

“The Gospel According to Isaiah”

Isaiah Chapter 59 - select verses

Sunday, May 5th, 2024

As tensions grew with England, importing Bibles to colonial America became impossible. In 1777, the Continental Congress voted to order 20,000 Bibles from Holland and Scotland, but none of those 20,000 Bibles appeared. Copies of Scripture were hard to find.

In 1781, publisher Robert Aitkin petitioned Congress for permission to publish an edition of the Bible, and Congress voted to endorse Aitkin's plan, leading to the first English Bibles printed in America!

After the Revolutionary War, Bibles remained in short supply. **In May 1816, 208 years ago this week**, a group of statesmen and clergymen met in New York City and formed the American Bible Society to publish and distribute Bibles across the new nation. Elias Boudinot, who had been president of the Continental Congress, gave \$10,000 to launch a new society and served as president until his death in 1821, whereupon John Jay, the first chief justice of the US Supreme Court, became president.

Sadly, I'm convinced that you couldn't get this through Congress in the present day!

As a Christian, if you were asked by someone what the gospel is, what do you think you might say? A good answer to that question is this: The gospel acknowledges **humanity's total ruin in sin**, and **God's perfect remedy in Jesus Christ**. **Again, that's Ruin and Remedy.**

Let's flesh this out a bit. The word “gospel” in the original New Testament Greek language means “good news” or “good tidings.” It is the good news that is the solution to the bad news that all people are unrighteous and are under the wrath and curse of God.

The gospel is called the “good news” because it addresses the most serious problem that we have as human beings, and that problem is this: **God is holy and He is just, and we're not**. God, therefore, must punish sin.

The late Dr. RC Sproul has written, “At the end of our lives, we're going to stand before a just and holy God, and we'll be judged. And we'll be judged either on the basis of our own righteousness - or lack of it - or the righteousness of another. **The good news of the gospel is that Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness, of perfect obedience to God, not for His own well being, but for His people. Us.** He has done for us what we couldn't possibly do for ourselves.

But not only has He lived that *life of perfect obedience*, He offered Himself as a *perfect sacrifice* to satisfy the justice and the righteousness of God.” (Ligonier web page)

Isaiah Chapter 59 is one of the Old Testament passages that addresses the Bible’s gospel message. **I invite you to stand as I read the first 8 verses:**

Isaiah Chapter 59:

1 - Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened,
that it cannot save;
nor His ear heavy,
that it cannot hear.

2 - But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
and your sins have hidden *His* face from you,
so that He will not hear.

3 - For your hands are defiled with blood(shed),
and your fingers with iniquity;
your lips have spoken lies,
your tongue has muttered perversity.

4 - No one calls for justice, nor does *any* plead for truth.
They trust in empty words and speak lies;
they conceive evil (trouble) and bring forth iniquity.

5 - They hatch vipers’ eggs and weave the spider’s web;
he who eats of their eggs dies,
and *from* that which is crushed a viper breaks out.

6 - Their webs will not become garments,
nor will they cover themselves with their works;
their works *are* works of iniquity,
and the act of violence *is* in their hands.

7 - Their feet run to evil,
and they make haste to shed innocent blood;
their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity;
wasting and destruction *are* in their paths.

8 - 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 passage is one of the more poignant statements of human sinfulness and fallibility in the entire Bible.

God is offended by the way we hurt one another in what we do and in what we say. Isaiah describes this at length through verse 8. How we mistreat one another is so significant to God, the Apostle Paul quotes **Isaiah 59:7-8** in **Romans 3:15-17**, where he describes how urgently we all need a Savior. Apart from the cross of Christ, verses 3-8 show us what we are - even we, the people of God.

Verses 9-15 describe what it is like to live in wickedness:

9 - Therefore justice is far from us,
nor does righteousness overtake us;
we look for light, but there is darkness!
For brightness, *but* we walk in blackness!

10 - We grope for the wall like the blind,
and we grope as if *we had* no eyes;
we stumble at noonday as at twilight;
we are as dead *men* in desolate places.

11 - We all growl like bears,
and moan sadly like doves;
we look for justice, but *there is* none;
for salvation, *but* it is far from us.

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:

13 - In transgressing and lying against the LORD,
and departing from our God,
speaking oppression and revolt,
conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

14 - Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands afar off;
for truth is fallen in the street,
And equity cannot enter.

15 - So truth fails,
and he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey.

We live in a society that has mostly rejected God and His absolute standards of right and wrong. We teach children that they can determine what is right for themselves and that they should act according to their feelings and desires. We teach them they can decide whether they want to be a boy or a girl. We'll even pay for gender transformation surgeries! In response to such a profane reality, the Moderator of our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) appointed a commission to draft a letter to our governmental leaders.

Here's a portion of the Overture that will come to the floor of the General Assembly next month in Richmond, Virginia:

That the 51st Assembly humbly petition leaders of the United States Government "to protect the lives and welfare of minor children from the physical, mental, and emotional harms associated with medical and surgical interventions for the purpose of gender reassignment. Furthermore, we (the assembly) call upon you to use your positions to promote the health, bodily integrity, and wellbeing of minors who are suffering from gender dysphoria and related conditions."

And what has been the result of pervasive relativism on our culture? It has brought chaos and strife - children killing children, children killing parents, and vice versa. Our society sees the confusion of it all, yet it gropes about looking for answers in the dark.

People are looking for answers to their problems, but they are failing to look to Jesus Christ and to the Bible for those answers. That's because they refuse to humble themselves and submit to God's authority. And as long as people continue to make that choice, they cannot hope to live at peace. They will continue to be confused by the sin that entangles them, and they will continue to grope about, looking for something that is right before their eyes.

Now, we come to verses 16-20:

16 - 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.

17 - 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.

18 - According to *their* deeds, accordingly He will repay,
fury to His adversaries,

recompense to His enemies;
the coastlands He will fully repay.

19 - So shall they fear
the name of the LORD from the west,
and His glory from the rising of the sun;
when the enemy comes in like a flood,
the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.

20 - "The Redeemer will come to Zion,
and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,"
says the LORD.

"In Ancient Israel, a "Redeemer" was a member of the family who shouldered a relative's need as if it were his own, For example, if a person incurred so much debt that he became a slave, a redeemer would buy his freedom back. That's an Old Testament picture of Jesus Christ. He is a Redeemer of people who have sinned their way into slavery.

"And the measure of His commitment to us is the covenant in verse 21 of today's 59th chapter of Isaiah." (Ortburg, 400) Let's read that:

"As for Me," says the LORD, "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, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore." (Ortburg, 400)

You'll remember that a biblical covenant is God pledging Himself, binding Himself to us so that he becomes our God and we become His people.

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it.

Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase the beautiful instrument. But to his great dismay it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no

right to keep that to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it."

That's an apt illustration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is a message found in the pages of Holy Scripture, Old Testament and New Testaments..

I began this sermon thinking about the Bible in America and the American Bible Society...

After the meeting establishing the American Bible Society, the mayor of New York helped procure office space, and the society began collecting funds from business leaders and churches. In 1829, the American Bible Society undertook one of the most astounding missions in American church history - to provide *every family* in the United States with a Bible.

The Bible is the most distributed, impactful book in human history, yet millions of people around the world and in the United States do not have a copy of their own.