

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

THE GREAT INVITATION

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear. and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee” (verses 1-5).

IF IT WERE not for the truth set forth in chapter 53 of Isaiah, there would be no possibility of this gracious invitation. Throughout this entire section of Isaiah (chaps. 49-57) God is presenting His chosen Servant, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Redeemer of Israel and of the world, whose rejection at His first coming was foreknown and plainly predicted, but who by His propitiatory work was to open up the way for guilty sinners to find peace with God and pardon for all their transgressions.

Because of His work God can send forth the gracious invitation for all men everywhere to partake of His salvation. Isaiah has been called “the evangelical prophet,” and he well deserves to be so designated. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is the Person and work of our Lord set forth so clearly and fully as in this wonderful book.

Man is shown to be utterly bankrupt spiritually, destitute of righteousness, and with no claim upon God whatsoever. Yet Christ, the Lord’s sinless Servant, is presented as the great sin offering through whose infinite sacrifice all who come to Him in faith will be justified in His sight. His salvation is based upon righteousness. In the Cross the sin question has been settled in a righteous way, and so God can now save all who come to Him in faith. It is hard for the natural man to appreciate the fullness of God’s grace. It is so easy to think of God as a merchantman with something to sell. But the truth is that God is too rich to seek to sell His salvation to anyone, and if He were to put a price upon it we would all be too poor to buy.

In each dispensation salvation has been by grace alone. All who were saved in Old Testament times, in the various ages before the Cross, owed everything to the work the Son of God eventually accomplished upon Calvary. There were different degrees of light, and men were placed under various economies as to their responsibilities to God in this world, but no man was ever saved by the animal sacrifices (Hebrews 10:4), or “by the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:20).

So Isaiah, after having set forth so clearly the atoning death the Anointed of God was to die, called upon all needy, troubled souls to appropriate by faith the gracious provision thus depicted. His message to thirsty souls was identical with that proclaimed by the Lord Jesus at a later date (John 7:37), and it is with a similar proclamation that the New Testament draws to a close (Revelation 22:17).

Isaiah here emphasizes not only the grace of God offering the water of life freely to all men, but also stresses the quickening and authoritative power of the Word of God, for it is through believing that Word that men receive divine life. This Gospel message is itself the water of life so freely offered. The Holy Spirit uses the Word as living water to bring life to those dead in trespasses and sins and to refresh and satisfy thirsty souls, who could never find true satisfaction in what this poor world has to offer. We may well be reminded of our Lord's words to the Samaritan woman, **“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but it . . . shall be in him a well [or fountain] of water springing up into everlasting life”** (John 4:14).

Although not mentioned here by name, it is the Lord Jesus Himself to whom reference is made. He is God's witness who was sent into the world to be the Saviour of sinners. For His advent Israel was taught to wait expectantly, but when He came in grace to save, they spurned and rejected His claims upon them. This clearly predicts the calling of the Gentiles when Israel failed to recognize the Son of David in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace then went out to the nations who had hitherto been strangers to the covenants of promise.

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, can ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (verses 6, 7).

“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near.” Men are responsible to turn to the Lord, and so to find Him as their deliverer. It is not that He is hidden and has to be searched for, but the call is to earnestness of purpose in turning to Him and heeding His voice while. He waits to be gracious, lest if He be rejected too often He may no longer exercise the hearts and consciences of those who harden themselves against Him.

“Let the wicked forsake his way” by turning to God in true repentance and the acknowledgement of utter helplessness, thus repudiating the thoughts of the natural heart, and he may be assured that as he turns to the Lord, God waits to **“abundantly pardon,”** for He delights to meet the trusting penitent in grace.

The chapter goes on to show how ready God is to take up those who turn to Him in confession of sin, and trust His love.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off” (verses 8-13).

How Isaiah’s own soul must have been stirred as he gave forth this proclamation! And what an encouragement it should be for every servant of Christ to remember that God has declared that His word will accomplish that for which He has sent it.

Sometimes preachers may get a little discouraged thinking they are talking, as it were, against a brazen wall, but God’s Word will never return to Him void. So the prophetic Word will have a complete fulfillment in God’s due time.

~ end of chapter 55 ~

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