

† A light in a dark place

- **Opening illustration: A light in a dark place. LOTR, Shelob, Frodo, Light of Galadriel**
- **Powerful image... a light shining in a dark place, bringing courage and hope with the power to drive back the darkness.**
- **As followers of Christ, WE HAVE SUCH A LIGHT. Most importantly, we have the LIGHT of Christ himself dwelling with in, Christ's Spirit in union with our Spirit- what Paul describes as the 'All Surpassing Power' God has placed in our hearts through Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 4:6-7** For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

- **Not only this- as people of FAITH in Christ, we have the gift of scripture, which the Holy Spirit uses to teach us, remind us, and encourage us by its truth. In 2 Peter...**

**2 Peter 1:19** We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

- **Church- if you find yourself discouraged because you believe we are living in a time of increasing darkness, scripture proclaims that we possess and even greater light... and a powerful and beautiful example of prophetic scripture shining as a light in a dark place is the scripture we will see today... Isaiah 55... it is an...**

† An invitation to a thirsty world

- **A world of people trying to satisfy their greatest needs through the futility of their own wisdom and efforts. To this reality of the human condition, the prophet cries out...**

**55:1** "You there! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.

- **Are you thirsty? Are you seeking that which you cannot purchase on your own? There is a source, a light in the darkness... a well of life that is freely given... so COME.**

– **BEFORE WE CONTINUE! Sunday February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, TO, PE.**

- **BIT OF BACKGROUND... Isaiah is the longest prophetic book in the Hebrew Bible, and contains the greatest concentration of Messianic prophecy in scripture. Isaiah lived and wrote prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the onset of the Babylonian exile some years later. Isaiah's ministry spanned from about 740 to 680 BC, roughly 300 years after the time of King David.**
- **KEY! These years in Israel's history were a time of great struggle both politically and spiritually. The Northern Kingdom of Israel (containing Galilee) was deteriorating politically, spiritually, and militarily and finally fell to the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom of Judah looked as though it too would collapse and fall to Assyria, but**

*it withstood the attack. In this time of political struggle and spiritual decline Isaiah rose to deliver a message to the people in Judah- a people whose freedom, way of life, and national identity was being threatened. His message was that they should trust in the God who had promised them a glorious kingdom through Moses and David. Isaiah urged the nation not to rely on any other foreign power to protect them for the Lord was the only protection they would need.*

- *For the Hebrews during the Babylonian exile, Isaiah’s words spoke of the Great Hope they had not been abandoned by God, they were His cherished possession, and He would accomplish their redemption.*
- *BUT BEFORE we can really understand Isaiah 55, we must go back to Isaiah 53, considered by many as the most significant prophetic passage in all of scripture, the high point of prophecy about the coming messiah, the suffering servant. If chapter 55 is an invitation, then chapter 53 is the promise that makes the invitation possible.*

† The promise that made the invitation possible

**Isaiah 53:4-6** *Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

- *NOW, in chapter 55, Isaiah is proclaiming- almost bursting with excitement- that BECAUSE OF WHAT MESSIAH WILL DO, THIS IS THE INVITATION GOD HAS MADE POSSIBLE!*
- *KEY- even though Isaiah is pointing to the future, to the coming of Christ, he writes as if this invitation into life is already accomplished.*
- *This is a trait of almost all Biblical prophecy. There is a NOT YET- something God promises to do, but because the promise is from GOD, it is absolutely certain, and by faith we are able to live in the GOOD OF WHAT IS YET TO COME, right now, in the present- in the midst of life as it really is! And Isaiah says...*

† Hey you! Are you thirsty?

<sup>1</sup>*“You there! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk, Without money and without cost.*

- *This isn’t physical thirst... it is spiritual, emotional, even intellectual thirst. This is the thirst we recognize when by God’s grace we come to terms with the reality that we cannot satisfy the deepest longings of our heart- not through our own efforts, or through anything this world can offer.*
- *We see a PARADOX... you with no money, come, buy, and eat- be nourished. The only way we can purchase what we can’t afford is if someone else pays the cost... the gift of God’s grace isn’t CHEAP! Christ purchased our freedom through the cross... but to us, it is FREE.*
- *There’s a gradation in the invitation... to come and receive WATER, WINE, and MILK.*
  - *Water- that which is necessary for life itself- NT image of the Spirit*
  - *Wine- God’s gift of joy, cheer, goodness*
  - *Milk- that which strengthens, nourishes.*

- **YOU WHO ARE BANKRUPT.. who have no ability to meet your own true needs... COME AND FREELY RECEIVE EVERYTHING YOU TRULY NEED.**
- **Isaiah continues... if this is true, why would you waste your money- the efforts and toil of how you think, how you feel, what you choose and do... on that which doesn't satisfy?**
- **Rolling stones, no satisfaction... Ecc... 'chasing after the wind'**

† No satisfaction

<sup>2</sup> *Why do you spend money for what is not bread,  
And your wages for what does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,  
And delight yourself in abundance.*

- **This isn't a prohibition against things in life that are good and enjoyable... rather, it is clear recognition that even the good things of life are temporary, and will not meet our deepest needs- of identity, purpose, peace, contentment, hope, and joy. Isaiah uses the word "Bread" to mean that which TRULY nourishes... strengthens, sustains.**
- **The Lord says "LISTEN CAREFULLY!"... eat, seek, what is GOOD, for what is truly good is available in ABUNDANCE.**
- **HEAR! When we try to meet our true needs on our own, whatever we use will eventually run dry, and we will always need more... we will be THIRSTY... but when our deepest needs are met by God, by Faith... his provisions are in abundance.**

<sup>3</sup> *Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live! (Jesus... life in abundance!)*

- **Now, Isaiah ties the promise of the Messiah back to God's covenant with David.. this was God's promise to David, and to Israel, that the messiah would be from David's line- and through the messiah, would come a NEW COVENANT- Grace, union with Christ.**

*(LISTEN!) And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
According to the faithful mercies shown to David.*

<sup>4</sup> *Behold, I have made him (The Messiah) a witness to the peoples,  
A leader and commander for the peoples.*

<sup>5</sup> *Behold, you (Israel) will call a nation (summon nations) you do not know,  
And a nation which does not know you (nations you do not know) will run to you,  
Because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel;  
For He has glorified you."*

- **Imagine you are a Hebrew, living in captivity in Babylon... the outlook for your people is not just bleak, it may be fatalistic. AND YET, through Isaiah God proclaims... Not only will you be restored, but nations you don't even know will come to you... because God has glorified you... GOD WILL REVEAL HIS GLORY THROUGH YOU! This happened through CHRIST... and because God's plan of salvation, through the cross, came through Israel, people will come running to you. GOD WILL RESTORE YOU, and through you, He will restore all of creation and all people that look to Him (also points toward end time, New Jerusalem, center of restored world.**
- **But while God's salvation is eternal, the opportunity to choose- to receive His salvation- is not. God's salvation is extended to all, but it must be received, and this is a choice, a choice of surrender. Of faith, of acceptance.**

† The choice of surrender

<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked abandon his way,  
And the unrighteous person his thoughts;  
And let him return to the LORD,

- **The root of wickedness, of unrighteousness... not just immoral acts. It is the claim that WE ARE OUR OWN GOD, that we are in control, we are our own moral arbiter, and we don't need God. GOD CALLS TO HUMANITY... lay down your rights, lay down your pride and self-centered attempt to control life on your own, and TURN BACK TO GOD!**

**(Return to the Lord)** And He will have compassion on him,  
And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

- **The call here is not to defeat sin in our own effort, clean ourselves up, and THEN return to God, but RIGHT WHERE WE ARE, in the midst of our struggles... to lay down our pride, and turn to God- For He is full of compassion, desiring to forgive, to redeem us... so that even in our brokenness, we can then begin to follow him from right where we are.**
- **This doesn't make sense to us! Even if we are a mature follower of Christ, wired into our human way of thinking is the idea that we only receive what we deserve. HOW COULD GOD TRULY FORGIVE ME, ACCEPT ME, JUST AS I AM right now, with my faults, my failings, my struggles, confusion, anger, doubts!?**
- **THERE ARE TIMES when we may say... "God, I know, intellectually, what Gospel says... that through faith in you I am fully forgiven, made new, I am your beloved child, I am holy and dearly loved, and never alone..... BUT I'M NOT SURE I BELIEVE IT. Maybe it's true, but it feels like I just have to make this all work on my own... I feel like I'm defined by my fears and weakness... IF I'M HONEST, is this really true?**
- **(EXAMPLE)... person I was walking through scriptures on God's grace... they came from performance based background... stopped me... Is this really true? If not, I don't want to continue, because I never dared hope that this could be what Christianity really teaches...**
- **CHURCH! In response to our fears, our doubts, our human way of thinking, GOD REPLIES... I AM NOT LIMITED TO YOUR THOUGHTS AND YOUR WAYS!**

† I AM not limited to your thoughts and ways!

<sup>8</sup> "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

- **My love, my grace, my plan... it is beyond you! The peace I offer is the peace that passes understanding. The love I give is beyond your ability to comprehend! The promise I extend is beyond anything you could ask or imagine. WILL YOU BELIEVE? Will you hear my word, and take the next step of faith!**
- **AND THEN, Isaiah points us to the sovereignty of God. Even though we will never fully comprehend the fullness of God's Grace, HIS PURPOSES WILL PREVAIL.**

<sup>10</sup> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
And do not return there without watering the earth  
And making it produce and sprout,  
And providing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;

<sup>11</sup> So will My word be which goes out of My mouth;  
It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire,  
And without succeeding in the purpose for which I sent it.

- **Church... God's purposes will prevail. Many events and issues of our day are incredibly important... political outcomes matter, and the choices made by our country and our leaders today will reverberate for generations- for good or bad, this is always the case.**
- **BUT AS WE DISCUSSED TWO WEEKS AGO- as followers of Christ, our HOPE, our PEACE, our JOY, our WISDOM... and that which compels us to be the LIGHT OF CHRIST IN OUR WORLD- TO LOVE PEOPLE- this LIFE WE POSSESS is NOT contingent upon the politicians or political outcomes of our day! Rather, our HOPE, our SOURCE, flows from GOD, our faith in His plans, and His purposes.**
- **And in an uncertain world, we can stand with certainty that God's word – His ways- will prevail. THAT IS A SOURCE OF COURAGE, OF JOY- right now, in the midst of life as it really is.**
- **Isaiah concludes this section by looking even beyond our lives today, to the ultimate promise and fulfillment of our Salvation, when God has restored all things...**

† The promise to restore all things

<sup>12</sup> For you will go out with joy And be led in peace; **(picture of deliverance)**  
The mountains and the hills will break into shouts of joy before you,  
And all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

- **Friends, this is God's promise to all who turn to Him, who receive the gift of Salvation in Christ. Our destiny is one of Joy, Peace, and ultimately, creation itself being fully restored, expressing the Glory of God...**

<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn bush, the juniper will come up, And instead of the stinging nettle, the myrtle will come up;

- **In God's time, the corruption of creation will be reversed, all will be made new, and this New Creation, for which In Christ we are MADE NEW CREATIONS... this will never end.**

And it **(restoration of creation)** will be a memorial to the LORD, An everlasting sign which will not be eliminated."

- **Friends, that is a source of ultimate hope. Even more, as BY FAITH we learn this, internalize these truths so that they increasingly are our source of who we THINK, FEEL, AND ACT, they will be a source of WHOLENESS. The presence and power of God to bring transformation to our character, our outlook, right now.**

† Right here, right now

- **PRACTICAL IMPLICATION of this, at least for me. Recently received email from nationally known Christian leader, one whom I respect. Email was about pending national legislation, right now, expressing great concern and urging Christian's to pray and express their opposition. Reading through the email, it would be easy to come away feeling highly**

*threatened, afraid, and discouraged- with a sense that life and all that is good as we know it is falling apart. Summed up with quote "this is a threat to life as we know it."*

- *As I sat there with a very negative countenance, felt this tugging in my Spirit- perhaps the Holy Spirit- saying "Ethan... YES, this is an important issue. It's possible the worst case scenario presented in this email may come to pass. BUT WHY ARE YOU FEELING DOWNCAST! Things will come that may threaten you WAY OF LIFE, but they will never threaten your SOURCE OF LIFE, for I AM YOUR SOURCE OF LIFE! HAVE FAITH! REJOICE!*

*"You there! come to the waters; You who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk, Without money and without cost. Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in the abundance of my life and my presence!"*

- *CHURCH! Be encouraged. With so much going on demanding to be our focus, may our focus- where we set our mind as the foundation for how we think, feel, and at- may this be Christ, what is True of Him, and what is True of US because we are IN HIM.*

✠ *Setting our mind- the gift of Communion*

- *A powerful way God calls us to SET OUR MIND ON WHAT IS TRUE is the gift of communion.*
- *ONLINE- if you haven't already, pause video and collect three things... BIBLE, Cup, Bread.*
- *This is not just a rote ritual. To pause and prayerfully celebrate communion, this is a sacred act... (not a sacrament), but sacred. This is the act of purposefully remembering, considering, and giving thanks for the REASON WE HAVE THE HOPE THAT WE HAVE... the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ....*

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26** *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

<sup>25</sup> *In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

- *My friends- if you believe this... that Jesus Christ is Lord, the son of God, and having made this sacrifice, God raised Him from the dead so that IN HIM you may be made new, brought from death to life... BE ENCOURAGED.*
- *YES there are so many things that could discourage us. Many things that need to be attended to (although maybe not as many as you think)... but in the midst of life as it really is, Christ invites us to LISTEN CAREFULLY TO HIM... COME TO HIM... EAT WHAT IS GOOD, and DELIGHT OURSELVES in the abundance of His Life and Presence.*
- *That is God's invitation. Will you come?*