

"All Mankind Will Bow Before Me"
Isaiah 65:17 – 66:24
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Last September we set sail into what seemed like a wide ocean of Scripture as we looked forward to navigating 66 chapters of Isaiah – a mini-Bible, if you will. In my opening lecture, I gave you a brief synopsis of Bible history leading up through the United Kingdom. Let me refresh your memory a little about the Divided Kingdom:

In the northern kingdom of Israel, composed of ten tribes, for a period covering over 200 years, there were 19 kings and not one of them walked with God. But God sent prophet after prophet – faithful men like Elijah, Elisha and Amos. They told the truth; they warned of God's chastisement to come. God planned to bring Assyria in as an instrument of judgment against their wickedness, and in 722. B.C. that took place. The northern kingdom was deported and never again resumed power as a nation. Often you hear of the "ten lost tribes of Israel."

Meanwhile in the southern kingdom, composed of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, there were 20 monarchs – and of those 8 were considered "good" kings. They had a heart for God.

Isaiah lived and ministered there among both types – the good as well as the evil. Uzziah was the 5th good king, Jotham the 6th good king, Ahaz was an evil king and Hezekiah was the 7th good king, but Manasseh, his son, was evil.

While the "good" kings were able to delay the judgment of God, the prophets warned that Babylon would come and take Judah captive for a period of 70 years. Then they would be restored to the land. Some of the prophets we read in the Old Testament ministered directly to what is called the restored kingdom – the time when the people returned from that Babylonian captivity.

While God intended to chastise His people to bring them back into a holy relationship with Himself, He did not intend to let the surrounding nations go unpunished for what they contributed to the erosion of godliness.

Isaiah opened in chapters 1-12 with judgment against Judah. In chapters 13-23 is the judgment was against the surrounding nations. Isaiah revealed what God intended to do to them. It was both a foretelling of future events and a source of hope for those feeling the "smarting rod of God" as Thomas Brooks termed it.

The outline for the rest of Isaiah had chapters 24-27 describing the Day of the Lord; 28-35 describing a judgment and a blessing; 36-39 a historical narrative about Hezekiah; and then a shift to chapters 40-48 showing the supremacy of the Lord; 49-53

describing the servant of the Lord; and 54-66 revealing the future plan of the Lord. Throughout all of it was the call of the Lord . . . repent . . . return . . . rejoice . . . I have it under control.

Perhaps it's helpful if we remember the difference between a priest and a prophet.

Priests were people's representatives to God, while prophets were God's representatives to people. If the Hebrews wanted God to forgive their sins, they called out to Him through a priest who offered prayers and sacrifices on their behalf. But if God desired to communicate with His people, He spoke through a prophet.

The prophets' ministry was both forthtelling and foretelling. Prophets would tell forth God's message to the people, firmly revealing to them the truth they needed to hear. They would also foretell the future, predicting God's judgments as well as His hopeful plans for tomorrow. And how did you know if he was a true prophet? The test was 100 percent accuracy according to Deuteronomy 18:20-22.

The prophet's primary messages concerned human sin and God's righteousness. These two themes weave their way through all the prophetic books, as do two others – the people's need to repent and the blessing God would give if they did. The prophets weren't always proclaiming doom and gloom. Shimmering like silken threads were God's hopeful promises that if the people returned to Him, He would forgive their sins and comfort them. That's what I said to you back in September.

Perhaps in hearing those words again as we draw to a close of our study of Isaiah, they take on some new perspective and meaning. When you study prophets, the whole subject of prophecy comes to our attention. As I've shared with you before, I believe the Bible teaches that after Christ's death as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) that purchased our salvation with His blood by fully atoning for sin; and after His resurrection and ascension and the birth of the church at Pentecost, the time of the Gentiles was at hand. Jerusalem would no longer be the center of true faith but with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, every Christian would become a living stone to build the church universal throughout the world as the gospel spread.

One day, however, and maybe very soon, the church will be raptured (caught up to meet the Lord in the air) and then a terrible time of tribulation (Daniel says it will last seven years) will begin. At the end of that time Christ will come again, defeat the Antichrist, judge the nations, and set up a millennial (that means 1,000 years) kingdom on earth during which time there will be total peace and prosperity with the Lord Jesus reigning from Jerusalem. Our lesson this week describes some of that time.

People will live long lives (vs. 20); they will be blessed with prosperity (vs. 21-22); the wolf and the lamb will feed together (vs.25), and the world will come to

Jerusalem to pay tribute to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. At the end of the millennium, however, Satan who has been bound for this period, will be let loose for a season and after a final battle of Armageddon, God will enter into the Great White Throne judgment. Whoever does not have his name in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into hell for eternity. The earth will be destroyed by fire and God will establish a new heaven and a new earth as described where our lesson started this week (Isaiah 65:17).

Now certainly we did not get all of that out of the book of Isaiah. That's why we study the Bible year after year. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Thessalonians, Revelation . . . it all fits together for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Isaiah was privileged to have not only the personal commission from God Himself in chapter 6 – “Who will go? Here I am, send me!” – but also the privilege and responsibility of being given the telescope to see the future glory of the land and Zion across the ocean of time . . . the year of the Lord's favor. Isaiah 66: 8-13 reminds us God is not finished with the Jews or Jerusalem. Vs. 8 asks, “Can a country be born in a day or a nation brought forth in a moment?” The answer is yes – The present-day nation of Israel was established May 14, 1948 and God says His plan is to extend peace like a river to Jerusalem and comfort her. We're to pray for the peace of Jerusalem because we're praying for the Second Coming.

Our questions asked us to summarize lesson 30 as to:

What will be created new by God? A new heaven and earth.

What will be characteristic of the millennial kingdom of God? Peace, prosperity, long life, and even the animal kingdom at peace.

What will be certain for the enemies of God? They will be put to shame, repaid as they deserve, receive judgment of an everlasting worm and torment of fire. That's a reminder that hell is just as eternal as heaven is.

I want to close out our study of Isaiah with some personal applications. Isaiah is quoted more than any other prophet in the New Testament. By studying this book chapter by chapter, we've gone out into some pretty deep water and, no doubt, a time or two you've felt like you were in way over your head, I know I did. But we kept treading as fast as we could, bobbing up for a needed gasp of air when we came to a familiar verse, until at last we feel like we're safe inside the boat. We know God is at the helm and through Isaiah's telescope we, too, have a firm view of the future horizon in sight.

The applications I want to leave you with have to do with anchors. You know that an anchor can hold you steady in the storm or it can hold you back if you're still dragging it when you should be underway with full sail. Let's look at some of those anchors we've found in Isaiah.

It's estimated that Isaiah was probably a teenager when he had his vision of the Lord (17-20 years old). Some of you may have come to the Lord early in life or, like me, not until you were in mid-life. And even though we probably didn't have the type of throne room experience Isaiah did, conversion still had the same elements for us.

- ◆ Conviction: "Woe is me . . . I am undone!" A sense of sinfulness before God's holiness. (6:5)
- ◆ Confession: "I am a man of unclean lips!" A broken and contrite heart is precious to the Lord. (6:5)
- ◆ Cleansing: "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (6:7)
- ◆ Consecration: "Here am I. Send me!" (6:8)
- ◆ Commission: "Go and tell the people." (6:9)

Probably in your zeal and enthusiasm of being a new Christian you stood like the watchman on the wall calling out the danger signals to all who would listen and to some who wouldn't. You wanted everyone to know the joy you'd found in salvation and the consequences for rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ. But hearts are hard and ears turn deaf and we come to recognize Isaiah 26:10 "Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the Lord."

So, the first dragging anchor we might drop is that of discouragement. While becoming a Christian is a matter of salvation – (remember "Christian's aren't perfect, just forgiven") . . . discipleship is a matter of becoming like Christ. It requires "a long obedience in the same direction" as author Eugene Peterson puts it.

I read about an advertisement where the devil was going to put his tools up for sale. On the date of the sale the tools were placed for public inspection, each being marked with its sale price. There were a treacherous lot of implements: Hatred, Envy, Jealousy, Doubt, Lying, Pride, and so on. Laid apart from the rest of the pile was a harmless-looking tool, well-worn, priced very high.

"The name of the tool?" asked one of the purchasers.

"Oh," said the adversary, "that's Discouragement."

"Why have you priced it so high?"

"Because it's more useful to me than the others. I can pry open and get inside a person's heart with that one, when I cannot get near him with other tools. Now once I get inside, I can make him do what I choose. It's a badly worn tool, because I use it on almost everyone since few people know it belongs to me."

The devil's price for Discouragement was so high, he never sold it. It's still his major tool, and he still uses it on God's people today. Are you dragging that anchor more often than you should? Pain, suffering, money worries, difficult relationships, job

insecurity, injustice . . . are any one of those a part of your life? We need a good dose of Isaiah 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Certainly, week after week as we've studied Isaiah, we were hit smack in the face with the second dragging anchor – the issue of pride. We've definitely learned by now that God hates pride. Isaiah 31:1 – "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in a multitude of their chariots and in the strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the holy one of Israel or seek help from the Lord."

Isaiah has challenged us to self-examination . . . How much do we rely on ourselves first, our friends second, and the Lord last? Do we follow Hezekiah's example of humility as he laid out the letter from Sennacherib before the Lord and waited for Him to deliver 185,000 dead Assyrians in the morning? Or, do we follow Hezekiah's example of pride after deliverance from a deadly boil and show the visiting Babylonians all in our storehouses? Pride acts without consulting God. We cut that anchor line when we heed Isaiah 48:17 "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 paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea."

The third anchor that may be dragging us down is being religious. In Isaiah's day it was out and out idolatry. Isaiah 29:13 "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is made up only of rules taught by men." Sound familiar in our day?

Isaiah chapter 58 – Day after day they seek me out, they seem eager to know my ways . . . they ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. They fast yet exploit their workers, quarrel and strike each other. Is this the kind of fast God has chosen? Again, we're confronted . . . What are we doing about the poor, the needy, or our own flesh and blood? And Isaiah reminded us . . . Honor the Lord's Day by not going your own way, but by delighting in the Lord.

Perhaps discouragement, pride or religiosity are not the anchors you have that drag down your Christian walk. Perhaps for you it's anger or being judgmental (lacking grace with others) or rebellion against what you know God wants you to do. I'm asking you today, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to cut those anchors loose.

Instead, we need anchors that will hold us firm through the storms of life. I offer you three to consider:

First Anchor, God's Savior and His Salvation – Listen to Isaiah . . .

1:18 "Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

64:6 "How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

7:14 "The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel."

9:6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

52:13 "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted." *God's Servant, Jesus Christ, would accomplish what we could not do for ourselves. He atoned for our sins.*

52:14 "His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness."

53:3 "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering"

53:5 "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed . . . the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

55:6 "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." *But there is more to the story . . .*

11:10 "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people." *That's his Second Coming.*

61:10 "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God; for he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."

Our anchor holds firm in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the security of our salvation.

Second Anchor, God's Sovereignty and His Serenity – Isaiah writes . . .

20:3 "Just as Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles." – *That's a reminder we humble ourselves to do whatever God asks of us in His sovereign plan. He is the potter and I am the clay.*

43:10-11 “. . . 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.”

43:13 “When I act, who can reverse it?”

44:6 “. . . I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no god.”

45:22 “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God and there is no other.”

46:10 “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”

48:9 “For my own name’s sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise, I hold it back from you so as not to cut you off.” *There is one Supreme God . . . sovereign yet personal, who gives us the peace beyond understanding.*

26:3 “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you.”

30:21 “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the way, walk in it.”

32:17 “The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.”

40:31 “Those who hope (wait) in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not faint.”

57:5 “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

The sovereign God Almighty is also a personal God. Through His Holy Spirit He lives in the believer today.

The third anchor is God’s Strength and Our Secure Future – Isaiah

25:8 “He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.”

26:19 “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake and up and shout for joy! Your dew is like the dew of the morning and the earth will give birth to her dead.”

35:10 "and 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."

49:15-16 "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget you, I will not forget you! See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

52:7 "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns!"

62:7 "You who call on the name of the Lord give yourselves no rest and give Him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of earth." *Why? – Again, because that means we're praying for the Second Coming.*

What wonderful, wonderful Scriptures we have in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 50:4 "The Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary." That's true, isn't it? It's been worth the commitment of time and effort for this year's Bible study. Isaiah's words speak to us today and our hearts leap with joy as we hear the Scriptures read. They do sustain the weary. Aren't we glad we stayed the course and reached the destination?

Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote a poem titled "The Winds of Fate." She writes: One ship sails east/one ship sails west, regardless of how the winds blow; it's the set of the sail—and not the gale, that determines the way that we go.

In the gale force winds that come at us in the struggles of life, we have those three firm anchors: God's Savior and His Salvation; God's Sovereignty and His Serenity; and God's Strength and Our Secure Future.

There's only one final Scripture to share . . . Isaiah 66:23 ". . . all mankind will come and bow down before me." *Lord, we will do that gladly.*

If you have never set your sail with a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, we ask you to come join us. Invite Him into your heart right now. Join the throng that will encircle His throne with praise and thanksgiving.

As God's people, we rejoice and say "Amen!"