

No Peace To The Wicked

The Psalmist tells us, 'Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints'. Here Isaiah contrasts the attitude of the wicked, perhaps thinking especially of the blind watchmen and ignorant shepherds of the previous chapter. They have no sense of the value lost to the church and the world by the death of those who lived uprightly, prayed for their brothers and sisters, and daily witnessed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unbelievers do not realise the benefits they receive from the presence of the church in the world.

The blessings of death

Those who die in the Lord are triply blessed. They are evermore preserved and protected from the evil of this world. Their souls are carried into the presence of the Lord there to walk in holiness and purity with their Saviour evermore. Their physical remains rest in their grave, which is to them a soft bed of comfort and ease, until body and soul will be reunited at the coming of Christ. Then He will gather His church to glory in the new heaven and new earth.

A catalogue of corruption

Not so the wicked. They will be held accountable and will answer for their sin. There is no escape. They have mocked the Lord's people, the Lord's pastors, and the Lord's gospel. In truth, it is the Lord Himself and His blood they have despised. They use God's good gifts to indulge their lust. They slay their own children, exploit the weak, and spoil all they touch. This does not imply they are irreligious. On the contrary, they worship creatures, they worship themselves and their fleshy passions. Here Isaiah likens this to raising idols and building altars on the tops of mountains and setting images in their own homes.

False religion

The religion of natural men and women is inwardly a sham. Outwardly, they adorn themselves with scents and ointments to disguise the stench of their hypocrisy. False religion, the mystery religion of Babylon, is used to control, manipulate and exploit the powers of this world. Yet, there is no joy gained thereby. Indulging in sin wearies the wicked and brings no satisfaction. Any pleasure is fleeting and no contentment is found. Nevertheless, no thought is given to God. Man will not admit his wilful stupidity. He insists on pressing on in his soul-destroying path to hell.

Sin will be judged

The Lord promises, 'I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works', that is, He will expose its emptiness and pretence, and He will judge it. The Lord, by the prophet, announces to all men in all generations that He will not be mocked, nor will judgment long be delayed. A cry of fear will be heard among the reprobate when Christ is revealed as Judge, but no deliverer will rise from their assorted idolatrous practices. Only true faith in Jesus Christ will suffice.

'Cast ye up, prepare the way'

Yet there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared. At the culmination of this prophetic passage Isaiah reminds the remnant people of the Lord's purpose for His church. The call to 'cast up' is a call to make a highway, a clear way, for the elect of God to travel upon and return to Him. The high and lofty One whose name is holy is the Lord Jesus Christ. He inhabits eternity and dwells in heaven to where He calls those who by quickening, reviving grace are made contrite and humble by the Spirit of God.

Evidence of mercy

The convicting Spirit of God will act upon the hearts of God's elect to humble and convince them of sin. Mercifully, for the weakness of our souls, He will not contend with us for long. At length, when our need of grace is learned, and the poor sinner cries out for help, the Lord is quick to heal. He is quick to lead, guide and direct so that the convicted soul may hear the gospel truth, see the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and be comforted by grace.

The fruit of the lips

Praise, gratitude and worship is 'the fruit of the lips' and this God creates in and from the hearts of redeemed sinners. It is the Lord's work to bring peace where there was distress for sin, and joy to where there was fear and dread. The Lord will heal. This saving work will be performed far and near, in all nations throughout the gospel age. It was felt in the

hearts of Isaiah's hearers, revealed in the days of the Messiah, and spread among the Gentiles to the ends of the earth.

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However, as wonderful as this comfort is, the opposite is dreadful. 'The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.' The distress that humbles God's elect contrariwise hardens the wicked. The conviction that brings one sinner to repentance reinforces opposition and rebellion in another. Salvation is all of grace. Mercy, upon the merits of the blood of Christ, is our only hope. May the Lord heal us under the sound of His truth in these gospel days and put His praise in our hearts and on our lips.

Amen

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