

SEPTEMBER 29

Today you begin Philippians. You may want to celebrate with your favorite latte.

Isaiah 57:14-59:21

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Having described the Messiah as the Servant of the Lord who will redeem both Israel and the Gentiles, this section concludes with a call to the people to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Vs. 14-15 This sounds like the message of John the Baptist. Notice that this leveling is described by God as humility that welcomes His blessing.

Vs. 16-19 As the Lord's servant, Israel failed, but in the future God will heal and restore them. I think the humility of that future generation will be the key.

Vs. 20-21 But this is a warning to all who resist God.

Isaiah 58

Chapters 58-66 are the last of three, nine-chapter blocks. This group of chapters looks at the sin of the people in Isaiah's day, and the coming of peace and prosperity to Israel and the entire earth, under the Messiah.

Vs. 1-2 This could well have been the people of Hezekiah's day. They were following the rules, but they were worshiping for their own benefit.

Vs. 3-5 They thought God should have regarded their fasting. This is God's commentary on their fasting. It makes you think of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman that those who worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Vs. 6-12 This is what God really wanted. Loving God with all one's heart was to turn into an outpouring of compassion for one's neighbor.

Vs. 13-14 The Sabbath was a day to delight in the Lord. It wasn't just a day off.

Isaiah 59

This sounds more like the early years of Manasseh.

Vs. 1-2 These verses state the real issue between God and man.

Vs. 3-8 I'm sure Paul had this section of Isaiah in mind when he wrote Romans 3:10-18. What Isaiah is describing here seems to indicate there was an ungodly king leading the nation.

Vs. 9-15 This is why God could not use Israel as a light to the world. Sin had infected everything about them. This is true of every man and woman on earth without Christ. All would be lost for us, *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us,*⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--*⁶ *and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* (Eph. 2:4-6)

Vs. 16-21 So, with Israel failing as God's servant, God chose another to intercede. This is all about Jesus.

When I read this, I realize how well Paul knew these verses. Verse 17 sounds like the spiritual armor. Verse 20 is quoted in Romans 11:26 as proof that God has a future plan for Israel to fulfill its calling.

V. 21 is the future covenant God will make with Israel because of the work of Jesus.

When I read v. 16, I thought of the fact that Jesus isn't "named," but you know it is Him. Who is this guy? Then I thought, "Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He." You might want to think of these verses as you listen to the second verse of this song, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Philippians 1:1-26

Philippians is another of those amazing letters from Paul where we find great statements of what it means to walk as a disciple of Jesus in the harvest. These statements like, *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*, and *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God...he humbled himself...*, and *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection*, stand alone as great teaching. But in the flow of Paul's encouragement and warnings to this church, they are expressed as the mature desires of a disciple totally in love with Christ. As we'll see, these expressions are meant to be our desires, too, as we follow Christ in the harvest.

Like Ephesians, Paul wrote this while he was being held in Rome awaiting trial. This is where we left Paul at the end of Acts. It was a polite imprisonment. Later, Paul was heard by Nero and released. Epaphroditus (a pastor or elder at Philippi) had brought a collection from the church to Paul. While there, "E" must have shared the general state of affairs in the church. He also got really sick for a while. Now that "E" was back on his feet, Paul was sending him back with this letter. As the spiritual father of the church, Paul not only thanks them for the gift, but he expresses some concern and suggestions. The biggest of these concerns is with those Jewish Christians trying to get people to obey the law to get saved. The other concern is that there seems to be a growing persecution of the church. Philippi was a very special Roman town. The people there had privileges as if they were living in Rome, but that meant that Rome had a very strong control of the city. About seven years after the writing of this letter, Roman persecution would take the lives of many Christians, Paul included. There is just a hint of it now. Generally, this letter is a thank you to a church that was very close to Paul's heart.

Vs. 3-6 The key phrase here is *partnership in the gospel*. The church at Philippi is the only church we know of that Paul planted and immediately, on their own, began supporting Paul financially. It wasn't just that they wanted to help the kind old man who helped them. They caught Paul's passion for following Christ: to be partners in the blessings of the gospel, reaching the lost and making disciples for Christ. They are now supporting Paul ten years after his work in Philippi.

V. 7 This is what a true partnership in missions gives the people back home. The people see what has been done by God's grace and become partakers of that grace and those blessings.

Vs. 8-11 Paul's prayer is that their *love* would *abound more and more*. The rest is important and descriptive, but don't lose sight of the focus of Paul's request. Love for Christ and others grows in the harvest, and Paul wanted it to grow in a certain way. If this love grew, the end product would be *the glory and praise of God*.

Vs. 12-18 This is like Job writing why it is good to suffer. Paul couldn't control the attitudes of the Christians who were trying to make him feel bad, but he was happy that the unbelieving public was hearing about Christ. God would take care of that other stuff.

V. 19 Paul had a good feeling that he would be released. We'll see this expressed again in chapter 2.

Vs. 20-21 The thought of being ashamed, I think, came from those bratty preachers trying to make Paul look small. But the real issue was that Paul was where he was, to give testimony of Jesus Christ to the Roman authorities. In this sense especially, he knew he wouldn't be ashamed. I like that line, *but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death*. Amen!

V. 21 Many Christians would say "amen" to this, but their treasure is really on earth. If they were to die they would be losing everything.

Vs. 21-26 The life that Paul describes here seems like discipleship on steroids. If you read what Paul wrote after his even bigger declaration in chapter 3, you'll see that Paul and the Spirit mean this to be normative thinking for the disciple of Jesus on earth. Why else are we here except to follow in the harvest, reaching the lost, and making disciples, who make disciples? Being with Jesus will be so much better, except this life isn't about us and what would be better for us? It is about following Jesus and reaching those He died to save.

Psalm 71

This psalm doesn't have information regarding the author; but reading it, I say, "You can't fool me. This is David." Just an older version of him, possibly before and after the civil war with Absalom. I see a lot of Psalm 40 in here, but really, it echoes all of David's praying and crying out and celebrating. The only thing that's missing is a reference to God's steadfast love.

Vs. 1-3 If this is David, the years had passed and now there was a new threat. David had been forgiven for what he had done regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, but there were many who were unwilling to forgive. David's hope was in the Lord, and again, he was looking to the Lord to vindicate him.

Vs. 4-13 This alternates between David's plea for help and the threat of his enemies.

Vs. 14-24 The one thing that strikes me is the long celebration of hope in these verses. The writer was now old and had been following God from his early years. He had seen adversity, and yet, he had known so much deliverance. He knew God.

Proverbs 24:9-10

I guess these are good general truths. But in the context of yesterday, seeing Satan referred to as a schemer, I guess you could take that application into today. You should have a note that *devising* can be read "scheming."

Adversity often comes from the human and spiritual side of scheming or devising sin. To scoff at God, His existence, His holiness and justice, is an abomination. That spiritual origin of these things is literally an abomination to mankind. It degrades mankind.

So what does God do for us? He gives us the Word, the Spirit, and insight into what's really happening in life. He gives us a place in the fight, in the harvest, winning the lost, turning them into disciples. We have seen everywhere that God makes us strong through adversity, but only through that adversity that is somehow linked to the harvest. Remember that verse from yesterday about Jesus sharing the spoil with the strong? Can you see some connection to that verse and v. 10 here? The work makes us strong. To hold back makes us weak, because our strength is in the Lord and in the Spirit; and they are both active in reaching a lost world. We all need to be in the Word in the harvest. That is where we draw close to Christ; use the armor and develop spiritual strength.

Even a seasoned disciple like Timothy was shocked into fear by the sudden aggression of Nero that had risen. Paul, facing death in a Roman dungeon, wrote to Timothy to remind him to be strong in Christ in the harvest.

2 Timothy 1:7-10 *For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our*

Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.