

“The First and the Last”
Isaiah Chapter 48
Sunday, February 11th, 2024

Children’s Sermon

This coming Wednesday is February 14th. *Is that a special day of any sort?* It’s Valentine’s Day! *What is Valentine’s Day about?* (Love).

Did you know that Valentine’s Day is named after a real person? Does anyone know who Valentine was?

Valentine was an actual man; a real human being.

A long time ago in Rome, it was illegal to be a Christian. If you were a Christian, you would be arrested. It was against the law to believe in Jesus. It was also against the law for soldiers in the Roman army to get married since they would always have to leave their wives at home when they went to war.

Well, Valentine was a Christian (a pastor) who broke the law by being a Christian and broke the law by performing weddings for soldiers who wanted to get married. Valentine knew that love is a gift from God and he wanted soldiers to be able to get married if they wanted to.

When the Emperor found out that Valentine was a Christian and was helping soldiers get married, he arrested Valentine and had him killed.

So, we celebrate Valentine’s Day to remember Valentine’s courage to be a Christian and to help people enjoy God’s gift of love to us.

Closing Prayer

God, we thank You for the gift of love, and we thank You for Valentine’s bravery to believe in You even when it was against the law. We pray that we would all be brave for You like Valentine was. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen

“Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin? The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.”

One of the great promises of God is the one that declares He would be our God, and that we would be His people. Among theologians that promise is called the **“Immanuel Principle,”** wherein God declares, “I shall be your God, and you shall be My people:”

- **Genesis 17:7** - God speaking to Abram, “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”
- **Exodus 6:7** - I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”
- **Jeremiah 31:1** - “At the same time,” says the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.”

- **Ezekiel 36:28** - "Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God."
- **2 Corinthians 6:16b** - "I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
- **Revelation 21:3** - "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.'"

These words speak of the most precious of relationships—the relationship by which God's people belong to Him as His own. Scripture elaborates to tell us that God has created, and is creating, this relationship through covenant (promise). As God tells the children of Israel in **Deuteronomy 29:12–13**, He has gathered them together "so that [they] may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord [their] God, . . . that he may establish [them] as his people, and that he may be [their] God." By and through covenant, God is making His people His own, and He is showing Himself to be their God.

But that doesn't mean God's people do everything properly (and we're part of that people if we trust Jesus Christ for eternal salvation). We remain sinners on this earth by our corrupted nature, but we are also redeemed from the punishment due our sins in eternal hell. Because we have received redemption in Christ, we are able to choose to sin, or not to sin. And that point is where the battle between heaven and hell is waged.

"Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round? On Jesus' bosom naught but calm is found."

The **48th Chapter of Isaiah** is before us today. Let's read verses 1-11. Please stand in reverence of Him Whose Word this is - our inerrant, infallible God:

Isaiah 48:1-11:

1 - "Hear this, O house of Jacob,
who are called by the name of Israel,
and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah;
who swear by the name of the LORD,
and make mention of the God of Israel,
but not in truth or in righteousness;

2 - For they call themselves after the holy city,
and lean on the God of Israel;
the LORD of hosts *is* His name:

3 - "I have declared the former things from the beginning;
they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it.
suddenly I did *them*, and they came to pass.

4 - Because I knew that you *were* obstinate (hard),
and your neck *was* an iron sinew,
and your brow bronze,

5 - Even from the beginning I have declared *it* to you;
before it came to pass I proclaimed *it* to you,
lest you should say, 'My idol has done them,
and my carved image and my molded image
have commanded them.'

6 - "You have heard;
see all this.
And will you not declare *it*?
I have made you hear new things from this time,
even hidden things, and you did not know them.

7 - They are created now and not from the beginning;
and before this day you have not heard them,
lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.'

8 - Surely you did not hear,
surely you did not know;
surely from long ago your ear was not opened.
For I knew that you would deal very treacherously,
and were called a transgressor from the womb.

9 - "For My name's sake I will defer (delay) My anger,
and *for* My praise I will restrain it from you,
so that I do not cut you off.

10 - Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

11 - For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do *it*;
for how should *My name* be profaned?
And I will not give My glory to another."

"Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown? Jesus we know, and He is on the throne."

Commentator Alec Motyer calls **Chapter 48**, "a hugely important chapter." (*Isaiah by the Day*, 233). He notes that this chapter "completes Isaiah's prediction of the 'Cyrus-plan' - the fall of Babylon in **Chapter 47** and the return of the exiles to Jerusalem in **Chapter 48**. But it also has an additional function: *in what spiritual condition do they return home?* A change of address does not bring about a change of heart, and they are not yet at home with the Lord."

Chapter 48 looks back to chapters 40-47. **Chapter 40** began, "Comfort, comfort My people." Ray Ortlund observes in his commentary, "God comforted His ancient people with a promise to release them from Babylonian captivity, bring them home, and show them His glory. The problem was (at least for the Israelites), God planned to use a

pagan conqueror named Cyrus to set those events in motion. The Jewish exiles choked on that. In fact, the actual appearing of the glory of the Lord was even more problematic. The glory came down in an ordinary man named Jesus of Nazareth who didn't throw off the yoke of Roman tyranny, but died on a Roman cross. That was a problem, too - "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." (**1 Corinthians 1:23**) (Ortlund, 318)

And so it is today. Every culture has its prejudices against God in Christ. The church should not be named among those prejudicial cultures and biases against Him!

"Listen up, Israel!" Isaiah uses the verbs 'listen,' 'hear,' and 'heard' 9 times in these 22 verses). Isaiah rebukes the Israelites - "Don't be stupid! Give worship where worship is due. God will not allow His glory to be wrongfully given elsewhere." Isaiah continued to recite God's credentials in an attempt to get the people to respond in faith. And those credentials are impressive! Consider:

- Verse 12 - God says, "I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last." Those words of Jesus appear again in the last chapter of the Bible, **Revelation 22:13**. In both **Revelation 1:8 and 22:13**, Jesus refers to Himself as "Alpha and Omega," the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The apostle John also refers to Jesus using the title "Alpha and Omega" in **Revelation 21:6**. Further, John applies the title to Jesus - "The Beginning and the End" in **Revelation 21:6 and 22:13**.
- Verse 13 - God's hand laid out the foundation of the earth;
- Verse 13 - His right hand stretched out the heavens;
- Verse 17 - He is the Lord your God!

But, how did Israel respond to God's rebukes through Isaiah?

- Verse 4 - Israel was obstinate (hard); their necks were like iron sinews (they were unsubmitive) and their brows like bronze;
- Verses 7-9 - The Israelites were "deaf to God's Word;"
- Verse 8 - The people of God were "rebellious;"
- Verse 22 - Ultimately, they were wicked and without peace.

Feeling superior is the wrong response for God's people. *Honestly, are not our hearts close kin with the Israelites' hearts?* We need to pray that God will replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (**Ezekiel 36:26**).

"Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away? In Jesus' keeping we are safe and they."

The future fall of Babylon is prophesied here as a present exhortation to Israel. The nation was reminded that God is in control and of all the miracles He had worked on their behalf in the past. *How about you? Are you mired in present circumstances? Do you need to remind yourself of God's faithfulness in your past?* If you keep a spiritual journal, write out a testimony of one such event or episode. Pray for opportunities to

testify of how God has worked in your life in order to encourage others and praise His name.

I'll share 3 brief points of application, all which begin with the letter 'L':

- Verse 2 - **Lean** on the God of Israel. A synonym of the verb 'lean' is 'rely.' This is **Isaiah 50:10**, "Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD **and rely upon his God**. **Lean** is mentioned first.
- Verse 8a - "Surely you did not **hear**, surely you did not know; Surely from long ago your ear was not opened. Synonymous to the verb *hear* is "**listen**." God's people did not **listen** to Him; they thought their understanding was superior to His. We listen to God by reading and meditating upon His Word, the Bible. **Hearing** God's voice and listening to Him is second.
- Verse 14 - **Love** the Lord, even as He loves us. In this instance, God is saying that He loved Cyrus; Cyrus was not a believer in Jesus Christ, yet God worked in him and through him. God loves all people as their Creator. But He has a special love for His children - "those who believe in His name." (**John 1:12**) That love is a soul saving love.

What do you think is the most well-known verse from the Bible? Probably **John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." *Who are the ones in this verse who do not perish, but have everlasting life?* Those who believe in Jesus!

It's clear in Scripture that not every soul that lives goes to heaven upon death. There is a real place called the grave; Sheol - hell. Hell is populated with souls that did not believe in Jesus Christ as Messiah, Redeemer, and Lord when they were alive on earth.

- Lean on Jesus - rely on His Word;
- Listen to God (by reading His Word);
- Love God and others.

In 1555, Dr. Nicholas Ridley was sentenced to be burned at the stake in England because of his witness for Christ. On the night before Ridley's execution, his brother offered to remain with him in the prison chamber to be of assistance and comfort.

Nicholas declined the offer saying, "I intend (God willing) to go to bed, and sleep as quietly tonight, as ever I did." Because he knew the peace of God, he could rest in the strength of the everlasting arms of his Lord to meet his need.

"Peace, perfect peace, death shad'wing us and ours? Jesus has vanquished death and all its pow'rs."