

***“From a stump they will regrow.”***

After my first couple years as a pastor, I was burning out. I was exhausted—I was frustrated—I was hurting. I had naively thought people would respond positively to the truth of Jesus and want to change. I was wrong, I could **not** have been **more** wrong. People fight against the truth. They resist it, they push back against it, they run from it. “What was the point?” I thought to myself, “Why even continue in this?” Thankfully the Lord put the story of the prophet Isaiah’s own ministry right in front of my face.

The prophet Isaiah was called by the Lord to take the Creator’s Word to his people. And Isaiah eagerly accepted. He was excited that the Lord would be willing to use him for his great purposes. But then the Lord told Isaiah what his job would be. The Lord was going to use Isaiah to **harden** the hearts of the people, to **close** their ears, eyes, and hearts so that they would **not** repent. The people would **hate** Isaiah because he spoke the truth. They would fight against Isaiah and persecute him.

Isaiah was stunned by this calling and task from the Lord and asked, ***“How long?!”*** How long would he have to carry out this thankless and painful task?! The Lord said, ***“Till the cities are destroyed.”*** The Lord needed the people to bottom out. They had rejected him and were living as hypocrites. The Lord needed to burn the hypocrisy out of them. The judgment of the Lord would fall upon the people and their hardened hearts. Destruction would run through them and only a remnant, a tenth of the people would remain. But then **more** destruction would come on that remaining group. **It** would all be destroyed, **they** would all be destroyed. The tree would be completely cut down, but from the **stump** it would regrow. The Lord said to Isaiah, ***“From a stump they will regrow.”***

And so just as the Lord said, the destruction came upon his people. The Assyrian Empire marched through the land and completely destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. Then the Assyrians marched into the southern kingdom of Judah and started doing the same. King Ahaz in Jerusalem was terrified and shaken by these strong armies. And so the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz to tell him, ***“Be calm. Do not be afraid. Do not lose hope. You must stand in faith, or you will not stand at all.”*** Then the Lord said a sign would be given, a child would be born to a virgin, a child named Immanuel, meaning ***“The Creator is with us.”*** The judgment would **still** come, the destruction would **not** be avoided. The Assyrian Empire would devastate the people, the land, and their cities. But the Creator would be with them through it all. Through **faith** they would be able to stand when all else collapsed, because through faith their stumps would **regrow** after the trees of their lives were completely chopped down. For the Lord to save the people, everything they built needed to first collapse and be destroyed. The Lord needed them to be hard hearted ***“till the cities were destroyed,”*** so that they would lose everything and bottom out completely. They needed to be cut down so that ***“from a stump they will regrow.”***

At the Disciple Garden there is a little redbud tree that a few years ago was really sick, so I cut it down thinking it was a lost cause. But since then it has completely regrown and is looking strong and healthy. It needed to be cut down to the stump so it could restart and grow as a healthy and good tree. It is the same with all of us—***“from a stump we will regrow.”***

Isaiah’s story opened my **own** blind eyes and revealed my **own** hardened heart. I had been wanting **worldly** success in pastoral ministry. I wanted everyone to **like** me, I wanted everyone to **listen** and think I was a **great** pastor. But this is not how the Lord works. I needed to be torn down, I needed to be humbled, I needed to fail in all of my ambitions and pursuits. Only then could the Lord truly use me for his purposes. Everything I had built for myself and all of my ego’s desires needed to be **chopped down** and utterly destroyed.

But once the Lord had chopped down the tree of my ego and ambitions, he was able to regrow me from the stump. Regrow me with different expectations, different goals, and a different heart as a pastor. Ministry wasn’t about me at all anymore. It wasn’t about “success” or what I wanted, it was simply about proclaiming and living the Creator’s Word in all of its truth—**no matter** the consequences. There was true joy and contentment in that. This church is not **“my church,”** all churches belong to the Lord. This is not **“my ministry,”** this is the Lord’s ministry. But as Isaiah learned, following the Lord is hard, because the true work of the Lord is a thankless and humbling job in the midst of his saving judgment.

The Lord’s work always starts with **hardening** hearts, **blinding** eyes, and **deafening** ears until our lives completely collapse in ruin. ***“Till the cities are destroyed.”*** Then when our lives are nothing but stumps, there the Lord’s Word works to regrow us into something new, good, healthy, and beautiful. ***“From a stump we will regrow.”***

Are you ready for the Lord to do **this** work in you and to you? Why do you think the Lord has brought you here this morning? Has he brought you here to **harden** your heart with his Word of truth? Are you going to listen to his Word and then just **dig your heels in** further into the illusion and lie that the Lord just wants you to be **“happy”**—that he wants to “bless” your dreams and plans? Are you here to blind your eyes and deafen your ears to the truth, so that the Lord can finish dismantling your hypocritical life and chopping down your ego? Or maybe you are here, **already** bottomed out, humiliated and emptied of everything, at your wits end and ready to let go of everything you have been trying to control? Are you here ready for the Lord to regrow your life from the stump of who you used to be, in whatever way he wants and desires?

The Lord’s Word **always** accomplishes his purposes. If you leave here shut down, blinded, deafened, angry, and closed off, then his Word has done its job. If you leave here open-hearted and rejuvenated, filled with hope and joy, then his Word has also done its job. His Spirit knows exactly what **you** need today. His Spirit **will** accomplish what is needed in your life through his Word. Maybe your heart needs hardening today. Maybe your life needs to be chopped down to a stump today. Maybe your life is already a stump and you are ready to regrow in brand new ways.

The fire of the Lord’s judgment is coming. The axe of the Lord’s judgment is coming. The cities will be destroyed. Our lives will be chopped down. ***“But be calm. Do not be afraid. Do not lose hope. You must stand in faith, or you will not stand at all.”*** If we stand in faith, then ***“from a stump we will regrow”*** through the Lord’s Word which gives and takes away, which tears down and rebuilds. **Amen.**