

## Isaiah 29:17-24 (NKJV)

<sup>17</sup> **Is it not yet a very little while Till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, And the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?**

<sup>18</sup> **In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.**

<sup>19</sup> **The humble also shall increase *their* joy in the LORD, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.**

<sup>20</sup> **For the terrible one is brought to nothing, The scornful one is consumed, And all who watch for iniquity are cut off--**

<sup>21</sup> **Who make a man an offender by a word, And lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, And turn aside the just by empty words.**

<sup>22</sup> **Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, Nor shall his face now grow pale;**

<sup>23</sup> **But when he sees his children, The work of My hands, in his midst, They will hallow My name, And hallow the Holy One of Jacob, And fear the God of Israel.**

<sup>24</sup> **These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine."**

Have you ever feared anything happening whose consequences would destroy life as you know it? When you look at the situation, you cannot imagine anything but the worst consequence. When you think of the fall out from the event, you cannot imagine anything but disaster.

This is not uncommon in life on this planet. God's own people were facing such a thing at the time of Isaiah. They were surrounded by enemies that were far stronger and more numerous than Judea would ever be. And the harm these enemies threatened was severe. And by all appearances, there would be nothing to stop the calamity. One would have seemed **merely logical** to pronounce doom and gloom. That is what the people who **simply believed the facts** would have concluded.

This is the audience that Isaiah is addressing. And what is Isaiah's message? Does he applaud their logical rational thinking? Does he say, I understand why you feel that way? I do too. Does he attempt to use logic to work his way out of their dilemma? What does Isaiah offer these people who are the throws of despair? He offers them what we all need. He offers them hope.

And where does the hope come from?

The promises of God.

We all experience despair from different lies. Oh, **the threats are real**. But the **conclusions are lies**. We all have to do battle with this stuff in our minds. Every one of us is tempted with despair. The problem with our world is that moth and

rust **DO** destroy. Investments fail. Businesses go out of business. Countries invade other countries. Jobs are lost. People make bad decisions. Marriages fail. Relationships sour. Cars wreck. Houses burn down. Food runs out. Yes. A lot of very very bad things could happen to us.

And yet there is nothing said in scripture that allows the people of God to live in gloom and doom. Why? Because the future is as bright as the promises of God. And that is what we see here. Isaiah is not speaking to these people, telling them to look on the bright side, to see the glass as being half full. He is telling them what is **sure to happen** and to trust the God who is going to **make it happen**. When believers have no hope, it is because we either **don't know what God has promised** or **we don't believe He will do it**. We have lots of other excuses, but this is the truth of our hearts. Hopelessness is either due to **ignorance or disbelief**. In scripture we see over and over again that despair is disarmed by hope. And hope is earnestly and excitedly looking forward to what we know God is going to do.

OK, lets look at our text to see what God was telling the Judeans.

**<sup>17</sup> Is it not yet a very little while Till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, And the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?**

Lebanon was known for its trees. Both of the Jewish temples were built with the trees of Lebanon. The forest was a symbol of strength and plenty. It was a wealth of resource that was regarded very favorably. Even now, if you look in that area of the world on Google maps satellite, you will see that Lebanon is still a green area on a largely brown landscape.

So what is Isaiah saying?

First Lebanon is going to be stripped of its pride. Its forest will be leveled. That is not the focus of the text, but it is its assumption. All the things that men boast in have to go before God's salvation arrives. We see this theme all through scripture. Salvation is not of works, not of us, not of **our contribution to what God does**, lest anyone would boast. No. What we are most proud of must go.

Then we are ready for **His** work. The trees of Lebanon are going to go.

Then what. The stripped landscape, the land devoid of human pride, will become something it could not have been in its natural state. It will become a fruitful field. It will become useful to sustain life. No longer will it be used to build castles. It will now feed people. And it will be amazingly good at it.

In fact, it will be seen as being something of a **forest of field**. Maybe the fields will grow crops so well they will appear as a forest? No one knows exactly what this means, but it looks to me like the land will be more productive for food than it ever was for trees. Or the field will have more value as a field than it could have had as a forest.

Again, is this any surprise? How useful were we before we came to Christ? Of what value were our contributions to anything that lasts forever? Did not God have to strip us down in order to make us useful to Him? Did he not need to remove our pride before we were willing to trust Him with our lives? What God does to Lebanon is what He does to all of us.

Some think that this prophesy was literal and they match it to time periods when Lebanon was devastated and then restored. Others think it was figurative and talk about how the Gentiles have come to the Gospel. I am not sure how to know exactly when or how it happened. But I am sure that what is described here is what **God continually does**. He brings down in order to lift up.

Is God in the process of tearing down in your life? Is He showing you that your way doesn't work, your strength is not strong enough, your wisdom isn't wise enough? Lean into it. Don't kick against the goads. Learn from Jesus as quickly as you can. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Our burdens can get pretty unruly pretty quickly.

<sup>18</sup> **In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.**

When God does this work of unbuilding and rebuilding, some amazing things will happen in people's lives. Remember how earlier in our text Isaiah described what happened when the truth was brought to **the literate man** and **the illiterate man**? Neither of them could find a good enough reason to go through the trouble of reading the book. This is what God's truth is to the mind of the natural man. It may be a curiosity. But it is not gripping.

Now look what Isaiah describes. The **deaf** shall hear the words of the book. The **blind** will see the truth of it. Is this a reference to what Christ would one day literally do? Maybe. But this kind of thing always happens when God is at work. If it didn't, none of us would be here. We would still be coming up with excuses for why the book is too much trouble.

But God will supernaturally remove the obstacles to seeing. That is the only way we ever see. God has to make the deaf hear and the blind see or **we never would**. And we are all the deaf and the blind until God intervenes.

Now look at what they hear? **They hear the words of the book**. That is where salvation is. At the end of our text this morning we see the word "doctrine". I think any preacher worth his salt wants to get his licks in here. The words of the book aren't very cool in our culture. But they are all we have of God in this life, unless He provides Divine Guidance from time to time. So, just like we would value a letter from someone we love but have not seen for a long time, so we will value the words in God's book. So we will value doctrine. Because it is the story of our beloved.

Notice too that it says the eyes of the blind shall see **out of obscurity and darkness**. The two words used here are interesting. The first means dusk. Any hunter knows the process of watching for deer as the light is fading. Last night I was within 60 yards of a deer in thick brush. But eventually I had to give up because it would be impossible for me to know what I was shooting at or where we I was aiming. Dusk makes it so we aren't sure of what we are seeing. Everything is unclear. It is a puzzle. We might think we see something, but we aren't sure. I suspect that is the best of human potential. We see creation and have some idea that there is a creator, but it is all fuzzy to us. But the next work is utter darkness. It also means destruction and death. That is the result of utter darkness. That is where the blind man starts. That is where every one of us starts. We are blind until God grants us life. (expand depending on the audience)

**19 The humble also shall increase *their* joy in the LORD, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.**

Remember, Isaiah is telling Judea this when the wolf is knocking at the door. God hardly ever does things in the way we expect or the way we would do them. Here Isaiah is telling people about payday.

First, let's start with humility. What is it? Well in this case the King James says meek. The word means meek, humble, poor, lowly. It is used of people who put themselves after others in importance. How do you know if you are meek? Just let someone ignore your contribution, or think badly of you as a person, or treat you as if you are in a lower position, or not give you the recognition you feel you deserve. Humility does not get too worked up over that sort of thing. Not so with pride. Pride can't let it go.

In our text those people who accept lower status in their minds, who do not see themselves as anyone with merit, **those are the people** who will have increased joy. This is like the poor in spirit that Christ referred to. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In our text we go from the blind and deaf to the humble. And all of them are being blessed. This is a lot of good New Testament teaching. The best position a human can be in is to see himself exactly as he is before God. And what do we see? We see clay. We see sheep. We see children. We see peeps. We see wheat and chaff. We see goats and sheep. Ultimately we see sinners in need of God's grace. We certainly have potential. But our potential only is achieved when God does the shaping and we submit to it. There is nothing glorious or grand about us. When we **see ourselves as we are**, we begin to **love Jesus as He is**. We begin to approach Him in the manner that will do us the most good. And we increase in joy and we rejoice. Why? Why would that be a result of humility?

Actually it makes perfect sense. Joy is not an event that is based on good circumstances. Otherwise when we face bad circumstances we would lose it. **Joy is the deep seated understanding that we are perfectly ok in God forever.** It is the default position of a believer. When our world crashes around us, we reorient to this point. Like the words of our hymn, it is well with my soul. That is the foundation of joy.

Now, if we are looking **to ourselves**, we cannot have this confidence. If we are depending upon **our resources, our skill, our intelligence, our virtue, our anything, our ability to control our world**, we are going to plummet. Because we know we will fail. We know we cannot attain what we need.

But when we reach a humble understanding of ourselves we can suddenly relax. We can tell any truth about ourselves and it does not hurt our position. We can tell the truth about our past and our present with confidence that nothing of importance is harmed. Our future does not rely upon those things. Both our hope and our joy have nothing at all to do with **our performance and intention**. They have to do with **Christ's performance and intention**. Humility cuts the cord of dependence on everything that has any chance of failing. It admits that truly, all we bring to Christ is our need. Not a single thing more. And we can know that Christ is completely competent to meet our need and He has promised that He will do just that. And the humble man increases in joy each day. He rejoices in God. Because that is the source of everything good in his life.

Isn't that a wonderful truth? Do you have joy? Can you sing "It is well with my soul" and believe it really is well with your soul? Is there any cord still connected to some dependence upon **your goodness or virtue** so that God will receive you? Today is an excellent day to cut that cord. Christ truly does receive us Just as I am. And He saves us Just as HE is.

Is your orientation point in times of trouble- I am safe in the hands of Jesus? It can be. It must be. In fact, anything else is an insult to Christ. Which of us really wants to call Christ a liar?

So Isaiah is telling these people about the work God will do. The deaf, the blind, the poor. They will all be in the cat bird seat. And that is us if we tell the truth about ourselves, if we are humble.

**<sup>20</sup> For the terrible one is brought to nothing, The scornful one is consumed, And all who watch for iniquity are cut off--**

**<sup>21</sup> Who make a man an offender by a word, And lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, And turn aside the just by empty words.**

We have here a picture of something God hates. Injustice. And we have a clear picture of tools that are used in the trade of the unjust.

We have seen all through Isaiah that God hates it when those who are responsible to administer justice use their position for personal gain and

administer **injustice**. Verse 21 gives us an important clue. **In the gate**. That is where court was held. That is where the decisions by leadership were announced. That is where justice should have been served.

So who is the terrible one, the scornful one, those who watch for iniquity? As far as I can tell it is the Jewish leadership. This would be true as a principle for **all authority**, but the application here is to the leaders of Judea.

Now, look what they are called. **Terrible**- This is a ruler who behaves ruthlessly toward his subjects. **Scornful**- to deride or to boast so as to express utter contempt. Now the third one is a little trickier. **Who keep a lookout for iniquity**. Now, based on other scripture this cannot mean it is describing someone who watches out for sin so they can deal with it properly. That is what elders are supposed to do in the church. That would be good behavior, not bad. So it must either mean that this person is keeping an eye out for sin so **he can join it**, or he is watching out for **supposed iniquity** so he can falsely punish it. Based on the context I think it might be the later.

When we look at the terrible one, the scornful one and the one wanting to falsely accuse, we don't have to go far to get some really good examples. Just look at the headlines and we see this deadly trio at work in both political parties all day long. But we are wise not expect much from the world. Another great example was the Pharisees of Jesus day.

They were watching for supposed iniquity all day long. They were always trying to hang Christ for the tiniest failures in obeying the traditions and the law.

Weren't they guilty of all these things?

<sup>21</sup> **Who make a man an offender by a word,  
And lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,  
And turn aside the just by empty words.**

The Jewish leadership did all of this to Christ. They dickered about words. They laid snares for Him all the time because Christ was reproving the leadership openly and clearly. They were also trying to sway the faithful with slander and lies. We think of the man born blind and that transaction.

God hates injustice. We do well to make sure there is nothing of it in our lives, anywhere that punishes good behavior or rewards bad behavior, simply because it makes our lives easier or richer to do so. When we reward evil, we punish the good. When we punish the good, we reward the evil. That is just how it works.

<sup>22</sup> **Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, Nor shall his face now grow pale;**

From what I understand, the wording in verse 22 really emphasizes what God did with Abraham. God redeemed him. He brought him out of slavery. Now we

normally would use these words of the Israelites coming out of Egypt. But here **what God did to Abraham** is equated with **the Exodus from Egypt**.

God brought Abraham out of a land of idolatry. God picked this man to save.

There was nothing about Abraham that made him so special God had to have him. No. In fact it would appear in scripture God picked him partly because he was so **un-special**. It was easy for God to show off in the life of Abraham.

And God redeemed him. The word means to deliver by any means. To ransom.

God picked Abraham in the midst of sin, in the midst of idolatry, through no virtue of Abraham's, to be God's chosen people. He brought him out of sin and into a walk with Him. That is the picture of God's work in every believer. He loved us while we were still walking and living in and choosing our sin. It was not that we were **so lovely**, it was the **He was so loving**. And He wooed us to Himself by the Holy Spirit. And He did it, so He would have a people for Himself forever.

So God is referred to as the one who redeemed Abraham. But the topic isn't really Abraham. It is **Jacob**.

**"Jacob shall not now be ashamed, Nor shall his face now grow pale;<sup>23</sup> But when he sees his children, The work of My hands, in his midst, They will hallow My name, And hallow the Holy One of Jacob, And fear the God of Israel.**

Jacob was given promises by God about the future of Israel. If they had not been fulfilled, Jacob would now be ashamed of the God he served. He would have reason to have second thoughts. He would have reason to have the blood run out of his face, as when happens when we hear terrible news. If God had not **come through**, this would have been tragic to Jacob. If the Jacob's heirs ended, Jacob would be embarrassed. If they failed to serve God he would also be embarrassed. But as always, God follows through on His promises...all of them. So instead of being ashamed, Jacob will be glad.

And what will Jacob see?

Jacob will see his offspring. And they will not be in the state they are in when Isaiah spoke. They will be in **a new state** that **God brings them to**. There is hope for Israel because God has promised something better. So Jacob sees his offspring. And how does God refer to them? **The work of My hands**.

Oh those hands. Oh those wonderful fingerprints of God. What **He can do** with clay is amazing, isn't it? What **He can do** with sheep is amazing isn't it? No wonder our hearts want to worship Him. Of course they do.

And that is what happens when God gets his hands on a person. Look at the rest. **They will hallow My name, And hallow the Holy One of Jacob, And fear the God of Israel.**

Our primary purpose is to love God and give Him glory. When God goes about doing something good in the lives of people, that is always his intention. That is his end game. **He will have a people who hallow and fear God**. The word for

hallow is actually sanctify. They will set God's name apart as something special. They will dedicate themselves to this God.

We can all affirm with our experiences that this doesn't happen completely or immediately. Sanctification is a process. God has set us apart and we are setting Him apart. He does all things well. We don't. We start with God inspired good intentions. But we, by nature, think too well of ourselves. **We think we can carry out** all these good intentions. But our behavior proves otherwise. God does not give up. He convicts us. He shows us the ends of ourselves. And He goads us on to continue. And the process ends up with a **deeper understanding** of the **goodness of God** and a **deeper appreciation** of **His grace** and a **greater dedication** of ourselves to **His glory**. Is that what is happening in our lives today compared to last year, or 10 years ago or 20 years ago? It should be. He is worthy of all glory honor and power. That is what God does in a person's life. That is where He leaves His fingerprints. That is what His hands are doing today, just like always. Is He doing it to us?

**<sup>24</sup> These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine."**

Isn't this just wonderful? There is always hope. There is always a chance. No matter how bad we blew it in the past, there is a second chance here. Even those who **no one would guess were going to make it**, even those we may have thought **were beyond all hope**. Here they come across the finish line.

Our behavior may have been bad. Our attitudes may have been awful. Maybe we were whiners and complainers. But God wasn't done with us yet. Oh those hands. Those wonderful hands. He is still working on our hearts. And oh we cannot help but notice that last word. What will these slow learners get? What will those who took the wrong path end up with? In both cases it is the same thing. Understanding or doctrine. We will end up thinking right about God and ourselves and our world. Doctrine. Oh wonderful doctrine. It is, after all, **the thinking of God for dummies**. The words important enough for God to spend lots of His best people to get it to us. Doctrine.

Carla and I still have the letters we sent to each other when we were dating. It is easy to see that I wanted Carla to know who I was. I wanted to impress upon her what was **important** to me. And I wanted her to know that **I loved her**. In some ways that is what God's Word is to us. It is no wonder God would place such value on it. If He loves us, of course He wants us to have it and to read it and to believe it and to depend upon it. Of course He does.

Given these statements above, it is very easy to see that it is very important to God that we think right about Him. So whatever He is doing in your life, it probably has something to do with fixing your doctrine. He wants you to think right about Him. End with "When peace like a river". (Can you say it?)