Song goes on to describe the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus in stunning detail. Then, in John 12:31-33, Jesus says:

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. – John 12:31-33

Earlier, in verses 23-24, He had said, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*”

So, the hour when the Son of Man is glorified is when He is lifted up from the earth and when He draws all people to Himself. If that’s all we heard, we might think of the glorious exaltation of the Lord Jesus in His ascension into heaven and His enthronement at the right hand of the Majesty on High. But John tells us Jesus spoke these words to show by what kind of death He was going to die. He brings salvation to His people by being judged in our place. His judgment in our place is our salvation and is also the judgment of this world and the ruler of this world, Satan.

Colossians 2:13-15 describes this by saying:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (ESV)

So, “*In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious*” is at least in part a reference to the day of Christ being lifted up on a cross to die, triumphing over the enemies of God’s people, making peace by the blood of His cross, delivering us from sin and condemnation, disarming Satan from his accusations against us, and fulfilling the promise of the Branch. Before Jesus was enthroned in heaven as the gloriously risen and exalted King, His throne was a cross, where He won victory and brought both judgment and salvation, justice and righteousness, in a most unlikely but most powerful way.

But in truth, “*that day*” continues from the cross until the glorious Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. And this whole passage spans that whole time, as we will see.

II. The Fruit of the Land

So, we've seen who the Branch is, and He's the most important figure here, but what about "the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel."? To understand this, I think we need to go to the seventh reference to the Branch of the LORD, which is from the Lord Jesus Himself in John 15:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." – John 15:1-5, ESV

Jesus says "I am the true vine." He doesn't say here that He's the branch, or does He? Follow me through the logic of this Scriptural word picture: In the LORD's vineyard, the House of Jesse, the Davidic Dynasty, grows into a gloriously fruitful vine, but then it is cut down. From the severed stump of the House of David, a shoot comes forth, which grows into a branch, and then becomes beautiful and glorious. Well, what does that branch become when other branches branch off of it and they bear fruit? It is now the vine, the true vine. Israel had been that Vine, but now the Branch of the LORD from the stump of Jesse is that True Vine. We are the branches now, as we are in Christ and abide in Him by faith.

We bear fruit which comes from the vine, and the fruit we bear from our union with Christ brings glory to God and joy and delight to us. We are the survivors of Israel, the redeemed remnant of the LORD, and as we abide in Christ, we bear much fruit, the kingdom of God expands and advances, and God works for His glory and our good in us and through us. It's a beautiful and powerful vision, and it is the present reality of the spreading and fruit-bearing true church.

III. The People Called Holy

Then, verses 3-4 go on to describe in more detail the survivors of Israel, the redeemed remnant of the Lord:

And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, ⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.

Four things are said about the people of God here:

1. We will be called holy.
2. We will be recorded for life.
3. Our filth will be washed away.
4. Our bloodstains will be removed.

These last two will be done "by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning."

1. **Jesus makes us holy.** The New Testament refers to the people of God as "saints," which means "holy ones." We are set apart by God and for God through union with Jesus Christ the Branch by the Spirit of God.

2. **We are recorded for life.** Now, the Book of Life is not explicitly mentioned here, but it is mentioned in Daniel 12:1 – *“But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.”* (ESV)

Also, Malachi 3:16-17:

“Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him”

And then, most famously, at the Great Day of Judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 –

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. **Then another book was opened, which is the book of life.** And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. **And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life,** he was thrown into the lake of fire. (ESV)*

Are you holy? Is your name recorded for life in the Book?

3. **Our filth is washed away.** This is a reference to being cleansed from the pollution of our sin.
4. **Our bloodstains are removed.** This is a reference to being forgiven from the guilt of our sin.

Both cleansing from pollution and guilt are applied to us by the Holy Spirit who came in the form of tongues of fire at Pentecost to show the accomplishment of cleansing and application of this by the “*spirit of burning.*” Hebrews 9 tells us that Jesus offered Himself up to the Father through the Eternal Spirit. Just as the fire in the Old Testament consumed the sacrifice and the smoke carried it up to God, so this was given as a picture of the Holy Spirit who was a spirit of judgment to carry the sacrifice of Christ to the Father, and then as a spirit of burning applies the cleansing of Christ to us, so as to remove our pollution and our guilt.

Do you feel dirty because of your sin? Do you know you are guilty before a Holy God because of your sin?

1 Peter 2:24 says, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed.”* (ESV) He has borne our sins, to remove our guilt, but He also cleanses us, burning away sin’s controlling grasp and polluting filth, freeing us from sin. Forgiven. Cleansed. Healed. Such amazing salvation comes only through Jesus Christ and His redemption, applied to us by the Holy Spirit.

IV. The Glory & the Covering

Then, finally, we see that we are not only made holy, recorded for life, and cleansed of our pollution and guilt, but we are also given a glory and a covering like nothing in this world could ever give us:

⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. ⁶ There will be

a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain. (Isaiah 4:5-6, ESV)

This language intentionally recalls the coverings of the Exodus: the cloud by day, the fire by night, and the booths/tents. The LORD Himself creates this covering, and the Lord Jesus Himself is our covering. He not only makes us holy, records us for life, and thoroughly cleanses us, but He also covers us and guards us. Every day until the day we're finally home with Him, the Lord Jesus is our shelter, our shade, our guide, our Shepherd, our defender, and our refuge.

Our application today is very simple:

Look to and trust in the Glorious Branch of the LORD. Come to Him for cleansing and for life. Abide in Him to bear fruit that glorifies God and satisfies your soul. Hide in Him for shelter in this life. Trust in no one else. Look to nothing else. He is the sovereign Lord of history and the only redeemer for His people.