

Back to Basics

General Topic: God Delivers and Restores

Sunday, June 26th, 2022

Author: Rev. Spencer L. Braddix

Lesson Text: Isaiah 51:1-8

Background Scripture: Isaiah 51

Isaiah 51:1 Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

3 For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my

salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

Lesson Objective(s):

This lesson will further entrench believers in knowing that God delivers on His promises and takes care of His children even in the midst of struggle.

Teaching Tools

Word puzzles may be developed from the following site: www.puzzlemaker.com. Also, www.dtlk.com has several visual aids that may be beneficial, as well as www.kidssundayschool.com which provide other helps for teaching.

Bible Journaling may be an interesting way to involve older teens in self-expression of the lessons they are taught. Visit www.lifeway.com/Articles/how-to-start-bible-journaling-in-six-easy-steps to find ways to use this valuable tool to learn and reinforce Scripture.

The Lesson:

Twenty-First century Christians need to be encouraged by the fact that God has promised deliverance from devastation. He wants to turn deserts into gardens.

That's really good news, for it seems that everywhere we look there are wars that are turning good places into deserts. Sinful men continue to ravage nations that have not caused them any harm as in the case of Russia and Ukraine. But in this week's lesson, God has promised to end all of this and also make the wilderness of Israel like Eden, God's garden

Background

Isaiah 51 seems to be addressed to the people of Israel who lived more than a century after the time of Isaiah. They are the nation suffering through the Babylonian Exile. Much of Isaiah 40–66 looks beyond the time of the prophet to the Exile and the returning exiles. The background of this passage is that the people are exiled away from Judea and are being held captive by the Babylonians. They are desperate. They are heart-broken and struggling to make sense of their predicament. Yet they still remember Yahweh. But does Yahweh remember them?

He does. The Lord calls upon the people to trust and believe in Him once again like their ancestor Abraham. The Lord employs the Abrahamic story in Genesis, a story they never forgot about, to remind the Jews what He is capable of. The Lord tells them that He is about to move. He is about to bring salvation once again for those who are pursuing His righteousness and glory. Cyrus, the king of the Persians, defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and subsequently freed the Israelites from bondage. This passage tells the story of God revealing His plans to them.

A Promised Deliverance (Isaiah 50:1-3)

In verse 1 the Lord bids the people exiled out of Jerusalem to listen and listen closely to what He has to say. He is preparing to share important news. Note that those who listen to the Lord are also the same people who "follow after righteousness." A person cannot do

one without the other. Many people turned from God before the Babylonian captivity and many others turned from God because of Babylonian captivity. Those who turned during captivity may have felt that God was unjust. They may have felt that God was unfair. Those who still had faith in the Lord are the ones the Lord was speaking to particularly.

Listening to and seeking the Lord are the preconditions for following after righteousness. One cannot follow after righteousness without listening to and seeking the Lord in spite of their predicament in life. Moreover, following after God does not necessarily mean following behind Him in the sense of committing to religious rituals without much dedication. It means pursuing Him. It means chasing after His ways. It means actively trying to please Him according to His desires.

Through Isaiah, God implores both those who have remained faithful and those who have lost the faith to look to the rock whence they were hewn. In proper context, the Lord is saying to behold the tradition upon which your people have historically relied or stood. The Lord is saying to honor the tradition, hold it in high regard. It is as solid as a rock. The Lord beckons the people to remember their culture, their past, their tradition. Look backwards and remember what God has done is important because it is a sheer reminder of what God is fully capable of. In other words, that which God was capable of in the past is what God is still capable of in the present.

When the people look at their tradition and remember their culture, they will remember the patriarch Abraham who is the father of their faith. The Lord directed Abraham's path by telling him to depart from his country and people to a land that God selected (Genesis 12:1). In this history, Abraham was alone with his wife Sarah who could not conceive children, and the Lord blessed them more than they could ever have imagined. The blessing of Abraham did not cease with Abraham but extended to Isaac and Jacob and all his sons. The Lord's covenant with Abraham did not stop with Abraham but continued regardless of circumstance or

situation through all of his descendants who continued to have faith in the Lord. This great story of Abraham in the Torah that the people knew so well says to them that if the Lord can take one man, Abraham, and separate him from his people, and still make a great nation out of his descendants, then the Lord can do it again.

These words were encouraging for those who struggled with wondering not if God was willing to deliver them but if the Lord was capable of doing it. These people had experienced military defeat at the hands of countless enemies. They knew in their heart of hearts that they were guilty of not keeping the covenant. They remembered the times that they worshiped other gods and didn't care for the God who freed them from Egypt and protected their ancestors. Some even scoffed at their tradition. Some ignored their heritage. So, they thought, why would God save us? Why would God return to us? Why would God rescue us in light of everything we have done against Him? It is a wonderful blessing to know that God is a forgiving God. And not only is He forgiving, but He is also able to forgive and restore when He pleases.

A Path to Deliverance (Isaiah 50:4-6)

As we continue in verse 4, the Lord again bids His people to listen to Him closely. His people, either Gentiles from other parts of the land or the Jews who have known him since Abraham, heed His words carefully and recognize Him as their God. He will make His law a light for the people who recognize Him as their Lord and seek to follow Him in the ways of righteousness. When God delivers them, it will include non- Jewish people who see His works in their redemption and can recognize His power and awesomeness.

The text then shows God declaring that His righteousness is near. On one hand, the Lord is saying that His righteousness is close in the sense that it is not far from people who once assumed it was distant and too far for them to grasp, because they were not members of

the chosen people. Here the Lord is explicit as to the proximity to His glory, even for those living as far-flung as "the isles." His salvation has gone forth, and it is there for any who desire to pursue it. The Lord is the Lord of all peoples. And He welcomes all peoples. What was once limited is now open; a covenant that was once particular is now open for anyone who is willing to accept and embrace.

On the other hand, however, when the Lord says His righteousness is near, He is also saying that Cyrus, king of the Persians, is on his way to battle the Babylonians. When the Persians and the Babylonians engage in war, the Lord has set it up for Cyrus and the Persians to emerge victorious. After Cyrus defeats the Babylonians, he will then free the people of Judea who were held in Babylonian bondage. This defeat and subsequent liberation will be in the name of the Lord for the world to see. Those who will be delivered will rest in God's arms in whom they trust because they will know that only the Lord could have kept such a promise of commitment.

A Permanent Deliverance (Isaiah 50:7-8)

God sums up this soliloquy by expressing to the Children of Israel that they should not be concerned about mere mortals or the power of human beings because evil will always lose in the end. Evil will eventually devour itself and destroy the world it infests. God's righteousness, that lasts for all time, will do away with it in the end. Isaiah is saying that no matter who emerges as an enemy of God and God's people, they will eventually fall. Connected to the Lord's salvation is the Lord's consistent and promised deliverance from His enemies.

The Jewish idea of salvation is centered on physical protection and deliverance from one's enemies. Jesus, a Jew himself, re-imagines this understanding and expands the definition to include God's eternal protection and deliverance from Hell and evil. Remember that God restores, no matter what was lost, destroyed, or taken.

The Lord has the power to redeem and deliver like He has done in the past. Always look to God's faithfulness in the past as assurance that God will continue to work on your behalf. God reminds His people that just as He did the unimaginable with Abraham, He can continue to do so with His people through the ages

Final Thoughts

In spite of what we see, we must remember God is faithful and He will deliver us, just as He did the remnant of Israel. He encourages us to listen to Him and to look back at what He did for Abraham and Sarah. Abraham believed God and became a great nation; we too must believe God and trust Him.

God comforts and consoles us as we fear Him. If we are faithful, God will deliver us. We must be willing to tell others that God's Word will last forever. We should encourage others to trust Jesus for deliverance and salvation. And if God be for us, who can be against us?!

Be Salt! Be Light! Be Blessed!