

Lesson 22 Lecture
Isaiah 51:1-52:12
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The Bible is a great place to find answers to life. However, I believe the answers mean more if we know what the questions are. For example, God is love - that's a wonderful answer, or truth, but think about the richness of that answer when you hear, "What character trait of God's is displayed when His only begotten Son Jesus died on a cross as a sacrifice for yours and my sins?" Therefore, thinking of questions to ask should help us better appreciate and believe the answers. I came up with four questions from our reading. They are:

- Is anyone awake?
- What's in the cup?
- What is God's will?
- What is meant by believing?

So, let's start with the first question, "Is anyone awake?" The title to this lesson, "Awake, Awake" is appropriate as this phrase is used three times (two coming from God) in our reading. Awake, Awake is a command. There are actual multiple commands from the LORD in our reading. Let's take a look at them:

- Listen or Listen to Me (52:8; 51:1,4)
- Hear me (51:7)
- Hear this (51:21)

What's Isaiah telling us from the LORD in these commands? Pay attention! We are relentlessly confronted with distractions in *all* aspects of our lives. I believe none of these distractions are by accident. I believe these commands the LORD is instructing Isaiah to write down are out of His awareness of how easily distracted we can become - especially spiritually. We can subtly fall into a sleepy unawareness of comfort-driven distractions that create unnecessary separation, or distance, from the beauty and wonder of our relationship with God.

In these commands, God is proverbially banging His fist on the table telling us to wake up and listen to Him and learn of the far better and abundant life He promises and makes available to every one of His children. He graciously commands and directs us to do the following in our reading.

- Rise up (51:17; 52:2)
- Shake off your dust (52:2)
- Depart, depart, go out from there! (52:11)
- Lift up your eyes to the heavens; Look at the earth beneath (51:6)
- Free yourself from the chains on your neck (52:2)
- Clothe yourself with strength (52:1)

I admittedly arranged these in a progressive order to give each of us a path that the LORD makes available to us should we choose to obey His command to awaken. Again, what He's

telling us to wake up from, is/are the portion(s) of our faith lives that have *either* taken the sleepy path of ease and comfort or submitting to the crippling fear from believing Satan's lies about the liberating truth of what happened at the cross. For those of you who think it's too late for you to awaken because you're too advanced in years, remember Moses didn't get really rolling in his ministry until he was 80.

Regardless of our age, each of us, from time-to-time, should ask God to make us aware of what aspects of our lives need to wake up. For most of us who are honest with our assessment in our walks with Christ, we should be at least willing to confess there is at least room for improvement. I say this with no condemnation in mind. It's just an honest take that each of us – especially me – can devote more of our time to the development of our relationship with God via worshipping Him, studying His Word, and serving Him according to His will. Just your faithfulness to staying with this Bible study is a testimony that you're, at least, not completely asleep.

King David is described in Scripture as a friend of God. While he did great things for, and in the name of the LORD, we all know he was far less than perfect. However, I'm convinced one of the reasons David was awarded this title as a friend of God was his genuineness before the LORD. He understood the risks of "falling asleep" on the LORD, so he was honest in his desire to be awakened when he wrote in Psalm 139:23-24, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*"

Sin separates us from God. Yes, all of our sins have been forgiven by our confession of faith in Jesus. However, to receive the full capacity of freedom that comes with this forgiveness, we must regularly ask God, as David did, to search our hearts to dig out perhaps those deeply rooted or subtle sins. This would be something like ongoing bitterness that leads to the absence of forgiving a wrong that was committed against us. Asking God to search our hearts can be a scary place to go for some of us. Some of the things we may be fearful that God might find are buried deep, and they're wrapped in a lot of pain and, possibly, shame. Please let me offer you some comfort as a response to your fears of God "finding out" about what darkness may lie in yours and my hearts and minds.

- **The LORD already knows about them.** Daniel 2:22: "He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what *is* in the darkness, and light dwells with Him."
- **If you take ownership of and confess it/them, He will immediately forgive it.** 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- **Remember the heart and mindset of Jesus.** Matthew 11:29-30: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Loved ones, God sent Jesus to the cross to tear down the veil that was separating us from Him. Give yourself permission to think about, ponder, meditate, and dwell on this clear and foundational Biblical truth. My hope is if you do this, you will gain a deeper appreciation of the desire that the LORD has for each of us to wake up and grow in our relationship with Him. He is

in complete control of our lives, and everything He is doing is designed for our goodness and to give us a hope. Our painful circumstances may not appear to validate this claim, but God is in this with us more-so for the long game – from an eternal perspective. This doesn't mean He won't provide relief now, but if He was willing to send His only begotten Son to the cross to accomplish an eternal good purpose, we should at least attempt to accept that our sufferings are somehow, but assuredly, doing the same. We may not be able to see that now, but that is the mystery of faith. *A higher level of faith is learning to trust through what we **don't** know because we're willing to trust in Who we **do** know.*

In the first 8 verses of chapter 51 God is imploring the Nation of Israel to listen and hear Him as well to lift their eyes to the heavens. In verse 9, though, the people cry out to God giving homage to the title of our lesson, "Awake, awake!" There are times in life, perhaps you're going through one now, where it feels like God is asleep. Maybe you're witnessing corrupt and immoral people prospering and seemingly getting away with their sins while you're struggling to live in a manner that is pleasing to God. Firstly, Psalm 121:4 confirms that God is not asleep, "*Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*" Perhaps that is or isn't helpful. It may not be helpful because if He's not asleep, why isn't He stepping in as our God and Savior? Exodus 3:7 confirms God is clearly seeing what is going on in your life, "*And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows."*" By your faith in Christ, you are an adopted child of God, so you can be sure that God is seeing your oppression.

Again, this may not be helpful because from your pain or exhaustion, you're thinking, "God, if You can truly see my oppression, why aren't You doing something about it?" Unfortunately, I don't have a clear answer for you. I will share with you what has helped me to offset this apparent disconnect between God being awake and caring about me, and Him not taking the action I believe He should take that lines up with my understanding of His character and Word. I believe, according to His Word:

- God is an infinite and eternal – He covers a much greater span of time than my life and yours.
- He is omniscient – He sees everything – far more than we can see.
- Isaiah will later tell us in chapter 55:8-9, "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Summarizing the above, God is not only looking at *our current* circumstances, but also, He is seeing how they interact with the entirety of not only our existence, but also the existence of others. He is seeing a much bigger picture than we can comprehend. However, these truths by themselves are not enough, at least for me, to get comfortable with God not being the Deliverer I'm looking for in my pain. This is why I go to the cross – it is there I find the heart of God. I find the fulfillment of Jeremiah 29:11, "*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*"

That's what we're looking for in our suffering right? Does God care? Does He really love me? My belief in the immensity of the gesture of God the Son **choosing** to leave the glory and

comfort of His throne in heaven, humble Himself to become a human, live a sinless life in a world that *He created* but has been ravaged and degraded by the sins of the very people He created, and then willingly surrender Himself to false accusations, torture, and murder – all on *my* behalf – paying the price for *my* sins.... that’s enough for me to overwhelm my current painful circumstances. That being said, I’m not, for one second, telling you this is an easy place to go. However, I’m certain it is a place of truth.

The next question I had from our reading was, “What’s in the cup?” In verse 17, we read about the people of Jerusalem who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of His wrath – it would eventually make them stagger. For a period of time that was dictated to them solely by their disobedience to God’s commandments, the Nation of Israel was subjected to God’s wrath. I looked up what is God’s wrath in Google, and I got a surprisingly solid response, “*The wrath of God is His holy, righteous, and settled opposition to sin and evil, a necessary expression of His perfect justice and holiness, not merely human-like uncontrolled anger; it’s seen as a judgment against ungodliness, revealed through suffering, societal decay, and ultimately a final judgment.*”

In verse 22, we read, “*I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again.*” Firstly, as I read these two verses, unlike a human being whose rage and wrath can so often become completely out of control, I read of a God who is in *complete* control of His wrath. As noted earlier, wrath is the righteous response to His promise for judgment on sin. He must judge unrighteousness to be a clear testimony, or proof, that He is righteous. Said another way, God needs to walk His talk for Him to be known as a righteous God.

God takes no joy in His wrath. I can say this with total confidence as the Scriptures clearly say He takes no joy in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), and He wants *everyone* to turn to Him and repent (2 Peter 3:9). It is at this juncture of the wrath of God conversation that we must dig deep, as much as our finite hearts and minds will allow us, into God’s character. If we’re honest with ourselves, we can at least understand the concept of punishment, or discipline, for bad behavior. However, we read of God’s grace in verse 22 where there will come an end to His wrath, and He will take it out of the hand of His children. The question I have, and one I encourage each of you to ask, is what did He do with that goblet of wrath? I believe the answer is He gave it to His Son on the cross.

In Luke 22:42, when Jesus asked His Father if it be His will to take the cup away from Him, I believe it’s quite possible that cup He was referring to was His Father’s goblet of wrath. Submitting to His Father’s response that it was His will for His Son to drink from it, Jesus drank *all* of it for the believer. This is another way to explain propitiation. In speaking of Jesus, 1 John 2:2 gloriously proclaims, “*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*” Propitiation is the act of appeasing or satisfying God’s wrath against sin through a sacrificial offering. My concluding point on this discussion of God’s wrath is by those who confess their faith in Jesus, He is the fulfillment of the promise in verse 22, “*I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath.*”

The third question is a big one, “What’s God’s will?” The word “will” is used 34 times in our reading’s 35 verses. There’s an old saying that goes, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way.” There’s a lesser-known saying that says, “Where there’s a will.....I want to be in it!” There’s a certainty to the word “will” – especially when it comes from God. Verses 13, 15, and 16 from chapter 51 remind us that if God, as our Maker, stretches out the heavens, lays the foundations of the earth, and stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – there’s a certainty to all of these acts of His “will” that will happen. I hope you thought of what I did when Isaiah mentioned that the LORD stirs up the sea and makes the wave roar. Do you remember what Jesus did when the disciples thought they were going to die on the stormy seas of Galilee? He commanded them to be still. This scene is a testimony to Jesus being a member of the triune Godhead. If God can stir the seas, He can calm them as well. Do you recall the question the disciples had when witnessing Jesus’ power, “*What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!*”

For those of you who are going through a storm right now, I’m certain you’re praying for the LORD to display such power in your circumstances. He still has that power because He does not change. If He has not yet flexed His Almighty to deliver you, I can relate to such frustration. I know this may sound wrong – maybe even blasphemous, but I do believe that sometimes having faith in Jesus is a harder life. The reason I say this is when we read of His delivering power in verses like these, but we don’t see it showing up in our painful circumstances. In our suffering, we can easily develop a sense of abandonment or concluding God doesn’t care. I know this because I’ve been there. Furthermore, the enemy is no doubt flooding you with thoughts that the reason you’re going through what you are is due to punishment for your sins. On that accusation, I can confidently confirm that accusation is a lie. The punishment for your sins – every single one of them – was taken by Jesus on the cross. There is neither no more punishment nor condemnation for the believer in Jesus Christ.

Having felt like being abandoned and not cared for in my stormy circumstances, the LORD showed me the vital importance of trusting in not only the foundations of His character, but also to develop, as I mentioned earlier, an eternal perspective. Therefore, if He is in control of all my circumstances, and I believe He is, then whatever pain I’m experiencing now is happening for an eternal developmental reason with a good and loving purpose. This is why I have made Romans 8:18 one of my key life verses, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*” My heart goes out to each of you who are on the stormy seas. While it’s taken me many years to arrive at this perspective, I have no doubt it’s true – not just for me, but for every person who places their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

The final question I came up with from our reading is, “What is meant by believing?” For those of you who have been listening to me all these years, you’ve likely heard me repeatedly emphasize that a foundational focus on each of our faiths must be on God’s character. Believing is only the beginning of faith. A complete faith involves trusting. I won’t speak for any of you, but, for me, there is a path to walk from believing to trusting. Depending on the person, this path can be a short one, or, if you’re like me, a life-long one. I’m not the most trusting person. That comes from a lifetime of committing enough mistakes and sins to rise up to the top of the Himalayas to not trust myself. Additionally, I’ve had many unfortunate experiences with other people not being trustworthy. I would imagine this is true for most of you as well.

The strange thing for me is asking me to *believe* in God is not at all a reach. The evidence is overwhelming, to me, that God exists and is real. However, *trusting* in Him is a whole different ballgame for an untrusting person like yours truly. For me, the concept of truly trusting demands a complete surrendering and total abandoning of control. This is the pinnacle, or peak, of vulnerability. The only hope for someone like me to arrive at such a place is to have zero doubt over the character of the person who I'm being asked to trust. This is why I continue to emphasize God's trustworthy character in most, if not all, of my lectures and teaching. *Your faith journey will only go as far as your willingness to trust God and release the entirety of your life to Him.*

I want to pull out a couple of verses from our reading that speak to the provisional, protective, and loving character of God for His children that I am convicted of being necessary components of taking us from believing to trusting. Specific to this lesson His character-defining actions are for Israel. Again, and importantly for us, by faith, we are adopted children of the Lord's. Therefore, listen to these descriptives of God's character and know that they apply to each of you who have confessed Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Let's start with verse 51:3, "*The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.*" While this is a prophetic verse for Israel that was partially fulfilled in 20th century when Israel became a nation again, the fullness of these acts of His will be realized in the Millennium.

What we, as believers in His only begotten Son should take away are the LORD'S caring, redemptive, and fruit producing words to those He loves. We read He will comfort and have compassion. This is supported by Psalm 86:15, "*But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.*" The 23rd Psalm is a beautiful message of God's comforting ways.

As a result of His comforting, compassionate, and redeeming ways, this produces in the believer joy, gladness, thanksgiving. and the sound of singing. Perhaps when you hear these words you think of the fruits of the Spirit as presented in Galatians 5:22-23 which are, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*" When we choose, and I cannot emphasize enough that it *is* a choice, to receive the truth of God's loving, compassionate, and comforting character, we can trade in those crippling emotions and experiences for the fruits of the Spirit. Doesn't that sound like a better way to live?

Let's take a look at another verse that speaks the truth regarding God's character. Isaiah 51:13, "*that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor?*" This may seem like an odd verse to choose for God's character but let me explain. Firstly, Isaiah reminds us that the God we love and serve is THE Creator. He is God Almighty, and He is all powerful – nothing can match God's power. Isaiah speaks of the "*constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor who is bent on destruction.*" What's the key issue in this statement? Living in fear. Isaiah focuses the attention of the fear of the oppressor, and I believe he is

referring to Satan. For those of us who live in fear, it's a horrible way to live. From fear springs corrosive emotions like pride, anger, depression, and many other things that, at a minimum, limit our ability to live the abundant life God promises and makes available to His children.

Our reading not only speaks to our terror of the wrath of the oppressor, but it also notes being fearful of people. Verse 51:7b exhorts us, "*Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults.*" Verse 51:12b points out, "*Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass.*" Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, "*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" The fear of God that Jesus is referring to in this verse is a fear of reverence and awe - not to be afraid of God. Let's think this through. Why would God send His only begotten Son to Earth to be the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins to tear down the veil that separated us from Him, so we could be afraid of Him? Does that make any sense? The writer of Hebrews rejected this idea of being afraid of God when He implored the believer to, "*Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*" (Hebrews 4:16).

In conclusion, I've attempted to answer the following questions:

- Is anyone awake?
- What's in the cup?
- What is God's will?
- What is meant by believing?

I want to close with something that struck me from verse 51: 6 which reads, "*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.*" If you read this verse a few times, I believe you will conclude that so much of our lives is fleeting. Furthermore, things are changing so fast, that it's getting more challenging to fully appreciate them before something replaces them. What, or better said, "Who," never changes is God. I find a peace and comfort in the permanency of the LORD.

Maybe it's just age, but I'm finding God's immutability, or inability to change, more and more important. He is someone I can count on to be who He is all the time and no matter what. Now, candidly, I'll be the first one to raise my hand when I don't understand all my circumstances - especially the more painful ones - and wonder where God is in them. Perhaps, again due to age and fatigue, I'm slowly surrendering the folly that I'm in control of anything in my life other than my choices to respond to it and live it.

Verse 51:6 confirms that the things of this life - this moment in eternity we've been granted by His grace - are wearing out like a garment. I find comfort that God's salvation will last forever and His righteousness will never fail. It's that permanency of His upon my life that overwhelms the variability of how I choose to live it. That is God's grace - my feeble and flawed attempts to be holy and do what right aren't what bring me peace. Psalm 73:26 comforts me when I hear, "My flesh and my heart fail; *but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*" This is why we so desperately need to be in the Bible - to remind us there is one thing in life that never changes - the truth of God's permanent love for us.

Returning to my opening comments about when answers become more meaningful and believable when we ask the right question. The answer is “Yes.” What’s the question? “Does God love me?” As the song goes, “Yes, Jesus loves me, for the Bible tells me so.” LORD, help us to remember the permanency of this answer as you tell us in, Isaiah in 40:8, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”