

How Shall We Escape?

Today's passage is short but sweet for all who have been led to find God's great salvation by Jesus Christ in the steps of the ancient people of God. A great part of true faith is necessity. Many adopt Christianity as a lifestyle choice and embrace its principles as an act of freewill. God's elect, however, are driven into the arms of Jesus not because it seems like a good idea but because every other refuge has been stripped away. This is what Isaiah is speaking about.

A shocking message

Isaiah has been faithfully speaking the prophecies of divine revelation to the people of his age. Now, however, Isaiah himself is commanded of God to testify by his actions and conduct. He is to remove his clothes! However, there is method in this madness. His appearance at first strange, even eccentric, becomes a sign and a wonder as the meaning of his behaviour becomes clear. The messenger has become the message.

An object lesson in nakedness

We might question how suitable it was for a prophet of God to go naked. Isaiah's actions would certainly gain him notoriety to the point of dishonour and offence. Whether or not Isaiah was completely naked, or merely shed his outer garments down to a loincloth, it soon became clear what he was portraying by his action. Egypt and Ethiopia, two proud and powerful neighbour-nations to whom the Jews had leaned for help, would within three years, be stripped, shamed and deported from their lands.

A nation stripped and peeled

A few chapters ago we learned how Judah itself would be peeled as a nation and stripped of its wealth, power and people. Here another lesson is being taught. Judah's trial is aggravated by disappointment. The saviours to whom it looked would be themselves defeated, shamed and carried away captive. Judah would learn it is foolish to rely on man's strength or form alliances with worldly powers to accomplish salvation. These are spiritual lessons.

An isolated people

The defeat of these two Cushite nations by Assyria would send shock waves through Judah. The fear and shame of Egypt and Ethiopia would be contagious. It would spread to those who sought protection under their wings or cherished hope the opposing armies might break themselves upon each other. Judah and Jerusalem, here called an isle or island because of their isolation in a tempestuous region, would be left without hope in the world.

A friend of the world ...

The spiritual lesson is clear. James tells us 'a friend of the world is the enemy of God'. It is futile to lean on human strength and human ability in spiritual matters. The Egypt of self-righteousness, the Ethiopia of freewill, may appear to offer comfort and a way of escape from the enemies of our soul but in a short time these refuges must be torn down, stripped away and exposed as the lies they are. Any and all hope we have in the flesh is vain and empty. God's people will find no comfort in Cush.

To whom shall we go?

Isaiah walked stripped and bare among the people to show there was no covering to be had in earthly hiding places. The portion of God's people throughout their pilgrim walk is to experience the peeling away of our refuges until we have no one to flee to but Christ Himself. It is the hungry and thirsty, the labouring, heavy laden, sick and sore, the dead and dying who confess they have neither resources within to please God, nor deliverers without. Sinners come to God for grace when they come to an end of themselves.

A sign and wonder

Isaiah's message was a sign and a wonder. Some build their faith on charismatic 'signs and wonders' and draw hope from fleshy excitement. True believers find the gospel to be our sign and wonder. It signposts to Jesus Christ and reveals the wonder of His great salvation. The Jews saw Egypt fall and asked 'how shall we escape?' The book of Hebrews picks up this theme asking, 'how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?' It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone who gives comfort to sinners.

The Way, the Truth and the Life

In our study tomorrow we shall consider first, the folly of trusting in the strength of man, second, God's wisdom in stripping us of earthly sanctuaries, and third, the spiritual meaning of God calling His elect an island. May the Lord lift up our matchless Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and show us clearly the uniqueness of the way of salvation.

Amen

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