

**Sarah Kretzmann**

**December 4, 2013**

## **Isaiah 11.1-10**

### **The Peaceful Kingdom**

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

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I was raised with only boys, as you know. My mom left us when I was ten, leaving my father on his own to raise three sons and a daughter. In some ways this made me extremely tough; in other ways, it made me extremely tender. Sometimes I recall relating very well to my brothers—they wrestled me hard, and I grew up being able to hold my own scrapping with them on the floor. At other times as the only girl, I felt very lonely, and I recall watching them as if they were aliens from a distant planet.

For example.

One time, when we were all home alone, my brothers began wrestling. But then the wrestling got serious. And then it got violent. And they weren't playing anymore. And blood was shed. And serious punches were thrown. And then suddenly, as if by some secret cue, they stopped. They each crawled to a separate corner of the kitchen and sat panting for just a few minutes. And then, quite out of the blue, one of them asked the others, "So, ya wanna go get a pizza?" "Yeah," the other two replied. They ran some cold water over their swollen faces, piled in a car, came back a short while later with a pizza and proceeded to eat it and laugh and joke, as if the previous gladiator scenario had never happened. This left me scratching my head, wondering, how can three brothers sit down and eat together and laugh and joke, when only an hour before our kitchen looked like some predatorial episode from "Wild Kingdom?"

Where in the world do people sit down next to each other, where one minute they hate each other, and the next minute they love each other? Well, family, for one. Every family has its own closeted skeletons similar to mine above, where siblings suddenly become Cain and Abel, where harmless play suddenly transforms into a hideous battle between life and death. And then they sit down to a Thanksgiving feast. Or a Christmas dinner. Enemies and friends. The wolf and the lamb. But even in families, the wolf and the lamb sleep with one eye open. Healing is never complete. Forgiveness is never unconditional. There is broken trust. There is deceit. There are ancient grudges.

The family unit is not the only place strange enough for the wolf and the lamb to exist side by side. The church is such a place, too. The church is an odd collection of animals, are we not? In our pews, you will find the wolf and the lamb. The leopard and the kid. The calf and the lion, the cow and the bear. The predator and the prey. The aggressor and the defender. The strong and the weak. The provoker and the timid. The bold and the meek. The shouting one and the silent one. And yet, in this place, there is shared confession. There is common prayer. There is Holy Communion, where enemies and friends receive the same body, the same blood. It is close, but it is not perfection. Even here in church, the wolf and the lamb sleep with one eye open. There is broken trust. There is deceit. There are ancient grudges.

So, then, is there nowhere where the wolf and the lamb truly co-exist peacefully? Is there really no place on earth where enemies lay down their weapons? Are grudges never fully mended, is forgiveness never complete? If not in the public eye, then what about in the human heart, at the very least? In the privacy of the human heart, can the wolf and the lamb be at peace with one another? No. This is there fiercest battleground. Here it is self versus self. This is the source of all human hatred, antagonism, ferocity. The human heart is where the wolf and the lamb fight, to the death. Because it is within the human heart where you are most divided and torn—it is where self-hatred and self-love fight to the death. It is your private battle between the good within you and the evil within

you. It is our deepest, most painful, most hidden brokenness. The sinner hates the saint; the saint hates the sinner. The wolf truly hates the lamb and vice versa.

So. If not in our families, our churches, or even within the human heart itself— is there nowhere in this universe where the wolf and the lamb can lie down peacefully? Is there nowhere where enemies can truly become friends? Is there no hope for restored animosity, no hope for torn trust to be mended, no hope for restraint in our desire to devour one another? Is there no hope, no place, for peace in our kill-or-be-killed world?

There *is* a place. There *is* a time. There *is* a kingdom. And it's just around the corner from this place and this time. There *is* a bizarre and wonderful kingdom where the wolf and the lamb truly love and trust each other, where the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear truly love and trust each other...a kingdom where brothers do not battle, where neighbors do not deceive, where the human heart does not torture. It is God's kingdom, it is God's reign, it is God's place and time, and he gives it to us.

It is the grandest of all kingdoms, and wherever and whenever that might be is God's to know, but we do know that it is the most peculiar and gorgeous display of harmony and peace that can be imagined...it is the synchronizing of good and evil, where no one will sleep with one eye open out of fear of their neighbor or of themselves...and, even more outrageous, the grand marshall of this whole extraordinary parade is a little child...yet not just any child, the child we call the Christ, the child who is born to make all things new.

The child will grow to be a man who will die on a cross, and under his cross will gather the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear, perpetrators and victims, predators and prey, and then the healing will begin, finally, for families everywhere, for the church around the world, and for your heart, and for mine.