

ISAIAH 24

THE BURDEN OF THE WHOLE EARTH

Here begins a new sermon, which is continued to the end of the 27th chapter. And according to the directions which the prophet had received, he does – in many precious promises – “say to the righteous, It shall be well with them!” On the other hand, he also says – in many dreadful threatenings – “Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with them” (chapter 3:10-11). And these promises and threatenings are interwoven, in order that they may illustrate each other.

This particular chapter contains mostly threatenings. The judgments spoken of are very sore and grievous, and the people threatened with them are very many. Here we do not have the burden of any particular city or kingdom, as in the preceding chapters; but we may very properly call this chapter “the burden of the whole earth!” Some think (and it is very likely) that this is a prophecy of the great havoc that King Sennacherib and his Assyrian army would shortly make of many nations in that part of the world, while others believe it points at the similar devastations which King Nebuchadnezzar and his armies would make in the same countries about 100 years afterwards – going from one kingdom to another; not only to conquer them, but even to ruin them and lay them waste. The promises that are intermingled with the threatenings were intended to be for the support and comfort of God’s people in those very disastrous times.

The general character of all earthly things is that they are empty of all solid comfort and satisfaction. Sin has turned the earth upside down; the world has become quite a different thing from what it was when the Lord first created it to be Man’s habitation. Sin has also scattered abroad the inhabitants of the world, for the rebellion at Babel resulted in the dispersion of the people from that place. This world disappoints those who place their happiness in it and raise their expectations high from it, and it does not prove to be what they promised themselves it would be. But those whose hearts are at rest in the Lord can rejoice in Him, even when the fig tree does not blossom (Hab. 3:17).

We must not fail to observe that it is God Himself Who brings calamities upon the earth. He has an incontestable right to pass sentence upon sin, and an irresistible power to execute that sentence. It is He Who sends destroying judgments to humble sinful men’s pride, and to mar their mirth. When God sends His judgments into the earth, He intends thereby to grab the attention of those who were wholly addicted to their worldly pleasures.

In verses 13-15, we find that mercy is still remembered, even in the midst of wrath! When Judah and Jerusalem were overrun by Sennacherib or Nebu-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A threatening of desolating judgments for sin – verses 1-12, 16-22
- ❖ An assurance that the righteous shall find comfort, despite these judgments – verses 13-15
- ❖ An assurance that God shall be glorified in these judgments – verse 23

chadnezzar, there would be a remnant preserved from the general ruin; and it would be a devout and pious remnant! And this is the method that God usually takes when His judgments are abroad; He does not make a full and total destruction (chapter 6:13). When the majority of mankind shall have all their comforts ruined by the emptying and desolation of the earth; yet there are still a few who have laid up their treasure in heaven and not in the things of this world, and so they can keep up their comfort and joy in the Lord!

This remnant is a small remnant. When all goes to ruin, there shall be one or two here and there who shall escape the common calamity – just as there are usually a few olives left hanging on an olive tree, after it is shaken in the harvest-time. Noah and his family are one example of this; they were preserved safely when the pre-Flood world was drowned. In gratitude for having so narrowly escaped this great destruction, this remnant shall lift up their voices and sing! When the mirth of carnal worldlings ceases, the joy of the saints is as lively as ever. When the merry-hearted sigh because the things of this world are languishing, the upright-hearted sing because the covenant of grace – the fountain of their comforts, and the foundation of their hopes – never fails! Those who rejoice in the Lord can rejoice even in tribulation.

After these assurances to the Lord's righteous remnant, there is another prediction of terror to obstinate sinners (verses 16-22). Worldly people think that they will dwell forever in the earth, as in a palace or castle; but they seem to forget that it shall one day be removed like a cottage, which shall fall and not rise again – although there shall be new heavens and a new earth, in which nothing but righteousness shall dwell. The high ones of the earth are puffed up with their grandeur, and think themselves out of the reach of danger; but God will surely visit them justly for their pride and cruelty.

When these judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth, the righteous cannot help trembling. But there is a most precious conclusion, in verses 22 and 23, that is full of Gospel-mercy! Jesus was expressly called by the Father to bring the prisoners out of the darkness of the prison-house of sin (chapter 42:6-7; Zech. 9:11-12; Luke 4:14-20). And when we observe the promises here given, that although these prisoners are shut up, yet they shall be visited after many days – what a sweet testimony this is of the grace of God in Christ Jesus! Must not our Savior be truly glorious in the eyes of His redeemed ones, and in the display of such mercies as are here said to be shown by Him? Yes! The moon shall look pale, and even the sun shall blush and hide his head and lose all his luster – being eclipsed by his Maker and his Lord! The ruin of the Redeemer's enemies will make way for His Kingdom, and then the Sun of Righteousness will appear in full glory!

Lord, we beseech You to draw away our hearts from this world, so that we may find true satisfaction only in our relationship with You! Amen.

