

What's the Message – Lesson 70

We continue our study of the prophets with two more themes from the book of Isaiah.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Oh, Lord, we praise You, and thank You for Your great mercy, for You have called us to be a part of the Purified Remnant of which Isaiah spoke. Help us to understand that in addition to the privileges that accompany this membership, there are also important responsibilities that we must fulfill. Amen.

Teacher, today you have selected two themes from the last part of the book of Isaiah for us to consider in a little more detail. The first theme combines the justice of God for our disbelief, with the idea that in spite of God's punishment there will still be a purified remnant to carry out God's plan; and secondly, we will begin to see the theme of The Servant.

Yes, Dale, these are subjects that begin to take shape with the words of Isaiah. As we have seen, there has always been the clear statement that God demands and deserves our complete obedience, otherwise there will be punishment. But the idea that there will be a remnant, a purified remnant after the punishment, to tell God's plan of salvation is an idea that begins to take shape with this prophet.

We can see this begin to grow, as early as chapter 10, verses 21 and 22: *A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them shall return.* Throughout the 66 chapters of the book of Isaiah the prophet is blasting Israel with revelations of their disobedience, and the certainty that God will punish them for it. But he is also holding out the promise that God is forgiving. Recall these comforting words from chapter 40, the first two verses: *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.* And what do you read in chapter 54?

For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. . . . For the mountains may depart and the hills may be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

And chapter 60 begins with these familiar words: *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you, and His glory shall be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*

The prophet concludes with these words in chapter 66: *For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord.*

But this promise of God led to a self-destructing conceit, something that we will hear much more of from Jeremiah. In later years Israel saw itself as immune from additional punishment, for in their eyes they “were now the purified remnant,” and ultimately, therefore they could do anything they wanted. But God’s will and His ways, as Isaiah also tells us, are higher than our ways. Our faithfulness is not to be an occasional thing, but an abiding thing. And that leads us to our second theme, that of the Servant.

There is a series of references to this topic, a group of passages we call the Servant Poems. It is not an easy concept to grasp because it changes like a shadowy wisp. Sometimes it seems to point to the nation of Israel as a whole. Sometimes it seems to point to a selected group within Israel, the Purified Remnant. Sometimes it clearly points to an individual, the promised Messiah. Sometimes it

might even imply all three of these. But from whatever viewpoint you see a given passage, the over-arching idea is that Israel is to be the servant of God. Dale, read a few of these sections for us please.

In chapter 42 we find the following: *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon Him, He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up His voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not quench; He will faithfully bring forth justice. . . . I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind.*

And in chapter 49 we find these words: *And now the Lord says, who formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, and that Israel might be gathered to Him, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength – he says: It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*

Once again we have beautiful words from a voice for God. But I still must ask, how do these words relate to our time? Teacher, what's the message in all this for us today?

Let's look briefly at each of these themes. Both of them were difficult lessons for Israel to learn. What is the lesson we should learn from the idea of the Purified Remnant? How does it apply to us? Well, go all the way back to God's covenant with Abraham. God promised to bless Abraham for what purpose? God gave Abraham, and his descendants many material gifts. Was it for them to luxuriate in? Or were he and his family to use those gifts for the benefit of others? Remember that God said, "I will bless you, so that you will **be** a blessing." Jesus had the same message when He told the disciples "You are to be a light unto the world."

There is a responsibility attached to being chosen by God. We are to spread the message of God's greatest gift of all, the gift of eternal life through His Son, Jesus. How well are we doing?

Secondly, as we said earlier, the concept of the Servant is fluid, sometimes referring to the people of Israel, sometimes to the Purified Remnant, and ultimately to an individual, the promised Messiah. Since we have saved the third part of this trinity until our discussion next week, our lesson here must be incomplete. Accordingly, I have selected another paragraph from John Bright's **Kingdom of God**. He writes: "You have always thought of yourselves a people chosen of God for a purpose, and so you were. But you forgot that destiny and were grievously punished, so grievously that you could not understand it and doubted all that you had believed in. Now, lift up your hearts! All is not ended! Before you is a new start and a greater destiny. God is calling forth for Himself a true people, the people of the Servant. He is calling you to be that people and to serve His purpose."

And we should add that this does not apply just to ancient Israel, but also to us today. We are to take up the task of the Servant, and to follow Him.

The servant poems culminate in the teaching of the Suffering Servant, in chapter 53. And it will be the subject of our entire lesson next week.