

Monday, July 8, 2019—Isaiah 4-7

Companies the world over make billions of dollars each year enticing people to buy their products so they will look and feel better. Image is powerful, but the ability to dress up the outside may craftily mask a life of brokenness and ugliness on the inside. Appearances can deceive. Lipstick will only do so much for a pig.

God's people were caught in this trap. God likened them to His vineyard. He had plowed the field and cultivated the vines, but their grapes were sour (5:2). "You furnish lovely music and wine at your grand parties; the harps, lyres, tambourines, and flutes are superb! But you never think about the Lord or notice what He is doing" (5:12). They were going to face His wrath and go into exile, humbling the arrogant and justifying God "Destruction is certain for those who say evil is good and good is evil; that dark is light and light is dark; that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter" (5:20).

The ones who could party the hardest would fall. The wise would be exposed as fool. "The enemy nations will growl over their victims like a roaring of the sea. A cloud of darkness and sorrow will hover over Israel. The clouds will blot out the light"(5:30).

This was terrible news, yet when God showed Himself in His glory to Isaiah, Isaiah was moved (6:1-8). He volunteered to go where God sent him, despite the gravity of the message. God was worth it, and God said eventually everyone would The work would be long and hard, but the message of holiness and restoration (6:13, 4:2-8) was worth the effort.

Praise God today for His majesty. Live in alignment to His truth.

Sunday, July 7, 2019—Isaiah 1-3

God did not write the Bible *to* contemporary audiences, but He certainly gave it *for* contemporary audiences. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers when they spoke to their situations, but He also knew how their efforts would speak to future needs and circumstances. God is wise.

Isaiah ministered during the reigns of several kings—some who were more righteous than others—and spoke to people of increasingly declining spiritual discipline and cultural stability. They needed a reminder of the majesty of God and the privilege of walking in righteousness.

Isaiah told the people their religious activities were appalling to Yahweh (1:10-17). They were going through the motions and completing all the requirements, but they were neglecting the poor and oppressed. The widow and orphan were suffering. He was willing to forgive them and restore them if they would listen to Him and return to Him.

Americans are especially prone to falling into this same trap. Many of them believe God exists for their comfort, and if they will simply follow His rules, He is obligated to bless them. He is more like a mascot than a master, so they rarely consider how to help others. The focus is on them.

God turned the attention to Himself and the last days (2:1-5). In the end, the attention will not be on a country or ethnic group. Fame will belong to Him alone, so they needed to stop trusting human power (2:22). They would be of no use against the judgment of God (3:1-25).

Ask God to show you His majesty and how you can obey Him.

Saturday, July 6, 2019—2 Kings 18-19

Standards for right and wrong change. What is acceptable now was unthinkable a few hundred years earlier, and the culture demands that everyone align. God empowers His people to be those who counter the culture for the sake of the culture. King Hezekiah was one of those rebels.

There was not another king like Hezekiah, before or after him (18:5). He removed pagan shrines, addressing the spiritual decline, and he stopped paying tribute to Assyria, addressing a political and military weakness. He did not “go along to get along.” He wanted Yahweh honored. Watching Samaria fall to the Assyrians did not sway him from obedience.

Satan will not slink away silently. He wants to inflict damage on God’s reputation and His people. The Assyrians invaded Judah during the fourteenth

year of Hezekiah's reign. They blamed the hardship on Hezekiah's purging of idolatry (18:22), though they said he had actually insulted their God, who was weak anyway. They boasted of their strength and said following Yahweh was a fruitless endeavor. He could not rescue.

King Hezekiah was troubled, so the prophet Isaiah spoke to him. God had heard the claims of the Assyrian king and would take care of him Himself (19:5-7). Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, acknowledging and worshiping God but noting the massive power of Assyria. He asked God to deliver them so the world would know He was God (19:14-19). In faithfulness, God delivered His people and brought an end to the king.

Praise God for empowering and protecting those who honor Him.

Friday, July 5, 2019—Hosea 11-14

"It that's what you want to do, I can't stop you." Parents have said it to children. Employers, to employees. When the mind is made up, there is often little that can be done to change it. The course is set, but the heartache and hurt are only beginning.

"For my people are determined to desert me. They call me the Most High, but they don't truly honor me" (11:7). God was devastated by this reality and its consequences. His burning anger was right to obliterate the nation completely, but His compassion would not allow Him to do that (11:8-9). If He completely destroyed them, a remnant would not be able to return to Him. If He allowed them to live, one day they would honor Him once again. Until then, the discipline would be severe (12:14, 13:12-16).

God was their rescuer, yet they had compromised themselves and given their hearts and devotion to idols. They were not secretly sinning. They were boldly compelling others to sin with them (13:1-3). Their hearts were severely damaged by the sin they had allowed to flourish among themselves. God would not stand for someone or something else occupying His proper space in their souls, hearts, and minds.

Oncologists know cancer treatment will be hard, but they look beyond it

to the healing. In sentencing His people, God looked to the day of restoration. “Then I will heal you of your idolatry and faithfulness, and my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever!” (14:4).

Praise God for His discipline, restoration, and love.

Thursday, July 4, 2019—Hosea 8-10

When Moses led the people to the cusp of the Promised Land, he sent in 12 spies. When 10 faithless spies convinced the entire nation they couldn't accomplish the task, God sentenced them to 40 years of wandering. The next morning, the people decided they would go ahead and do what God said, but it was too late. God's patience has limits.

Hosea had the same devastating news. The enemy was approaching, and it was too late to hope for God's deliverance (8:3). The people had chased gods and idols for too long, and the altars they had built to take away sin were actually the site of their sinning (8:11). The cup of God's wrath had filled up to overflowing, and judgment was coming.

The people thought the prophets were crazy for their pronouncements of judgment (9:7), yet the day was coming when they would be captured and exiled. They wouldn't be able to worship the Lord and offer sacrifices of any kind. The work God had done to free Israel was now going to be reversed. Their prosperity had led them to lavish sin (10:1), and their lives of freedom and ease would come to an end.

July 4 is a nationwide day of celebration for Americans as they recall the birth of the nation and the greatest example of freedom and democracy the world has ever known. Freedom has to be won, defended, and maintained. Spiritual freedom requires the same. Praise God for freedom in Christ. Pray for growth and strength to defend and maintain it.

Wednesday, July 3, 2019—Hosea 5-7

Choices have consequences. That's the order God has built into the world. Knowing consequences motivates good choices. Usually.

Israel and Judah clearly knew the consequences God promised for

obedience and disobedience. He had told them in His Law and through His prophets, yet the two nations seemed to be in a spiritual stupor as they continued their sinful ways and barreled toward their demise. Hosea told them they were going to come to God one day and find He was no longer there (5:6). Their religious adultery would give birth to illegitimate results.

People tend to turn to immediate answers—money, friends, skills, habits, drugs, and the like. Israel had turned to political and military solutions, but those would not work. They would eventually realize God was the only answer, and they would need to repent—to change their minds and change their direction—in order for Him to restore them (6:1-3). What that would require was unknown because God had been slaughtering them with His prophets' words for generations, and they had not returned.

God spoke sadly about His desire to redeem His people, yet they continued to pursue foreign gods. They reveled in their wickedness—from the kings and priests to the simplest citizens. There was nothing sincere about their approach to God and His ways. They were going to suffer, die, and become a laughingstock to their enemies (7:1-15).

Pray for wisdom and conviction to know truth and make good choices. Pray for courage to repent and call others to the same.

Tuesday, July 2, 2019—Hosea 1-4

Reality television has made a mockery of marriage and relationships. Shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* chronicle the efforts of the titular character searching for a mate from a beginning group of more than a dozen contestants. What God designed to be shared solely between a husband and wife is shared with many contestants and every viewer for the sake of ratings and commercial success.

God's people made a mockery of their relationship with Him. Yahweh was to be their only God. To Him they were to give their heart, their devotion, and their future, yet they had compromised that covenant and gone after idols, committing spiritual adultery. God called Hosea to marry a prostitute in order to

illustrate the depth of their depravity (1:2).

In doing this, God shocked the people. They did not understand how awful their sin was, and they also didn't fathom how deep His love for them was. He was going to punish them for their sin, yet He promised that one day He would restore them to abundance (1:6-11). Everything they used to worship idols—grain, gold, and oil—were all gifts from God. They were paying their “lover” with gifts from their Husband (2:8). God would take away those gifts to show Israel their reality and then win them back.

Alcohol and immorality had robbed the people of sound thinking (4:11), yet God still loved them (3:1). Though they loved shame (4:18), He would restore their honor and His.

Praise God for His righteousness and expectation of holiness.

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