

Redeemed and Restored

Isaiah 49:1-26

I have thought many times that I would love to have been on the road to Emmaus with those two disciples and the resurrected Christ – when Jesus taught what is recorded in **Luke 24:27**, “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures [Old Testament] concerning himself.” I am certain that Isaiah 49 was one of the texts which Jesus explained that day. I say that because we cannot properly understand Isaiah 49, if we do not see Jesus Christ as its central figure.

Friends, there are promised blessings in this chapter – which should give followers of Christ peace, hope and joy. And there are promised judgments upon the wicked which should give us confidence in our battle for right – but also sadness that God’s judgments are necessary. If we have compassion for the lost, we should pray and live in such a way that people will be drawn to God’s blessings rather than shattered by God’s judgments. Let’s begin by reading Isaiah 49:1-2,

“Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar [God is speaking to the Gentile nations of the world – which includes us]. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name [the incarnate Christ has now come into view. God the Son was called by God the Father to become fully man in order to accomplish world changing tasks].² He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.”

When our Lord Jesus came to earth, He spoke truths that cut into the souls of people like a sharp, two-edged sword. And what effect does the

truth of God's Word have on people? According to Hebrews 4:12, it exposes the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. It renders us naked and without excuse before the eyes of Him to whom we must all give an account.

Verse 2 also mentions that at times Christ's truths are like polished arrows which deeply pierce into our hearts. But those penetrating truths have the power to heal us from the poison of sin, if we confess our wrongs and put our trust in Him – who forgives and cleanses us of all our guilt. Christ offers His healing and forgiveness to all peoples of all the nations.

In verse 3, someone else comes into view, “And he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’” Exodus 19 tells us that God formed the nation of Israel so they could be a holy nation, a royal priesthood among the Gentiles. As a nation – Israel entered into a covenant with God – whereby they promised to love God and to be a witness to the nations concerning the one true God and His righteous ways. Unfortunately, a large majority of Old Covenant Jews were habitually unfaithful to their covenant with God. And so Christ was born of the Jews to be what Israel should have been – a light to the nations – which besides blessing the Gentiles, will also help the people of Israel to return to God and glorify His name. Sadly, when Christ was on earth, only a remnant of Jews repented of their sins and became His devoted followers. As a nation, Israel rejected Christ as their Messiah. **John 1:11** tells us, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” But that is not the end of the story. Let's continue reading Isaiah 49:4-5,

“But I [the Lord Jesus] said, ‘I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.’⁵ And now the LORD says, he 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.”

It seems to me that God’s plan is for a whole lot of Jewish people to end up embracing Christ as their Messiah/Savior and to enter into the blessings of the New Covenant. Even when Christ was on earth – in His time of humiliation – there was a remnant of Jews who embraced Him. It was from this Jewish remnant of believers that the New Covenant Church was birthed. The gospel then quickly reached the Gentiles, who began to embrace Christ and pour into His Kingdom. If we keep reading, that is exactly what God promised in verse 6,

“He [God the Father] says: ‘It is too light a thing that you [the Lord Jesus] should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

Here is an important truth. There are judgments and promised blessings in the Bible that have a “now” and a “not yet” aspect to them. When Isaiah lived, and before his son could say daddy or mommy – the ten northern tribes of Israel were judged and carried out of the promised land by the Assyrians [722 B.C.]. The southern tribes of Judah barely escaped that same fate. But a little over a hundred years later, the southern tribes had become so wicked that God sent the armies of Babylon to conquer Judah and carry off the survivors to various cities throughout the Babylonian empire. It looked as if the nation of Israel was done, finished.

But 70 years after the Babylonians began carrying away the Jews from the promised land, God raised up the Medes and Persians who conquered and destroyed wicked Babylon. God then began to raise up kings to help the people of Israel return to their land. King Cyrus of Persia, who is mentioned in Isaiah 44 and 45, gave the following edict in **Ezra 1:1-5**,

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD . . . might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom . . .³ ‘Whoever is among you of all his people [speaking of the Jews], may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD . . .⁴ And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.’⁵ Then rose up the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.”

Because of the favor of King Cyrus, a remnant of Jews returned to their land in safety and with financial aid. Twenty years later, with the help of King Darius, the Jewish people were able to rebuild their temple. And then a number of years later King Artaxerxes helped Ezra return to Jerusalem with financial aid and a command to teach the Gentile leaders God’s Law. King Artaxerxes and his queen also provided Nehemiah safety and financial aid to return to Jerusalem to help his people rebuild a wall of protection around that city. And because of help from Kings and queens – Ezra and Nehemiah were used of God to lead the Jewish people into a great revival, which enabled Israel to expand their borders back to the extent of Solomon’s day.

Much of what I have just said is referred to in Isaiah 49:7-13. But ultimately these verses are describing the greater blessings Christ will achieve by working through His Body, the Church. To understand verses 7-13, we need to remember that Christ was initially rejected by the vast majority of Jewish people,

“Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One [Jesus], to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation [Israel], the servant of rulers [God the Son did not take on flesh in order to be served – but to serve. But what God accomplished through humble, faithful Jews like Ezra and Nehemiah – will in a greater degree be achieved by the ascended Lord Jesus during this New Covenant age. Let’s continue to read]: ‘Kings [like Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes] shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.’⁸ Thus says the LORD: ‘In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people [Old Covenant Israel had moments when they were a blessing to the nations – but it was Jesus who inaugurated the New Covenant, which is greater than the Old Covenant. Much of what Isaiah goes on to say I have already referred to. The Jews were allowed to return to their land and Isaiah says next in verse 8], to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages,⁹ saying to the prisoners [the Jews who were carried off by the Assyrians and Babylonians], ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’ They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture;¹⁰ they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.¹¹ And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up.¹² Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene.’¹³ Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.”

These events happened with the help of kings such as Cyrus, Darius

and Artaxerxes. And then the revival, recorded in Nehemiah, closes out the Old Testament. However, during the 400 year interlude between the Old and New Testament, Israel as a nations once again turned away from God and experienced hardships and defeats. By the time Christ came to earth, the Jews were under the yoke of the mighty Roman Empire. Let's continue to read Isaiah 49:14-18,

“But Zion [the Israelites] said, ‘The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.’ [the Jews have said this numerous times in their history. It happened when they were defeated by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans and most recently during the WWII Holocaust. But listen to how God answers the Jewish people].¹⁵ ‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.’¹⁶ Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.¹⁷ Your builders make haste; your destroyers and those who laid you waste go out from you.”

God raised up kings to serve Israel as He continued to use them according to His plans and purposes. But one of the greatest ways God used the Jewish people was when the ascended Lord Jesus started His New Covenant Church at Jerusalem. It was Jewish Christians who took the gospel to the Gentiles. And because of that, we can accurately say that Gentile Christians are the spiritual children of those first Jewish believers. We will talk of this again later.

As we move on to verses 18-26, we are definitely looking at New Covenant believers, who became God's new temple on earth during the last days of Old Covenant Israel, which because of its persecution against Christians was severely judged by God.

I will never forget when I was at Jerusalem back in the 90's – looking at the wailing wall, which was a retaining wall for the stone temple and is all that is left of that temple. As I stood there, I watched busload after busload of Christians from all over the world coming to see where Jesus walked and spoke and gave Himself to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. There are far more Christians who travel to Israel from other nations than there are Jews who travel to Israel from other nations.

With that in mind, let's look at verses 18-26,

“Lift up your eyes around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, declares the LORD, you shall put them all on as an ornament; you shall bind them on as a bride does.”¹⁹ “Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land – surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away [the Roman Empire].”²⁰ The children of your bereavement [mainly Gentile Christians] will yet say in your ears: ‘The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in.’²¹ Then you [that remnant of believing Jews] will say in your heart: ‘Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away [by their unbelieving Jewish brethren], but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?’²² Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons [followers of Christ] in their bosom, and your daughters [followers of Christ] shall be carried on their shoulders.’²³ Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers [may I remind you that Christians today are being honored by leaders from many nations. Numerous Nobel Prize Peace winners have been Christians – including the last two from Kenya and Ethiopia]. With their faces to the ground they [those who oppose God's people] shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame’ [Christians today need to hear that. Because of God's judgment upon ISIS and Alkaidah, thousands of Muslims are coming to Christ].²⁴ Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the

captives of a tyrant be rescued? ²⁵ For thus says the LORD: ‘Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you [that promise was first given to Abraham and continues to be kept on behalf of Abraham’s descendants, followers of Christ – Galatians 3:29], and I will save your children. ²⁶ I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.’”

Friends, those who oppose and attack followers of Christ, will not fare well. On Christmas Eve we were reminded of Mary’s words recorded in

Luke 1:50-52,

“His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation . . . ⁵¹ he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”

God has scattered the proud in the past, and He promises to do so now and in the future. Listen to New Covenant blessings described in **Ezekiel**

36:26-27,

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh . . . ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

What does that promise mean for faithful followers of Christ? We are told in **Isaiah 48:17-19,**

“This is what the LORD says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. [Unfortunately for Old Covenant Israel God goes on to say] ¹⁸ If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness

like the waves of the sea. ¹⁹ Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains”

Because Christians have God’s Law written in our hearts, we should be experiencing peace like a river and our righteousness should be growing in our everyday conduct as we learn to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And because we are in the New Covenant through repentance and faith in Christ, God forgives our iniquity and remembers our sin no more. Christians, since we have been forgiven so much, should we not be forgiving people, who want even our enemies to come into God’s blessings? Yes.

I hope we have seen this morning that God has promised blessings to the Gentiles and blessings to the people of Israel – who He will bring back to Himself. Listen to the words of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, in

Romans 11:1-26,

“I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham . . . ¹¹ So I ask, did they [Israel as a nation] stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean . . . ²⁵ I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved”

If Christians today do not understand and believe the promises we have looked at this morning, then we will not have the full measure of peace and hope that God intends us to have. Christianity has already powerfully impacted the world, and yet there are promises of much greater impact in

the days ahead. These blessings are occurring because of what Christ accomplished during His first coming. Let me close by reminding you of God's promise recorded in Isaiah 19:23-25, which is that Egypt, as a nation, and the nations of the Middle East, will in close fellowship together, worship our Triune God – along with the nation of Israel.

I sincerely hope the world doesn't have to experience myriads of more devastating judgments. I believe if Christians could be united in believing God's promises, and living in ways that illicit God's blessings, that in the days ahead, there will be many more than 70,000 people a day coming into Christ's Kingdom. Let's pray.