

THE BAD NEWS OF RUIN: OUR HOPELESS PREDICAMENT

Isa 59.1-15b

CBC-13 Dec 2009

Commenting on Pres. BO's speech in Oslo, Ambassador John Bolton (JB):

He says that "We have to acknowledge the hard truth that we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes." Well, no kidding, homo sapiens are [sic] hard-wired for conflict and we're not going to eliminate violent conflict until homo sapiens ceases to exist as a separate species.

Here humanistic pessimism challenges humanistic optimism; both are wrong. JB goes on to criticize rightly BO's misunderstanding human nature, but JB apparently misunderstands the gospel of Jesus Christ. The **biblical bad news** contradict's BO's optimism; the **biblical good news** (gospel), JB's pessimism. The Prince of peace, and only he, does and will bring peace.

Eighth-century Israel's situation had parallels with ours. Religious, some wealthy, some poor, overwhelming social problems, elements of "humanism," a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason (MWCD). Yet neither they nor we as a whole have come to a consensus of atheism.

Part 1 → the bad news in Isa 59.1-15b; **Part 2**, the good news in Isa 59.15c-21. You need both because first only → despair. Second only → apathy.

This chapter is addressed to society as a whole made up of sinful individuals, without denying remnant of grace in the midst of the ungodly—same as now.

WE ARE SEPARATED FROM GOD (59.1-2)

When troubles prevail, we doubt that God knows, cares, can do anything, because we pray and our prayers go unanswered.

1. God Is All-Knowing and All Powerful (59.1). "Behold" → special attention. Anthropomorphism (hand/ear). Short/weak hand → limited power; heavy/dull ear → limited awareness. Unanswered prayer in this case had another explanation. God IS (objectively); omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, immutable. God reproves our tendency to doubt or blame him.
2. Your Sins Have Deeply Offended Him (59.2). The reason for unanswered prayer is our iniquities (crooked behavior), our sins (wickedness, offense against a moral standard). God is holy and we are unholy. God hates sin and we love it. We hate the Lawgiver and he knows it. We have a personal relationship with God, but it is no longer fellowship but enmity (Amos 3.3). That is why he has stopped answering our prayers (Psa 66.18, lit., "see iniquity with pleasure," JFB). See John 9.31; 1 John 3.21-23. Remember Joshua's prayer of complaint and God's answer, Josh 7.6-13.

You have no right to expect an answer to your prayers while you cherish your sins and continue defying God. If you come broken, contrite, then he will.

WE ARE GUILTY OF GREAT SINS (59.3-8)

To convict and humiliate us, God elaborates through his prophet. This is merciful, since it prepares us to receive his mercy and grace.

1. Our Praying Members Are Polluted (59.3). Hands/fingers/lips/tongue that have been sinning are now unfit for praying. They are "defiled, polluted," ceremonially unclean and so unacceptable for worship (Cf. 1.15). The God of love hates violent hands. The God of truth hates lying tongues.
2. We Prefer Vanity and Lies to Justice and Truth (59.4a-b). As a whole, "no one enters suit justly; no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies" (ESV)—prevalent social injustice. Frivolous lawsuits defraud the innocent and prevail. Judges take bribes. This is so seriously wrong because the courtroom is sacred, representing God (Rom 13.1). Great corruption in US govt.: executive, legislative, judicial. All are driven more by political expediency than by moral absolutes. Relativism prevails; there is no publicly-acknowledged standard of truth.
3. We Are Dangerous Like Snakes and Spiders (59.4c-6). "They" → this "wicked and perverse generation/nation" (Acts 2.40; Phil 2.15). We form plans for evil, and they result in harm (59.4c-6). Cockatrice → adder (poisonous snake). Eggs either poison when eaten or hatch into more poisonous snakes. Spider's webs are worthless for clothing → the activities of sinners cannot atone for their sins, because their deeds are actually iniquity and violence.
4. We Practice Destructive Ways (59.7-8). The metaphors drop; this is a plain declaration of gross wickedness. Verse 7: We are eager to hurt others, even killing them. We plot evil and leave behind a swath of desolation and destruction. Verse 8: we are not peaceful, just, straight, or helpful. Our society is guilty of all this (e.g., abortion, every day's headline news); each one by nature (Tit 3.3). When some seem better, it only God's restraint or saving grace. You must OWN that to be saved.

WE ARE HOPELESSLY LOST (59.9-11)

1. We Wait in Vain for Justice (59.9). Two pairs of parallel lines: a-b → judgment = justice = righteousness, a strange rescuer far behind who never catches up with us; c-d → light = brightness, obscurity = darkness = gloom, the figurative night never ends, the dawn never comes. We keep on waiting on the world to change, not because we don't care, but because we feel so powerless to change it—and truly we are!
2. We Grope Like Blind Men for A Solution (59.10). The blind need a wall as a reference point, but though we reach hands and touch things, we cannot find it. The blind stumble at noon like the sighted in pitch black. 59.10d could be rendered, "among those in full vigor we are like dead men" (ESV), graphically portraying disadvantage, disability. Political leaders promising utopia, "hope and change," without Christ, cannot deliver. The discerning moderate their expectations of public servants.
3. We Know that Salvation Has Not Come (59.11). "Roar" or "growl" like bears; "mourn sore" or "moan and moan" like doves. Nothing merely human can or has brought about the perfect society—not prosperity, education, capitalism, socialism, communism, ecumenicalism, man-made religion, secularism, atheism, multiculturalism, science, ecology,

psychology, pharmacology, genetic engineering, genocide, isolationism, conquest, pacifism. Not the Democrat Party nor the Republican Party nor any other political party. All these have been tried and the 20th century may have been one of the bloodiest of all. It is way, way past time to realize that hope in all these human resources is completely misguided.

OUR ILLS SPRING FROM OUR OWN INGRAINED IRREVERENCE AND IMMORALITY (59.12-15b)

Man alone cannot be the solution because fallen man is the problem! We are anti-God and anti-neighbor, without power to change ourselves, like Ethiopians/leopards, because we are “accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13.23).

1. We Continually Offend God (59.12-13b). Not just faults but “transgressions” → rebellion, revolt, to rise up in clear defiance to authority. Not just little or a few, but “multiplied” → become many, abound. Not in secret with some fear of God but “before thee” → right in his face. “Our sins testify against us” → courtroom scene, no denying the accusations against us; we are caught red-handed. 59.12c-d → conscience. Deep down we know God condemns us. 59.13a-b → our ingrained depravity and actual sins prove we are anti-God to the core.
2. We Habitually Hurt Each Other (59.13c-15b). “Oppression” is the strong abusing the weak; “revolt” is the weak rebelling against the strong, all veiled in lies. 59.14, justice and truth personified and rejected. 59.15, “truth is lacking” (ESV). The rare person who repents is hunted down for persecution.(59.15b). What kind of an ungodly society is this?! Our case is totally desperate and hopeless—apart from the grace of God.

THE GOOD NEWS OF REDEMPTION: CHRIST THE SAVIOR

Isa 59.15c-21

CBC-20 Dec 2009

The biblical story of man’s redemption directs all our faith and hope toward a great Savior who is truly/fully human and truly/fully Divine. OT “Meshiach” = NT “Christ” = “Anointed One.” The only way man can be delivered from all our miseries and fulfill our purpose (glorify God, enjoy him forever) is if Christ comes to us and accomplishes redemption all by himself. The NT reveals that “Jesus” (Jehovah is salvation) and only he is this Christ (John 20.31).

JC saves his people and the world in TWO comings—one past, the other future, and we are in-between them. First coming—laid the foundation for comprehensive and eternal salvation. Second coming—totally consummates it. The glorious conquest herein described has already begun but is not finished as it will be when Christ returns → the kingdom of God with the Lord on his rightful throne and all his creatures subject to him in either willing worship or captive punishment.

This “great salvation through Jesus Christ” is the gospel, and it calls for an appropriate response from its hearers, viz., repentance, faith, baptism, discipleship (59.20b; cf. Matt 3.2; 4.17; Mark 1.15; Acts 8.12; Matt 28.18-20). In this way the kingdom has arrived in the church of Christ, and it will triumph completely when Christ returns in the new creation.

Isa 59.15c-21 is so rich and profound we cannot explore in any detail how they are fulfilled in Christ’s 1st and 2nd comings, but we must content ourselves with a simple exposition of the words, and even that is not easy.

THE LORD’S REACTION OF HORROR AND COMMITMENT (59.15c-16)

1. Displeasure with the Ruin. Or, offended, aggrieved, lit., “it is evil in his eyes.” God is not aloof and apathetic about human sin and misery.
2. Discovery of No Rescuer. Immediately he thinks of our salvation and how to effect it, but he found no capable Savior among us, no “intercessor” to stand between us and our ruin.
3. Determination To Be the Redeemer. “His arm” is the Lord’s might; “his righteousness” is his fidelity to his own nature and his promise. The Lord himself will save man—totally helpless and hopeless without him.

He achieves total conquest by: 1) overthrow, 2) rescue and renewal.

THE LORD’S REVENGE ON HIS ENEMIES (59.17-18)

Not the tame Jesus commonly imagined but the Conquering Savior/King.

1. Suiting Up for His Righteous Warfare (59.17). Righteousness, salvation, vengeance, zeal—all aspects of the his nature and his holy intentions. Breastplate, helmet, garments, cloke—metaphor of warrior’s attire.
2. Satisfying His Righteous Wrath (59.18). Supremely angry, he will inflict a terrible, just punishment on *all* evildoers, even “the islands” (universally). Two cosmic judgments: 1) the *cross* (elect), 2) the *parousia* (reprobate).

THE LORD’S WINNING OF WORSHIPERS (59.19-20)

1. The End of His Victory: the All-Inclusive Society (59.19a-b). “So” → as a result of. The *cross* makes converts fall like dominoes all over the world; the *parousia* brings to an end the salvation of all the elect.
2. The Means of His Victory: the Awesome Spirit (59.19c-d). The Holy Spirit “raises the banner,” rallies the troops, secures the victory.
3. The Beginning of His Victory: the Arriving Savior. Redeemer → one who ransoms slaves. Zion: 1) earthly Jerusalem (cross), 2) church (parousia).

THE LORD’S COMMITMENT TO OUR ETERNAL SALVATION (59.21)

This is the covenant of grace and salvation. Paraphrase with interpretation:

As for me [Yahweh, expression of holy resolve], this is my covenant with them [my elect], says the LORD [Yahweh]; My Spirit [the Holy Spirit] that is upon you [the Messiah, covenant-mediator], and my words [esp. the divine promise] shall not depart out of your mouth [i.e., Jesus Christ will keep relying on these words, obeying them, finding them trustworthy], nor out of the mouth of your seed [descendants—clearly spiritual, i.e., his immediate disciples], nor out of the mouth of your seed’s seed [all generations of believers in Jesus Christ], says the LORD [Yahweh], from this point forward and forever.

Thus “the promised blessings of the divine Spirit and word are secured for endless generations” through Jesus Christ (Motyer). Only he is able to save mankind and its individuals. Repent and believe the gospel! Amen.