



Today marks a highlight in the 2021 Charis Bible Reading plan as we begin our journey through the book of Isaiah. Some of us have been following this plan all year to read through both the Old and New Testaments in a year. We are following the reading plan contained in the Reformation Study Bible and we have posted this plan on a Facebook page of Charis Community Church called "2021 Charis Bible Reading Plan." Feel free to join this Facebook page. It is open to everyone interested in following our Bible reading plan. For the remainder of the year, our Old Testament reading will be in the prophets, Isaiah being the first.

Reading through the Bible in a year is a noble and difficult goal. We need each other to help us through the difficult times and the challenges that come with completing such a difficult task. Yet, it is a task that I'm committed to and one that I view as an essential component of discipleship. The plan that follows is an attempt to help build healthy habits of daily Bible reading. For some, it is a continuation of what you started at the beginning of this year. For others, it will be the start of a new habit, or maybe picking up where you left off. A task this large must allow for moments of rebounding. Wherever you find yourself, I'm excited to offer this plan to help us work our way through the book of Isaiah together. Today is always a great day to start.

The Isaiah reading plan begins September 23 and will take us through the book of Isaiah by reading 2, maybe 3, or 4 chapters each day. We will finish the book of Isaiah on October 17.

Isaiah Reading Plan

September 23:	Isaiah 1 -2
September 24:	Isaiah 3 – 5
September 25:	Isaiah 6 – 8
September 26:	Isaiah 9 – 10
September 27:	Isaiah 11 – 13
September 28:	Isaiah 14 – 16
September 29:	Isaiah 17- 19
September 30:	Isaiah 20 – 23
October 1:	Isaiah 24 – 26
October 2:	Isaiah 27 – 28
October 3:	Isaiah 29 – 30
October 4:	Isaiah 31 – 33
October 5:	Isaiah 34 – 36
October 6:	Isaiah 37 – 38
October 7:	Isaiah 39 – 40
October 8:	Isaiah 41 – 42
October 9:	Isaiah 43 – 44
October 10:	Isaiah 45- 47
October 11:	Isaiah 48 – 49
October 12:	Isaiah 50 – 52
October 13:	Isaiah 53 – 55
October 14:	Isaiah 56 – 58
October 15:	Isaiah 59 – 61
October 16:	Isaiah 62- 64
October 17:	Isaiah 65 – 66

This is not a Bible study. It is an attempt to help us develop a habit of reading God’s word ourselves and allowing the Word of God to speak to us. Each day is supplemented with a commentary I’ve prepared for that day to make Isaiah more understandable. This is a difficult book, but it’s not impossible. It is a treasure trove of God’s grace and his promises that are met in Christ. The commentaries I’ve prepared below are far from scholarly. They are the product of my understanding of this book from years of reading it through in a Bible reading plan.

In addition to the commentaries that are available for people to download, I will also post them each day on the Facebook page, “2021 Charis Bible Reading Plan.” I will also be hosting a Zoom meeting on Tuesday evenings from 7 to 8 pm for open discussion for anyone to share insights of the reading and ask questions. If interested please let me know so that I can email you the Zoom link. Our first meeting will be on September 28 and we will conclude on Tuesday, October 19.

A few words about Old Testament prophecy in general and Isaiah in particular. Old Testament prophecy is one of the most demonstrable aspects of God’s grace. It is a revelation from God

calling people to repent, believe, and be blessed by God. It contains warnings and it contains promises from God. When the prophets aren't speaking, God's people are in trouble. God's people are in even deeper trouble when they refuse to listen to the prophets.

Old Testament prophecy is specific in time and ethical in its purpose and intent. The dating of Isaiah's prophecy, for example, is specific to the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (1: 1). It's God's perspective on world events at the time of writing. We often think of prophecy as being future-oriented and much of it is. But, in the Old Testament, much of it is orientated to the situation at hand at the time of writing. Historical context is critical to interpretation. Prophets often weave in and out of present circumstances to future visions of God's restoration, all of which are fulfilled in Christ, some already in his first advent, others waiting for his return.

Obviously, Isaiah wrote his prophecy over the course of nearly 60 years as Isaiah 1:1 would conclude. This is key to our understanding of the process of inspiration. Isaiah wrote the words God gave him and those words came through the process of meditation, reflection, lament, and petition of God. The book of Isaiah, as with a lot of Scripture, is an accumulation of the writer's journey with God. With respect to future events, prophets often speak more than what they knew at the time. At the same time, we must understand that while God does not bypass Isaiah's personal journey, Isaiah is in fact presented the very word of God. To listen to Isaiah in his capacity as a prophet is to listen to God.

Isaiah begins his prophecy at a critically important time of transition between the age of Moses and the advent of Christ. The old world is passing away and as new world powers emerge, so do questions of the future state of Israel. Will Israel continue to be a light unto the nations initiated by Moses at Mt. Sinai or will Israel succumb to a blending of the other nations around her? The similarities to Isaiah, as well as the other prophets are strikingly similar to our time.

All this raises the question of what is the role of a prophet in our day. The Holy Spirit is not about writing new books for the Bible, but the conviction of given revelation. It is the job of preachers and teachers to expound the word of God and make appropriate applications to our present times and circumstances. When we do, we'll find the Old Testament prophets incredibly illuminating and useful in our walk with God.

Thursday, September 23, 2021

Reading: Isaiah 1 and 2

Welcome to the book of Isaiah! This is a long book, 66 chapters in all. But, for the next month, we're committed to reading it together, several chapters each day. I'm going to provide a guide for each day's reading to help us better understand what we're reading. We will finish our reading of this book on Sunday, October 17.

The very first verse of Isaiah establishes a timeline as well as the main focus of Isaiah's prophecy. The focus of Isaiah is upon "Judah and Jerusalem," yet that does not preclude Isaiah from addressing the sins of other nations, including the northern kingdom of Israel. The timeline begins with the reign of Uzziah in Judah, followed by his son Jotham. Second Kings 15 provides the historical context for this period. Azariah in 2 Kings 15: 1 is the same person who is named Uzziah in Isaiah 1: 1.

Uzziah's reign is very short in Judah. He contracts leprosy and lived quarantined from others for the rest of his life. Jotham, his son takes over asking. (So much for people who see no relevance to the present from the Old Testament. They too had quarantine measures). Both Uzziah and Jotham "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kings 15: 3 and 34). Yet the people did not (see 2 Kings 15: 4, 35).

A few words of the desolation are mentioned in 1: 7. I'm personally tempted to believe that Isaiah is referring to a period much later in his ministry, the reign of Ahaz. That aside, verse seven begs the question what is this desolation Isaiah is referencing in verse 7? Is it physical or spiritual or both? I think it's both. Whether this is the reign of Uzziah or Ahaz, Judah's wayward condition didn't just happen overnight, all at once. It was a slow fade, with warning signs even in times of prosperity and peace. The desolation is from "foreigners" and their destruction is often worse than the trail of physical destruction they leave behind. Ultimately, physical destruction is a sign of the spiritual degeneration of a nation. That scenario certainly fits in Isaiah 1.

What must not be missed in the opening chapters of Isaiah is that it's not that the people of Judah aren't worshipping. It's what they've done with their worship. Their worship is so synchronized with the false gods around them that they see no distinction of the one true God who desperately wants to be their God. Again, present-day warnings and applications should be blatantly obvious to those of us in Christ, who also live in the midst of a pluralistic, inclusive culture. We must be careful not to add anything to the simplicity and purity of doctrine contained in the Gospel.

Given this background, the opening chapters of Isaiah reveal an incredibly gracious, merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in unceasing faithfulness. Instead of laying down the hammer, Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." Praise God for the gift of repentance.

In contrast, Isaiah chapter 2, details what pure unadulterated worship looks like. Isaiah does not just hear the word of the Lord in 2: 1, he “saw” it. This is an important distinction and one we must ask ourselves as well. What Isaiah sees is the mountain of the Lord, Zion, where God dwells in the midst of his people and all who enter are not turned away. This period is more complicated to discern in Isaiah’s timeline. His mention of Zion is not the same as the pilgrimages mentioned in the Psalms. He is speaking into the future, “it shall come to pass in latter days” and “all nations will flow to it.” Hebrews 12: 22 reveals the pathway to this mountain, Zion, for those of us who are in Christ: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.”

Brothers and sisters, this worship in Isaiah 2 is both now and forevermore. Our access is through the finished work of Christ and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah is speaking of the New Jerusalem, the same as Revelation 21. The good news of the Gospel is that it begins in Christ and continues for all eternity. Don’t abandon your faith to another as Isaiah 1 warns.

Friday, September 24, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 3 -5

The opening chapters of Isaiah often weave in and out of the present circumstances in Judah to times when Isaiah looks to the future restoration of the Lord. We see this in chapter one where Isaiah is addressing the wayward condition of Judah, followed by a brief interlude in chapter 2 describing the future restoration of Zion, the New Jerusalem.

We see this pattern again today in our reading of chapters 3 through 5. Chapter 3 picks up where Isaiah left off in chapter 1. The Lord is taking away from Judah, “support and supply” (3:1). The reason for this is “Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen.” The gods they have called upon in their synchronized worship lack the power to deliver their false promises, let alone save. Notice all that God is taking away in chapter three to prove that he alone is the source of what they need.

But in chapter 4, Isaiah once again looks to the future to “the branch of the Lord” which Isaiah describes as “beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel” (vs. 2). Those who experience this restoration are called “holy” (vs. 4). I believe it is best to view this branch as Christ. He certainly fulfills all the promises of Isaiah 4 and this chapter describes kingdom life for Christ’s followers.

Chapter 5 is Isaiah’s first reference to a vineyard and this chapter brings us back to the present circumstances at hand, Judah’s sin. Isaiah 5: 7 states that this vineyard is “the house of Israel.” The thrust of chapter 5 is best summarized in verse 4, “What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?”

God gave Israel everything they needed to bear a fruitful harvest. Instead, they chose the path of wickedness. The remainder of chapter 5 addresses the consequences of these choices with a series of “woes” and “therefore” statements. It’s a litany of Judah’s sins and the reasons why God will destroy this vineyard.

For those of us in Christ, the relevance of chapter 5 should be obvious. We too have been blessed with every spiritual blessing and equipped with everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1: 3). We are God’s vineyard. Are we allowing ourselves to be pruned by the vinedresser?

As I read the tragedy of Isaiah 5, the words of the hymn “How Firm a Foundation” come to mind. “What more can he say than to you He hath said – to you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”

Saturday, September 25, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 6 -8

Isaiah 6 is Isaiah’s call to prophetic ministry. The timing is significant, “in the year that King Uzziah died.” Uzziah is the same person as Azariah in 2 Kings 15. King Uzziah contracted leprosy and his son Jotham took over as king while Uzziah lived the rest of his life in quarantine.

We know from 2 Kings 15 that the period of Uzziah and Jotham was a time of peace and prosperity for Judah. Things are about to change, however, not just with the death of Uzziah, but with emerging world powers and military alliances that Judah is right in the middle of. Second Kings chapters 15 and 16 provide helpful background information for understanding these chapters in Isaiah.

The vision Isaiah receives in Isaiah 6 is preparing him for the difficult times ahead. It also raises questions about the chronology of Isaiah’s prophecy. Chapter six is probably the beginning of it, not chapter 1. Isaiah is a contemporary of Micah and Amos. Micah is from Moresheth (Micah 1: 1) and lived outside Jerusalem. Amos was from Tekoa and he considered himself to be “no prophet, nor a prophet’s son.” Both Micah and Amos’ prophecies were largely discredited. Isaiah’s cry of “here I am! Send me” (6: 8) is a call to pick up where Micah and Amos left off. Isaiah does not assume this role naively.

Isaiah receives a magnificent vision in chapter 6 of the “Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (vs. 1). This is a beautiful chapter that focuses on the holiness of God that will always stand in stark contrast to the sinfulness of man. Isaiah quickly sees this gap and cries, “woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips.” Not only that, Isaiah lives among a sinful, rebellious people. Only the Lord can purify Isaiah’s lips, remove his guilt and atone for his sin (6: 5). This is the good news of the Gospel. Verses 8 through 13 record Isaiah’s commission from the Lord that will guide his prophecy for the rest of his life.

Chronologically, chapter 7 is years later than chapter 6. Isaiah is sent to King Ahaz to counsel him regarding a Syrian invasion of Judah. Syria has joined forces with the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) to attack Judah. "Ephraim" in this chapter is referring to the Northern kingdom of Israel that split off from Judah, the southern kingdom. According to 2 Chronicles 28: 5 the Lord gave King Ahaz of Judah into the hands of Syria. Ahaz then appeals to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria to deliver him.

Isaiah offers a better alternative in chapter 7; wait for a sign from the Lord. After Isaiah's words, Ahaz also hears directly from the Lord himself. The Lord asks Ahaz to pray big, "ask a sign of the Lord your God." Notice the limitlessness in God's offer to Ahaz, "let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (7: 11). But, Ahaz refuses the Lord's offer, "I will not put the Lord to the test." Be careful not to interpret this as Ahaz's piety. It is anything but. It's a sin all too familiar to those of us in Christ. God in his generous grace invites us to ask of him and we in our pride and self-sufficiency sin by refusing his invitation.

Since Ahaz refuses to ask the Lord for a sign, the Lord delivers a sign to Ahaz through Isaiah, "Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (7: 14). We should immediately be able to connect the dots. The sign given to Ahaz through Isaiah is the advent of Christ coming to earth.

Chapter 8 deals with the coming Assyrian invasion. Even though Tiglath-pileser of Assyria delivered Ahaz from the hands of Syria and Israel (Ephraim), this is far from a cozy relationship. As in our day, there's a considerable amount of fear and also conspiracy about what is about to happen and how to respond. Isaiah's word about all this is in verse 12, "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread." Instead of turning these matters over to the Lord, the people of Judah and their leaders have succumbed to the false worship among them. They "inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter" (vs. 19). They even "inquire of the dead on behalf of the living"

Brothers and sisters, as we travel the ups and downs of a pandemic that has seen no shortage of conspiracy theories and polarizing opinions, shouldn't we consider Isaiah's question in all of this, "Should not a people inquire of their God?" (8: 19).

Sunday, September 26, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 9 and 10

Isaiah chapters 7, 8, and 9 all speak of promises from the Lord of a child being born with the specific task of delivering God's people from their sin and fears of surrounding military turbulence. Specifically, we see these promises in **Isaiah 7: 14**, **Isaiah 8: 3**, and from today's reading, **Isaiah 9: 6**.

Who is this child? In the case of Isaiah 7: 14 and 9: 6, the short answer is Christ. In the case of Isaiah 8: 3 with Maher-shalal-has-baz, the son of a prophetess, it appears this child is an immediate answer to the long-term promises of a child found in 7: 14 and 9: 6.

As with a lot of prophecies, there are immediate fulfillments and then there are ultimate fulfillments in Christ. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Corinthians 1: 20).

Today's reading from Isaiah 9 is the most common, most specific reference pointing to Christ. This passage is clearly looking into the future. The chapter begins in verse one by looking at the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the destruction they endured from the Assyrians as "the former times," even though Isaiah is viewing as his present reality as he pens these words. Isaiah is looking to "the latter time." While this promise is specific to Israel, Isaiah broadens it to be "of the nations."

Beginning in verse 8 of chapter 9, Isaiah returns to the situation at hand in Judah and the eminent judgment that awaits their sin. Notice the refrain of this section, continuing on into chapter 10 of, "For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still" (9: 12, 17 and 10: 4).

Beginning in Isaiah 10: 20 to the end of the chapter, Isaiah speaks of a remnant that will return to Israel. Here Isaiah is again looking into the future. I believe this is fulfilled in Judah after the Babylon exile and the return of the exiles to Jerusalem recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah.

But ultimately, that's the short answer. The long answer is again found in Christ. We are part of the remnant of Israel spoken of in Isaiah 10.

For those following the Charis Bible reading plan, from today's reading in the New Testament, "As for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (Galatians 6: 16). We are that remnant and as we focus on the conclusion in Galatians today, be careful not to abandon your faith for another gospel that is really no gospel at all.

Monday, September 27, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 11, 12 and 13

Isaiah 11 is a picture of restoration, a promise of things to come that will be accomplished by the Spirit of the Lord. Verse one states, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit."

Felled stumps and branches emerging from those stumps are a common theme in the opening chapters of Isaiah. They represent the destructiveness of sin. Sin always leads to death and death is an opportunity for God to make all things new. As cities are laid waste due to people's sin and God's judgment upon them, there are also promises laced into these passages of God's

restoration; his making all things new. It's a reminder of Romans 5: 20, "but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

One of the earliest mentions of a branch is in Isaiah 4. That chapter begins with a request from seven women to have their reproach taken away on the day of judgment mentioned in Isaiah 3. These women lack the basic necessities of food, clothing, and a husband. They beg the Lord to take away their reproach (4: 1). The Lord answers with a promise of "the branch of the Lord." It will be "beautiful and glorious and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel" (4:2).

The second mention of a stump is at the end of chapter 6 where Isaiah is given a vision of a felled stump (6: 13). As cities are laid waste without inhabitants (6: 11), so are the terebinth and oak trees. But, they will sprout again. These stumps represent not only God's judgment of sin but also his glorious restoration. Not only will they sprout again, but God will make it even better than it was before. "The holy seed is its stump" (6: 13).

In Isaiah 11, the identity of "the holy seed" is clarified for us. It is a shoot from the stump of Jesse who is King David's father. All that will be left of this dynasty is a stump, but there's a promise that a shoot will emerge from this stump, not from David, but from David's father Jesse. This will be a work of the Holy Spirit. We know this shoot to be Jesus Christ, our Lord, as the opening chapter of Matthew confirms, with his family tree. Jesus is the true and better David, the son of Jesse.

Isaiah 12 breaks out in a song of thanksgiving that though God was angry with his people for their sin, his "anger turned away, that you might comfort me" (12: 1). This short chapter is a call to "give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people, proclaim that his name is exalted" (12: 3).

Beginning in Isaiah 13, we have the first of a series of oracles concerning God's judgment of specific nations that will continue through to chapter 24 which is Isaiah's apocalypse. Indeed, the whole earth is guilty before God (Romans 3: 19) and in need of the righteous branch to deliverer them.

Brothers and sisters, this is the good news of the gospel, "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples – of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11: 9 -10).

Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 14, 15 and 16

Today's reading of Isaiah chapters 14 through 16 includes a series of judgments or oracles against specific nations. It is a new section of material in the book of Isaiah that began in chapter 13 with Babylon. This section will take us to chapter 24 which is Isaiah's apocalypse.

Before continuing with the oracle against Babylon that Isaiah first started in chapter 13, the first two verses of chapter 14 contain a brief interlude of a vision of a restored Israel. This includes what Isaiah introduced in 12: 13 where the northern territory of Ephraim is united again with Judah. In order for this to happen the defeat of Babylon will have to occur, which the rest of the chapter addresses. This vision is not just limited to Israel but includes "sojourners" who will "attach themselves to the house of Jacob" (vs. 1).

However, Babylon takes on a deeper meaning in Scripture to include those powers that oppose God's people as we see in the book of Revelation. Therefore, while the restoration mentioned in Isaiah 14: 1, 2 does see a fulfillment of sorts in the book of Ezra, it is best to see this only as a partial fulfillment or a foretaste of God's future restoration that we await. The remainder of chapter 14, is a picture of Israel triumphing over Babylon and actually taunting the Babylonian rulers. Again, the reference to Babylon is both literal and symbolic to include opposing forces against God's people.

At the time of Isaiah's writing, Babylon is part of the Assyrian empire and eventually, Babylon will replace it in their conquest of Assyria. For now, however, we need to understand that Isaiah's focus of Babylon is years ahead of the Babylonian exile that occurs after the book of Isaiah. Even the mention of the Medes (13: 17) who will eventually defeat the Babylonians and allow the Israelites to return to their homeland after 70 years of exile is years before it would have ever entered the mind of Isaiah's audience. Isaiah will not live to see it, but God knows the beginning from the end.

Beginning in Isaiah 14: 24, Isaiah switches focus from Babylon to the situation at hand with Assyria that poses a more immediate threat to Judah, and Jerusalem in particular. The threat of Assyria in the book of Isaiah occurs at two different times and under two different sets of leaders, both in Assyria and in Judah.

The first threat was under the reign of King Ahaz in Judah. Ahaz's first encounter with Assyria was on friendlier terms with Tiglath-pileser as the two shared a common enemy in Syria that had joined forces with the northern kingdom of Israel to attack Judah and Jerusalem. Ahaz forms an alliance with Assyria to defeat Syria and eventually, Assyria overtakes Syria as well as the northern kingdom of Israel. This is the beginning of exile for the northern kingdom of Israel who is eventually exiled to Samaria.

Assyria would like to do the same with Judah but Ahaz in 2 Kings 16, goes to Damascus and ends up copying an altar in Damascus in the sanctuary of Jerusalem and synchronizing the worship in Jerusalem with Assyrian gods. This prevents Judah from being captured by the Assyrians, but

what must be understood is Judah is nonetheless defeated by the Assyrians. The northern kingdom of Israel suffers a military defeat by the Assyrians; the southern kingdom of Judah suffers a spiritual defeat by the Assyrians through Ahaz's synchronized worship. Sorting all of this out will be extremely confusing for the people of Judah and will be a large focus of Isaiah's prophecy. What must be understood is when a nation synchronizes its worship to that of its enemies, the enemy has nothing left to conquer. King Ahaz made a military conquest from Assyria a moot point. Judah wrongly believes God saved them from exile, unlike their northern counterpart that eventually went into exile by Shalmaneser in 2 Kings 17. The reality is Assyria dealt a more serious blow to Judah, certainly from a spiritual standpoint.

The second threat posed by Assyria comes during the reign of Ahaz's successor, Hezekiah. This is years after Ahaz and it is with Sennacherib of Assyria. This encounter will be covered later in Isaiah in chapters 36 and 37. God intervenes in answer to Hezekiah's prayers and not only reroutes Sennacherib's army but through the angel of the Lord strikes down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp (37: 36).

It is unclear what threat of Assyria is being addressed in Isaiah 14: 24 – 27 in the oracle of judgment against them. I believe it is all of them and what Isaiah is stating in this section with his oracle of judgment against them is that Assyria, like all other enemies of God, is a defeated foe.

The next two oracles of judgment in Isaiah are against Philistia (14: 28 – 32) and Moab which includes all of chapters 15 and 16.

The mention of Philistia is a long-time enemy of Israel, going back to the days of King David. Isaiah's oracle of judgment against them comes in the year King Ahaz died (15: 28). Philistia suffered under the hands of Assyria and might very well rejoice over their defeat mentioned prior. But, they too will not escape God's judgment of their sin.

The oracle against Moab is another long-time foe of Israel, tracing their ancestry back to Lot's eldest daughter (Genesis 19: 31 -37). Their opposition was most prominently seen in Israel's journey to the promised land in Numbers 22 and the story of Balaam. The downfall of Moab is their pride (16: 6).

All of the above is rather long and hopefully not too confusing. What must be understood from all of this is that God will not allow sin to go unabated. Moreover, God's people must not fall for a false sense of security obtained from military alliances that severely compromise the faith of their people through synchronized worship.

Wednesday, September 29, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 17, 18 and 19

Let me say up front today's reading in Isaiah, along with all of the oracles of judgment from chapters 13 – 23 is difficult reading. It is, I believe, some of the hardest reading in Isaiah. Some of these nations or cities no longer exist. Our lack of knowledge of the historical background of all of these places makes it difficult to understand the full extent of what Isaiah is speaking. What are we to make of this material in Isaiah?

First, understand that Isaiah is speaking to the present circumstances of his people in Judah and the surrounding nations. His readers would have gotten the message clearly in light of the events of their day. Isaiah and the people of Judah are experiencing a rapidly changing world. And, it's that type of a setting that quickly reveals what people put their trust in. For some, it's a nationalistic pride, tremendous wealth, or trading empires that offer them a false sense of security. Faith and trust in the living God get pushed out of people's lives in such settings.

And so it is in our time. "There is none righteous, no not one." We all stand guilty before a holy God. We see many of the same things in our world that we see in these chapters. In this sense, what we're reading in these chapters is intensely practical. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Look around you in our world today. Who or what are people putting their trust in? Better yet, ask yourself that very question.

Isaiah's oracles of judgment continue in today's reading with judgments against Damascus (chapter 17), Cush (chapter 18), and Egypt (chapter 19).

Damascus is the capital city of Syria and it will eventually fall to the Assyrians under Tiglath-pileser's reign. It was a central trading hub between Egypt and Mesopotamia. It was also a center of culture and religious pluralism. This judgment is particularly striking in light of King Ahaz's copying of an altar in Damascus in 2 Kings 16: 10 – 20 that introduced synchronized worship in the temple in Jerusalem. This act represents one of Judah's most heinous offenses of idolatry.

Notice verse 7 of chapter 17, "In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel." As people are brought low, and the objects of their worship are taken away, people will look directly to God, their maker. Verses 11 through the end of the chapter represent this painful process of God removing in order for us to look to our Maker.

The judgment against Cush includes all of chapter 18. For Isaiah, this represented the remotest part of his world. Cush is the Biblical Ethiopia. Their commodity is papyrus (18: 2). Isaiah foresees a day when this proud people will bring tribute to the "Lord of hosts" (18: 7).

Chapter 19 is an oracle against Egypt. Even though God had previously defeated the gods of Egypt in the Exodus, Isaiah's prophecy against them is a second judgment upon their idolatry. God is stirring up a civil war in Egypt (vs. 2- 4). Indeed, Egypt spent most of the eighth century in such a conflict. But, God is also doing something new at the end of Isaiah 19. Beginning in

verse 16, there is a promise that Egypt, Assyria, and Israel will all be blessed. “The land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians” (vs. 17) and the aforementioned will fear because “of the purpose that the Lord of hosts has purposed against them.” This fear is heightened by four things that will emerge in Egypt, Assyria, and Israel: five cities in Egypt (vs. 18), an altar, and “a pillar to the Lord at its border” (vs. 19). Finally, “there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria in which Assyria will come into Egypt to worship the Lord” (vs. 23). Israel will also enter this mix and together they will be “a blessing in the midst of the earth.”

What we see in Isaiah 19: 16 – 25 is a vision of a future restoration, not only Israel but surrounding nations. It is for all people in whom God will redeem and call his people. This is the work of God’s hand and we share with Israel in our inheritance.

Thursday, September 30, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 20, 21, 22, and 23

God’s prophets of the Old Testament are often asked to do some strange things, even bizarre things in order to get the attention of the people to whom they’ve been called to proclaim God’s message. Ezekiel is probably the strangest. Chapter 4 of Ezekiel has confounded me every time I read it. If there’s a second to this weirdness, it’s probably Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 20.

As Sargon, King of Assyria fights against Ashdod (a Philistine city), Isaiah is given a sign from the Lord. He is to walk “naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush” (20: 3). The sign that Isaiah is illustrating is that Egypt and exiles from Cush will also be carried away by Assyria, “naked and barefoot.” While other nations have put their faith and trust in Egypt and Cush to deliver them from Assyria, the Assyrians in turn have dealt them a humiliating blow. “And we, how shall we escape?”

In chapter 21, Isaiah is given “a stern vision” “concerning the wilderness of the sea. This chapter is about the fall of Babylon and closely parallels 13: 1 – 14: 23, although at first, it is not readily noticeable that this oracle concerns Babylon. That identity is reserved for the end in verse 9. This vision gives Isaiah considerable pain and anguish (vs. 3, 4). Yet, Isaiah is faithful to deliver that which the Lord has given him, “what I have heard from the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you” (vs 10).

The oracle against Dumah beginning in verse 11 is an oasis in Babylon and is a continuation of the oracle against Babylon.

In chapter 22, Isaiah turns his sights on Jerusalem. What he sees is not what the people of Jerusalem are seeing (vs. 2). But the Lord of Hosts has a day, one of “tumult and trampling and confusion” (vs. 5). God will remove his protection of Judah. He will take away “the covering of Judah” (vs. 8). In that day, the people of Jerusalem will look everywhere, but to the Lord who

brought all of this about in order to punish Judah for its sin (Vs. 9 – 11). Instead of taking heed to Isaiah's prophecy, the people were deceived into joy and gladness, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (vs. 13).

Finally, today's reading concludes with an oracle against Tyre and Sidon. Isaiah is certainly not the only prophet to address them. Even Jesus addressed Tyre and Sidon in comparison to the hardness of heart of his audience. Again, the more things change the more they stay the same. Tyre and Sidon are both major trading empires that accumulated great wealth. They placed considerable pride and security in their wealth which ultimately led to their downfall.

Friday, October 1, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 24, 25 and 26

Isaiah 24 is considered Isaiah's apocalypse, breaking from judgments of specific nations found in chapters 13 - 23 and turning to humanity as a whole. It's a stark picture that highlights the supreme power of God and man's wayward pattern of sin. We all stand guilty before a holy God who cannot help but act in response to our sin.

But in chapter 25, Isaiah breaks out in song after recording the long list of judgments against the nations. He declares this God to be *his* God who is worthy of praise and adoration. Isaiah's God has done "*wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure*" (vs. 1).

Isaiah speaks with respect to the overall character of God's plan. It's wonderful, faithful, and sure. He also speaks about the deliberateness of God's plan. He did not just come up with it in reaction to a world spun out of control, but he *formed it of old*. Indeed, before the foundations of the earth (Ephesians 1: 4).

Once again, Isaiah is taking us to "this mountain" (vs. 6), which is Mount Zion, but notice that God is preparing this mountain "for all peoples." It's a beautiful place, one "of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined." Best of all God "will swallow up death forever." Verse 9 provides the RSVP for this invitation: "*It will be said on that day, 'Behold this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'*"

In Isaiah 26, the prophet composes a song to be sung in that day. It's a song of a strong city, no doubt the new Jerusalem with salvation as its walls and bulwarks and gates that the righteous enter, a place where perfect peace exists and its focus is on the Lord and those who have put their trust in him.

Who would not want to go to this place? Yet as commentator Barry Webb has so accurately summarized, "either repentance will bring you to the feast or pride will keep you away, and the

consequences will be unsullied joy or unspeakably terrible judgment. The alternatives which the Gospel sets before us are as stark as that.”

The sad reality of Isaiah 26 is we’re not there yet. Even though God has clearly established a path for the righteous (vs. 7), the way of the wicked does not embrace it. While the hand of the Lord is lifted up, the wicked refuse to see it (vs. 11). As believers try to strive for righteousness in this life, our efforts often seem in vain. Isaiah compares this to a pregnant woman suffering through childbirth only to give birth to the wind (vs. 18). What a hopeless picture for humanity!

But all is not lost. There is hope in God and his perfect Shalom will be fulfilled. *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy. For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead (vs. 19).*

The New Testament speaks of this struggle in terms of *light momentary affliction that is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4: 17, 18).*

May our cry as the Lord tarries and as we struggle to be that of the early church in 1 Corinthians 16: 22, Maranatha: *Our Lord Come!*

Saturday, October 2, 2021

Reading Isaiah chapters 27, 28

Isaiah chapter 27 is a picture of the redemption and restoration of God’s people Israel. The chapter begins with the punishment of Leviathan and the pleasant vineyard that emerges when those who oppose God are eradicated.

In Psalm 74: 14 we read of God crushing the heads of Leviathan. This appears to be an imaginary multidimensional, multiheaded creature, a metaphor for anyone or anything that stands in opposition to God or his plan. The emphasis of Isaiah 27 is not the identity of Leviathan, but the certainty that God’s plan will prevail over any force of evil or any opposition to his plan.

God has established a pleasant vineyard in the beginning verses of Isaiah 27 in which he is the keeper (vs. 2-3). This is not the first mention of a vineyard in the book of Isaiah. The reader is harkened back to Isaiah 5, to the first vineyard that God plants with great expectations. The Isaiah 5 vineyard was established by God himself, clearing it, planting it with the choicest of vines and establishing it, even building a watchtower in it expecting an abundant yield of produce.

Isaiah 5: 7 reveals the identity of the vines in this vineyard. It is none other than God's chosen people, the house of Israel, the men of Judah, who are the subjects of God's pleasant pruning. Remarkable then that God destroys this vineyard in response to the sin of Israel and Judah. Even though God had done all he could do for this vineyard (Isaiah 5: 4), the people of God's vineyard defied God, and beginning in Isaiah 5: 8, a litany of their sins is outlined. It can best be summarized in Isaiah 5: 21, *Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!* What a terrible sin the pride of man is. Yet, *For all this, his anger has not turned and his hand is stretched out still* (Isaiah 5: 25).

So, in Isaiah 27 it's a new vineyard that we see, a picture of restoration and renewal. It's a place where God exists every moment and he keeps it night and day. *In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit* (Isaiah 27: 6). There is a refining process of the people who inhabit this vineyard. *The Lord will thresh out the grain and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel.* But, in the process, the Lord is calling us from the ends of the earth to come worship him on his holy mountain at Jerusalem (27: 12-13).

Isaiah 28, records the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) by Assyria. Eventually, they will be exiled to Samaria. This also provides a stern warning for Jerusalem. Their pride will also be their downfall. But, Isaiah 28 also provides a beautiful promise from God in the midst of man's pride. God will lay a "cornerstone" in "Zion," two familiar terms that could use some explanation.

Zion is a specific geographic location, marking the hill of Jerusalem on which the city of David was built. But, in the Bible *Zion* takes on a much broader context to include the heavenly city or kingdom of heaven (see Hebrews 12: 22). It is also used to describe the people of God in which those of us in Christ are certainly included.

A *cornerstone* is a stone that forms the base of a corner of a building, joining two walls together for structural support. Without it, the building cannot stand. God is laying a cornerstone in Zion in Isaiah 28. No doubt a reader in Isaiah's day might interpret this to mean that God will build a new temple in Jerusalem. And that's exactly what God does, but it had to be confusing to a reader in Isaiah's day. Keep in mind Isaiah 28 comes before the exile and the temple in Jerusalem is still standing. God will build a new temple all right, but it will far exceed our imaginations.

The foundation God is laying is none other than his one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. *This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4: 11-12).

We in Christ are God's building or temple (1 Corinthians 3: 9). Peter refers to us as living stones *being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 2: 5).

Sunday, October 3, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 29 and 30

Isaiah 29 is a prophecy of the siege of Jerusalem. Isaiah addresses Jerusalem as “Ariel” in verse one which is an altar where sacrifices were given in the temple. Isaiah is addressing their dead worship, the rituals in which they are only going through the motions, “this people honors God “with their lips, while their hearts are far from him” (vs. 13). Yet even in their judgment, God promises to “do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder” (vs. 14). Even though this is a chapter detailing the judgment of Jerusalem, it is also a picture of a future restoration, promised in verses 22 – 24.

Instead of heeding Isaiah’s warnings, many in Jerusalem are seeking an alliance with Egypt to protect them from the threats of Assyria. Isaiah issues a stern warning in chapter 30 for those who seek help from Egypt. From God’s perspective to join this alliance is symbolic of Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness. They are encouraged to trust in the Lord as their defense and not in foreign alliances, especially Egypt. Have God’s people forgotten that God released them from Egyptian bondage at the Passover? Now, years later, they want to return? How grievously offensive this is to a God who is mighty to save his people.

In a broader context, Isaiah 30 warns of the dangers of taking matters into our own hands. *“Ah, stubborn children,” declares the Lord, “who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin”* (30: 1).

Waiting on God to act or to tell us what to do is difficult. But, while we grow impatient in this process, Isaiah 30 has a powerful promise for those who put their trust in him:

He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “this is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. (Isaiah 30: 19 – 21).

Isaiah paints a far more beautiful picture of a world that I long more and more to be a part of. It’s a world that looks radically different from the newsreels we follow. In the one sense, I’m already a part of the world Isaiah foresees. In another sense, it’s still a long way off. While a citizen of heaven, I’m a resident of earth (Philippians 3: 20). That’s why Jesus instructs us to pray, *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6: 10).

Monday, October 4, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 31, 32 and 33

Yesterday, Isaiah 30 addressed the ungodliness of those seeking an alliance with Egypt to ward off Assyrian aggression. That topic is continued today in our reading of Isaiah 31. But where Isaiah 30 ends with a reminder of God's grace, chapter 31 is a call to repentance. The two go hand in hand.

But first, let's take a closer look at the context of these chapters. In Isaiah 14: 28 we read that King Ahaz has died. His death comes at the end of the oracle against Assyria and at the beginning of the oracle against Philistia in Isaiah 14.

Even though Ahaz is dead, the threat of Assyria is still very real. It also means that Hezekiah is now king in Judah. He's a good king who tries to initiate reforms among his people to help them turn to the Lord for their deliverance. Assyria is the dominant world power of the time. They've invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and they've dispersed the people as their captives under the reign of Shalmaneser. The people of Judah are frightened of the same thing happening to them. This produces a variety of responses from the leaders and people of Judah. One response is to form an alliance with Egypt for protection against Assyria. Isaiah 30 and 31 warn against such an alliance. Another response is complacency or denial of the imminent threat of Assyria. This response we see in 32: 9 where Isaiah speaks out against a wealthy class of complacent women "who are at ease."

But, Isaiah shows us what the proper response should be under such unstable circumstances. Trust in God's grace and repent of sin. Isaiah 32: 1- 8 speaks of the promises of one who waits upon the Lord and repents of sin. It is a king who will reign in righteousness. This is a promise of a restored leader. But, restored leadership needs a restored people. Isaiah paints a picture in today's reading of what that looks like.

These are troubled times, but in Isaiah 33, we read that "The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure" (33: 5, 6).

Instead of fearing the threat that Assyria poses to Judah, the people should fear the Lord. The reason they don't fear him is they do not treasure their relationship with him.

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapter 34, 35 and 36

Isaiah 34 is Isaiah's judgment of the nations. Whereas previous chapters have been individually focused, this chapter is similar to Isaiah 24, where the focus is on humanity as a whole or in the case of Isaiah 34, "all the nations."

I've often said that it's hard to see your own sin when you're focused on the sins of other people. There is a mounting threat from Assyria in these chapters that will come full throttle today in our reading of chapter 36 where Sennacherib invades Judah. What Judah doesn't seem to understand is that they are included in the Lord being enraged against all the nations (34: 2). They are part of the Lord's day of vengeance (34: 8). Judah's sin is just as repugnant as that of the other nations around them. Sennacherib's invasion is part of that judgment. That's a hard thing for God's people to understand in the Old Testament, how an unrighteous nation such as Assyria is used by God as an instrument of judgment against God's own people. Yet, it's something that happens over and over in Scripture and it's about to happen in today's reading from Isaiah.

Isaiah 35, provides an interlude between God's judgment of the nations in chapter 34 and Sennacherib's invasion in 36. It's a vision of restoration that will come about after the Lord's fury of judgment is unleashed on the nations. "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing" (35: 1, 2). God will establish a highway called "the Way of Holiness" (35: 8) that is void of anything unclean or of ravenous beasts. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrows and sighing shall flee away" (vs. 10).

But first, Sennacherib invades Judah in chapter 36. Verse one provides the timeline, in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign. Sennacherib has taken all the fortified cities of Judah and now he believes he has the rest of the nation in submission to him. He then begins to intimidate Judah with the pride of his power and previous military success by sending his Rabshakeh to Hezekiah and his leaders demanding they surrender.

Hezekiah has removed the high places of worship in Judah and Sennacherib wrongly believes that this means that Judah no longer has God on their side. The exact opposite is true. Hezekiah has removed the false gods from Judah and Judah has been instructed to now worship at one central altar in Jerusalem, the altar of the one true God, maker of heaven and earth.

All of this results in one of the greatest air wars in all of Scripture, between Hezekiah and his men and Sennacherib and his Rabshakeh. While Sennacherib continues to taunt Judah, "who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand" (vs. 20)? Hezekiah and his men wisely keep silent by "answering him not a word." Stay tuned for tomorrow's reading of God's deliverance of Judah.

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 37 and 38

What do you do when your back is up against a wall when you face insurmountable odds that spell glooming defeat? It's exactly the situation Hezekiah is in as Sennacherib king of Assyria invades Juda in Isaiah 36. Hezekiah models for us what a proper response should be in such circumstances in Isaiah 37: 1, "As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord." He also seeks godly counsel through the help of the prophet Isaiah. Hezekiah is positioning himself to hear the voice of the Lord.

There are so many voices clamoring for our attention right now. The temptation is to form a position that we're comfortable with and then defend our turf. Such an approach doesn't always lend itself to understanding or for that matter Biblical accuracy. Maybe it's time for us to take a fast from social media, television news feeds, and our personal escapes from reality and position ourselves similar to Hezekiah where we can hear the voice of God. Are we reading our Bibles and are we seeking godly counsel? Are we hearing the Word of God? Are we willing to repent of our own sin?

This is the position that you and I need to assume, not just right now, but at all times in our life in Christ. When we do, the Lord will speak to us. He certainly did for Hezekiah. Isaiah 37: 14 – 20 is Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance. The remaining verses of chapter 37 record Sennacherib's fall from power. His army is rerouted and "the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp" (37: 36). Sennacherib is also assassinated by his own sons (37: 38) as he worships his false god.

Brothers and sisters, our God moves mountains when we pray. He did for Hezekiah and the nation of Judah and he will do it again for us when we pray.

Chapter 38 records Hezekiah's sickness almost to the point of death. Hezekiah again prays and God extends his life another 15 years. Isaiah 38: 9 – 20 is Hezekiah's song of thanksgiving for what the Lord does in his life.

Tomorrow's reading will show how Hezekiah lived the next 15 years of his life.

Thursday, October 7, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 39 and 40

Isaiah 39 records the tragic indiscretion of good King Hezekiah. In chapter 38, Hezekiah falls sick and almost dies, but God grants him 15 more years. Between Isaiah 38 and 39 one has to wonder if this was a blessing for King Hezekiah. Isaiah 39 records his last remaining years. Second Kings 20: 12 – 21 provides a parallel account.

With Assyria no longer a threat to the people of Judah a new world power is emerging with Babylon. Envoys from Babylon pay Hezekiah a visit in Isaiah 39 and Hezekiah hides nothing from them. Hezekiah welcomes them and reveals to them all the treasures of his house, everything that is in his storehouses, and his entire armory. When Isaiah questions Hezekiah about all this, Isaiah warns that these same people from Babylon will carry God's people into captivity after Hezekiah is dead.

Hezekiah's response is startling. Hezekiah recognizes that the word Isaiah spoke to him is true and good, but he selfishly shrugs off what his moment of indiscretion will mean for his people after he is dead. At least "*there will be peace and security in my days*" (Isaiah 39: 8) reasons Hezekiah.

Hezekiah is a sad reminder that the sins and indiscretions of old men are just as serious as the sins and indiscretions of young men. Sadly, he doesn't end well. This side of heaven we never outgrow our battle with sin. We must stay vigilant.

Isaiah chapter 40 begins a turning point in Isaiah's prophesy and is one of the most beloved sections of Isaiah. I believe this is written in Isaiah's latter years. It is the summary of his prophesy and all that he has previously addressed in previous chapters. After the death of Hezekiah, God's people do go into Babylon captivity. Neither Hezekiah nor Isaiah will live to see this, but Isaiah does see it through a vision of the Lord. Beginning in chapter 40, Isaiah writes to the surviving remnant of the house of Judah of what awaits them. It's some of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture of the power, holiness, and absolute sovereignty of our God. Read it and be encouraged. *Behold your God* (Isaiah 40: 9). Isaiah in these passages is viewing his circumstances through the power of his God. He is not viewing God through the enormity of future circumstances.

In the midst of turbulent times, God issues through Isaiah a message of comfort and consolation to the people of Judah in 40: 1, 2. Their warfare is ended and their iniquity is pardoned. A reader in Isaiah's day would certainly ask, *how so?*

One could easily understand the ended warfare as deliverance from Assyrian aggression. Indeed, Isaiah 37 documents the divine intervention that brought about Sennacherib's fall and an end to their warfare. It was a very ironic turning of events that only God could bring about. But, if understood that way, then the end of this warfare is only a temporary reprieve. While there is peace in their day, as Hezekiah proclaimed at the end of his life (Isaiah 39: 8), it certainly didn't last long. Babylon is emerging as a world power that will treat Judah far more harshly than Assyria ever did, long after Isaiah is dead. Their warfare is far from over. As far as pardoned iniquity is understood, how is one to understand the prospering of the wicked that persists during this time, leading up to Babylonian captivity?

Clearly, Isaiah is proclaiming a message of deliverance that is stated in time. It is a present action with a continuing result. In other words, the reprieve of Assyrian warfare is a foretaste of what is yet to come. This is the timeless truth of the gospel spoken as early as Genesis 3: 15,

unpacked throughout the Old Testament, and solidified in the New. In this sense, Isaiah 40 speaks of the advent of Christ, while it does not negate salvation in Isaiah's day.

Enter John the Baptist who heralds the good news of Isaiah 40 by announcing the advent of Christ. It is Jesus and Him crucified for our sin that our warfare has ended and our iniquity is pardoned. Yet, like people in Isaiah's day, we still continue to sin, probably because we don't understand the full extent of our pardon.

Jerusalem had and would continue to receive more than sufficient penalty for its sin, however that truth does not exclude the fact that her people would receive a double measure of grace and favor. While Isaiah writes before the close of captivity, he announces warfare reaching an end and sin fully pardoned in the present. For Isaiah, it's an ever-present reality with a continuing action, with much affliction in-between. God is mighty to save his people time and again.

Maybe if we understood the full extent of our pardon and the end of our warfare that Christ has granted to us we wouldn't sin as much in our present life. If we understood the glory that awaits us, heaven would be more real on earth.

Friday, October 8, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 41 and 42

Isaiah 41: 10 has been a go-to verse for me for years for anyone whose facing fears, trials, or suffering and the uncertainty that comes with it. I memorized this verse years ago without fully understanding the historical context in which it was written. That understanding has made this verse all the more powerful to me.

Isaiah has received this revelation toward the end of his life. If King Hezekiah isn't dead at this point, he's reaching the final years of his life. The people of Judah have managed to witness the hand of God redirecting the Assyrian army away from Judah and the eventual downfall of Assyria as a world power. This was something that only God could have done. Yet, just when things seem safe in the city of Jerusalem Isaiah receives a revelation of an emerging power in Babylon that will pose a more serious threat than even Assyria. In 587 BC, after Isaiah penned Isaiah chapter 41, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. The temple was destroyed and the people were exiled to Babylon.

There are at least three important points we must not miss from the latter portion of the book of Isaiah beginning in chapter 40.

First, God knows the beginning from the end (Isaiah 41: 26) and he has chosen to disclose it to his covenant people through his prophets. It is but one of the many ways in which God is with his people. Isaiah warns of *one from the north* (41: 25: Babylon) who will begin the exile of

God's people from their homeland. But, God also knows in advance who will bring them back. It will be the Persians, under the leadership of Cyrus who is specifically named in Isaiah 44: 28 and again in Isaiah 45: 1. Notice what Ezra 1: 1 has to say about Cyrus and God accomplishing his sovereign plans through others. It is always through the word of the Lord, spoken through human authors (in this case it's Jeremiah) through God's common grace (by God stirring up the spirit of King Cyrus). Our God is all-knowing.

Secondly, as Isaiah 41:10 so clearly states, our God is an ever-present God who will not leave his people or force them to face trial unattended. Often, we'll look at these types of situations in which God's people face trials and tribulation and question why God allows it to happen. Such questioning misses this point. The inescapable truth that must not be missed is that God is with us. The power of this truth cannot be emphasized enough. Our God is omnipresent.

Finally, God is committed to his people in spite of their continued rebellion and sin. Earlier in the book of Isaiah with Isaiah's pronouncement of judgment upon the nations the repeating mantra was *For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still* (5: 25; 9: 12, 17). In Isaiah 42: 6, God says, *I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations*. Our God is a covenant maker and a promise keeper.

Beginning in Isaiah 42 we have the first of four servant songs found in the book of Isaiah in Isaiah 42: 1-9. The other three are found in **Isaiah 49:1-13**, **Isaiah 50: 4-11**, and **Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12**. An explanation is in order of the identity of the servant in these passages.

In Hebrew, a servant is a trusted envoy, a confidential representative, or one who is chosen. Sometimes the servant is Isaiah himself as we see in Isaiah 20: 3, where Isaiah the "servant" of the Lord is instructed to walk barefoot and naked as a sign of the impending judgment of Egypt and Cush. Other times the servant is the covenant people or faithful remnant of Israel. Then, there are times when the servant songs undeniably point to Christ, as in the case of Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12 that portrays Jesus as the suffering servant.

Rather than drawing lines of demarcation attempting to identify the servant specifically, I have personally found it most helpful to identify the servant in Isaiah's servant songs as all the above, Isaiah himself, the covenant people of Israel, and ultimately Jesus Christ. I believe such a view is pertinent to understanding the Incarnation of Christ.

In terms of servanthood, the Scriptures reveal that Christ does not ask anything of us that he himself has not also joined "as a son" (Hebrews 3: 5, 5: 8, 9). While Isaiah walks before his people barefoot and naked as God's servant to the house of Israel, Jesus bares our sin naked on a cross (John 19: 23, Psalm 22: 18). While Isaiah is faithful in this task and the entire book of Isaiah is the product of Isaiah's service, Isaiah is nonetheless an imperfect servant. He is "lost, a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6: 5) in need of redemption. Yet, Isaiah does model what God also requires of the house of Israel. Today's reading in Isaiah 42, describes not only Isaiah's life but how the house of Israel should be. Beginning in verse 18 to the end of the chapter, Isaiah 42 describes Israel's failure as God's servant. Ultimately these songs or commands to servanthood

are fulfilled in Christ, the true and better Isaiah, the true and better Israel, God's Son, Jesus Christ.

This is important to our understanding of servanthood. It is a matter of individual commitment with our relationship with Christ, but we also serve the church as a whole. We do so as Christ's ambassadors. Yet, our service in this life, while necessary, will always be imperfect because it is tarnished by our sin. We need the perfect, sinless life of Jesus, the perfect servant, not only as the basis for our service but the perfect spotless righteousness for our sin of where our service misses the mark.

Saturday, October 9, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 43 – 44

Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of redemption in Isaiah chapter 43. The opening verse shows that Israel's only Savior is the very one who created and formed us (43: 1). The redeemed have nothing to fear because they have specifically been called by name and belong to God.

Redemption requires a ransom to be paid and in the case of Israel that ransom is compared to the wealth of Egypt, Cush and Seba combined (43: 3). It will also come from other people given in exchange for Israel (vs. 4). These are infinite analogies used to illustrate the limitlessness of God's grace in our redemption. Specifically, Isaiah is describing the doctrine of election in the opening verses of this chapter. While the faithful remnant of Israel will experience this redemption, they nonetheless will not escape the trial that is to come. Isaiah is speaking of the future Babylonian captivity or exile. This chapter is really an instruction manual not only on how Israel should face this trial, but how believers, in general, should face trial. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you... When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned... (vs. 2).

The redeemed are the elect, described in verse 10 as God's "witnesses," servants of God's own choosing (vs. 10). Whatever is in Israel's past, should be left behind, "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old" (vs. 18). God is "doing a new thing" and his people must pay careful attention in their walk with God that they notice it. As you read this chapter be sure to claim these very promises yourself. They are yours in Christ.

Chapter 44, continues the theme of Israel as God's elect by describing the price that is to be paid to obtain it. Verses 6 through 8 reveal that if there is a "redeemed" people then that people must also have a "redeemer." That can only come through God and God alone who is the true "King of Israel" (44: 6). But, notice the second half of verse 6, which speaks with respect to the redeemer himself, "and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts." Who is this redeemer? The short and obvious answer is Christ. Yet in Isaiah, we have a fuller picture of all that Jesus encompasses and fulfills. The ransom that he pays to redeem us is from the wages of our sin, but our redemption comes with covenant stipulations of servanthood and being God's

witnesses. Think back to yesterday's discussion of the servant songs in Isaiah referring to Isaiah himself, the nation Israel and ultimately Christ. Our union with Christ comes with individual and corporate responsibilities.

As a result, Isaiah has no choice but to address the foolishness of idolatry in verses 9 through 20. This section reveals not only the sin of idolatry but the stupidity of it. How can sinful human beings possibly fashion an object of worship that will save them from a Holy God, let alone fulfill all that Isaiah has described in our redemption? God and God alone must intervene and Isaiah proclaims that redemption beginning in verse 21. We must remember that the redeemed or ransomed are regarded as "servants" (vs. 21).

Sunday, October 10, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 45, 46 and 47

Isaiah throws his readers a curveball in the final verse of Isaiah chapter 44 at the designation of Cyrus being God's "shepherd" who will fulfill God's purposes (44: 28). Today in our reading beginning in chapter 45, Cyrus' role as God's chosen instrument is expounded. This is none other than the Cyrus king of Persia of Ezra 1: 1.

Be mindful in today's reading of Isaiah 45, that Isaiah is addressing all this years before it ever happens, probably before Cyrus is even born, certainly before the Medes or Persians defeat Babylon. It is a very specific prophecy in Isaiah that has for some raised questions of its authenticity. Some believe that Cyrus' name is a scribal addition added years after Isaiah was dead. Such a view raises serious questions of Biblical inerrancy, but more importantly, it seriously limits the power of God. Isaiah has consistently described a God who knows the beginning from the end. We should not find it odd that Isaiah, functioning as a prophet, would mention Cyrus by name. It's what prophets do.

Moreover, Isaiah's prophesy is consistent with his latter counterpart, Jeremiah who spoke in Jeremiah 25: 11, 12, and again in Jeremiah 29: 10 of 70 years of captivity in Babylon, after which God would bring His people back to Jerusalem. Notice Ezra 1: 1 speaks of the role of Cyrus being the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophesy, not Isaiah's even though Isaiah's is consistent with Jeremiah's.

What is odd in Isaiah 44 and 45 is Isaiah's designation of Cyrus as a "shepherd," as "anointed," "whose right hand I have grasped" (44: 28, 45:1). These are unprecedented descriptions for one outside the covenant community of Israel such as Cyrus, but certainly not beyond the grasp of God's power and plan. Isaiah confirms that Proverbs 21:1 is true, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."

It is not unusual that God would use an outsider such as Cyrus to "subdue nations," loosen "belts of kings and open doors "and cut through bars of iron"(45: 2). Who better for this task

than Cyrus? God allows him to do the heavy lifting and help Israel when and where Israel is unable to help themselves. This is grace! Unlike the first exodus where Moses would have to confront the hardened heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, Cyrus readily comes to the rescue of Israel, even financing the construction of a new temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1: 4). It is “for the sake of Israel,” God’s chosen (45: 4) and as we’ve seen throughout Isaiah, God’s grace knows no bounds.

Even though God will use Cyrus as a chosen instrument to lead Israel in a second exodus, The Lord, and he alone, is Israel’s only Savior. Beginning in verse 14 to the end of chapter 45, Isaiah is quick to remind us of that. “To me, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance” (vs. 23), quoted in the New Testament in Romans 14: 11 and Philippians 2: 10, 11.

Isaiah 46 and 47 confront the idols of Babylon even bringing them to a point of humiliation in chapter 47. Both of these chapters chronologically should come before chapter 45. The humiliation of Babylon will be before the reign of Cyrus who will release exiles back to Jerusalem.

Monday, October 11, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 48, 49

Today’s reading in Isaiah 48 cannot be understood without chapter 47. While both chapters address two entirely different topics one cannot be understood without the other.

Yesterday’s reading of Isaiah 47 addresses the defeat of Babylon as a world power. This is written by Isaiah before Babylon has even become a major power, let alone before they carried Judah captive. That’s because God knows the beginning from the end.

Today in chapter 48, God wants his people to understand that when Babylon is defeated and Cyrus king of Persia allows the people of Judah to return to their homeland, it is God who does this, not a Babylonian idol the people of Judah acquiesce to while in Babylon. Note again that Isaiah writes of this over 70 years before it even happens (Isaiah 48: 5).

Isaiah 48 speaks of God accomplishing his purposes with his people Judah while they were in Babylonian captivity. It speaks of a day when they’ll be permitted to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. “*Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, “The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!”*” (Isaiah 48: 20). When this happens it will be the second Exodus for the people of God. The Old Testament book of Ezra picks up the storyline Isaiah prophesized in Isaiah 48.

The Old Testament often finds God’s people in places where they should not be. Egypt and Babylon are the two most prominent departures. Yet even in Egypt and again in Babylon, they still belong to God. Residency does not determine citizenship.

The transfer of the people of God from the kingdom of Babylon to their homeland in Jerusalem is symbolic of our Christian experience and what redemption looks like. Due to sin, the people of Judah are exiled to Babylon. While their residency is in Babylon their citizenship is in Jerusalem because they belong to God. It's just a matter of getting them back and God does that in an extraordinary way through Cyrus King of Persia (Ezra 1: 1). In the process, God refines his people.

Isaiah 48: 12 – 22 is the Lord's call to Israel that his purposes will not be thwarted no matter the circumstances God's people find themselves in. It's according to God's plan, not man's. The God who is the first and the last (vs. 12) has also "laid the foundations of the earth, "they stand forth together," by the power of his hand. The problem is we rebel against the Lord's will for our lives. We do not pay attention to his commandments and forfeit his peace in our lives (48: 18). "There is no peace for the wicked" (48: 22).

In Isaiah 49: 1 -7 we have the second of Isaiah's servant songs. The identity of this servant seems to be Isaiah himself, "And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him – for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength" (49: 5). God asks Isaiah in verse 6 if the task assigned to him is too small a task to be God's servant. The task God has assigned Isaiah is to "bring back the preserved of Israel." It won't be Isaiah who does this. So it's best to understand the servant in this chapter to be not only Isaiah himself, but Israel at large, "the preserved of Israel." But, who exactly does this include?

The end of Isaiah 49: 6 is quoted in Acts 13: 47 by Paul at Antioch in Pisidia after a long explanation by Paul to Jews of Israel's history and how Jesus fits into that. Some of the Jews in the Synagogue believe, but others are filled with jealousy and begin to contradict Paul and Barnabas. Paul understands that this message of the gospel must first go to the Jews, but since they thrust it aside, he now has to take it to the gentiles. Paul then quotes Isaiah 49: 6 in this mission. Paul sees himself as a servant of the Lord to the gentiles on a par with the ministry of Isaiah.

The remainder of Isaiah 49 is a vision of the restoration of Israel. In that sense, Paul's quotation of Isaiah 49: 6 is significant because he obviously sees himself fulfilling the mission Isaiah writes of In 49: 8 – 26. This will be a mission to all peoples, as God "will lift up his hand to the nations" (vs. 22). Moreover, people "shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene" (vs. 12).

While people are coming to a restored Israel, the people of Zion are less than welcoming. "But Zion said, "the Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Clearly, Paul sees the fulfillment of Isaiah 49 in Acts chapter 13 where his ministry shifts from a mission to the Jews to Paul being an apostle to the gentiles.

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 50, 51 and 52

Today's reading includes the last two of Isaiah's servant songs. The first two were in 42: 1-9 and 49: 1-13. The third one is in today's reading of Isaiah 50: 4-11 and the last one begins in Isaiah 52: 13 and will go into tomorrow's reading of all of Isaiah 53.

In the opening verses of chapter 50, Isaiah describes the breach in relationship between the Lord and his people Israel by comparing it to a divorce. It is not the Lord who initiated the divorce, it is Israel's sin that will lead them to exile, "Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away" (vs. 1). Throughout their history, God has been calling out to Israel inviting them to repent of sin and be restored in their relationship to him. The servant Isaiah has been faithful to deliver this message, yet when he called to the people, on behalf of the Lord, no one answered (vs. 2).

Even though Israel has given up on God, God has not given up on them. The good news of the gospel is that God's hand is not shortened that it cannot redeem (vs. 2). God and God alone has the power to save. The message of the servant in this particular servant song is the word of God (vs. 4) that is received by people who have a teachable spirit and whose ears are opened and awakened to the servant's message. The servant in this song has set his face "like a flint." He knows that even though his message will be rejected, he will not be put to shame. "He who vindicates me is near" (vs. 7). This particular servant song closes in Isaiah 50 with a rhetorical question, "Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant" (vs. 10).

For those who do, Isaiah 51 is a message of comfort. Isaiah 51 is calling obedient followers to remember their past and God's steady hand of faithfulness. This chapter is not only a call to faithful living but a cry for a spiritual awakening. The problem is Israel does not know God because they have shunned God's word and the servants God has sent to them. God is wooing them back to him. Notice how Isaiah defines the righteous in verse 7, "the people whose heart is my law."

Isaiah 52 announces the Lord's coming salvation. It begins with a call to a spiritual awakening among the people of Zion (vs. 1). The salvation of the Lord cannot be purchased, it is a gift of God's grace (vs. 3). This is the good news of the Gospel and the focus of those who herald it is not their mouths, but their feet who carry it forth on mission (vs. 7). This verse is quoted in Romans 10: 15.

Beginning in Isaiah 52: 13, we have the last of the servant songs in the book of Isaiah. This song will continue on into all of Isaiah 53. This particular servant song reveals that the servant who brings salvation to Zion does so both in word and in deed. Those who believe the word are those who trust the suffering servant for their salvation.

Wednesday, October 13, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 53, 54 and 55

All of Isaiah 53 is a continuation of the last of Isaiah's servant songs that began in Isaiah 52: 13. It's nearly impossible not to see this servant explained in this song as Jesus. The graphic descriptions of the crucifixion are unmistakably the passion of Christ described in the gospel accounts, "even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Isaiah's message, as with all of Scripture, culminates at the Cross of Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

Isaiah 54 is a chapter that is unsurpassed by few others in the Old Testament in terms of literary beauty alone. More importantly, it is a wealth of information for us, of promises made and promises kept by our God.

The last verse of Isaiah 54 summarizes God's intent in this restoration, "*This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord*" (vs. 17) While this is not among the servant songs in the book of Isaiah, the servants of the Lord are nonetheless mentioned as the recipients of the promises of this chapter. This is described as the Lord's vindication. Isaiah's people will be taken into captivity in Babylon as earlier chapters of Isaiah warn. As Isaiah 54: 7 says, for a brief moment God will desert his people to discipline them. Now he is gathering them back. While Isaiah 54 speaks of life after exile and it would seem that the chapter refers to their return to Jerusalem, it's also clear Isaiah envisions a future time that includes believers in Christ in territory far broader than Jerusalem.

God will fulfill his purpose through the discipline of his people in Babylon. They will come through this trial intact as a nation, but they won't be the same. They will be far better after the Lord's discipline. Not only that, they won't look the same as when they left the land. In verse 2, Isaiah tells them to "*Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out.*" God is planning a big tent meeting in which God's people "*will possess nations and desolate cities*" (vs. 3). This is an everlasting covenant of peace in which the perfect shalom described in earlier chapters of Isaiah has now fully come to God's people.

Isaiah compares this to the days of Noah when God would no longer punish the earth through a universal flood. Now he promises that he will no longer be angry or rebuke the sin of his people (vs. 9). Why? Because he is sending his servant, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, to redeem his people and atone for their sin. God will be perfectly satisfied with his covenant people because he will be perfectly satisfied in the finished work of his servant, his only Son our Lord Jesus.

Isaiah 55 speaks of the need for the Word of God to be our ultimate source of authority and the satisfaction of our deepest longings. It alone is sufficient for life. God issues an invitation to us in Isaiah 55: 3, "*Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.*" It's a summary of everything Isaiah has said thus far and the source of it is none other than God's very word. In spite of rumors, false allegations, and unbelief, what Isaiah has spoken will come to pass because it is not Isaiah's word, it is the word of the Lord.

Isaiah 55 reminds us that God has already spoken. He doesn't think or see things as we do. His thoughts, ways, and words are not as ours (Isaiah 55: 8, 9). It is our duty as Christians to conform our lives to God's word and not expect God to conform to us.

These chapters in Isaiah force us to ask why we would want to follow a God who is a slave to our whims, desires, and will? Especially when God's word exists to provide guidance in a troubled world. Even with people who blatantly reject Scriptural truth, the words of Isaiah 55: 11 ring true, God's word *"shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."*

Thursday, October 14, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 56, 57 and 58

Beginning in Isaiah 56 and continuing to the end of the book, Isaiah is speaking about exiles who are returning to the land of Judah after Babylonian captivity. Remember Isaiah is speaking into the future in these chapters of something that will last 70 years. When they do return, they will be a mixed bag of past sin that has suffered the judgment of exile and new sin that's been picked up from life in Babylon. They will not be the same returning as when they left. One could argue either way if they've been changed for the better or for the worse, but the ultimate test is how they will respond to the Lord's commands when they return. The Lord's hope is they won't repeat the same sins that led them to exile. Isaiah lays out the path forward in today's reading.

One of the first issues to be addressed is the relationship of foreigners who have joined themselves to the Lord. Isaiah addresses this group in verse 3 and again in verse 6. "Foreigners" in this context could include those who converted to Judaism either through marriage or voluntarily. It also, according to verse 4, includes eunuchs. What is required is the same thing that is required of all who would come to God, a heart of obedience. God's intention is "a house of prayer" with acceptable offerings and sacrifices on God's altar (vs. 7).

In order to accomplish this Israel's irresponsible "watchmen" and "shepherds" will have to be replaced as verses 9 – 12 warn.

Isaiah 57 warns of the sin of idolatry and the dangerous trend to return to the very things that led them to exile in the first place. The chapter begins with righteous or devout men who perish with no one to protect them. These people are the scorn of many in Israel and Isaiah warns of the sin of mocking them (vs. 4). The mockers are "children of transgression" and as such their propensity is toward idolatry. Their "collection of idols" cannot deliver them (vs. 13). "But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain" (vs. 13). The remainder of the chapter is a promise of comfort for the repentant and obedient.

Chapter 58 reminds Israel that when they return to the land of Judah their religious practices and observances will have to change. God is not concerned with the outward appearances of people going through the motions of fasting or observing the sabbath. God is seeking heartfelt worship that he can bless “with the heritage of Jacob your father.” “The mouth of the Lord has spoken” (vs. 14).

Friday, October 15, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 59, 60 and 61

Isaiah 59, addresses the judgment of those who reject the word of God and redemption for those who believe the good news. The problem is not with God, it is with man, “but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (59: 2).

Our sin runs so deep that it is impossible for it to ever allow what Isaiah promises in chapters 60 and 61 without divine intervention. “We hope for light, and behold darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom” (Isaiah 59: 9). “We hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us” (vs. 11). “The Lord looked, but there was no one who would intercede.” Salvation can only come from “his own arm” (vs. 16).

“A redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression” (Isaiah 59: 20). Isaiah 60 and 61 reveal what Zion will look like when the redeemer comes.

Isaiah 60 speaks of the future glory of Israel. It closely parallels Revelation 21 and provides us with a glimpse of what the New Jerusalem will look like. In short, it’s a return to Eden or life as God intended it to be. The best part of this chapter is that God is there and a diverse group of people is gathering from around the world to worship him. This place should occupy our deepest longings and getting there should be our life’s goal or ambition.

Isaiah 60 opens with the announcement that “your light has come.” This is Jesus who is the light of the world (John 8:12). Everything that is in the darkness should draw those who are in Christ closer to this light as Isaiah 60 informs. It is in the light of Christ where we are freed of sin and we walk in the freedom of obedience to his commands. It is through Christ that our access is guaranteed and this, in turn, is the source of our worship and joy.

As you read Isaiah 60 today, take a moment to allow God’s word to speak to you about the possibilities. Would you recognize Isaiah 60 if you saw it in real-time? Isaiah 60 is proof that God’s plan will prevail and that is good news for us the recipients. As we’re in the midst of a pandemic that doesn’t seem to end, it’s passages like this that should carry us through.

Isaiah 61 announces the year of the Lord's favor that Jesus has inaugurated. This is the gospel that we are commanded to take to the whole world and proclaim to all of creation (Mark 16: 15).

The first two verses of Isaiah 61 are what Jesus quoted in Luke 4: 18, 19 at a synagogue in his home region of Nazareth. Jesus is handed a scroll of the book of Isaiah. We're told that Jesus unrolled the scroll and read from Isaiah 61. He then rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. In the next nine verses of Luke 4, Jesus becomes both the preacher and the sermon illustration as he unpacks Isaiah 61 for us.

In the opening line of his sermon on Isaiah 61, Jesus says, *today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing* (Luke 4: 21). Miss that important point and most of the book of Isaiah will make little if no sense at all. But, the rejection of this from the people of Nazareth left Jesus marveling at their unbelief, concluding that, *"A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household"* (Mark 6: 4). As Jesus marvels at the unbelief of people in his home region who heard him preach Isaiah 61, we must heed his question in Luke 18: 8, *"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

Saturday, October 16, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 62, 63 and 64

Isaiah 63 pictures the coming salvation of Zion and all that it entails. Keep in mind Isaiah is giving this vision to the exiles in Babylon. Therefore a lot of what Isaiah records in chapter 62 involves a return to Jerusalem and a reestablishment of Jerusalem as the central hub of their worship. All of this is "for Zion's sake" (vs. 1). God feels a sense of responsibility and loyalty to Zion based on his past promises to her. As a result, he "will not keep silent;" he "will not be quiet."

God will reestablish Zion as a witness for the nations to see his righteousness. When he does they will "be called by a new name" (vs. 2). While salvation is an individual matter, with God it goes further to include the restoration of all things. The desolation of Judah will be restored to its former fertility. Young men will marry again. God will establish watchmen over Jerusalem who will not keep silent about Israel's sin. These are promises from God that Israel must constantly keep petitioning the Lord for fulfillment. They should give God "no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth" (vs. 7). When God does this, "they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken" (vs. 12). Compare the last verse of Isaiah 62 to 1 Peter 2: 9 of what is true of us in Christ.

While Isaiah 62 is a picture of the restoration of Zion, Isaiah 63, by contrast, speaks of the Lord's day of vengeance. The focus is on Edom, a long-time enemy of Israel and its important city of Bozrah (63: 1), but in a broader context, it is against all who reject God's plan of righteousness.

As Isaiah announces this outpouring of God's wrath, he's forced to remember God's past mercy and steadfast love. Isaiah 63: 7 – 14 recounts all that and more. The concluding verses of Isaiah 63 are then a call for prayer for God's unfolding mercy. That prayer is continued on into Isaiah 64.

Sunday, October 17, 2021

Reading: Isaiah chapters 65 and 66

Throughout the book of Isaiah, we have seen that God's mercy knows no bounds. It is extended to Israel in spite of sin, their continued rejection, and even a change of location. It's best summarized in Isaiah's question, "Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?" (Isaiah 50: 2, 59: 1). In the opening verses of Isaiah 65, we see that not only is God able to save, he stands ready to save those who will seek him: "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me" (Isaiah 65: 1). Not only that, God's salvation is extended "to a nation that was not called by my name." Notice Paul quotes Isaiah 65: 1 in Romans 10: 20 with regard to the gospel being extended to Gentiles.

The problem is never on God's end. Our sin is always the culprit. As God stands ready to save, his people turned away in their idolatrous pursuits. God "will not keep silent, but will repay" (vs. 6). He would cease to be God if he did. "Yet for his servant's sake," he will not destroy them all (vs. 8). God is drawing a people to himself. God's grace will bring us to this place or our pride and refusal to repent will keep us away. These are hard choices the gospel presents.

While Isaiah is speaking of a future promise of the restoration of Zion, Isaiah 65: 17 – 25 show that it will find its ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and new earth.

Today we conclude our reading in Isaiah 66, with probably my favorite verses in the entire book in Isaiah 66: 1, 2:

Thus says the Lord:

"Heaven is my throne,

and the earth is my footstool;

what is the house that you would build for me,

and what is the place of my rest?

²All these things my hand has made,

and so all these things came to be,

declares the Lord.

But this is the one to whom I will look:

he who is humble and contrite in spirit

and trembles at my word.

In all of Isaiah what God is seeking is people who are “humble and contrite in spirit and tremble at the Word of God.” This verse has humbled me for years and often I feel I fall short in its goal.

Perhaps you’ve felt this as you’ve struggled to read through this book of Isaiah. Take heart my friend and press on. God’s grace knows no bounds. Humble yourself in his presence in the light of his word.