

"Jerusalem Now . . . Jerusalem Then"
Isaiah 3:1-4:6
Carol Martin

As I read and prepared my lesson for this week like you did, I think the word that kept coming to mind was chaos and confusion. It reminded me of a story in Chuck Swindoll's book originally titled *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*. It's the story of a man trying to fix a mess of confusion. See what you think about it . . .

Monday: FOR SALE - R. D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Phone after 7 p.m. and ask for Mrs. Kelley who lives with him cheap.

Tuesday: NOTICE - We regret having erred in R. D. Jones' ad yesterday. It should have read: One sewing machine for sale. Cheap. Phone and ask for Mrs. Kelly who lives with him after 7 p.m.

Wednesday: NOTICE - R. D. Jones has informed us that he has received several annoying telephone calls because of the error we made in his classified ad yesterday. His ad stands corrected as follows: FOR SALE - R. D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Cheap. Phone after 7 p.m. and ask for Mrs. Kelly who loves with him.

Thursday: NOTICE - I, R. D. Jones, have NO sewing machine for sale. I SMASHED IT. Don't call as the telephone has been disconnected. I have not been carrying on with Mrs. Kelly. Until yesterday she was my housekeeper, but she quit.

Like one ad brought frustration to Mr. Jones, sometimes one pressure builds on another in our society and eventually it erupts in acts of murder or mayhem as is so often reported on the evening news. Sometimes it's just one sin that begins to ripple out in ever-widening consequences that soon affects a total family unit, perhaps a church family or, in the case of Judah, a whole nation.

Isaiah served as prophet to the people for about 64 years, spanning the reigns of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Bible commentaries state that our lesson of chapters 3 & 4 likely occurred during the reign of King Uzziah.

Uzziah was the king of Judah for 52 years and Isaiah came into position as a young man toward the end of his reign. King Uzziah's reign was considered the second most profitable to Judah since the time of Solomon. During the early years of his reign, he was faithful and pleasing to Jehovah God; unfortunately, his later years were not.

King Uzziah's sin was that he invaded the temple priest's quarters and offered incense on the golden altar. He was confronted by the High Priest Azariah and a band of 80 priests to cease his arrogant acts against God. Uzziah was suddenly struck with leprosy while in the act of offering incense and driven from the temple. He died in a

house outside the palace and was buried in a grave separate from the other kings of Judah.

We need to remember that our Bible was not put into a chapter and verse format until the twelfth century. Where we begin reading this week in chapter 3 is really an idea that follows the thought God left with us last week . . . “stop trusting in man, of what account is he?”

I spoke last week about a courtroom scene where God was bringing accusation against His idolatrous and rebellious people.

One person wrote, “A full lawsuit contains a summons, a charge, the evidence and a verdict, though these elements may sometimes be implied rather than explicit.”

In chapter 1 the Lord called heaven and earth as his witnesses and summoned Judah to court. Now in chapter three we have:

The Judge – in 3:13 “The Lord takes His place in the court.”

The Defendant – in 3:14 “the elders and leaders of His people.”

The Charge – in 3:9 “They parade their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it.” 3:12 “Youths oppress my people, women rule over them, your guides lead you astray.” 3:14 “The plunder of the poor is in your houses.”

The Verdict – in 3:10 – **good news**: “Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.” In 3:11 – **bad news**: “Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them. They will be paid back for what their hands have done.” Not a pretty picture.

Our lesson asked us to think about the conditions of famine, and of having political and military leaders removed, social upheaval, society in chaos, people running from one potential leader to another searching for a stabilizing force. What would that be like in America?

In a nation of God blessed plenty, the idea of true famine is very foreign to us. Probably the closest we’ve come to this in modern times was our own Depression era and, no doubt, you’ve heard stories from your parents or grandparents about how tough times were during those days. We take for granted a government system where political parties change power without revolutionary riots or military coups happening.

I’ve been in a country where there were armed soldiers on street corners carrying machine guns and an armed soldier was stationed in the post office and in the bank. It’s scary to see real distinction between social classes. The poor are very poor and the rich are very rich. There is very little of what we all probably consider ourselves – the “middle class.” Upheaval of this magnitude is almost beyond our grasp and

certainly beyond our experience. Our leader's group had a good discussion about this. I'm sure your small group did too.

The policy of conquering nations in Isaiah's day was to remove the military and political leaders from those territories with just that objective in mind – to create chaos. It's a picture of anarchy and helplessness in which people run to and fro desperately looking for support, for someone or something to put their trust in. You can count on the fact that everything is topsy-turvy in a society where insolence, greed, injustice and godlessness reigns. It would be Babylon eventually that would be the instrument to carry out God's verdict of guilty.

Perhaps we women took a second look at Isaiah 3:16 to 4:1 because it addresses the women of Isaiah's day (and will no doubt have application for the women who will be in the Tribulation period). In the horror that would befall Jerusalem, we're reminded of what happens to women in time of war – it's a familiar theme, and a graphic, heart-rending illustration of total disaster.

Women symbolize the wealth and creature comforts of society and they represent the vulnerability of society. It takes so little to reduce them from suave beauty to poverty, humiliation and bereavement. Such are the consequences of disease, war, rape, and widowhood. Proud Jerusalem in all her finery could be reduced to ruins in a moment; garments of gauze and veils would not protect her from the judgment she deserved.

The proud and arrogant women of Jerusalem had doubtless been among the principal ones to profit from the oppressive activities of the nation's leaders. Vain of their beauty, they sought to add to it by every device known to women of fashion. But God was about to smite them with sores and diseases that would disfigure them and make them to be loathed by their former admirers. Now they were going to be denied their luxuries and finery.

Instead of the finest apparel and jewelry, they would wear the ropes of the exile people, the sackcloth of affliction, their hair cut off in shame and branded like cattle by new owners. They'd be denied the joys of marriage and children because of the devastating depletion of the male population through war . . . begging the remaining men to "take away their disgrace" (which in that society was to have no children).

It may not be necessary, but I do want to make a reference to the list of things mentioned in these last verses of Isaiah 3 – bangles, headbands, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, ankle chains, sashes, perfume rings, capes, cloaks, purses, mirrors, tiaras, shawls, etc.

There are many things that in themselves are absolutely not sinful. Legalism would like to take a list like this and say, "See, women should never wear these things.

The Bible condemns them.” But that is not true. I believe that every woman should look as good as she can – like the old saying, “if the barn needs painting, paint it.” The keyword though is appropriate, isn’t it? A moral society has a standard of what is considered “loose, provocative, or inappropriate” dress for its women. It’s a parent’s responsibility to teach modesty and appropriate dress to both sons and daughters.

We have to realize, however, that some have never had that training. Others may know and been taught what “good taste” means but have let the advertising media, society and peer pressure dictate their dress – often to the disappointment of us as parents.

We need to remember that in the New Testament careful instruction is given to women that their adornment be not that which is outward, but rather that of meekness and grace which is the adornment of the heart. Pride and vanity are both hateful to God, whether it is manifested in men or women. When pride adorns “self,” it is wholly taken up with outward adornment and forgets the Giver of all good and perfect gifts.

Christians don’t need to be “plain Janes.” Pat Merold once told us, “Present the best you that you can be.” I try to do that when I stand before you. If you adorn your heart with the love of God as the first thing you put on in the morning, regardless of what price tag your wardrobe has or what accessories you choose to compliment it, you’ll be beautiful to everyone who sees you.

In his book *Who Switched the Price Tags?* Tony Campolo recalls a time he and a childhood buddy came up with what he called “a brilliant and creative plan for mischief.” He writes: “Our plan was to get into the five-and-dime store and change the price tags on things.

“We imagined what it would be like the next morning when people came into the store and discovered that radios were selling for a quarter and bobby pins were priced at five dollars each. With diabolical glee, we wondered what it would be like in that store when nobody could figure out what the price of things really should be.

“Sometimes I think that Satan has played the same kind of trick on all of us. Sometimes I think that he has broken into our lives and changed the price tags on things. Too often, under the influence of his malicious ploy, we treat what deserves to be treated with loving care as though it were of little worth. On the other hand, we find ourselves tempted to make great sacrifices for that which, in the long run of life, has no lasting value . . . sometimes I think that one of the worst consequences of being fallen creatures is our failure to understand what is really important in life.”

Many believers are like the daughters of Zion whom Isaiah condemns; they go through life with many unnecessary burdens and focus on superfluous luxury that corrupts the heart.

Well, just as our last lesson had a condemnation for Judah in chapter 1 and a look into the future hope of the millennial kingdom in chapter 2, so in today's lesson chapter 3 condemns Judah and chapter 4 of Isaiah is looking not only to days of restoration which would follow the Babylonian captivity yet to come, but far beyond to the millennial kingdom we all await. It is remarkable how many times in the book of Isaiah the same sequence of events is covered, the events connected with the future judgment of Israel and the Kingdom Age when the Lord Jesus will reign over the earth.

Certainly, prophecy is a picture of Isaiah's day and was fulfilled in the past but this does not exhaust its meaning. Very likely these conditions will prevail again in the future and will bring down the wrath of God known as the Great Tribulation. There will be physical famine and a famine for leadership with rulers having the maturity level of children. People will clamor for leadership and willingly follow a charismatic Antichrist. But even in situations similar to that of Sodom, God will remember the righteous as He did in the time of Lot.

The blessed hope for all of this is in Isaiah 4:2. Here the Branch is introduced for the first time in Isaiah. It refers to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Branch – at His first coming, had “neither form nor comeliness that Israel should desire him”, the Scriptures say. After His return, however, He will not only be beautiful and glorious but also Israel's beauty and glory.

We know that both Jew and Gentile will survive the Tribulation and enter the millennial kingdom. The glory of God will be upon every house in the kingdom, not just in the temple. God is faithful to His remnant and the remnant left in Zion will become a center of blessing for the whole earth. The glory of the Lord that once was seen over the Tabernacle and sanctuary of old will be as a cloudy pillar over all the homes of the redeemed city, both as a glory and as a defense. Like Israel in the wilderness so long ago, the restored nation will be under Jehovah's gracious care when their hearts are turned back to Him. A new city will arise on Mount Zion, purified and protected by God.

We're going to hear a lot about the remnant and we'll meet this word again and again in Isaiah. So, let's examine it for just a moment.

The word remnant encompasses the ideas of sin, judgment, election, grace and glory. The prophets speak of a remnant from Israel and the nations in a fourfold sense:

1. **First, there is a remnant of Israel from its past history.** Regardless of how great the apostasy was, the Lord always retained a remnant, which was the channel through which He caused the blessings of His covenant to flow to Israel. This remnant feared the name of the Lord and continued to hope in His name. Remember when Elijah despaired that he was the only one left who loved the Lord and God said there are 7,000 who have not bent the knee to Baal? That's a remnant.

2. **Second, there is a remnant according to the election of grace during Israel's partial and temporary hardening and blindness today.** The Apostle Paul points this out in Romans 11. He says, "Did God reject His people? By no means! . . . At the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace." Every era in Israel's history has had such a remnant.

3. **Third, the word remnant is used for the nations that remain after their judgment at the Second Coming.** In Acts 15:13-18 James is speaking and says, "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described how God showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. As the prophets say, 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild and I will restore the remnant of men who seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord.'"

4. **Fourth, remnant is used time and again in connection with Israel's restoration.** In the day of Jacob's trouble, (the Great Tribulation) according to Zechariah, two of the three parts of Israel will be cut off, but a remnant will remain. That part will be called holy. It will be separated from all its former uncleanness and be wholly consecrated to the Lord.

Chapter 4 closes with the thought of a shelter and a refuge provided by the coming of the Messiah. Security will come to the nation Israel at last.

If all the Bible had to tell us was the wonderful hope of the future – the joys of the millennial kingdom – the rewards of our salvation, without the horror and gloom of the preceding prophecies of judgment, the prophecies of salvation would be glib and unconvincing indeed. It is the very real expectation of punishment and facing an angry God that makes us truly appreciate the grace and forgiveness that our loving heavenly Father extends to us through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, who paid for our salvation through His blood on the cross.

Let's close in prayer. Would you bow with me please?

Lord, if there is anyone here today that does not know the peace and joy of full forgiveness through your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, prompt them with the Holy Spirit today to talk to their leader or to me that we might have the precious joy of sharing the good news of your love with them. Let us be mindful of what we've studied this week, careful that our priority is on godliness and purity in appearance not on adornments of pride and vanity. We love you, Lord; we are your servants. Protect us as we claim the righteousness of the Jesus as our outer cloak. Dismiss us in your peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.