

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #74

Isaiah 51:1-11

I don't know if you have ever seen the programs called "Intervention," but they are fascinating. They take a person who has some addiction problem and sit them down in a room and they are confronted by people who love them and those people force the person to get some help or else they turn from them.

What God does in this book of Isaiah is to sit Israel down and confront her. She has a big addiction problem, her transgressions and sins. This has caused a major problem in her relationship with God and God offers her a way out. He offers her His blessings.

Just this past week Israel finds herself the target of much animosity from all over the world. It does not appear as if too many nations are interested in defending her or helping her. This is a wonderful time for her to do exactly what Isaiah challenges her to do in these verses.

As we come to Isaiah 51, God calls Israel to pay careful attention to Him and His Word. In **verse 1** God calls people who were pursuing righteousness and those who seek the LORD to listen to Him, and in **verse 4** He calls them to pay attention to Him, and in **verse 7** He calls them to listen to Him, and in **verse 9** He tells them it is time to wake up.

Now the verb "listen" (shamah) in **verse 1** and **verse 7** are the same. The word means to listen in the sense of understanding, applying and obeying the Word of God (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 836). The verb "pay attention" (qashab) in **verse 4** is one that means to perk up your ears as an animal would and carefully attend or focus on what you hear (*Ibid.*, p. 746). The verb "wake up" (ayour) in **verse 9** means to rise up from sleep and become very alert and fervent about what you hear (*Ibid.*, p. 615).

So God calls His people who are interested in pursuing righteousness and interested in seeking Him and His blessings to wake up and start seriously focusing on understanding and applying and obeying God's Word. Now the context of this is important. We saw last time that Jesus Christ obeyed the Word and will of God perfectly in caring out a humiliating and excruciating assignment. Now God calls Israel to obey Him.

No matter what your present state, if you will purpose to do what God says in these verses, God promises He will do some amazing things for you.

People who pursue righteousness and people who seek the Lord by understanding and applying the Scriptures can find great comfort and encouragement from knowing God's Word and plan. On the other hand, there is no comfort or encouragement for those not right with God.

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN BEING COMFORTED TO LISTEN TO HIS WORD, UNDERSTAND IT, BELIEVE IT, AND OBEY IT BECAUSE HE HAS PROMISED TO DO SOME AMAZING THINGS FOR HIS PEOPLE AND GIVE AMAZING BLESSINGS TO HIS PEOPLE.

Those who decide to take God's Word seriously and pursue righteousness and seek the Lord can find great comfort and hope. Keep in mind that this nation had been involved in terrible iniquity and transgressions against God (50:1). He calls this rebellious nation to turn from her sin and transgression and turn to Him and He says if she will, He will do some amazing things for her. The same is true for you and me.

There are **three main directions** God asks His people to look toward in this context as a basis for turning to Him and His Word and as a basis for being comforted:

DIRECTION #1 – Look backward at what I have already done in the past. **51:2, 9, 10**

In these verses there are three past memories God challenges Israel to think about:

Past Memory #1 - Look back to what I did with Abraham. **51:2**

God basically says to Israel, those who want My righteousness and want to seek Me can be comforted by thinking about your historical roots. Think about where you came from as a nation. Look to your father, Abraham, and think for a moment what I did for him and with him.

God entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham when he was nothing. He was a 75 year old man living in Haran when God first chose him. God promised that He would make of him a great nation and bless him, but that birth process was painful for Sarah, both physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 when God finally fulfilled His promise. Both Abraham and Sarah wondered if He ever would give them a child, but in the end these two experienced the great blessings of God. God blessed him and multiplied him.

All Abraham had to do was to believe God and totally trust in God. That was it. The only thing God asked Him to do was to follow His Word and trust in Him. Abraham did and God blessed him.

God's point to His people is look back on this and be comforted with this. God says I chose one man (Abraham) just like I chose one nation (Israel). I am a God who always fulfills My Word to those who place their faith in Me. I may not fulfill it instantly, but I always fulfill what I said I would do eventually. Abraham proves that. All I ask you to do is trust Me, be faithful to Me and My Word and I will bless you.

Past Memory #2 - Look back to what I did to Satan. **51:9**

Notice the source of our strength, not from us but from "the arm of the Lord." God says put on strength by thinking back to what I did to Satan.

Now Rahab was the name of a person, but it was also a symbolic name applied to Egypt (Psalm 87:4; 89:10). By linking this name to the crushing of the dragon, God is connecting this to Satan.

As I understand it, God is basically saying think back to what I did when Satan led Egypt to try and destroy you in the days of old. I cut him to pieces.

God says I have already dealt Satan one death blow and so My people may be comforted by knowing that trusting in Me is what will save them. My people's strength is in My arms.

Past Memory #3 - Look back to what I did for Israel . **51:10**

God's people need to think back and remember how powerful God is. He can cut down any power and He can remove any obstacle so Israel will be in her land. God dried up the sea for Israel so they could escape from Egypt.

This is a great memory for Israel to have. God is capable of using the same kind of strength to permit Israel to return to her land again. She needs to reflect on the past and see what God has done.

DIRECTION #2 – Look around at what I am doing in the present. **51:5**

In the Hebrew text, the first word of **verse 5** is “near.” What God is presently doing is offering His righteousness and His salvation to all the world which comprise all of the coastlands.

We learn in this verse that God's salvation will reach out to the coastlands of the world and there will be many who expectantly look for and long for God's great salvation and deliverance. In fact, for the most part, it is believers from the nations who expectantly look for the return of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ came into this world this brought the salvation of God and the righteousness of God to Israel and to this world. Israel needs to know that this is exactly what God is presently doing in this world right now; He is saving people all over the world. He has not forgotten about her.

Notice the righteousness of God is “My righteousness” and the salvation of God is “My salvation.” There is always a close connection between God's righteousness and God's salvation because both are found in Him. You cannot gain righteousness by looking to you nor can you gain salvation by looking to you; we must look to God.

God's righteousness and God's salvation is very near right now. You can experience God's salvation and righteousness this very hour by faith in Jesus Christ.

Truth is, Israel has always had a problem realizing it is God's righteousness and not hers. In fact, Paul said in Romans 9:30-31, that Israel tried to come up with her own righteousness and God would not accept it.

DIRECTION #3 – Look forward at what I am going to do in the future. **51:3-6, 11**

There are seven future promises that God makes to Israel:

Future Promise #1 - I am going to make Israel's land into a Garden of Eden. **51:3**

God says to Israel, I want you comforted by knowing that there is coming a day when I will turn Israel's Promised Land into a fruitful land and garden like the Garden of Eden. God says I will turn your desert areas into a garden of God. We know that the first Adam initially lived in a garden paradise but he sinned and lost it. God says I am going to turn Israel's land into a brand new Garden of Eden.

God says to Israel I want you knowing that one day when all the nations of the world look to you they will see that you are a nation of joy and gladness. Your land will be filled with singing and melodies.

There will come a day when God will cause a land that has been desolate to become a land that is flourishing.

Future Promise #2 - I am going to send My law and justice to rule the world. **51:4**

We may observe that from **verses 4-7**, that there is a great emphasis on the personal pronoun "Me" and "My." These two pronouns are used fourteen times in these verses. God is stressing what belongs to Him. Notice that in **verse 4** God calls Israel "My people" and "My nation." God wants Israel to know that she is His property.

Obviously, God wants His people paying attention to Him and His Word because His Word goes forth from Him. Since they are His people, they should be very interested in His Word and will.

God's righteousness and justice will one day rule the world. The contextual implication of this verse is that there will come a day when Israel will shine forth as the nation of God as a light to the whole world.

The whole world will be filled with the knowledge of God and will know that God is a just God who fulfills His Word and will to His people.

Future Promise #3 - I am going to judge the peoples. **51:5**

God says My powerful arms will one day judge the peoples of the world. God will eventually judge the nations. This is why it is so important that God's people give themselves to carefully understanding and obeying the Word of God.

Future Promise #4 - I am going to demolish the heaven and earth. **51:6a**

In Luke 21:33 Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." The best thing that any person can devote himself or herself to in this lifetime is carefully understanding the eternal Word of God.

It is absolutely foolish to spend your whole life devoted to this world, because this world will eventually be gone and so will all the evil people who live in it. What will last forever is God's salvation and God's righteousness.

Now the reason God brings up this cosmological point of the earth and sky vanishing at this point is because during the Tribulation this is exactly what God is going to do just before He gives Israel her land. God is going to blast the earth and sky with His wrath and most inhabitants of the world are going to be killed. But Israel has nothing to fear because when these things are seen, God's salvation and His righteousness will be fulfilled.

The challenge to look to the sky and to the earth is the challenge to Israel to look for something tangible and temporal and realize that when she sees these things, His eternal salvation is near and His eternal righteousness is about to be established on the earth. **Comfort is found in God's salvation and righteousness and not in things that are temporal.**

Future Promise #5 - I am going to destroy the inhabitants of the world. **51:6b-8**

It is interesting to see in **verse 7** that there is a slight change in the emphasis from **verse 1** from pursuing righteousness to knowing righteousness. Real comfort not only comes from wanting a relationship with God but knowing the Word of God.

God's people have nothing to fear from any man because God is going to rid this world of Israel-haters, Christ-rejecters, and God-mockers. Two metaphors are used as to what God will do to the enemies of His people: 1) He will cause them to disappear like a garment eaten by moths; 2) He will cause them to be devoured like a worm devours wool. So the enemies of God's people will end up being eliminated like a moth-eaten, worm-eaten judgment. Now the process of how this works is little by little. A moth or worm does not devour the whole thing in one sitting but little by little. That is exactly what the Tribulation will do, wipe out people little by little.

Future Promise #6 - I am going to bring my ransomed nation into their land. **51:11a**

The point here is that Israel will come rejoicing to Zion, Jerusalem, because the great sovereign God cut Satan down to size. Zion is a real, literal, geographical location. It includes Israel's land, Israel's capital city Jerusalem, and Israel's Temple. The point of this is that God will do miraculous things again for Israel and bring her into her land. The "ransomed" of the LORD will return to her land. Israel will finally come home to all of the blessings of God.

Future Promise #7 - I am going to cause My nation to have everlasting joy and singing.
51:11b

God wants His people comforted to know that if they will turn from their sin and turn to Him, He will do great things for them. Sorrow and mourning will be turned into everlasting joy.

Those who pursue righteousness, and who seek the Lord, and who desire to carefully understand and obey God's Word, will be strong and comforted knowing they will be blessed by God.