

“AWAKE! AWAKE!”
Isaiah 51:1 – 52:12

Song – “Our God Reigns”

In the first half of Isaiah we studied the “woes” . . . the doom and gloom of coming chastisement and captivity for God’s idolatrous people and the warnings of disaster for the surrounding nations. Through all of it was a call to repentance.

In chapter 40, however, there was a change looking forward to the future of Israel – a return to the land, and the promise of a Savior, the Messiah.

As Lin reminded us last week in chapters 42-53 we have four of what are called “Servant Songs” of the book of Isaiah.

1st Song – The Chosen Servant (42:1-4)

2nd Song – The Mission of the Servant (49:1-6)

3rd Song – The Steadfast Obedient Servant (50:4-9)

4th Song – The Suffering Servant (52:13-53:12)

In chapters 49 – 50 there was:

- A call to Servanthood – the plan of God
- A commission to bring salvation – the mind of God
- A covenant of reconciliation – the heart of God
- A challenge not to lose hope – the compassion of God
- A comfort in obedience – the wisdom of God, and a
- A caution about light – the power of God.

There was a message to the unbelievers of the world; a message to all who feel forsaken and forgotten; a message to those who were in bondage to sin and death, and the specific mission to the human race to warn each person to fear the Lord and obey the Savior.

In Isaiah 51 we are immediately struck by the word “listen.” Who is his audience? It is those who pursue righteousness. The verb means to steadfastly, earnestly seek Him. However, we do not stop at just finding Him, but to become like Him, so that we may stand firmly in His presence. What is this righteousness we are to pursue? We certainly do not obtain it by our own actions, but by the name whereby He shall be called, “the Lord our Righteousness.” Jeremiah 23:6. The audience, therefore, is the remnant of Israel, and to all who are determined and professing seekers of God.

Isaiah invites us to look at our past. We should never forget our past and our inheritance. Do you and I remember what our roots are and the blessings of His transforming power? Isaiah asks us to think back to Abraham and Sarah. They were old and barren and might as well have been inanimate rocks in the quarry, but our great God took an impossible situation (from an earthly prospective) and created a great nation from Abraham and Sarah. If God could do that for them, what can He do for you and me?

Verse 3 is a personal treasure to me. “The Lord will comfort Zion!” What a promise . . . deliverance from its ruins much like He had taken a barren womb and produced a nation. God has promised me a new future. That’s a comfort because it’s not just reassurance or emotional support, but its complete spiritual restoration to the point of unexpected blessings. He has promised to pluck me from the curse of sin that began in Eden and bring me into a place where I will be full of joy, thanksgiving and singing. It’s a promise to cause great rejoicing in all of us! May I never forget what God has done for me!

John Piper in his book, *GO IS THE GOSPEL*, states that, “One of the reasons many Christians seem to have no thrill being forgiven through the gospel is that they have not been broken-hearted over their sins. They have not despaired and they have not wrestled with warranted self-loathing. They have not despaired and they have not wrestled with warranted self-loathing. They have not grieved over their sin because of its moral repugnance, but have grieved only because of guilt feelings and threats of hell.” I, too, must confess that at times I have been too complacent in what I truly have.

As we move to verse 4, we begin to see the developing revelation of the person and work of the Servant, Jesus Christ.

God is addressing, “my people”, and promising us His law and justice to rule. The word “Law” can muster positive and negative feelings in our heart. But God’s intent in giving us the Law is to restore us to a harmonious relationship with Him, with ourselves, and with others. God’s Law is really the Word in our hearts. God earnestly desires to be personal. We belong to Him. We see over the next two or three verses the following declarations:

My people, My nation, My justice, My righteousness, My arm, My salvation. God wishes us to look ahead to all that He has to offer.

Calling us to look deeply inward, Isaiah uses the imperative tense, “Do not fear the reproach or reviling of men.” Why would Isaiah state this so emphatically? Because, if you and I know and trust the God of righteousness, then we have nothing to fear. We must not slip quickly over the word know. To know connotes a truly intimate union with the righteous God and not just conforming and going through the motions. Karen Goodman in her book, YOU’RE STILL HERE GOD, observes “fearing who God is, is not a lecture but a lab.” God must be the center of our hearts. The taunts of men may assail us, but in the future there will be an end. These men will not endure, but righteousness and salvation lasts forever to all generations.

Continuing in words of comfort and assurance in vs. 9-16, Isaiah writes, “Awake, awake!” Remember the past.

It was God who conquered Egypt and had power over the Canaanite and Egyptians gods, and He who divided the deep waters of the sea to provide deliverance for His people.

Isaiah 51:11 “The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” Isn’t that a beautiful verse? I love Amy Carmichael’s thought, “Sorrow is one of the things lent, not given. A thing that is lent may be taken away; a thing that is given is not taken away. Joy is given, sorrow is lent . . . then it will be taken away and everlasting joy will be our Father’s gift to us, and the Lord will wipe away all the tears from our faces.”

We know what ransom is – paying the price for another’s release. Certainly God was willing to pay the price for His chosen people, the Jews, and also, as we learned in last week’s lesson, for we Gentiles too. Isaiah 49:6 “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” Jesus’ paid the price . . . His shed blood on the cross to free us from the captivity of sin.

“I, even I, am He who comforts you.” (Isaiah 51:12) You need not live in fear of your enemies. God is everlasting and omnipotent. If God is all that and more, why fear anything that opposes you. God will not allow us to be shackled by death or

hunger. His is our portion, our food, our power, the words of our mouth, and our Creator. I must always fear God more than men.

In verses 17-23 Isaiah calls for action. Awake! Rouse yourself!!! True, Israel has a future glory, but the sad present state of the nation was that she'd sunk into a stupor of unrighteousness and idolatry. For that she would drink a cup of God's wrath – and drink of it so deeply it would be like a woman in a drunken stupor without children to help her. That wrath came in the form of captivity, calamity, ruin and destruction, famine and sword. But the enemies would not always have the upper hand. One day that wrath would be turned back on the tormentors; those who had “walked all over them.” In ancient days, the victorious armies would actually force the vanquished to stoop or lie down on the ground and actually walk over them.

We are victorious in Jesus Christ. We'll not taste the cup of wrath because of His sacrifice. But we still face our own enemies of fear, covetousness, jealousy, rage, ego, pride. Have we walked over them and made them submit? We have the power to do just that through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit within us!

Jerusalem did not have any leaders to wake up the people. The United States suffers from a paucity of leaders as well. We are, as a whole, in a moral, physical, economic, and spiritual stupor. We have fallen victim to an absolute hunger for corporal

things to save us. I can assure you that there is not any government program that can rescue us. God's care can move us in the right path to a more thriving nation, but we must AWAKE, and the church must lead the way. We must be servants to one and all. This is the highest form of leadership.

In chapter 52, Jerusalem was told not only to awake but "put on your garments of splendor." Many commentators believe that the Jerusalem of verses 1 and 2 refers to the ultimate spiritual renewal of Jerusalem in the Millennium. Awake, like a bride, with beautiful new clothes laid out for her. Wow! Imagine being asleep in a drunken stupor, clothed with filthy rags and waking up with garments of splendor and beauty. Those "garments" were not just the daily dress of the day, but rather a reference to the priestly garments of Aaron. These garments featured fine fabric, colorful design, precious metals and gems, and very specialized workmanship. As the high priest represented the Israelites when he entered the Tabernacle, he was set apart and responsible for bearing the iniquity of the Israelites. This required holiness.

Certainly we could apply the metaphor of clothing to mean being what you were intended to be; that is, set apart to demonstrate the power of God through His holiness in our lives.

The fact was, however, that the Jerusalem of old was often polluted, even after the return of the exiles from Babylon captivity.

It was a generation before the walls and Temple would be restored . . . Jerusalem became a buffer state between Syria and Egypt. Antiochus seized the Temple and sacrificed a pig on the holy altar and forbade the reading of the Torah. Under despotic rulers Jerusalem was once again destroyed with 30,000 of its citizens deported, a million put to death, and 30,000 young men crucified and hung on the walls of the city.

But in the Messiah's kingdom, Jerusalem will arise from the dust; "rise up, set enthroned, O Jerusalem." No more will they be captives with chains on their neck.

Verse 3 says, "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." How can I be released from my captivity? What does redemption mean? It literally means release from bondage, often with a ransom. I mentioned that earlier. Here's a great illustration I found.

The slave market is our present world system that is not built on the foundation of God's principles. The slave master is Satan seeking whom he may devour. The slaves are humanity, you and me! The problem is sin. The highest bidder for our sin is Jesus Christ's death on the cross. One commentary puts it this way: "The community of God is open to all because God refuses even a penny of our self-righteous moral currency."

Israel was deceived by promises of a better life in Egypt in the past. More recently, the northern tribes were captured by the Assyrians and the south conquered by the Babylonians.

In verses 7-10 of Isaiah 52, we are told “how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.” If we look closely at the word beautiful, it’s not about being physically beautiful, but about being timely. How timely are the feet of those messengers who bring good tidings or good news. In ancient times, a messenger would declare from a high place in the city that the conflict or war was ended and the enemy defeated. They were victorious. Our Servant, Jesus Christ, wants each one of us to give the good news that the victory has been won!

Who brought the good tidings to you? In my case, it was my mother. She modeled Christ for me and spoke of Him often in my early years, as well as my defiant years. I remember coming home very late one night or very early depending on how you look at it. I jumped under the covers being as quiet as I could possibly be. My Mom knew I was pretending to be asleep, but did not awaken me or let me have it. Instead, she put her hand on my shoulder and prayed for me and left the room. The other “beautiful feet” were my Sunday school teachers and pastors that took a special interest in me. You see, Jesus would not have been known to me if no one had told me.

We are constantly subjected to bad news. Take any given broadcast or newspaper and recount the horror. Just recently locally three people were killed by a 20-year-old man; on the national level we have high unemployment, increasing national debt, an utter lack of government transparency, traffic deaths increasing by 5%, drug overdoses, and the probable addiction to Wiccan chaplains in the prisons for those who worship nature and witchcraft. Internationally, the conflicts go on in Syria and Afghanistan, genocide in African nations, threats of nuclear holocaust by the North Koreans, and industrial espionage by the Chinese who provide 40% of our dollars. Now add at a personal level all the conflicts and suffering we experience. On a daily basis I see patients suffering from excessive anxiety, loss of loved ones, terrible job situations, financial crisis, divorce, ongoing loveless marriages, health crises, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, loneliness, paralyzing depression, infidelity and the loss of any hope. This world needs some Good News! Our God is the God of Hope for this hurting world.

Imagine the Babylonian captives. Talk about the depth of despair. In Psalm 137:1-4 in the NIV translation, it says: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded song of joy; they

said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing one of the songs of Zion while in a foreign land?”

Indeed, how can we sing when we are in a world in which we do not have citizenship? The answer is in verses 8-10. “Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.”

They will see with their own eyes:

Acts 1:11 “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Zechariah 14:4 “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. . . . vs. 9 The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.”

His grand and glorious Second Coming – all will see. Ah, but first Isaiah is going to speak of his First Coming – the Suffering Servant. That’s next week’s lesson.

Both of the chapters we've had in this week's lesson summarize our current plight. We're under judgment for our sins; man needs deliverance from his deserved punishment; prophets have been sent to announce the coming Savior and the church has been sent to announce the good news – He has come! Finally, both Jew and Gentile can be delivered from bondage to a homeland in heaven.

As verses 11-12 close our lesson, however, the Jews are captive in Babylon. "Depart! Depart! Go out of there! . . . The God of Israel will be your rear guard." It's time for action.

What is your Babylon? What holds you captive? Whatever it is, let it go! Make a decision, but do not do it in haste. Be pure in heart as you and I enter His courts. He loves us and wants us to be set apart because we are carrying the vessels of the Lord. The returning Jews were to take with them the vessels that had been stolen by Nebuchadnezzar before he destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. We are now temples of the Holy Spirit. God is giving us a call to holiness.

Why are we drawn to holiness? R. C. Sproul states, and I agree, "It is dangerous to assume because a man is drawn to holiness in his study that he is truly a holy man. I am sure that the reason that I have a deep hunger to learn of the holiness of God is precisely because I am not holy."

I take great comfort in knowing that God is behind me and in front of me as I seek to know him more intimately.

Song –

Let's close in prayer. Our precious God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We give you praise for taking us out of captivity by your ransom. Thank You for making us a citizen of heaven and not of this world. In a world filled with bad news, we have good news. I am convicted, Lord, that I must have a greater heart for the lost and hearting. Help me see with spiritual eyes and hear with spiritual ears and feel with a spiritual heart the intense need of an "Eternal Savior" in my life as well as in the lives of those you put before me. Amen.