

**Isaiah 48:1-22 (NKJV)**

**1 "Hear this, O house of Jacob, Who are called by the name of Israel, And have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; Who swear by the name of the LORD, And make mention of the God of Israel, *But* not in truth or in righteousness;**

**2 For they call themselves after the holy city, And lean on the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts *is* His name:**

**3 "I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did *them*, and they came to pass.**

**4 Because I knew that you *were* obstinate, And your neck *was* an iron sinew, And your brow bronze,**

**5 Even from the beginning I have declared *it* to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed *it* to you, Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, And my carved image and my molded image Have commanded them.'**

**6 "You have heard; See all this. And will you not declare *it*? I have made you hear new things from this time, Even hidden things, and you did not know them.**

**7 They are created now and not from the beginning; And before this day you have not heard them, Lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.'**

**8 Surely you did not hear, Surely you did not know; Surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, And were called a transgressor from the womb.**

**9 "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, And *for* My praise I will restrain it from you, So that I do not cut you off.**

**10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.**

**11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do *it*; For how should My *name* be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.**

**12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I *am* He, I *am* the First, I *am* also the Last.**

**13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; *When* I call to them, They stand up together.**

**14 "All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear! Who among them has declared these *things*? The LORD loves him; He shall do His pleasure on Babylon, And His arm *shall be against* the Chaldeans.**

**15 I, *even* I, have spoken; Yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper.**

**16 "Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit Have sent Me."**

**17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go."**

**18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.**

**19 Your descendants also would have been like the sand, And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; His name would not have been cut off Nor destroyed from before Me."**

**20 Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!"**

**21 And they did not thirst When He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.**

**22 "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."**

I listened to a sermon about this passage on Sermon Audio from Matthew Hoskinson of the First Baptist Church in NY City. It was very good. The title of his sermon was called **Stubborn Grace**. And I cannot think of a better summary of the chapter.

Now, let's start with a question. Do you think that God extends grace toward people that He knows He is going to destroy some day? Does God provide earthly rescue for people who will never receive His eternal rescue? Does God ever extend grace that is not saving grace? Does He sometimes grant good things to people who will remain in rebellion against Him?

Our text this morning shows that YES, sometimes God does exactly that. Look at the last verse of our text. Vs 22 "**There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."** That is actually the summary of the condition of the people in our text. As you read the passage it might strike you as almost a change of topic. But it isn't. The word used here for peace is shalom. It means peace or tranquility. It is the opposite of war or distress. It is the condition **our hearts crave**. We want peace. We tend to take it wherever we can find it. And we are very open to substitutes. If drugs or alcohol give us a feeling of peace, we will take them. If an experience will give it, we will pursue it. We want shalom. But true peace only comes from one source. Like Gideon **must have known** when he named his alter in Numbers 6:26, **The Lord is Peace**.

We have a whole chapter here that describes a people who are making choices that will never lead to peace. They are rebelling against God. In verse 4 we see the condition of these people's hearts.

**4 Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze,**

What God is describing is a stubborn rebellion. Here are a people who a choosing sin. They know they are choosing sin. And they are not about to change their minds.

People are often compared to stubborn animals. John Oswalt says that in animals and people, the only reason we won't go in the direction the master wants us to go is **BECAUSE it is the way the master wants us to go**. We might not even have a reason to go a different way. But if that is what the master wants, we aren't going to do it. Remember how we learned in Romans how the law inflamed sin. We saw that humans are more likely to sin once they hear what God says sin is. To demonstrate this truth, try it yourself. Find something within reach of a 2 year old that you know the child would have no interest in. Then tell that child a few times that they are not allowed to touch it. Then walk out of the room.

It would be comforting to blame our sin on ignorance of the law. Because that can still have us feeling pretty good about ourselves. But more than likely verse 4 describes our state of heart. We saw what we wanted. We wanted what we saw. We fixed our hearts on what we wanted. And what God thought about it was only a fleeting thought at best. That describes most of the sin we have ever done.

This **state of being** is not driven by logic, or wisdom, or really any kind of rational thought. It is driven by passion. There is nothing dumber than a person living in rebellion. Rebellion **of God** or **of anything God says** or **of any authority that represents God** just makes us look stupid. And that is the state of these people.

Now something else about our text. Look at the references to the idea of **listening** and references to **God's word**. There are 7 references to listening and 12 to God's word.

So what is the answer to the dilemma of these people? Simple. Listen to God's word. That is God's appeal to these people throughout the whole text. He implores them to believe on Him. And that is true for us today. Is there some place that you are straying from God's word? Is there some place you are resisting His will? Is there something you are being tempted to do that you know is against God. The path toward life is simple. In fact it is infuriatingly

simple. Read what God says. Do it. Period. That was the solution laid out clearly for the stubborn people in our text.

OK, let's look at the text verse by verse.

**1 "Hear this, O house of Jacob, Who are called by the name of Israel, And have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; Who swear by the name of the LORD, And make mention of the God of Israel, *But* not in truth or in righteousness;**

**2 For they call themselves after the holy city, And lean on the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts *is* His name:**

We are given great clarity right from the start who this is talking to. It is talking to the people of God, the people who God had chosen to represent Him. The house of Jacob, called by the name of Israel, even the prime tribe- those from **Judah**. They were the leadership tribe that Christ would come from. And they ascribe to the correct God.

Look at this. They have everything right. They have a rich spiritual heritage. They are associated with a lot of really spiritual people. They have a correct understanding of who is God. They ascribe to the proper teaching. They have all the right sources. They even have the right blood line. Wow. They have every single advantage. They have every human reason to be proud. All would be good, except for one word. **But**.

But what? **But not in truth or in righteousness.**

This passage is written to spiritual pretenders. These are people who care more about how things look than how things are. They are glad to go through the motions. They will present their offerings. They will cling to the trappings. But it has not changed **who they are**. They say **amen** to the sermons and they say **yes** to the sin in their lives, and the discrepancy is really no one else's business. The gnostics of John's day would have been proud of these folks. Their **spirituality** and their **daily decision making** did not interfere with each other. Being **hearers of the Word** was enough for them. **Doing was optional**, and if truth be told by them, actually foolish. Why lose the world when you can have both God **and** the world?

Are we like this? Do we ever comfort ourselves in the face of our sinful choices that we have very good intentions, that we go to a Bible believing church, that we have very good doctrine. And after all, I am really not intending to to this sin. It sort of just happens to me?

If so, we are more like these people than we would care to admit.

**3 "I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did *them*, and they came to pass.**

**<sup>4</sup> Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze,**

**<sup>5</sup> Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, And my carved image and my molded image Have commanded them.'**

God is revealing something important about Himself here. He is giving one of the reasons that He reveals things prophetically. And it isn't pretty. He presents it here as a **defense of His honor** which these people would quickly strip Him of if they had the chance.

Here God could be talking of anything that He had already predicted ahead of time and then came to be. Maybe He is talking about the exodus from Egypt, maybe the victories and wars he predicted previously, maybe the fall of Jerusalem. Remember this portion of Isaiah is directed to people who would have been captives in Babylon.

God is saying, **I told you what would happen ahead of time**, not because it would thrill your soul when you saw it happen. I told it not so you could set your hearts on this wonderful promise of mine. I told it to you ahead of time **so you could not say that your idol did it**. Really. That is what this is saying. God is guarding His own honor because He knows that these people are so stubbornly against Him that they would never do it.

Now we would never do something like this.... Would we?

Think about the thing that you have done in your life that you are most proud of spiritually. Think of something where you are tempted to be proud about it, as if to say, look at this wonderful thing that I did.

Now suppose God were to have prophesied that thing. Like Jon, you are going to royally mess up a whole lot of important things. You are going to be prayerless, selfish, unloving, fleshly, etc. But on this day of 2018 I am going to cause you to finally have victory over the sin that so easily besets you. Now if God had done that, how would that change how I viewed that event? Exactly. I would recognize it for what it really was. I would realize that I could not take credit for that thing. I could not say- I, inspired by my own sense of goodness and morality, have done this wonderful thing. No. I couldn't. Because God already gave the inside scoop. There is no idol I can give credit to.

We have all robbed God of credit when we have spoken through our pride. It is amazing. If we just look at our own histories, all it would have taken for our demise is a series of unfortunate events that God refused to rescue us from. If he had just **let us on our own** without intervening we would easily have completely different life circumstances. Our history does not prove that we were wise or good. All it proves is that God was powerfully gracious to rescue

us from our selves and sin. That is the story of every Christian. We do well to glorify God when we talk about the ways that He has led us beside streams of water. It is like that illustration of the turtle on the fencepost. If we have found ourselves in a wonderful position, we know we didn't put ourselves there.

Ok, so God has told them that in the past He didn't want His glory stolen. Now He is telling them that, even now, He does not want His glory stolen

**6 "You have heard; See all this. And will you not declare *it*? I have made you hear new things from this time, Even hidden things, and you did not know them.**

**7 They are created now and not from the beginning; And before this day you have not heard them, Lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.'**

**8 Surely you did not hear, Surely you did not know; Surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, And were called a transgressor from the womb.**

It is easy to see what it happening here. God is telling these people that He does not trust them. He knows them well enough that if He did not pronounce these things ahead of time, somehow they would find a way to twist it so that this was not a result of the goodness of God. They would say, oh I knew this was coming. Or my idol knew this was coming. But because God prophesied its coming so clearly and ahead of time, none of those treacherous strategies to rob God of His glory would work. God was making sure He would get full credit.

The sermon I was listening to earlier started with a question. Why do bad things happen to good people. At this point in the sermon the question was turned on its head. He brought out the point that not only were **these people** were transgressors from birth, but **we all are**. So basically there are no good people. He showed how now the question has been turned on its head. You can expect that **bad things** would happen to **bad people**. So we no longer need to ask why **bad** things happen. Now the question is, why do **good things** happen to **bad people**? And that is what we will see in the rest of this text. Now God has told us why He had this truth prophesied. But why was He actually doing this thing? Why is He going to send Cyrus to rescue His people and send them back to Jerusalem. We know what the answer cannot be. It cannot be because they are such good people.

**9 "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, And *for* My praise I will restrain it from you, So that I do not cut you off.**

**10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.**

**11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; For how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.**

Normally when we see things happen we interpret it in several ways. When good things happen to **God's people** we think that maybe they are being rewarded or blessed. And maybe it had to do with choices they made.

When Christians **suffer** we often think that God is using this event to teach them something or to make them stronger. Sometimes it is a discipline for a decision they have made.

When good things happen to **bad people**, we often think that God is winning them to Himself. Or maybe God is just being God and His grace is so rich that it spills out on all people, even those who hate Him.

When bad things happen to bad people we figure that they are just tasting life on this planet. And maybe God is punishing them.

But our text this morning is none of the above.

This is God's reasoning for doing good things to bad people.

I am doing it for My name's sake, for My praise, for My own sake, for My glory.

Now normally when we read something like this

**10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.**

When we read this it is the process of God using situations to wake up His people. He is doing it for their good.

This is a quote from CS Lewis

"God **whispers** to us in our pleasures, **speaks** to us in our conscience, but **shouts** in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world"

Normally that is what we expect to see. We all have a testimony of how God has used pain to strengthen our relationship with Him. But that is not what He is describing here. This passage is an exception to the rule. And by it we find God's most compelling motivation.

God is going to display a most amazing grace. He is going to deliver a generation of God haters to the homeland of Jerusalem. He is not doing it to reward them. They have already shown what they are in the refining fire. And none of it is good. He is not doing it to win them to Himself. He is doing it for one reason. He is doing it for the Glory of His name.

**I am doing it for My name's sake, for My praise, for My own sake, for My glory.**

God is a jealous God. He will not share His glory with another. For better or worse the Israelites are the people who God has identified His name with.

And He will not allow their stubborn rebellion to rob Him of any of His glory. So God is extending His grace, **not** because of what they are, **not** because of

their attitude of worship toward Him, **not** to make of them something better, **not** to win them to Himself. He is displaying it **in spite of** who they are. Because He will not even **allow their rebellion** to rob Himself of the glory He deserves. We need to add this to our theology. God will not be robbed of His glory. Ever. And He will be glorified **because of us** or **in spite of us**. Remember. This is God we are talking about.

**12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last.**

Here is the I am that is and there is no other. Here is the I am. Here is the one true God. It is hard to know if this is talking about the Father or the Son. This applies to both of them.

**13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; When I call to them, They stand up together.**

**14 "All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; He shall do His pleasure on Babylon, And His arm shall be against the Chaldeans.**

**15 I, even I, have spoken; Yes, I have called him, I have brought him, and his way will prosper.**

**16 "Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit Have sent Me."**

God is now rubbing it into this rebellious people. He is saying come listen and learn something. I am going to do this thing, the thing that not a single one of all my people would have ever guessed would happen. Look where it says **The Lord loves him**. This is talking about Cyrus. Here gathered are all of God's so called people. They are the ones who are worshipping God but falsely. And God here says I will tell you who I love. I love Cyrus. He will do my will.

Now He goes on to say that He will do my will, pretty much because He has no other choice. He will be doing what He wants. I will make sure that Cyrus **wants what I want**. Cyrus isn't going to get any credit for doing God's will. But Cyrus will be accomplishing something that is central to God's heart. I have been reading the Gospels lately and one of the things that has stood out this time is the importance of obedience. Every now and then someone in the crowd would say something flowery about either Jesus or the kingdom of God. Jesus's response nearly always comes back to one thing- obedience. We want to shift the focus to everything else, everything flowery, everything experiential, everything lofty. Jesus wants to shift the focus to simply doing



what we are told for the right reasons. We want to offer a flowery sacrifice that we put so much of ourselves in. Jesus's response is- do what I tell you to do. Just do that. We are very good at doing every spiritual thing except obey. Jesus is good at focusing the conversation on the one important thing. Obey. Here are these pseudo servers of God. They have lots of stuff right. But they will not obey because they do not love God. Here is Cyrus who has nothing right. I think God says that He loves Cyrus in the context of Cyrus doing God's will for us to get this point. Cyrus is probably not going to experience the saving grace of God. But God is saying, of anyone in this room, I will pick Cyrus. He does not **say that He loves me**. He is not hypocritical. But at least He is **doing** my will. While you guys are **supposed** to be my people, but the one thing **you will not do** is obey me.

Will you do what Jesus says? No excuses. No yes buts. No telling Him why you are the exception to the rule and it is impossible for you in your current condition or position to obey Him. No back talk or self talk or silent murmuring. Just YES LORD. Will we do what Jesus says? That truly is a million dollar question. Try just reading through the Gospel of John with this single question- will I obey what Christ said?

Next we see God's heart toward His rebellious people.

**17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.**

**18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.**

**19 Your descendants also would have been like the sand, And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; His name would not have been cut off Nor destroyed from before Me."**

**20 Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!"**

**21 And they did not thirst When He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.**

**22 "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."**

Verse 17 is interesting. The word for leads means basically to march out for you. This is not like a coach yelling from the sidelines what to do. It is more like a captain leading his troops into battle from the front. That is how our redeemer leads. This is a picture of Jesus leadership here. He did not sit in

heaven telling us what to do. He certainly had the right to. But he came and took on flesh. He didn't just **tell us** how to live. He **showed us** how to live. Our redeemer got involved in the most costly manner available. He put His life on the line for us. That is the kind of redeemer that is speaking. That is the heart condition of the one urging His people to follow.

Look at the passion here. It sounds like Jesus during the so called triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

**Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.**

Here we have it again. He is not saying, oh that you would have sung louder. Oh that your quiet time could have been 15 minutes longer. Oh that you could have used less offensive language or quit smoking. Or even oh that you could have attended a few more church meetings.

No Oh that you would have simply **done what I said**. If you had obeyed, it would have directly impacted your shalom. **The peace and tranquility that you lack is directly related to your lack of obedience**. This passage connects those dots. That isn't me.

Look at the peace described here. Like a river. I have often looked at a river and wondered how it could keep flowing. Where is all this water coming from. Tons and tons of it. And it just keeps coming like there is no tomorrow. That is how we are supposed to experience the shalom of God. We can have peace like a river. There is an unending supply continually filling our hearts. Is that not what we want?

Even with all we have seen, even with as stubbornly resistant as these people have been, God calls out to them. He calls them to freedom from their slavery. This is what He says:

**Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!"**

God is calling this rebellious people to repentance. He is holding out a promised deliverance and calling them to participate in it. He is telling them well before it happens to join it when it does. It is a call to faith and trust in the character and the promises of God.

He is saying, do not be afraid to flee your captivity. Flee from the people who surround you in your slavery. Make a break for it. And when you do, give God the credit. Let it be known, when Cyrus tells you you can leave the corruption of Babylon that this is exactly what God had promised and is doing for His children. Take the freedom and give God the credit.

If any of you are without Christ this morning, that is exactly what He is telling you. You can leave the slavery of sin. You can be free based on the promises of God. Jesus Christ died to save you from your sin. You can receive His redemption and have peace like a river. You can be forgiven of all your sin. And you can go forward into the rest of your life singing because of the wonderful thing that Christ has done for you.

**<sup>21</sup> And they did not thirst When He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.**

Here is the contrast. Here is what happened when people obeyed Christ. This is what happened when people went out of their slavery at God's leading. God provided. God provided.

If we will obey, if we will follow God where He leads, He will provide for us just like this. He promises to supernaturally meet our needs if we will just trust Him to do so. We seem to be willing **to do anything** to meet our own needs with our own resources. We will trust **insane sources** to get our needs met. Our historical path looks somewhere between suicidal and insane with how we made choices to meet our needs. But we did not have peace like a river. We did not have shalom.

But if we will just obey, God will pull out all the stops. He will give us what we need no matter how impossible it might appear. **What our souls crave, our souls will get.** That is what happens to those who's hearts have been captured by God and who respond in obedience.

And what about the rest?

**<sup>22</sup> "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."**

What kind of peace do we have this morning? What would the people who live with us say? What kind of peace do we want? Does submission at every point seem to much to give to have this kind of peace?