

**Awake! Awake!**  
**Isaiah Chapter 51:17-23**  
Sunday, March 3rd, 2024

If you were here for the Men's Conference yesterday you will already have heard this, but our memories fade quickly. And most weren't here yesterday.

In the year 1739, the great American intellect and theologian Jonathan Edwards, preached 30 sermons on one verse, **Isaiah 51:8**. That verse reads this way in the *NKJV* of Scripture:

“For the moth will eat them up like a garment,  
And the worm will eat them like wool;  
But My righteousness will be forever,  
And My salvation from generation to generation.”

The typical Puritan sermon form consisted of the text, followed by doctrine, and then application. Edwards stretched that template over a whole series rather than a single sermon; the first sermon covered the text and began the doctrine, the next 27 sermons continued to address the doctrine, and the final two sermons covered the application.

The concept of righteousness is featured prominently in this **51st Chapter of Isaiah**. Five times in the first 8 verses we find the word “righteousness” used. It is God's attribute of initiating and perfecting a right relationship with His creatures, as well as a human person's attribute of fidelity to that relationship.” (*Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition*, 102)

Righteousness is the quality of being right in the eyes of God. It is making the right choices, or doing things that please Him. These can be little choices like being kind to others or big choices like receiving the grace of God in becoming a Christian.

There is something very important we must consider. Until Jesus Christ comes into a person's life savingly, he/she will not experience the peace that transcends human understanding. We cannot hope to live lives that please God apart from His rightness being reckoned to our account. To be righteous is to be just.

In fact, you must be righteous if you wish to spend eternity in glory with Jesus. These are Jesus' haunting words in **Matthew 5:20** (remember this reference) - “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

It's intriguing to me - and it's not a coincidence - that our Communion hymn today is #520 in the *Trinity Hymnal* (**Matthew 5:20?**). The title? “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness!”

If we are trusting in the righteousness of Christ through faith, then our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, and anyone else for that matter!

**Isaiah 51:17-23:**

**17** - "Awake, awake!  
Stand up, O Jerusalem,  
you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD  
the cup of His fury;  
you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling,  
*and drained it out.*

**18** - *There is* no one to guide her  
among all the sons she has brought forth;  
nor *is there any* who takes her by the hand  
among all the sons she has brought up.

**19** - These two *things* have come to you;  
Who will be sorry for you?—  
Desolation and destruction, famine and sword—  
by whom will I comfort you?

**20** - Your sons have fainted,  
they lie at the head of all the streets,  
like an antelope in a net;  
they are full of the fury of the LORD,  
the rebuke of your God.

**21** - Therefore please hear this, you afflicted,  
and drunk but not with wine.

**22** - Thus says your Lord,  
the LORD and your God,  
*Who* pleads the cause of His people:  
"See, I have taken out of your hand  
the cup of trembling,  
the dregs of the cup of My fury;  
you shall no longer drink it.

**23** - But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you,  
who have said to you,  
'Lie down, that we may walk over you.'  
and you have laid your body like the ground,  
and as the street, for those who walk over."

The concept of "awakeness" is another feature in **Isaiah Chapter 51**. It comes forth in multiple couplets in this present chapter and the next chapter. We see it first in verse 9, "*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!*" In this instance, the command to awake implies that the Lord has appeared to be asleep. **Psalms 44:23** also seems to teach that where the Psalmist writes, "Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off forever."

But, we also know that's not possible for God to sleep or slumber. **Psalm 121:3-4** teaches, "He (God) will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

Author Victor Hugo wrote, "Have courage for the great sorrows of life, and patience for the small ones. And when you have finished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake."

We'll see again next Sunday, Lord willing, that **Chapter 52** begins the same way as our text today. "Awake! Awake!"

Our passage for today (**Isaiah 51:17-23**) also starts out, "Awake, awake, O Zion." Zion is known as the 'City of God' and it was one of the hills on which Jerusalem stood, so Jerusalem is often referred to as "Zion." It also can refer to a mountain (Mount Zion) and the temple.

Verse 17 also speaks of "the cup of His fury," an image of God's judgment. The *English Standard Version (ESV)* calls this "the cup of (God's) wrath." Verse 17 also calls this "the cup of trembling" or "the cup of staggering" as the *ESV* interprets it. Those forced to drink from this cup drained it "to the dregs." These words are highlighted again in verse 22.

"On the cross at Calvary that Good Friday, God turned His face of wrath toward his bleeding, dying Son, and made Him drink that cup of rejection to the last drop. See here the price of your redemption: God must hate His own sinless Son, the joy of His eternal heart, so that He may love you justly. The Father must become the enemy of the Son, the avenging angel who slaughters the firstborn Son in the dark Egyptian night of His captivity."

"The Cross was the cup of eternal wrath, distilled from the anger that had been building up since the sin of Adam, concentrated into one terrible drink. The Son drank the cup of wrath, so that we could drink the cup of salvation. And when He had finished His cup, there was not even a drop left for us who gratefully receive the benefit of His death." (Horton, *We Believe*, 101& 102).

Ray Ortlund helps us understand today's passage when he writes, "Isaiah sees the people of God lying in a drunken stupor, having been force-fed the bitter cup of His wrath in Babylonian captivity. That liquor was more than their faith could handle. They reeled and collapsed in despair. No human defense or comfort could help.

Judah hadn't understood that it was God, not the Assyrians or the Babylonians or any human power - it was God alone they had to reckon with. *And if God is against you, what escape is there?* Now Isaiah reveals the good news inside that bad news. The God who put that cup to their lips can also take it away. He can even refill it with his most potent, 100-proof judgment and shove it down the throats of the Babylonians - which is what he promises to do.

God, the Jewish exiles must see, has fulfilled His disciplinary purpose. A new day of grace has dawned. For the Jews in Babylon, this meant getting up and returning to the Promised Land. For us today, it means getting up and entering into the promises of Christ. Isaiah is saying to us all, "It isn't God who needs to be aroused. You do. Wake up to what God has done. His salvation is ready and waiting. Come on! (Ortlund, 346)

"Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." **Ephesians 5:14**

Let's apply some of what we find in this chapter:

Verses 1, 4, 7 - "Listen to the Lord; seek Him!" Listen to His word preached, and seek His righteousness in serving Him and His people, the Church.

Verse 7 - "Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults." God's got this!

Verse 11 - "Come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on your heads." These are not funeral dirges, but psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs sung with joy and gladness to a God who has done everything necessary for our salvation from sin.

Dear ones, let us live as a people who do not have to drink from the cup of God's wrath because He has drained that cup on our behalf! *What manner of life ought you to have since you've been freed from your captivity?* You have every reason to be thankful to Jesus for living and dying on your behalf. He lived a perfect life - not even one little sin - to satisfy God's judgment against us who were polluted in every possible way. He died an undeserved death for people who couldn't roust up their own salvation.

A young child was diagnosed with a terminal disease. The parents knew that he would die soon. The child as well knew that his death would be soon.

One night he was sitting in his mother's lap watching television with her. He looked up into her eyes and said, "Mommy does it hurt to die?"

The young mother was overcome with grief and had to leave the room for a moment to gather her emotions. She stood in the bathroom and prayed, "God what can I tell him?" She felt that the Lord gave her a word for him.

She went back into the room and said, "Honey do you remember how so many times you have fallen asleep in front of the television and then the next morning you wake up in your room? Well I will tell you what happens. When you go to sleep your father comes in and with his strong arms he picks you up and carries you into your room.

And then the next thing you know you wake up in your room. Well, death is just like that. When you die, you fall asleep and Jesus Christ gathers you up in His strong arms and carries you to heaven. And then you wake up in another room!"