

"So the ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be on their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!" (Isaiah 51:11, ESV)

Last week's lesson on Isaiah 50 started a new segment of the book of Isaiah, transitioning from basically a historical account of how God would deliver Israel from captivity in Babylon (physically), to the more serious problem of how God would deal with sin, and their spiritual need--by sending a Deliverer! A Savior! Messiah! (In Isaiah 42:1, He's referred to as the Lord's Servant, "in whom His soul delights, and upon whom He has put His Spirit to bring justice to the nations"!)

In Isaiah 50:1-3, we saw how the Lord again took issue with Israel's charge that He had somehow forgotten them (during their time in Babylonian captivity)--with an emphatic "no"! Noting that He hadn't breached their covenantal relationship (by issuing a certificate of divorce), and that it was because of their transgressions that they had been sent away into captivity! And noting how "when He called, there was none to answer"! Did they really believe that "His hand was so short that it could not ransom" (save), or that He "no power to deliver them"! Hadn't He already demonstrated such power in delivering them from Egypt, when He had "dried up the Red Sea" (among other things)?

The Lord "had given Him the tongue of disciples," He said, "that He might know how to sustain the weary with a word...and He awakens Me morning by morning, and opens My ear that I might listen as a disciple"! And Isaiah writes the amazing prophetic words (in Isaiah 50:5-6) that "when He (His Father) opened His ear, He was not disobedient to the call...but gave His back to those who (would) strike Him, and His cheek to those who (would) pluck out His beard...not covering His face from humiliation and spitting...but setting His face like a flint...knowing that He who vindicates Him was near"! Wow! Here clearly anticipating and totally aware of what was to come! Picturing, for the first time in the book of Isaiah, in such detail, the "suffering Savior" who would face rejection from the very people He had called His own (who "knew Him not"), as He would head to the Cross!

And we were greatly challenged by this lesson, as Motyer says, to "follow the model of the Servant, rather than to walk in the way of self-sufficiency"! And, as Constable wrote, "to listen to the Servant, to follow His example, and to experience His salvation"! And we concluded that, like the Israelites but, more importantly, like the Servant (Jesus), so we too can expect to "walk in darkness," but not in the darkness of sin, but in the kind of darkness represented by suffering, and rejection, and misunderstanding for our faith, which Constable describes as something that comes along with the calling to be a true servant of God!

And that set the scene for our lesson last night, which continues with the theme of "the Servant"!

Isaiah 51 is addressed to "those who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord" (the same ones who Isaiah 50:10 says "fear the Lord and obey the voice of His Servant")! And we find chapter 50 filled with imperatives--to "listen to Him" (in verse 1), and to "pay attention to Him," and to "give ear to Him" (in verse 4), and "not to fear" (in verse 7), and to "arouse ourselves" (in verse 17) ...All for the purpose of knowing, and understanding more clearly, who our God is, and what's He like--and (as Kirk pointed out last night) "who we are, and how lost we are without Him"!

Wiersbe describes it as a call to "look back" to remember Abraham and Sarah, "as progenitors of the Jewish nation, and a people who started small but who would become as numerous as the stars of the heavens"...! Then to "look ahead" to the day when justice would come to the world and His people vindicated by the Lord"! Then, finally, to "look within" where one would find either fear or faith"!

God's Word, in Isaiah 51:7, says, "Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people who have My teachings in your hearts; do not fear when they revile you !" (And the implication is that this will surely happen!) I haven't tracked it, but I'm told that there are 51 references in the book of Isaiah alone telling us, as believers, "not to fear"! I particularly love Isaiah 43, and the song, sung by the Hillsong singers which captures its words (and you've got to sing along):

- "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and the waves will not overcome you! Do not fear, for I have redeemed you! I have called you by name! You are Mine! (And the chorus) For I am the Lord your God! (And the echo) I am the Lord your God! I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; for I am the Lord your God! (And the echo) I am the Lord your God! I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior! I am the Lord (Do not fear)! I am the Lord (Do not fear)! I am the Lord (Do not fear)! When you walk through the fire, you'll not be burned, and the flames will not consume you! Do not fear, for I have redeemed you! I have called you by name! You are Mine!" (Forgive me for all the exclamation points, but I really feel they belong there!)

The "awake, awake" of verse 9 is actually a plea directed to our Lord (as if He would ever "be asleep on the job")! But we are encouraged to call upon Him (obviously more for our benefit than His)! For example, Jeremiah 33:3 say, "Call upon Me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which Thou knowest not!" (KJV)

The joy of the return from exile, expressed by the "ransomed of the Lord" in verse 11, is only a foretaste, Constable says, of the great joy that His people would experience as a result of His redemption through the Servant, and their return to the Promised Land in the Millennium"!

Verse 21 says that "Jerusalem was drunk, but not with wine"! Drinking a cup of wine (in the Bible!) was a figure of judgment, and the drunkenness of Jerusalem, and of God's people, represented His wrath upon them, for their sin! But God (in His grace and mercy) "took away the cup of reeling, the chalice of His anger...and (instead) put it in the hand of their tormentors"! And God said, "they would never drink it again"!

And so this marks the transition for His chosen ones, as Constable writes, "from peril to promise"! When "all sorrow and sighing will flee away"!

Men, hear the Word of the Lord!

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