

July 20

Isaiah 60-64

Reading Isaiah 60-63 is another piece of Isaiah that is unique. You might read it and say "Hey, wait, this never happened!" That is because it is looking ahead at the Millennium and the New Heavens/New Earth. We now look with Isaiah into the far distant future --

In Isaiah's description of the glory of Zion that is to come when God's program for the nations has run its course, there is a lot of imagery that reminds me of the end of the Book of Revelation. In particular, the description that Isaiah's successor John gives of the New Jerusalem -- the new heavens and new earth. Once again the words of the New Testament author find their roots in the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah uses very much the same language as John does in Revelation when referring to the millennial kingdom. The language of Revelation 21 comes from Isaiah 60.

Before we leave the subject of the dependence of the Book of Revelation upon the Book of Isaiah, it would probably be worthwhile to note another evidence of the same thing found in Isaiah 63. Its description of God's day of vengeance and redemption provides at least some of the imagery that pops up in Revelation 19. There Jesus is pictured riding on a white horse "dressed in a robe dipped in blood" treading "the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God." Revelation 19 builds on Isaiah 63.

Way back in Isaiah 42, when we began to look at the servant songs, we noted that everyone recognizes four servant songs and that some see Isaiah 61:1-3 as a fifth one. The word servant isn't used here and the passage is different than the others because the "servant" isn't being spoken about, he is doing the speaking! Technically, I don't think it is like the other servant songs, but even if we don't put it in the same bundle with them, it is clearly Messianic in nature. It is the servant speaking and He is talking about His mission. Some commentators have attempted to explain the first part of chapter 61 by saying that these verses apply primarily to Isaiah himself. Their view is that it is the prophet upon whom the Spirit of the Lord has come and that He is the one who is bestowing beauty for ashes with the good news of his message. That interpretation might work except for the fact that Jesus gives us the definitive interpretation from his own lips. Luke tells us that after the temptation experience; Jesus returned to Galilee and there began His ministry by attending the synagogue in Nazareth and reading from the scroll of Isaiah. This is what he read: "The spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And when he had finished reading from Isaiah 61, he looked at the people of Nazareth and

said, "This day the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." I am the fulfillment -- I am the servant of the Lord about whom Isaiah prophesied! This is what I have come to do. For Jesus to have chosen to make His first public statement by reading and claiming those verses is extremely significant! It's like saying, "whatever else I say and do is to be viewed through the lens of this mission statement. I am God's servant - the messiah you have been waiting for - and this is what I'll do."

I didn't know if you noticed it or not but Jesus intentionally stopped reading in the middle of a sentence. The part He left out was this, "and [to proclaim] the day of vengeance of our God." He did that, of course, because bringing judgment or vengeance would not be a function of his first coming but of His Second Coming.

Every Christian ought to view their own calling and sense of purpose in the light of Christ's own perspective. If you are also a servant of God, this is what servants do. Jesus said, my goal is to be a servant to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners. That is who I have come to reach. Aren't those the very people that we often try to avoid? I think the reason is because those are the neediest people around and needy people make demands upon our time, our energy and our resources and sometimes on our sensibilities that we are just not prepared to deal with. It costs too much! If I "get involved" with that poor dysfunctional family it will mean spending hours and hours helping them learn to help themselves, and I just don't have time for that! If I reach out to that hurting person whose husband or wife just divorced them, it might mean that they will want to depend "too much" on me.

THEY-WILL-SUCK-ME-DRY!

See when you help needy people, the price tag can get very high. Just ask Jesus what it cost Him! Far too often, we are willing to minister only within some rather clearly defined limits. But Jesus says that these are the exact people he came for...

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Why these people? I'm sure there are several reasons that the true servant might immediately give, but one of the most obvious is this: because these are the people who are ready to acknowledge that they have a need that is bigger than their own resources and abilities. Jesus said that only sick people are willing to call for the physician so He, the great Physician, came looking for the people who knew they were sick.

Our passage today was full of glorious hope. All that Isaiah has seen by faith and faithfully reported is on the other side of a tremendous affliction. Even though he cannot see it now, even though it will be a long time coming and Isaiah knows that in his physical body he will experience persecution and death before

it comes, he is confident that what God has showed him will come to pass. His prayer reflects that faith -- rooted in what God has done in the past and focused on what he has promised for the future.

Guys- the word for the day is 'hope'. Not a fru-fru kind of hope, but hope that is based in the confidence that a future reality is way better than the 'now'. Isaiah saw it 2700 years ago!

And we have a guarantee from the very person who fulfilled all of the servant songs that this future is sure! No matter what you are facing today, we have hope in the New Heavens and New Earth.