

Route Sixty-Six

Part Twenty-Three

Isaiah

*Hear, O Heavens, and Give Ear, O Earth
(John 5:39 Isaiah 1:2a)*

With Study Questions

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10/13/2019*

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Hear, O Heavens, and Give Ear, O Earth

(John 5:39 Isaiah 1:2a)

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 1:2a).

Introduction

One of my children entered my study and asked why Jews do not believe in the New Testament-why they don't believe in Christ. There are a number of layers in answering such a question. The most obvious, surface answer would be the influence of their tradition. Tradition has been at war with Christ from the beginning (Matthew 15:3). At a deeper level, there is a veil upon the hearts of men that can only be removed by the grace of God.

But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away (2 Corinthians 3:15, 16).

But such a passage should not be read in such a way as to conclude that the truth of God's word is, as it were, hidden under a shroud. As if only the wisest of scholars and shrewdest investigators have the intellectual integrity to unearth the cryptic mysteries of redemption. And though Paul was writing in regard to Moses, the same truth applies to all of the Old Testament, which is theme of our current series, Route Sixty-Six. Jesus was not unclear that the Scriptures testify of Him as even a cursory reading of Isaiah makes manifestly obvious.

It is with glorious repetition that we see (in a book written seven hundred years before His birth) allusions and predictions that can only pertain to Christ. It's been said that...

...the prolonged description of chapter 53 suits only one figure in all human history-the Man of Calvary.¹

The magnitude of the conspiracy and the madness of a false Christ to perpetuate such a hoax at the price of His own excruciating death, crosses the border of sound thinking. And though it is not merely chapter fifty-three which yields no other reasonable alternative to Christ, let us glean from the ministry of Philip as he instructed the Ethiopian Eunuch who was reading Isaiah (Acts 8:38).

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.³² The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; *And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth.*³³ *In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.*"³⁴ So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him (Acts 8:30-35).

May there be no veil upon our eyes as we seek to preach Jesus in our examination of Isaiah.

Survey of Isaiah

Whether we compare him to a Beethoven, Shakespeare or an Einstein, Isaiah as a prophet is said to be without peer, even among prophets. This is not because what he said is somehow more true than other prophets, but the sheer length of time (a prophet for, some say forty, perhaps sixty years) and scope of his message (during the reign of four kings and numerous adversaries).

¹ Baxter, 253.

Beyond being a prophet, he was also said to bold, patriotic, tender, sympathetic, indignant (in a good way), reverent and spiritual (also in a good way). Jewish tradition indicates that it was probably Isaiah who was placed in the trunk of a tree sawn in two (Hebrew 11:37).

The historical setting is during the oppression of Israel (Judah and Jerusalem) by the surrounding, evil nations and the anticipation and prophecy of their exile. It is a time of great political and moral turmoil. Isaiah goes back and forth in his rebuke of Israel and his rebuke of their oppressors. At the same time, he also speaks glorious words of deliverance which have their sights initially on Judah and Jerusalem, then the surrounding nations, then the entire world.

Many of these great rebukes, judgments and promises of deliverance had a more immediate historical fulfillment that his original readers would have, more or less, endured or enjoyed. But Isaiah is no mere history lesson of something that happened twenty-seven hundred years ago. It speaks to and anticipates all of history, to the very end. Perhaps this is why, after the introduction of the prophet in chapter one, verse one, it opens with a heralding:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken (Isaiah 1:2).

The book opens with a chastisement of God's own covenant people (1:3). It is Israel that is a "**sinful nation**" from head to toe (1:6). Only a remnant remained faithful, lest they would have ended up as Sodom and Gomorrah (1:9). Their worship became a stench and God would not hear their prayers (1:15). But even hear, in the midst of this reprimand, we begin to see hope for those with a willing heart (1:19).

**"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord,
"Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as
snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as
wool (Isaiah 1:18).**

There is always a promise of restoration for those who are willing (1:26). The magnitude of this promise is great. The Lord establishes His house and the nations will flow to it, beating swords into plowshares. Christ is the hope of the nations and of true peace. But even God's people

are tempted to follow “soothsayers” (2:6) over the word and promise of God Himself. And our ability to discern with any sense of justice or righteousness becomes compromised and disabled.

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! ²¹Woe to *those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight (Isaiah 5:20, 21)!*

There is truly a timelessness to words such as these. Evil is not merely tolerated. It is sanctified.

Chapter six of Isaiah is a bit of a turning point. It has been suggested that in the history of the church, there has not been a chapter in Scripture that has more influenced the liturgy of the church than this chapter. We are called into His thrice Holy presence, behold His glory and receive His pardon. Isaiah’s ministry will have a worldwide focus, but he will not until his lips are touched by the forgiving power of God. Truly the coals are typical of Christ.

And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged” (Isaiah 6:7).

And it is not unclear from whence this deliverance comes. In the next chapter we read words the angel spoke to Joseph (Matthew 1:20-23).

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

Yet even amidst these wonderful promises they seek mediums and wizards over God.

And when they say to you, “Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,” should not a people seek their God? *Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living (Isaiah 8:19)?*

The word of God is sufficient to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16). Yet it is in our nature to look elsewhere. Again, God's hand is not too short to overcome our natural defiance. In the midst of rebellion, the promise is once again stated.

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace *There will be no end*, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

The church will be established, and the Great Commission fulfilled, not by the will of God but by the **"zeal of the Lord."**

Yet this straightening out of that which was made crooked by sin is not always a straight line. The world is full of evil and darkness. Yet we should never think God is on the sidelines, inactive, waiting to make an entrance. The greatest evil power on the earth at the time was the king of Assyria. But what the king of Assyria meant for evil and for his own glory was, in a deeper and more primary sense, decreed by God.

Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hand is My indignation... ¹⁵ Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? (Isaiah 10:5, 15).

We are ever reminded that we are mere clay in the hands of the potter (Isaiah 29:16; 30:14; 41:25; 64:8). Yet we are again reminded of Christ, "a Rod from the stem of Jesse" (11:1) anticipating the baptism of Christ:

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2).

Also, see the vast power and range of His redemption.

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9b).

But this is no mere crusade. It is personal an eminently conciliatory and comforting to the soul.

He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 25:8).

It is not without cause that he pens the words:

You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You*, Because he trusts in You (Isaiah 26:3).

It should ever be the quest of the Christian to keep our minds “**stayed**” (*samuk-lean*, lay rest) on Christ.

It is worth noting the seldom addressed fulfillment of the prophecy contained in Isaiah 28:11. The “**stammering lips**” of 1 Corinthians 14:21 was a sign of God keeping His promise of the New Covenant. This is why it is called a *sign* gift.

In chapter forty the tone of Isaiah appears to focus upon Divine grace and comfort. So much so, that higher critics will say it was written by someone other than Isaiah, though with no solid evidence. Someone might as well say that C. S. Lewis could not have written the Chronicles of Narnia because the tone of it is so unlike Mere Christianity. It is not a different author. It is a different subject.

It is here that we are reminded, as Jesus even taught (Matthew 24:35), that the...

...flower fades but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Isaiah bids us to have a Divine perspective with the words,

Behold, the nations *are* as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales (Isaiah 40:15)

Conversely, we are encouraged that...

But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

May our hearts and minds ever be fixed upon such uplifting truth. But before the uplifting truth and exaltation, there would be the humiliation and suffering. Isaiah specifies and individualizes. It would not be the victory of a nation or a people, but of a person. Jesus would set His "**face like flint**" for Jerusalem (Isaiah 50:7; Luke 9:51).

I gave My back to those who struck *Me*, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting (Isaiah 50:6).

We will finish with a brief perusal of the ultimate message of Christ in this book. But first let us appreciate the cosmic victory of the One Man who truly donned "**the breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation**" (Isaiah 59:17).

Isaiah uses the largest and smallest images available to express the galactic and minute nature of the victory of Christ.

The sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory (Isaiah 60:19).

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust *shall be* the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," Says the Lord (Isaiah 65:25).

These promises are so glorious that some don't believe they can happen apart from Christ returning and completing what the cross has left

undone. Let us not doubt the power of the cross. There is a great deal to discuss in terms of eschatology (end times) and heaven when we read these words, words which speak of the new heavens and the new earth. Suffice it to say that the beginning of these promises are found in the resurrection and they will be fully consummated in glory. But let us complete our study of Isaiah with a focus upon the heart and power of this redemption.

Christ in Isaiah

The heart of all redemption is found in the sin-bearing **“Servant”** whose **“visage was marred more than any man” (Isaiah 52:13, 14)**. It is against the mentality of image-makers that Isaiah informs us that there was nothing about the way Jesus would appear that would or should attract us to Him.

He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him (Isaiah 53:2b).

By nature, men would reject Him and hold Him in contempt (53:3). But He would bear **“our griefs”** and carry **“our sorrows” (53:4)**. He would step in and endure that which we could never endure, that being **“Smitten by God” (53:4)**. As the great substitute, He would not merely stand before a bus or a train but stand before the wrath of God and be **“wounded for our transgression...bruised for our iniquities.”** The **“chastisement for our peace was upon Him” (53:5)**.

We had gone astray, and the Lord **“has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (53:6)**. And we serve no reluctant Savior, but one who endured the depths of hell **“for the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2)**. Isaiah says it this way:

He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53:11).

From this verse we learn that true righteousness, our justification (our declaration of righteousness) comes by faith, by **“knowledge”** of God’s **“righteous Servant” (53:11)**.

Questions for Study

1. What are some reasons people give for not believing the Scriptures? Is there a deeper way to understand this? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. How was Isaiah unique as a prophet (pages 3, 4)?
3. Describe the historical context during the writings of Isaiah (page 4).
4. What was the condition of Israel at the time of Isaiah (page 4)?
5. God calls us to “reason”. What is the conclusion of our reasoning (page 4)?
6. Explain how a rejection of God leads to a compromised ability to discern good from evil (page 5)?
7. Isaiah six chronicles a unique event. How so (page 5)?
8. How does a child fit in to Isaiah’s prophecy of deliverance (pages 5, 6)?
9. How does Isaiah bid us to have a Divine perspective (pages 7, 8)?
10. Discuss the cosmic significance of the victory of Christ (pages 8, 9).
11. Meditate upon the beauty of Christ in Isaiah 53 (pages 8, 9).