

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

Isaiah Warns Against Relapse

Readings: *Isaiah 29:22-24; 27:2-13; 32:12-20; 33:2-24; 22:15-25*

Reflections:

- Isaiah continues to share words of hope and promise for God's people. "Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the Lord, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it." This image reminds the reader of the prophecy of Joseph from Genesis 49:22: "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall." The verses following this passage in Genesis outline how the vine was attacked but God protected it and blessed it. This image was familiar to Israel. It was an image of a vine that was loved and blessed by the gardener. The goal of the vine was to produce good wine, a symbol of blessing to all those who would draw near. This is why Isaiah goes on to write, "Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit." God's vision was for a people who would ultimately understand his heart and would carry his grace and mercy and truth into a broken world. Israel was chosen because of how humble and poor they were as slaves and an oppressed people. Yet, Israel was unable to remain humble before God and consistently failed to live out their mission of bringing God's light to the world. They were consistently living at odds with the very God who was trying to save them, "For this is a people without understanding; so their Maker has no compassion on them, and their Creator shows them no favor." Harsh words to accompany the harsh judgments they were experiencing.
- Isaiah 32:12-20 contains a powerful word of promise that is rich with meaning. "...the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest. Though hail flattens the forest and the city is leveled completely, how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free." Here we observe a number of significant truths.

- God is the God of humility. The place of blessing and transformation is the desert wilderness. It is here in the place of brokenness and weakness that God meets us most profoundly. He pours out his Spirit to transform our broken lives. It is in the wilderness God had met with Israel. It was in the wilderness where Jesus would one day retreat to meet with his father.
- As we submit to God in the desert he turns the desert into a fertile field, a fertile field that is transformed into a forest or an abundant jungle of life and growth. Here in the desert we discover and experience God's heart for true justice for the poor and what it means to live a life of true righteousness.
- Righteousness is not a moral perfection that is able to live up to a legalistic code of religious laws. Righteousness is a life devoted to love and serve others in need. Righteousness is not the moral perfection of Pharisees and Levites who passed by the hurting man in the ditch in Jesus' parable, "Who is my neighbor?" Righteousness is the lifestyle of the Samaritan who stopped to show compassion on the man who had been beaten and abused.
- It is this life of righteousness where we experience God's peace. As we live with this kind of peace the impact on our lives is amazing: quietness and confidence. Quietness of our spirit means we are at peace within our hearts. Confidence is how we approach our relationships. Being intimately connected to God's heart enables us to live lives of faith (confident trust in God) and lifestyles of faithfulness (demonstrating trustworthiness within our own relationships).
- As we live this kind of peace and righteousness within our relationships, our families and communities are transformed into places of deep security, rest and fruitfulness. Now this is all based on everyone within the home embracing God's ways. If someone does not choose to submit to God and his love, then they can be a source of division, pain and brokenness within the family or community. My righteousness cannot guarantee how others will respond.
- Isaiah 33:2-24 presents such a strong contrast between the vision of God and Israel. "The Lord is exalted for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. He will be the sure foundation for your times; a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear (humble submission) of the Lord is the key to this treasure." God's salvation rescues us from all of the problems and brokenness and enemies of our soul. God's wisdom for all of the choices we have to make in navigating our way through a broken world. God's knowledge is for all of our lack of understanding when faced with difficulties that overwhelm us. What is interesting is that there is no mention of God's love. God is later described as a ruler, not a father: "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King; it is he who will save us."
- The final treasure, God's grace and love, is finally revealed to us through Jesus as he introduces us to God as our father. Israel had so much offered to them and even the key

to access it (humble submission). It wasn't until Christ came that we fully have the heart of God, the full treasure chest.

- The contrast to Israel is so strong. "You conceive chaff; you give birth to straw...." Israel is not a community that embraces the treasures of God but a people who choose their own ways and as a result, only give birth to worthless straw and chaff.
- Isaiah 33 ends with a wonderful promise for a day when Zion is restored. As we will see, this restoration is not a physical city but rather a spiritual community who become the "new Jerusalem." "Look upon Zion, the city of our festivals (their annual celebrations reminding them of their exodus from Egypt); your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved, its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its ropes broken. (It is interesting that the image is of the tabernacle and not the temple. It suggests a humble portable dwelling, not a permanent majestic dwelling for God.) There the Lord will be our Mighty One. It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams....No one living in Zion will say, "I am ill," and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven." Praise God for Jesus!