

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 14/06/2020

Mini Series - Trusting God in the darkness

Part Three – “Incentives to trust God in the darkness?”

Isaiah 51:1-8 Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ² Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. ³ For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. ⁴ “Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. ⁵ My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be for ever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. ⁷ “Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings. ⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my righteousness will be for ever, and my salvation to all generations.”

When we find ourselves in a dark place, we need a light, so that we can see the way.

This is true in every dimension of our lives, including the spiritual dimension. There are times when darkness seems to hide the lovely face of God from us and we feel abandoned. The cause of God's apparent absence may be sin in our own life, in the life of a family member or in the life of members of our church. Equally, it might be that God has chosen to hide his face for a season to strengthen and prove our faith.

When we find ourselves in a dark place, we need a light, so that we can see the way.

What light will we seek at these times? We have seen two possibilities shown to us by Isaiah.

Isaiah 50:10-11 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. ¹¹ Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who equip yourselves with burning torches! Walk by the light of your fire, and by the torches that you have kindled! This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.

- a) We can seek our own light, but that will end in the torment of eternal judgement - v11
- b) We can do what v10 commands – trust God in the darkness and rely on him to guide us.

The people of God were exiled in Babylon because of their sin, losing everything that enabled them to worship God. Amongst their number were a few, such as Daniel and Nehemiah, who remained faithful to God and refused to compromise their faith.

They felt the depth of the darkness they were in and grieved over:

- The sin that had brought them to this place
- The way God's name had been dishonoured, because the Babylonians thought their false gods had won
- The fact that the walls of Jerusalem and the temple worship had been destroyed

God gave these faithful exiles the command in **Isaiah 50v10** and calls on us, too, to obey this command in the midst of our own darkness, no matter what the cause of it.

We must never doubt in the darkness what God has told us in the light. Isaiah has shown us that:

- we can trust God in the darkness because he has a purpose for us in it. He hasn't forsaken us and he is able to deliver us in the darkness
- The Lord Jesus Christ, the suffering servant and our Saviour, is the one who enables us to trust God in the darkness. In his humanity, he trusted God in the darkness, submitting his mind and will to the Sovereign Lord. As our prophet, priest and king, living forever, he sustains us in the darkness with his word, and enables us to submit our wills and minds to the Sovereign Lord, so we live lives that glorify him.

Isaiah now goes on to call us to listen to three incentives from God to trust him in the darkness.

1. The incentive of God's electing love and creative power

The faithful exiles must have felt small in number, and indeed they were. They perhaps imagined that in a generation the people of God would be wiped out. It seemed a hopeless situation, and they appeared to have lost everything.

Isaiah 51:1-3 Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ² Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. ³ For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

God calls them to trust him by looking back to two significant events:

- a) **The call of Abraham and Sarah** -he called two people to be his first people and promised that he would birth a great nation from them. Both were old and as good as dead where giving birth to children was concerned.
 - God kept his promise, despite all the hindrances, and brought into existence a nation so big that no one could count them. He can do this again. He chose that nation as his own purely because of his electing love.
- b) **The formation of Eden** - God created the world out of nothing and planted a garden that was a place of blessing, provision and fellowship with him for Adam and Eve.
 - God promised that he would do the same again, restoring the places the Babylonians destroyed.

The exiles are reminded that God has done these things before and so can do them again. He will not abandon the people on whom he settled his electing love, because his love does not change.

When we are in the darkness, we need to look back to what God has done in the past so that we can trust him in the future. **God's electing love and creative power**

have never failed and never will – he will bring us into a place of blessing even if the path to that place is dark.

Yet if these promises are only for the nation of Israel then they don't offer much for us today so is there more?

2. The incentive of salvation for the nations

Vv4-5 ⁴ "Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. ⁵ My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.

Israel's biggest problem was their sin, and without deliverance from that they would still have been eternally lost even if God delivered them from Babylon. We all need deliverance from the sin that is deeply ingrained in our hearts, not just rescuing from our circumstances.

God is promising a salvation that:

- would reach **the peoples**, though he will not forsake his ancient people. He has reconciled the nations to himself through the death of Jesus.
- not only saves people from the **penalty** of sin (eternal hell) but also saves them from the **power** of sin. This salvation is linked with righteousness (v5).

Titus 2:14 tells us Christ ¹⁴ gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

- God's purpose is to have a people who will joyfully submit to him and his law – a people made up of Jews and Gentiles. This salvation will last forever, unlike the earth and the people who live on it.

Isaiah 51v6 but my salvation will be for ever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

God is promising:

- Eternal righteousness that will give people a right standing with God
- Eternal salvation, resulting in a holy people who joyfully submit to God forever

Having first asked us to look back, Isaiah is now asking us to look forward not just to the end of our current problems but on to eternity, to a restored Eden where there is righteousness and the blessing of God's presence forever.

As new covenant believers, when we are in our current darkness, we look

- back to the cross of Christ and see how God has dealt with our sin to make us holy
- forward to the return of Christ and the anticipation of a new earth and heavens, a place of eternal blessing.

As we look back at what God has done, and forward to what is to come, how are we to live?

3. The incentive of justice for God's people.

As God's people, we are to live like the servant of **Isaiah 50:4-8**, submitting our minds and wills to God, living as Christ lived, and speaking as he spoke. This will bring hostility as it did for Jesus, a hostility he endured by trusting the Sovereign Lord in the darkness. Fear of rejection, hostility or persecution can keep us from leading godly lives or speaking about Jesus. This fear can be so great that we give up on Jesus if we have never really got the gospel deeply rooted in our hearts.

To counter that fear, we need to understand what will happen to those who hate us – one day they will be put into the eternal fire of hell. **For those of us who love Jesus that should grieve us, and drive us to witness to the gospel.** Rather than fearing those people who are passing away like a moth-eaten garment, we should pity them.

How will we respond to these incentives?

- If we seek to make our own light, trusting in our own strength and wisdom, and relying on secular means to deal with the darkness, God warns us in **Isaiah 50 v11** you shall lie down in torment.

Heed the warning and repent of that attitude, now, and return to the Lord, seeking him and his salvation and righteousness. It is only this that will last forever and secure your eternal life.

The question that needs to be asked is will you trust God in the darkness:

- For electing love and creative power
- To save you from sin and make you righteous and holy to stand in his presence
- To justify you and vindicate you before his throne, before the nations and those who hate you

Isaiah 50:10 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.