

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtrminc.org Today's Date: July 31, 2016

Transitory Partners of The Eternal God

“‘Comfort, comfort My people,’ says your God. ² ‘Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her time of warfare is over, her iniquity has been pardoned, and she has received from Yahweh’s hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of Yahweh in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert...’” Isaiah 40:1-3

“A voice was saying, ‘Cry out!’ Another said, ‘What should I cry out?’ ‘All humanity is grass, and all its goodness is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flowers fade when the breath of Yahweh blows on them; indeed, the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever.’” Isaiah 40:6-8

“See, the Lord Yahweh comes with strength, and His power establishes His rule. His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. ¹¹ He protects His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in the fold of His garment. He gently leads those that are nursing.” Isaiah 40:10,11

I have been reading through the book of Isaiah in my daily reading. I was very much impressed by this section of Scripture, the other day. When you read through the entire chapter, in light of the historical context, ...as well as the sweeping expanse of world history..., the statements, questions, and declarations about who God is, and the reality of our miniscule, transitory existence next to His greatness, gives us a reality check that is not only humbling, but full of hope and comfort.

What are the first three most important principles of good Bible interpretation? Context, context and context! We need to understand *the historical background*. What was the occasion and setting in which this prophecy was spoken? What was the flow of thought that preceded this chapter? How does this prophecy fit in with *the larger purpose or argument of this book*? Finally, we have to examine *the argument within this chapter itself*, to understand the point of what is being said. As we come to grips with these layers of context, we should more clearly understand what was being communicated to those first hearers. What was God saying to *them*? Then, we can take *those* lessons we glean from His communication with them, and *apply them* to our own lives and historical situation, where they fit.

Isaiah lived at a critical time in the history of the Jewish peoples. The ethnic family of the Hebrews had been separated for about 180 years before Isaiah showed up on the scene. In 922 BC, **the Jewish nation was split into two factions: Israel to the north, comprised of 10 tribes, and the kingdom of Judah to the south.** Judah retained allegiance to the Davidic line of kings, and retained at least a semblance of worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. The northern tribes *revolted* from the Davidic kings, and set up their *own* system of worship, in defiance of the instructions given by God to Moses. In the intervening generations, **both nations wandered away from God.** By 742, when Isaiah received his call to be a prophet (Isa. 6), the northern kingdom was rapidly moving toward destruction, because of their idolatry, injustice and sin. **In Isaiah 5, God revealed that both nations will go into exile, because of their disregard of God and His expectations** for righteous behavior. **Their lack of knowledge of Him, His character and His ways was a key factor in their demise** (5:13). God would humble the arrogant, and He alone would be exalted (2:9,11,12,17; 5:15,16; 10:33; 13:11). When God called Isaiah to be His prophet, it was clear that he was to preach until foreign armies had come from afar to overrun the land, and take His people into exile. In fact, God had Isaiah prophesy to 13 nations that they would each be judged by God (13-23). **By 722, the Israelites to the north had experienced this!** The nation of Assyria, to the far north, swept in over the land, ...and **God did not protect them.** They were defeated, destroyed and only a small remnant survived to be taken into captivity in a far away land. **This same judgment loomed over Judah and Jerusalem.** God even used Isaiah to prophesy that the Assyrian army would spread through the land, like the waters of a river overflowing its banks. It would rise up, reaching even to the neck, surrounding Jerusalem itself, ...**YET** its plans would NOT succeed (8:5-10). **Unrighteous Assyria was only an instrument that God used** to discipline these other nations, but, in the end, they, too, would face judgment (10).

The book of Isaiah is a carefully crafted book. Isaiah was a well-educated man, probably from the noble class. His writing is skillful, utilizing nearly every literary device and employing over 2,200 vocabulary words, far more than any other OT author. **The book is divided into two parts, written in poetry. They are divided by a historical “bridge” of prose, which separates these two parts.** Isaiah confronts God’s people with their sin, and calls them to repent and return to God in true reformation of their hearts and lifestyles. He warned them of God’s impending judgment and exile from the land because of their sin, but also proclaimed the hope of a future salvation, ...including the restoration and return of a remnant of the Jewish people to the land of promise, once again. **The prose portion (chapters 36-39) records the final demise of the Assyrian threat by God’s hand alone. It also sets the stage for the rise of a future nemesis, the Babylonians.** At the time of Isaiah’s writing, they were only a second-class power, having themselves been defeated by the Assyrians. **Just as God used Assyria to judge and remove**

decadent Israel, He would later use Babylon to punish and exile faithless Judah over a hundred years in the future. BUT, even as this reality is hinted at, the message of this second half of Isaiah's book is profoundly optimistic. If the first half is primarily a book of *judgment*, then the last half is primarily a book of *hope*.

Chapter 40 is the beginning of this "book of hope". It begins with a command to comfort "My people", says God. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, encourage her that *her time of warfare is over, and her iniquity is taken away*". There was warfare, servitude, humiliation, ...why? Because there was sin in the camp. Not everyone was guilty of sin, but everyone is affected by sin in the camp, ...even the sins of other people! Like Achan in Joshua 7, sin in the camp is offensive to God, and the more corrupt a nation becomes, the more it likely it is to come under judgment. **It is important to understand God's purposes here.** There is definitely an intention to discipline and judge evil, but **there is a higher purpose: to liberate, purify and focus the hearts of those who desire to serve God. Thus, we find the next admonition is to "prepare the way for the Lord".** The literal word picture was about filling in the pot holes, and making a smooth, straight roadway for the coming king and his entourage. The idea is to **make a smooth, unobstructed pathway for God to enter your life. Remove the distractions, and old baggage. Put aside the old habits and comforts that cause you to be apathetic.**

Why? The expectation, hope and PROMISE is that the "glory of Yahweh will appear, and all humanity will see it". What did He mean by *that* statement? This principle has played out numerous times in history. **In this setting, the manifestation of the glory of God would be the fulfillment of His promise to bring his scattered people back into the land of promise.** Everyone will certainly be able to see *that*. This happened in history a couple of times. Initially, the Jews came back under the Persian king, Cyrus, who defeated the Babylonians (who had defeated the Assyrians). This was an amazing thing! Whoever heard of a nation deported from their homeland a distance of 1,000 miles, return to the place of their homeland after 70 years in exile? Yet, *that* was the immediate fulfillment. God would do it *again* after a 19 century exile, when the Jews returned to their homeland in 1948! **BUT, God had in mind an even greater glory, one that nearly the whole world has been made aware of.** John the Baptist took Isaiah's words, calling for the Jews of his day to "prepare" for the coming of their God, and **it was Jesus who would bring the glory of the Lord into bold manifestation through His ministry of miracles, signs, and sacrificial love.** His ministry has been proclaimed around the world, AND He is coming *again*. Then every eye *will* see Him (Rev. 1:7)!

Then, another voice commands Isaiah to cry out. "What shall I cry out?" "All humanity is grass," was the message. Human lives are as transitory and temporary as grass, which is here today, blooms, withers, and fades away. **BUT God's Word remains forever. This sets the stage for the good news message of hope for this chapter.**

God comes in strength. His power establishes His rule. He will bring recompense, provision and focus to His work. He will *protect* His flock like a shepherd should, gathering His lambs in His arms, even carrying the young in the folds of His garment. In the midst of these transitory lives, the upheavals of history, **God is on a steady course, establishing His Kingdom, caring for His people, gently meeting our needs and moving us along.**

The next 12 verses describe His greatness: He is the *Creator* and *Sustainer* of this entire universe. No one could teach Him or advise Him, because His knowledge or wisdom is far beyond even our imaginations. *The nations are like a drop in the bucket to Him, ...like nothingness and emptiness before Him.* None can compare with Him. He is enthroned above the heavens. *Princes and rulers are of no account. He can reduce them to nothing in a moment!* They barely take root, and they are gone. Yet, **He is systematically, calmly, relentlessly accomplishing His eternal purposes in the midst of these very transitory human lives, ...including our own.**

This is important to understand, in the midst of what seems to us to be a rapidly changing, chaotic world. **God is still in control. He is still relentlessly accomplishing His purposes.** Even when governments rise or fall, or when we find ourselves to be displaced, or our plans are turned upside down. **God can use even the difficult things for our good. He strips away comfort, to clear away apathy; He allows even the unrighteous to take from us, so that our eyes turn to Him as our Source, our Hope, our Savior, our Security, and His Kingdom as our focus.**

How does the chapter end? "Why do you say, 'My way is hidden from Yahweh, and my cries are ignored by my God?' Do you not know? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never grows faint or weary; there is no limit to His understanding. He gives strength to the weary and strengthens the powerless. ...those who trust in (lit., 'eagerly and expectantly wait for') the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint."

Be encouraged, God is in control. The seasons of difficulty and injustice are only temporary. Even the lives of those who cause trouble, ...those who are hostile or deceptive or set against us..., are only like grass. They will be gone in a very short time. **Focus on God.** Don't think He doesn't know. He knows EVERYTHING, ...and He *will* make things right. **He is relentlessly accomplishing His purposes. His Word and His Kingdom will abide forever. Be eagerly and expectantly looking to Him for strength, focus and guidance to have eternal impact partnering with Him.**