

Friday, May 5, 2017

If only

Isaiah 48-49

This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be cut off nor destroyed from before me."
Isaiah 48:17-19

These verses remind me of the lament that Jesus offers over the city of Jerusalem in Luke 19:42. God laments what the nation missed out on. By their own choice, they turned to other gods and trusted in them. Those gods brought pain and judgment upon the nation. If only they had listened to the teaching of the Holy One. If only they would have chosen what is best instead of settling for the least. If only they had paid attention to the commands and the directions of the right way to go. Things would have been much different. There are consequences to sin. Sin is forgiven, but the consequences remain. They could have known peace. They could have lived lives of righteousness. Their children would have learned the same obedience and would have flourished. God makes this statement so that they can see how they ended up where they were. This new generation has a new choice to make. Will they listen to the Teacher? Will they follow His directions? Will I? Today is a new opportunity for me to listen carefully to what God teaches—to look deeply into His Word for the truth that will guide my life. A new opportunity to lean on God and God alone for all my needs and to take the Holy Spirit power within me to have my life choices be righteous choices.

O LORD, I know that I could live in regret for all that could have been if I had only listened and obeyed Your teaching. Instead, I choose to live going forward. I choose to have Your teachings continually lead me on the path that is best. I choose to allow Your power within me to give me the strength to follow You! Amen.

May 1 - 6, 2017

Saturday, May 6, 2017

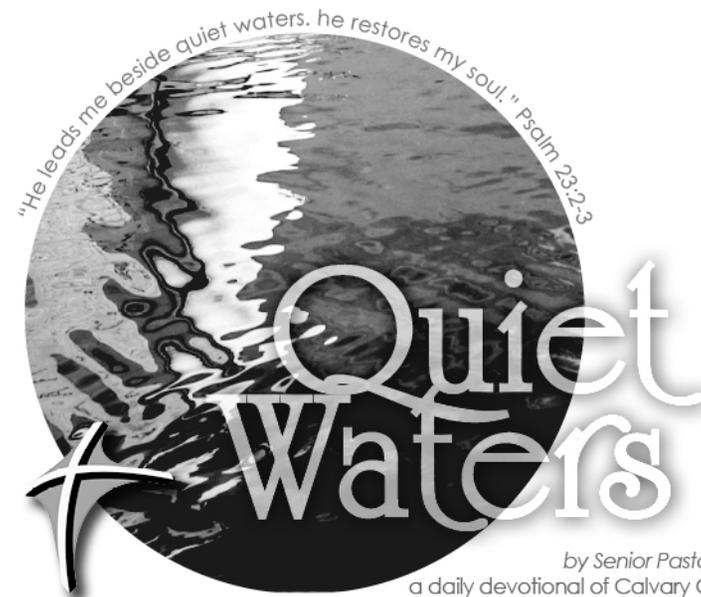
Who?

Isaiah 50-51

Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.
Isaiah 50:10

Isaiah 50:4-11 contains the third of the four "Servant Songs" found in Isaiah (42:1-7; 49:1-7; 52:12 - 53:12). Following the "song" is a recognition that there is a remnant that fears the LORD and obeys this Servant that will suffer. This remnant is given some admonitions. They are to look back and remember that God is faithful (51:1-3). They are to look ahead and realize that God has a plan that He is working out (51:4-6). They are then challenged to look in their hearts for what they know to be true (51:7-8). God searches for men and women who are devoted to Him. God made this clear through Hanani the seer to Asa in 2 Chronicles 16:9. He searches for those who will fear Him and whose hearts are fully committed to Him, He strengthens. He strengthens them to remember, to look ahead with confidence and to look inside for the change that He has made in their lives. *"Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant?"* Me!! Lord, let this be me! Let me obey all that Jesus has taught.

O Dear LORD, please take my life as a willing sacrifice. Help me to be one of those who is following You closely. Help me remember Your faithfulness, help me look forward with confidence, and help me see the absolute ways You have taken my heart of stone and given me a heart of flesh that is tender toward You!! Amen.



Monday, May 1, 2017

Comfort

Isaiah 40-41

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Isaiah 40:1, 11

Chapter 40 opens a new section for Isaiah. It has been observed that the book of Isaiah, in some ways, is like a Bible in miniature. The Bible has 66 books and Isaiah has 66 chapters. The Old Testament has 39 books and there are 39 chapters in the first part of Isaiah. Both seem to focus primarily on the judgment of sin by God. The 27 chapters of the second part seem to parallel the 27 books of the New Testament, in that they both seem to emphasize the grace of God. These 27 chapters of Isaiah open with the ministry of John the Baptist and close with the new heavens and the new earth. Of course, the chapter breaks were not part of the original text of Isaiah, but it is an interesting way to consider the book as a whole. The comfort spoken of by Isaiah in chapter 40 and forward is for a future generation. Rabbis have called Isaiah 40-66 "The Book of Consolation." Indeed, that is what it is. It provides comfort as it reveals that God is to be trusted and that He cares for and comforts His own. He tends His flock like a loving shepherd. It would be a visual for the people who would be coming back to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple of God. It is a comfort for me today as well. I can be comforted to know that God is a God of judgment, but also a God of grace, who longs to comfort His own.

Dear God, how I need the comfort that can only come from You. So many times I can feel overcome with the circumstances of life that seem to try to overtake me. Remind me often that I am gathered in Your arms and that You are carrying me close to Your heart. I rest in Your care. Amen.

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

I, even I

Isaiah 42-43

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior."

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. Isaiah 43:25

Twice in this chapter God makes an emphatic statement through Isaiah. "I, even I." There can be no doubt. God is making a sure statement that He alone can save people from their sins. There is no savior apart from Him. His suffering servant (Isaiah 42:1-7) will set the captives free. He saves for His own sake. This is significant and must be remembered. I do not deserve forgiveness. God is perfectly within His rights to punish me for my transgressions. I have no claim on forgiveness. Nor does God owe me or save me for happiness. He saves me to show the compassionate nature of His character. He saves me to declare and proclaim His glory through my forgiveness and salvation. He is the only Savior who saves. In saving, He saves completely. He blots out sins and remembers them no more. It is not that they are forgotten—it is that God chooses not to remember them ever. Sin will never be held against the person whom God has saved through Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)! A desire to be a witness that testifies to the fact that God saves stirs up in me when I understand my salvation in this way. Just as God saved the nation of Israel so that they could be a witness, so also God has saved me to be a witness of His lovingkindness, extended through the complete forgiveness of sins.

Dear God, You, even You, are the One who has saved me completely. You have rescued me from my bondage to sin and have set me free—not because of anything I have done, but because of Your overwhelming love and mercy. How I love You and how I long to make You and Your forgiveness known. Help me have the boldness needed to share what You have done for me! Amen.

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

Sovereign

Isaiah 44-45

"This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

Isaiah 45:1

This is a most surprising verse! It is significant for several reasons. First, God is making clear that He will overthrow Babylon through a Persian king. Remember that neither Babylon nor Persia had power at the time of this writing. Furthermore, God names a man yet to be born. No less than 150 years prior to the birth of Cyrus, God has decreed his name. Beyond that, God has determined that this man Cyrus will be God's anointed, even though he will not acknowledge God (45:4)! God is stating that He has chosen and empowered Cyrus to carry out God's will. God does this so that it may be clear to all that God is LORD and that there is no other god before Him (45:6). God has chosen to give this pagan a title of honor so that through this man, God may work His plan for the rebuilding of a temple, a city, and a people. In this clear prophecy, which declares with great detail what will happen 150-plus years in the future, God declares His absolute authority over all things and all times. God alone is sovereign over all there is—not just over those who turn to Him. All people serve God's purposes. That can be hard for me to understand, but God is absolutely sovereign over all things. As I embrace that truth tightly, it brings great peace. God's plans cannot and will not be thwarted by any person. The created does not control the Creator (45:9).

Dear God, thank You for the peace that comes to me as I ponder the truth that You are sovereign. Sometimes I am tempted to doubt that fact. I get wrapped up thinking that things are falling apart. Remind me that they are not. You are holding all things together and are working all things together for Your purposes. Thank You for the clear teaching in this passage. Amen.

Thursday, May 4, 2017

Faithfulness

Isaiah 46-47

"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Isaiah 46:3-4

Once again, God's Word shows that confidence is to be found in His faithfulness. Over and over in this section of Isaiah (chapters 40-48), God is revealing His nature and character so that His people can find comfort. Over and over He states that He is in control and that His love for His people will never wane. The repeated truths and clear teachings will bring great comfort to a nation returning from exile and—much more—to all those who have followed. This promise, that God will be with Israel even to their old age, is a promise to a nation that God loves deeply. Just as He loved them in their infancy, so He will love them and sustain them and carry them. He will rescue them. God has certainly not turned His affection away from the house of Israel. He still has a deep and abiding love for them and a plan to rescue them. They can be confident of that. Many times I have heard verse 4 read without verse 3. When this is done, it gives a much different interpretation of the passage. God is clearly speaking to a nation here. But even as He speaks to a nation, He reveals His nature and His character. As He does, I am able to apply the truth of His nature and character to myself individually as well. Since God is faithful to sustain, carry, and rescue a nation that He loves, He will sustain, carry, and rescue me, as a child He has adopted into His family through Christ. This brings me great comfort. My confidence can be found in God's faithfulness as well.

O LORD, great is Your faithfulness. Who am I that You should care for me in the same way that You care for Your chosen nation? Thank You for Jesus and for making it possible for me to experience Your faithfulness in my life. When I am tempted to doubt, fill me with the comfort of Your promises. Amen.