

## SEPTEMBER 24

### Isaiah 43:14-45:10

Reading these portions of Isaiah, we can see why everyone who has loved God has loved these verses. There is something that wells up in you spiritually by reading what God confirms about Himself. So imagine being a Jewish leader who was familiar with this section of Isaiah and being very aware that Israel was the nation chosen by God to take the Word to the nations. And then you hear a man named Jesus say this, *Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.* (John 8:58) As you read today look for *I am*, and you will understand why the Jews were angry when Jesus said that. Not everyone was angry. Some people understood, and love for God began to well up in their hearts.

#### Isaiah 43:14-28

Vs. 14-21 Even as God speaks to the people of Judah who will be going into exile, and to the generation in exile, note how God affirms His love for them. His names reflect His care and His sovereign control. Notice the assurance in vs. 18-19. With a history like Israel's, they could easily sink into despair because of their failure. God said He was doing something new. Even the wild and barren wilderness would answer God's call and provide a way, and water, for God's chosen people.

Vs. 22-24 In contrast to God's promises and affirmations going back to Adam and Eve, this people disregarded God. Even though there were laws to follow after Moses, God didn't burden them in that they never really honored God; but they burdened Him by their rebellion and sins.

Vs. 25-28 Isn't v. 25 great? God will forgive their sins in spite of their sins. God made a promise to Adam and Eve and to Abraham. And before the foundation of the world, He had already ordained a Savior. That is why God can state v. 25 like this. That's not just mercy, that's grace.

#### Isaiah 44

Vs. 1-8 This is an amazing declaration of God's love for His people. Much of this will not happen until Christ returns. Take note of what God says here. There are some great verses, and notice again the purpose of prophecy.

V. 3 This mention of pouring out the Spirit would eventually make sense on the day of Pentecost as proof of the salvation offered in Christ. In Romans 5:5 Paul says that the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit. I'll bet Paul was thinking of a verse like this.

Vs. 9-20 In contrast to God and the hope presented in vs. 1-8, this is the brilliance of making idols. In our case, it would be finding security and hope in anything but God. It would be finding fulfillment in any life other than following Christ in the harvest. Before the Babylon exile, Israel and Judah were full of idols. When the Jews returned, idolatry was never a big problem. But they did develop other problems. Sin without God's cure and help remains sin and finds something other than God to occupy it.

Vs. 21-28 This is an amazing expression of God's love.

Vs. 21-22 These two verses comprise the beginning and the future fulfilling of Israel's purpose. God made them, and in essence, has redeemed them. Based on all of the promises and God's faithfulness, their future is absolutely secure.

V. 23 Since God owns the future, they could have sung this back then. It will be sung in the future as Jesus returns to Jerusalem.

Vs. 24-28 Just follow the word *who*. And, looking at v. 24, can you sense the impact of Jesus saying "I Am?"

V. 28 This mention of Cyrus will be expanded on. Since it will be a dark day when Jerusalem is destroyed and the people go into exile, God is giving them hope. God names by name the king who will order the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The miracle of this will slowly begin to unfold the day that Nebuchadnezzar takes the first Jews captive. That begins the book of Daniel. The chapters in Daniel make great kids' stories, but as we go through Daniel it will amaze you to see what God is doing. It is amazing love.

Isaiah 45:1-10

Vs. 1-4 These are good words for Cyrus because of how God will use him. Actually, it says more about who God is. Cyrus' claim to fame is that He commanded the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Other than this, we don't know five other words he spoke. On the other hand, we have far more dialogue from Nebuchadnezzar, who God called a great king and who might have been saved. Darius the Mede was a great king and loved and feared Daniel. Darius gave the command that the Jews be protected and permitted to worship their God only. When Cyrus heard of what happened in Babylon (Daniel 6), he commanded the Jews to return. There is a good chance that Cyrus knew Daniel personally and knew all of what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar. What you see in Nebuchadnezzar and in Darius might give you hope that those men were saved. Who knows about Cyrus?

Vs. 5-8 Who is a God like this? There is no other God. Notice that God doesn't just give light. He forms it. Edison made the light bulb; God made light.

Vs. 9-10 Faith doesn't strive with God; only unbelief contends with God.

It is hard to read all of this and not be affected by the love and greatness of the Lord. We are so undeserving, yet we should be so grateful that He has reached out to save us.

### **Ephesians 3**

If this reading in Isaiah wasn't enough to inspire you, this might do the trick.

V. 1 Now this chapter is a major digression of sorts, but never has so much cool stuff been said on a rabbit trail. Some say Paul gets back to the subject in 3:14 where he begins to pray. I think the entire chapter is a Spirit-inspired interruption, and that Paul gets back to the point in 4:1. You can judge for yourself.

Vs. 2-13 These verses make up one wonderful sentence. As you read this and glean what you can, it is good to think of what the mystery is (vs. 4-6). The mystery is not that the Gentiles would be saved. It says that the Gentiles will hope in the Messiah, when Isaiah is talking about the Millennial Kingdom. The Psalms say the nations will worship God. The mystery that was hidden was the church; that is, that group of people from the Gentiles (with those few believing Jews) who were now taking the gospel to the world. Up to now, that had been Israel's job. The Gentile church was totally unforeseen. This is what the principalities and powers (satanic also) did not see. According to God's purpose in the OT, if only Israel could be a witness to God in the world, then all you had to do was to get the Jews to kill their Messiah and the plan of God would stop. But as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:8, *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

The death of Jesus didn't mean the end of Israel's ministry to the world. It meant the beginning of the church, formed not of a people with a nation and a language and geography, but of those saved by grace through faith and united in Christ. Satan never saw that coming. That was the mystery. After the church does its work in the harvest, then God will put believing Israel in center stage and bring His purpose of redemption to completion.

Vs. 7-8 This was Paul's understanding of his life in God's plan. In our own place in the harvest, reaching out to those whom God has put around us, we have the same mission and calling.

V. 10 Note again the rulers *in the heavenly places*. These *rulers and authorities* are mentioned again in Eph. 6:12 as the evil spiritual forces we wrestle with.

Vs. 14-19 In light of what Paul has just said regarding the unfolding grace and revelation of God's plan of redemption, he has to thank God and pray for these people.

Vs. 16-19 Think through this prayer. This is what God wants for each of us.

V. 16 This strengthening comes as a result of internalizing the riches of God's glory and it is a requirement for v. 17 to be possible. When you look at the glory of what God has done in creation, there should not only be a sense of awe, but also a sense that this wise God is watching over us and in control of all things. This was God's argument to Job. The glory that Paul is pointing to here is particularly in how God has engineered redemption since before the foundation of the world, shrouding it in mystery and suddenly revealing it fully in Christ. This is something it might take us a lifetime to internalize and appreciate, but there are pieces of it, right now, that should cause awe, gratitude and trust to rise up in us. This is designed to give us an unwavering hope so that, as v. 17 says, Christ can continually  *dwell in your hearts through faith*. Fear drives faith from our hearts and keeps us from abiding in Christ.

V. 17 Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith is dependent on us standing strong in the Spirit. This abiding in Christ goes beyond just being a believer. The Ephesians were already believers. This process of being strong in the Spirit so as to abide in Christ takes place in the harvest and gives us a sense of joy, a sense of mission and sense of destiny. It is being a disciple in the harvest in every sense of what Jesus taught His disciples to be.

Vs. 18-19 Laura's comment here was that one knowledge is traded for another. Knowing Christ is greater than all knowledge. Knowing Christ is greatest and it is the relationship of being saved, abiding in His world and following Him. Following Christ in the harvest on this dying planet begins and ends with knowing *the love of Christ*. What opened our eyes? *The love of Christ*. Why do we forsake all else and follow? *The love of Christ*. Why are we willing to suffer and give our lives for Him that others might be saved? Guess. What is our joy in all circumstances and our confidence for the future? *The love of Christ*. The more we follow in His Word and in the harvest, the better we know our Lord and abide in Him.

Vs. 20-21 This is the benediction to the people and the close of this very amazing prayer. Notice that what God can do is tied to the harvest by His glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations. That's where the power is. *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*.

So what is the love of Christ? It is not just some feeling. God expressed His love in a lot of planning and doing. It is messy. It involved time and birth and sweat and tears and conflict and blood, lots of blood. Without all of God's planning and work, we have no love and would not know love. With all of what God has done, we are alive in the love of Christ and have a model to follow and a commission to fulfill.

### **Psalm 68:1-18**

I guess this is David's version of, "If God is for us, who is against us." Following Christ doesn't always appear to make sense, but God can open windows in heaven in a night, or decimate an army while they are sleeping. He can certainly protect us and we can't be more secure in life than when we are standing with Him. Faith knows this.

Vs. 1-3 David had seen this over many long years. This is an encouragement to those looking to God. It reminds me of Jesus telling His disciples that they would have sorrow, but that their sorrow would turn to joy.

Vs. 4-6 God leads the faithful to His own habitation, but the rebellious get to live somewhere else.

Vs. 7-10 David is recounting God's provision and love for Israel as He led them through the wilderness. Isn't it interesting that we just read in Isaiah about God leading his remnant through the wilderness?

Vs. 11-14 The key here is that God gives the Word. This sounds similar to things God is saying in Isaiah.

Vs. 15-18 Mountains are looked upon figuratively as being proud. That's why in Isaiah it says that before the coming of the Lord, the mountains will be leveled. There will be humility in His presence.

In this case, the humble mount that God has chosen, Jerusalem, is full of His power and glory. In fact, He would have a victory outside of Jerusalem and lead captives free. *Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."* (Eph. 4:8)

### **Proverbs 24:1-2**

So much for desiring to hang with the cool, the celebrities, the rich and the beautiful.