

SEPTEMBER 10

Isaiah 6-7

This is holy ground today. Today we get a couple of great portions of Scripture.

Isaiah 6

V. 1 Uzziah had reigned for 52 years. The only ruler that two generations of people had ever known was dead. The king who had kept peace and brought stability to the nation was gone. Humanly speaking, everything was shaken. Although Uzziah had messed up, his sin had taught him humility and the fear of God. The world was growing very unstable. Now what? It may be that Isaiah was in the temple praying with this concern moving his heart. God had Isaiah just where He wanted him.

Vs. 2-3 This is the only time that Seraphim are mentioned by name in the Bible. The description is interesting since they have six wings; and the four living creatures in Revelation 4 have six wings and also say, *Holy, holy, holy...* It must be that they are the same kind of angels. The living creatures of Ezekiel have four wings. The Cherubim, like over the ark of the covenant, have two wings. Normal angels fly, like Gabriel, but it never mentions him or Michael having wings. I'm always amazed that these angels naturally declare God's holiness. They will do this in Revelation, too. Certainly this wasn't scripted; it was their natural impulse. Whatever is happening among the angels that we don't see, God's holiness is a very emotional and important issue for them.

Also, notice that they say, and see, that the whole world is full of His glory. They can't help but see it. We don't see this yet. Because of the body of death, we see as through a glass eye, darkly. (That's Mark Twain.☺)

Vs. 4- 5 I don't think Isaiah was any worse than any of us. Why would God have chosen to use him if he had had a vile mouth. Still, like Job, when Isaiah saw the Lord, he realized that much of what he had said was complaining, ignorant, untrue and unjust regarding the Lord. Think back to Job's words in Job 42:1-6.

Vs. 6-7 It is interesting that God wanted to use Isaiah's mouth, so we have this visual of cleansing. But really, the cleansing was of the heart, from which the mouth sometimes utters stupid stuff.

V. 8 This is Isaiah's commissioning.

Vs. 9-13 The basis of Isaiah's message to Israel will be judgment. He will become a testimony to them of their refusal to have faith in God, which will result in hard hearts, blind eyes and deaf ears. But judgment will also bring mercy.

V. 9 Jesus quotes this.

V. 10 Paul quotes this.

A remnant would be saved from the exile, and through that seed would come the Christ and the future nation that will fulfill God's will for Israel.

Isaiah 7

Vs. 1-9 The southern kingdom of Judah was almost always at war with the northern kingdom of Israel. The occasion of this distress is the alliance of Syria and Israel against Judah.

V. 4 Notice how the Lord tells Ahaz to chill. Ahaz was to show quiet strength without anger or pride. This is a good word to us. In 2 Kings 16:2 we hear that Ahaz was not a God-honoring king. It is amazing to think that God is going to make this kind of a promise to an ungodly king.

But then, think of all the grace God showed to the northern kingdom through Elijah and Elisha. This should teach us something about loving our enemies.

Vs. 10-17 So it is the fear of the people of Judah facing certain destruction that brings the occasion of one of the greatest prophecies of the Bible. Think of that. How often have we seen impending danger be turned into praise for the glory of God? Unfortunately it is a part of living on this planet of death. Fortunately there is a Savior who loves us, who we can trust and follow.

V. 14 The word for virgin can also mean young woman, but what's the point? In order for this to have been a sign, it had to be miraculous. It had to have been miraculous back in Ahaz's day and then also surrounding the birth of Jesus. Somewhere, a virgin known to the community in Jerusalem would have a child. Although it would be a miraculous event, it wouldn't be a child like Jesus, the Son of God.

Why this kind of sign? Well, prophetically, it makes sense; but in that day, it must have been a sign that although the world was falling apart and although the northern kingdom would go into exile under Assyria, this child would grow in peace. You know how you hear people say that they don't want to have children because of the world they would be bringing them into. God shows that the kingdom of Judah will be safe for this child; even though, at that point, everything looked like it was coming to an end.

Knowing Christ, we really know what the world is like, and it's far more dangerous than anyone could ever guess. Yet even so, the hope in this world is symbolized and personified by Immanuel, Jesus, God with us.

V. 15 The *curds and honey* will be explained below.

Vs. 16-17 The "razor" God will use to "shave" the kings of Syria and Israel will be Assyria. This event will be a landmark event rivaled only by the splitting of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms. Assyria would take the northern kingdom into exile and those people would be lost to Israel forever. Remember that people of all twelve tribes were also living in the kingdom of Judah.

Vs. 20-25 I've heard the *curds and honey* explained as the way Assyria laid waste to the countries. Vineyards and crops didn't fare well, and the main source of food was from animals - milk and cheese (you didn't want to kill your cows for meat) and you spent a lot of time looking for wild honey. Remember too, Israel was said to be a land flowing with milk and honey.

Imagine what it would have meant for Isaiah to be commissioned seeing the glory of God, but commissioned to bring a message of impending judgment and salvation only being found in turning to God. We don't have to imagine that at all. As disciples, we were captured by the glory of Christ, His love and sacrifice; and we are commissioned to bring that same message to a dying world. *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* (John 15:16)

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Vs. 16-21 These verses kind of explain themselves. Note that these super-apostles took the liberty of striking people, possibly thinking of Nehemiah at the end of that book. In order to show the Corinthians the ungodly mindset and attitudes of the false apostles, Paul would have to, uncomfortably, show how the Lord had worked with him. It will be a shock to see how the Lord confirmed Paul. In v. 21 Paul's words are very pointed.

Vs. 21-29 Paul wrote something like this before in his very famous words in Philippians 3, but here there is a little more attitude. Actually the tone here seems to be one of sorrow rather than sarcasm or irony. Paul seems to be hurt that the Corinthians hadn't defended him.

V. 22 This is how we know the super-apostles were Jews. Corinth was a very, very Jewish church, and so these people found it easy to show they were true blue Jews. Remember, Paul was born in Tarsus in today's Turkey, not in Jerusalem. So Paul lacked that qualification on his pedigree.

Note that in this catalog of sufferings and mishaps, many things are mentioned that are not in Acts. The shipwrecks are not mentioned, and the one at the end of Acts hasn't even happened yet. We know of one beating in Philippi at the hands of the Romans, but nothing of these five at the hands of the Jews. That means that Paul received 195 lashes. Paul sounds like they should have had an action figure made after him. His theme song could have been, "Man of Constant Sorrows." Even though Paul could have mentioned his triumphs, all he is mentioning as proof of his apostleship is his suffering for Christ. That is a very interesting mindset. You don't find too many people who see their sufferings as God's confirmation.

Vs. 28-29 And this alone would be enough to choke a goat. I'm sure the Corinthians understood that they were a case in point.

Vs. 30-33 This sounds cool, but I think the idea is that of being hunted like a criminal. I'm willing to bet that none of the Jewish super-apostles had anything like this happen to them. In fact, because they were trying to bring Christianity back to the law, they might have had some approval with the orthodox. Paul could have talked about the disciples made in Damascus, but Paul pointed to his suffering and humbling.

What is interesting here is that God did all of this to Paul. The Lord "made" Paul in the harvest; Paul did not make himself. Our ideas of our heroes, even today, are driven by the world we live in. Jesus said, *for he who is least among you all is the one who is great*. The Lord of the harvest made Paul the man he became. It wasn't Paul's education or guts. Few of us would be willing to suffer as Paul did. We should just look to following our Lord in the harvest and trying to stay the least of all and servant of all. And we might also need to view our "failures" and "weaknesses" as those things that confirm that we are on the right track following the Lord.

Psalm 54

These were still the early days of David running from Saul. David had 600 rag-tag men and their families following him through desperately rough terrain. There were many, many troubled days and ups and downs. Now, Jonathan came to encourage David in the Lord. He left, and then David heard that Saul was on his way and the Ziphites were telling Saul where to find him. It was time to run again.

Vs. 1-3 Notice that David needed salvation and vindication. Not only was it hard to stay alive, it was hard to be regarded as a worthy leader when times were tough and lies were being spread.

Vs. 4-5 God's faithfulness was in response to His promise to David and His promise to all who choose to acknowledge God's name. *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.* (Matt. 10:32)

Vs. 6-7 We have come to see how suffering and being delivered moved David to constantly promise to declare God's faithfulness and deliverance. We see David's commitment to praise the Lord clearly in Psalm 40:9-10. Here, we have to wonder if David was writing this in retrospect and had already been delivered, or if David knew from his experience following the Lord, that he knew deliverance would come. At this point David was still running, and so this was written by faith, following a God who was as good as His promise. We do that too, following our Lord in the harvest, facing daily uncertainties and challenges, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. Yet in faith, we know the Lord will use us and use our suffering and emotional ups and downs. We just stay at His feet in His Word, following, and even now, we can praise Him for the victory to come.

Proverbs 23:1-3

I've actually applied these verses. There will be something similar in Proverbs 25. What I see in them is to be cautious in humility when you are in a place where you are to represent the Lord. This is sort of along the lines of what Jesus said about not taking the prominent place in a gathering, but rather taking a place in back. When we represent the Lord, we should be cautious and respectful and never lose sight of the situation. Too often we relax, laugh too loud, speak too openly, eat too excessively; and the result is that we are caught off guard and do not realize we've gone too far and endangered our testimony in the harvest. An ambassador is always on duty representing his Lord.