

Sermon outline and notes, © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (SwiftCreek.Church)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, May 23, 2021

Isaiah 59:1-21 (read vv.9-16) “Truth Is Fallen in the Public Square”

Intro. Our nation and our world are in trouble. I am not talking about the pandemic, though that has certainly been a major problem. There is a spiritual virus that has spread throughout the world and has even infected much of the church today. It is the virus of sin and Satan’s lies. Man has not changed spiritually and much of what we read in chapter 59 of Isaiah is history repeating itself. This chapter is also a prophecy of our future.

This morning I’m going to share with you the great problems we can and are experiencing. Then I will share the reasons these problems prevail. Finally, I will conclude by giving a word of hope in such times as this.

So I want to share with you based on chapter 59 of Isaiah:

I. THE GREAT PROBLEMS WE CAN EXPERIENCE

Isaiah looked upon the landscape of his nation and lamented all the problems that he witnessed. Many of these same problems are with us today:

A. Injustice Prevails - This is one of the primary themes of this chapter. Isaiah says in the last of v.3, “Your tongue has muttered perversity.” Actually, that word should probably be translated “injustice.” Isaiah says in v.4, “No one calls for justice, nor does *any* plead for truth.” He says in v.8, “... And *there is* no justice in their ways....” He says in v.9, “Therefore justice is far from us....” In v.14 God says, “Justice is turned back....” Then we read in the last of v.15, “Then the LORD saw *it*, and it displeased Him that *there was* no justice.” So evidently there was a great deal of injustice in the land, with the rich exploiting the poor and the rulers using their authority to make themselves rich (1:17-23; 3:13-15:5:8-30). Too often the innocent were condemned and the guilty acquitted. The unjust seizing of property and even judicial murder were all too common. Justice is to show no favoritism or discrimination, and yet there was favoritism toward some and discrimination against others.

Injustice is with us today. There are examples of racial injustice, especially in our nation’s past. Injustice takes place when evidence is manipulated or suppressed and when false witnesses testify. On the other hand, injustice also is when a guilty criminal serves little or no time, sometimes because of favoritism due to their race or social connections. Thousands of crimes, even murder, go unsolved. Perhaps the greatest injustice is when an innocent baby is slaughtered in the womb. God is a just God and He will not take kindly to any form of injustice.

Isaiah sees another problem:

B. Perversion Replaces Righteousness - Isaiah says in v.8, “They have made themselves crooked paths....” There is a contrast between what is crooked and perverse with what is right and straight. He says in v.9, “... Nor does righteousness overtake us....” This problem is also alluded to in the last of v.14, where it says, “And equity cannot enter” the public square. The word translated “equity” (*n^ekochah*) is not what we hear about today. Based on Hebrew poetic

parallelism, it must be similar in meaning to “truth.” It refers to what is upright, straight, or right as opposed to what is crooked or perverse.

Ah, we are living in an increasingly perverse and crooked society. We have abandoned what is right in the eyes of God. Sexual perversion is one of many expressions of this very thing.

C. Spiritual and Mental Blindness Prevails - Isaiah says beginning in the last of v.9, “We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, *but* we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if *we had* no eyes; We stumble at noonday as at twilight....” This blindness was predicted in the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28:28-29.¹ One of the saddest consequences of sin is that the power of spiritual perception continually lessens. People are in spiritual darkness and they can’t even see the truth anymore, even when it is plainly presented to them.

D. Peace Is Replaced by Violence, Turmoil and War - God says beginning in the last of v.7, “Wasting and destruction *are* in their paths, The way of peace they have not known, And there is no justice in their ways; They have made themselves crooked paths; Whoever takes that way shall not know peace.” This describes many Americans today, especially in some of our major cities. They live in a state of ongoing turmoil, conflict, and violence. Is this how you want to live?

E. Prayers for Deliverance Go Unanswered – Look at vv.1-2, “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” The problem is neither God’s ears nor God’s arm. The problem is with the sins of humanity. Then in v.11 he says, “We look for justice, but *there is* none; For salvation, *but* it is far from us.” Not only did the oppressed not find justice on the part of their rulers, but even the Lord seemed to hold back intervention.

Have you experienced a similar problem, that your prayers go unanswered? It seems that God has hidden His face from you? Perhaps you haven’t truly repented of your sins. Perhaps you need to be saved.

Now when a society experiences all these problems, we are not surprised to read of another problem:

F. We Sink into Despair - Isaiah says in v.11, “We all growl like bears, And moan sadly like doves....” These appear to be expressions of disappointment, sorrow, pain, and misery.

What a sad picture! Isn’t this a picture of our country today?

When a nation experiences these kinds of problems, we would be wise to seek to know why these things are happening. Well God explains why in this chapter through His prophet Isaiah. So let’s see secondly:

II. THE REASONS THESE PROBLEMS PREVAIL

Isaiah gives several reasons for such conditions in this chapter but I will focus our attention only upon three:

¹ “The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness....”

A. Our Sins Have Multiplied - God says in vv.2-3, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity....” Such sins destroy the possibility of having a relationship with God. That is why prayers go unanswered, and such problems prevail. Then Isaiah confesses in v.12, “For our transgressions are multiplied before You, And our sins testify against us; For our transgressions *are* with us, And *as for* our iniquities, we know them.” Then he names six specific sins in v.13.² Indeed, “our transgressions are multiplied....”

How true this is in our nation. Our sins against God have multiplied since I was a boy. Profanity and immorality are much more pervasive. Just look at the difference between the movies that were commonly seen in the 1950s and today.

Isaiah identifies in our text a major reason for such problems that he identifies.

B. God’s Truth Is Replaced with Lies - This is the root cause of so many of our problems today and this chapter says much about this reality. Note that in v.3 that two of the sins that have hindered the Lord’s answering prayer for deliverance from their problems is that “Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity [or injustice].” He says in v.4, “No one calls for justice, Nor does *any* plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies....” Then Isaiah confesses in the last of v.13 that his people had been “Conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.” Then God says in vv.14-15, “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; [Why?] For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter. So truth fails....” The word for “street” is not a typical, narrow street of the city, but a broad plaza. It refers to the wide street at the city gate, the seat of government and commerce (see Gen. 19:2; 2 Chron. 32:6; Neh. 8:3; Esther 4:6; Job 29:7). Thus the Hebrew word may be translated the “public square” (HCSB).

Based on the context, the first application of this verse relates to justice in the courts. Note the connection between truth and justice. That’s because true justice involves discovering the truth. Is the accused guilty or innocent? Ex. 18:21 says that judges are to be “men of truth” who hate covetousness, i.e. cannot be bribed. One way the courts determine the truth is through witnesses, and yet false witnesses result in unjust outcomes in the courts. Here’s the problem: the more society departs from the truth and embraces lies, the harder it will be to avoid false witnesses in the courts.

However, since “the street” was also the place of government, commerce and public life, we must not limit this problem to truth falling in the courts. The fact is truth is the basis of the social fabric, their groundwork of all morality. Telling the truth is vital in a marriage and other relationships. Once truth falls as a vital virtue in society, and once lying becomes pervasive, society becomes corrupt and unhealthy. We are used to politicians lying, but it has become worse. They boldly lie with a straight face. One credible witness reported that a prominent politician’s brother admit that they practiced “plausible deniability” if they were ever questioned about their family’s profitable business dealings with other countries. You know what that means? As long as the denial seems plausible, they will freely deny any charge levied against them. Now, lying is increasingly common in the news media and big business. Social media has

² These are six infinitive absolute verbs to identify more specific ways the people have rebelled against God (Gary V. Smith).

the power to suppress the truth and promote lies. If there is a political or financial incentive, lies will abound.

The concept of absolute, objective truth has certainly fallen in American society today. The Hebrew word for “truth” (*emeth*) in v.14 gives the word picture of something this is firm, reliable, stable, and thus it refers to objective truth that you can rely upon. Yet today, there is no such truth in the minds of many. Truth is the ever-fluctuating opinions of the experts. Truth is fluid, changing from generation to generation, and even day to day. Today they talk about “your truth,” which may be different from someone else’s truth.

For example, if a person is born a male, there used to be no question but that that child is a male and science has even discovered that females have two X chromosomes in their cells, while males have both X and a Y chromosomes. Yet now public policy allows a person to declare that a male is a female based on subjective feelings. Truth has fallen in the streets when those with the reprobate mind can redefine marriage. Marriage was God’s idea and in God’s plan, marriage is between a man and a woman. That is the truth! Truth has fallen in the streets when medical doctors are suppressed on social media when they share their scientific findings regarding effective early treatment of the coronavirus, or when they question the effectiveness of masks and other such measures. Are people following opinions or objective truth, verified by double-blind, peer-reviewed studies? Yet once you jettison objective truth for subjective feelings or mere opinions, then there is no truth. You are left with the question of Pontius Pilate, who asked Jesus, “What is truth” (John 18:38).

Yet the fact is God is truth, and all truth is rooted in Him. Jesus declared that He is “the truth” in John 14:6. He said in John 18:37, “For this cause ... I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Truth is expressed in the Word of God. In John 17:17 Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”

This problem of telling and believing lies is becoming increasingly prevalent today. When truth has fallen in the public square, then we have a responsibility to lift high God’s truth. In fact, Paul said in Php. 2:14-15 that we live “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life....” And that leads to another reason for all the problems described in this chapter:

C. Too Few Are Standing up for Truth, Righteousness and Justice - Isaiah says in v.4, “No one calls for justice, Nor does *any* plead for truth....” Likewise, he says in v.16, “He saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor....” God looked for some champion of the oppressed to arise, but “there was no man.” None stood up to resist the unrighteous and protect the innocent against false accusation and injustice. Perhaps few even interceded to God in prayer the way Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:22-33).

Perhaps part of the problem is mentioned in v.15, “So truth fails, and he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey....” The Hebrew words translated “makes himself a prey” refers to his possessions being plundered. Those who practice evil turn against those who speak out against what they’re doing and even plunder *their* possessions as yet another act of injustice.

Will we be silent in the face of such injustice, immorality, and apostasy? We are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16), and God expects us to make a difference. Paul said in 1 Tim. 3:15 that the church is to be “the pillar and ground of the truth.” As our cities slide deeper into sin, part of the reason could be that the voice of God’s church is

largely silent in proclaiming God's truth when it is countercultural. We have this perverted idea that to reach the world we must make the world like us. Yet Jesus said the world would persecute the true church (John 15:20).

Furthermore, will God always patiently stand by and do nothing about such spiritual and moral corruption? No! If spiritual, moral and social evils are inadequately dealt with by man, there must be divine intervention at some point. Isaiah says in the last of v.15, "Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice." So beginning in the next verse we are going to see that the day will come when God Himself will act to save His people and condemn the guilty. So let's see last of all:

III. WHAT IS OUR HOPE IN SUCH TIMES?

Based on Isaiah 59, I can say that we should:

A. Confess Our Sins to God - After stating the sins of the nation in vv.1-8, the prophet begins to confess the nations sins on their behalf beginning in v.9. I think he is hoping to encourage others to join him in such national confession. That is our only hope of salvation. Yet too often, instead of confessing our sins, people deny their sins.

B. Turn and Repent of Such Sins - In such evil times, who is it that the Lord will rise up on behalf of to bring salvation and deliverance? Look at v.20, "The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the LORD. Yes, that is the key. We must turn from our transgressions against the Lord.

C. Trust in Christ, Your Redeemer - Isaiah says in v.20, "The Redeemer will come to Zion..." The Redeemer pays the price to restore what we have lost due to sin. That Redeemer is Jesus, who at the price of His shed blood will save us and restore what was lost. Then he says in v.21, "...this *is* My covenant with them: My Spirit who *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth..." Notice the change from the third person plural to the second person in that verse. It is believed to denote a reference to the Messiah that Isaiah spoke of so often. Indeed, the Holy Spirit filled Jesus (cf. 42:1). He spoke the Word of God like no other.

D. Our Ultimate Hope Is the Second Coming of Jesus - Look at vv.16-18, "He saw that *there was* no man, And wondered that *there was* no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to *their* deeds, accordingly He will repay, Fury to His adversaries, Recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay." Sin, perversity, injustice and lies may prevail for a generation or more, but the day is coming when Jesus will judge this world (Acts 17:31). His coming in the last of v.19 is compared to a flood of water. This is an image that would be easily understood in a country where a dry waddy can quickly become a major stream in a few seconds. His power in judgment will be overwhelming and unstoppable. God will be victorious over His enemies, you can be sure of that.

Yet when Jesus comes again, He will not only judge the world, but save His people who trust in Him. Notice in v.17 He will put on "a helmet of salvation." He will establish his kingdom

for them, where righteousness, justice, prosperity and peace will prevail! The kingdom is prophesied more fully in chapters 60-62. God's commitment to accomplish all of this is communicated by referring to His zeal.

Conclusion: When Jesus comes again, will you and your loved ones be saved or judged? If you have repented of your sins and believed in Jesus, then your sins have already been judged at the cross. Final and complete salvation awaits the children of God. Yet there are increasing numbers of people who will face the judgment of God. Don't allow the problems of Isaiah 59 to overtake you when God has provided a way of salvation and peace.

Sources: Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: Isaiah 40-66* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), vv.9-21 only; H. D. M. Spence & Joseph S. Exell, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. __ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), vv.9-17 only; Warren Wiersbe, *Be Comforted* (Colorado Springs: ChariotVictor Publishing, 1992). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). McGee read, but nothing added.

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker, or go to www.SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com/Resources. Dr. Felker's email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).