

Complacency and the Holy Spirit

Isaiah 32:9-20

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

Feb. 11, 2024

⁹ *Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice;
you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech.*

¹⁰ *In little more than a year
you will shudder, you complacent women;
for the grape harvest fails,
the fruit harvest will not come.*

¹¹ *Tremble, you women who are at ease,
shudder, you complacent ones;
strip, and make yourselves bare,
and tie sackcloth around your waist.*

¹² *Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vine,*

¹³ *for the soil of my people
growing up in thorns and briers,
yes, for all the joyous houses
in the exultant city.*

¹⁴ *For the palace is forsaken,
the populous city deserted;
the hill and the watchtower
will become dens forever,
a joy of wild donkeys,
a pasture of flocks;*

¹⁵ *until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.*

¹⁶ *Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.*

¹⁷ *And the effect of righteousness will be peace,*

and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust^[a] forever.

*¹⁸ My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.*

*¹⁹ And it will hail when the forest falls down,
and the city will be utterly laid low.*

*²⁰ Happy are you who sow beside all waters,
who let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free.*

- Isaiah 32:9-20, ESV

What's the difference between confidence and complacency?

Confidence is rooted in the truth and in reality. Complacency is a mis-placed false confidence or false contentment. I watched a funny YouTube video a few days ago about a Master of so-called Non-Contact Martial Arts, which is supposed to enable the person who practices it to know people out without ever touching them. Well, a Non-Contact Martial Arts Master was put into a fight against a real, trained boxer. The boxer was trained, prepared, and confident. The Non-Contact Master was complacent. I honestly don't know what he was thinking, but he was knocked out pretty quickly.

Or, in a more realistic scenario, someone who has carefully saved and invested and has a healthy retirement account can be confident heading into retirement, but someone who hasn't really saved or invested much is just being complacent.

Complacency: Causes & Consequences, vv. 9-14

For years, Isaiah had been warning the people of Jerusalem and Judah of the coming consequences for their idolatry and worldliness. He had called on them to repent. Yet, God had made it clear that His people would not listen to the prophetic words of Isaiah, but that Isaiah's ministry would bring a judicial hardening to Jerusalem and Judah. Thus, in the face of the Assyrian threat, the king responded by sending a bribe to Egypt for their chariots and horses and the men of Jerusalem and Judah, as we saw last week, were largely easily divided into two categories: fools and scoundrels.

Today, attention is turned to the wives of those fools and scoundrels, the complacent daughters of Jerusalem:

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you will shudder, you complacent women;
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the populous city deserted;
the hill and the watchtower
will become dens forever,
a joy of wild donkeys,
a pasture of flocks;*

That's a pretty hard word from the Lord. What was the cause of the complacency of the daughters of Jerusalem? We're not told explicitly in today's passage. It seems they had been taken in by the lies of scoundrels and the actions of the fools, and they, too, were trusting in the promise of thousands of chariots and horses from Egypt.

Are you complacent? Spiritual complacency can afflict both men and women, of course. What causes you to place presumptuous trust in in trustworthy things instead of relying on the Lord?

Do you think that, because we live in America, a model for freedom, prosperity, and military might, that we are secure from any serious threats to our security or freedoms? After that last few years, that's probably less of a temptation.

Do you think that because you come to church on Sunday morning a couple of times per month, your children will follow Jesus all their lives?

When you got married, did you presume that because you were a Christian and you married another Christian, you would live happily ever after with no serious problems or conflicts?

Are you tempted to think that spiritual growth is something that will just happen naturally, almost automatically, because you're a Christian and you sometimes go to church?

Or, if you are a little more serious about your spiritual growth, do you think that will itself keep you from temptation or from major trials?

If you have a good-paying job and are reasonably competent in your profession, do you think this guarantees you financial security, or do you think that financial security will itself protect you from catastrophe?

Or maybe your complacency, your life of ease, is more one of surrender to the status quo, a giving up and giving in to the empty daily routine.

Whatever the cause of your complacency, it is deadly dangerous.

A.W. Tozer wrote: "Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people."

Because God loves us, He will discipline us for our complacency. He will shock us and shake us. C.S. Lewis famously said, "Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Actually, what he wrote was, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

And so, here in Isaiah 32, we see God very specifically warning of the coming of hard and painful realities a little more than a year after this prophecy. The hand of God will bring devastation and desolation upon His complacent people.

But this alone will not be enough to turn the hearts of God’s people back to Him. Pain and suffering, even devastation and desolation, are not sufficient in themselves to bring us to true repentance. God speaks here of how the complacent in Jerusalem will be grieved, will be in deep distress, but it is not really the language of repentance here, just of anguish:

*Tremble, you women who are at ease,
shudder, you complacent ones;
strip, and make yourselves bare,
and tie sackcloth around your waist.*

The language here could be a call to repent, but this exact language doesn’t necessarily mean repentance. We see the King of northern Israel wearing sackcloth in 2 Kings 6, when Samaria is under siege by the Syrians, but he isn’t repentant, just deeply distressed –

Ben-hadad king of Syria mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria. ²⁵ And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab^[a] of dove's dung for five shekels of silver. ²⁶ Now as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, “Help, my lord, O king!” ²⁷ And he said, “If the LORD will not help you, how shall I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the winepress?” ²⁸ And the king asked her, “What is your trouble?” She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.’ ²⁹ So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him.’ But she has hidden her son.” ³⁰ When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes—now he was passing by on the wall—and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body— ³¹ and he said, “May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today.”

³² Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Now the king had dispatched a man from his presence, but before the messenger arrived Elisha said to the elders, “Do you see how this murderer has sent to take off my head?”

– 2 Kings 6:232, ESV

So, too, here in Isaiah 32, the women of Jerusalem will wear sackcloth and strip themselves in anguished grief, but not in genuine repentance. Every time I’ve seen a major crisis in my lifetime – the space shuttle Challenger disaster, 9/11, the stock market crash & the Great Recession, COVID – I have seen people emotional – scared, hurt, angry, grieving, but I have rarely ever seen true repentance. People didn’t earnestly and humbly seek the Lord. Instead, they demanded the government do something! They wanted revenge or a new government program or something, but they did not really want the Lord. How about you?

Until the Spirit . . . (vv. 14-20)

What does make the difference? Only the Holy Spirit.

*¹⁵ until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.*

*¹⁶ Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.*

*¹⁷ And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.*

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who let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free.*

Look at what happens when God pours out His Spirit – First, there is overwhelming fruitfulness. The wilderness becomes a fruitful field and the fruitful field a forest. Incredible, unprecedented growth comes with the outpouring of the Spirit.

We see this happen in the Book of Acts at Pentecost and in the first generation of the New Covenant age. Jesus engaged in 3 ½ years of earthly ministry and had about 120 disciples when He ascended to heaven. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out of those 120, and 3,000 souls were added in one day. Soon, the Jerusalem Church had over 5,000 people, and then the church was spread by persecution and within one generation, within 40 years of Pentecost, churches had been planted all around the Eastern Mediterranean from Egypt to Rome – Israel, Syria, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Greece, Crete, Italy. Hundreds of churches with hundreds of thousands of believers all over the Greek-speaking Roman world within a generation. Compare that to the growth of the Gospel Kingdom for centuries before – essentially isolated to Israel and really only to a remnant within Israel at that, with just a handful of occasional Gentiles included now and again.

This abundant fruitfulness the Holy Spirit brings doesn't just lead to more conversions to Christ and more churches. It brings more -

Justice & Righteousness – *“Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.” - v. 16*

Spirit-filled Christians care about and pursue justice and righteousness, because the throne of our King sits on a foundation of justice and righteousness. Historically, it was Christians who abolished slavery twice – once after the Fall of the Roman Empire and then again rising out of the evangelical movement during the early 1800s. Christians adopted the ideas of universal human rights, of equality under the law, and of just war theory, demanding that even warfare submit to rules of justice and restraint. Christians have brought human rights to oppressed women in India and China and other places, as they followed the example of Jesus, who had women among His closest followers and even encouraged them to sit at His feet and learn from Him right alongside men. Unfortunately, too often, Christians have given into worldliness and the idolatry of selfish pride and materialism and have violated their own principles of justice and righteousness. We need less of our flesh and more of

the Holy Spirit. And, ultimately, we need the King who reigns in righteousness and justice to come and establish His perfect rule.

Peace – The Holy Spirit also brings great peace to God’s people – *“And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”* – vv. 17-18

Jesus gives us a peace nothing in the world or in our own flesh could ever give us.

Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* (John 14:27, ESV) And *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33, ESV)

We can have this peace of Christ now ruling in our hearts, even in the midst of a world of affliction and suffering. This peace gives us the strength to live courageously in the face of fear. But, of course, our hearts long for the everlasting and perfect peace that will come when Jesus returns to judge all evil and usher in endless peace.

Judgment – And so the coming of the kingdom ultimately brings judgment – *“And it will hail when the forest falls down, and the city will be utterly laid low.”* – v. 19

While Isaiah is probably here foreseeing the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians and perhaps even then the downfall of Babylon itself, he is also looking beyond that temporal judgment to the final judgement of the City of Man. God delivers His people into the kingdom through judgment.

Before the end, before the final judgment, Christ brings judgment to both His people in the church and to nations in the world, just as He brought judgment to Jerusalem and then to Babylon. He does so to advance His Gospel Kingdom in the world, and we need to trust Him as He is doing so.

Joy – In the end, the work of the Holy Spirit in the Kingdom of the Righteous King brings God’s people eternal joy!

*“Happy are you who sow beside all waters,
who let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free.”*

This is a picture of an idealized world where agriculture is abundantly fruitful and livestock can roam free without any fear of harm. This is the abundant, happy goodness God has planned for His people.

Psalm 16 ends with these words:

*You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. – v. 11*

In this life, we only ever experience partial and fleeting joys. The Holy Spirit allows us to experience deeper and more eternal joys that come from knowing Christ, but still, our flesh and the world are always stealing that joy. The LORD is the fountainhead of all joy and pleasure, and when we are in His presence forever, there we will be truly, deeply, eternally, contentedly happy.

Conclusions

Step back and take a wider look back at all of Isaiah 32 now. This prophetic oracle from Isaiah begins with the proclamation of a King who will reign in righteousness, who we know now is the King Jesus. Then, it describes those who rule under King Jesus in His kingdom and the positive influence they have on the world and those around them.

Then, we get three categories of people who reject the King who reigns in righteousness, three categories of people who refuse God and His grace: the fool, the scoundrel, and the complacent, all of whom suffer disastrously for their stubborn sin.

Then, we’re told that the change from devastation and desolation to fruitfulness, righteousness, and peace will come only when the Lord pours out the Spirit from

on high. We're told how the outpouring of the Spirit will bring such blessing to God's people and, through them, to the world.

So, is it the reign of the King of Righteousness and His followers that brings blessing to the world, or is it the outpouring of the Holy Spirit from on high that brings the blessing? Of course, these are not separate things, are they? 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven and was enthroned at the right hand of God the Father as the King of Righteousness above all earthly powers, God poured out His Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit came to glorify Jesus and bring people into His kingdom. Jesus reigns in the hearts of His people through the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us His righteousness and peace through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

We need the Holy Spirit to work in us because we need more of Jesus in us. But we cannot be complacent about this truth; we must be desperate, hungry and thirsty for God to act now in us and through us, even as we're eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus. We need to earnestly seek the Lord and plead for the Holy Spirit to bring us more of Jesus and His reign in our hearts, our homes, and our church, and then to bring the blessing of His kingdom through us to our neighbors and the nations.

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