

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 47

Isaiah - Themes

Sharon Kingston taught our 11th grade English class at Coronado High School in Lubbock, Texas (the “Hub of the Plains”). Among the many assignments, we read Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Ray Bradbury’s *Dandelion Wine*. Before this time, all of my reading was for plot (fiction) or information (non-fiction). Mrs. Kingston taught us reading on a new and different level. She taught us to read for themes.

Mrs. Kingston explained to us that themes were fundamental ideas that were explored in a literary work. For her, it was what made real literature stand out from books like *Dune Buggy Baby*. (I should note that we never knew whether *Dune Buggy Baby* was a real book, or simply her ridiculous title to distinguish trash from something worth one’s time!) These fundamental ideas were typically ones that were a part of tradition or culture. They were common ideas that most people could identify with, even if they were not always contemporary.

Perhaps you remember *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester Prynne lives in 17th century Boston in a Puritan Community. She has a baby girl (“Pearl”), even though her husband had not yet made it over to America from England. Without question, the baby was the result of an adulterous affair. The community shuns Hester and the baby, forcing her to wear a scarlet “A” on her clothing to identify her sin, and keep her in shame.

Hester refuses to identify Pearl’s father, keeping the identity of Arthur Dimmesdale (the young, local minister) confidential. The psychological burden on Dimmesdale seems to be driving him to physical death with some mysterious heart ailment. Dimmesdale gets help from a new physician, Roger Chillingworth, who is Prynne’s husband finally arriving to the community, but using a false identity. He is incognito to all but Hester in order to ferret out the adulterous man and get revenge. Of course, there is great irony that Chillingworth is unwittingly becomes the personal physician (and ultimately co-habitator) of Dimmesdale. Here, the plot takes an interesting turn... Read the book if you wish to learn it, because plot is not the reason we mention the book. It is not, after all, *Dune Buggy Baby*! !

Our concerns are the *themes*! There are a number of themes in the book that are old ideas we can draw from Scripture in general and more specifically from Isaiah. Isaiah, like much of literature, is written with themes that echo throughout the chapters, finding expression over and over in verse and prose. Hawthorne brings out themes of Biblical law, sin and its consequences, guilt, knowledge and the

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human condition, but he does so with an edge of hypocrisy in religion and religious choices.

What is most notably absent in Hawthorne's narrative, is any placement of God in the story line. One is challenged to successfully deal with Biblical law, sin, and consequences, when one leaves God out of the picture. Hawthorne's contemporary Orestes Brownson, a well-known Catholic commentator, analyzed *The Scarlet Letter* opining,

Mr. Hawthorne seems never to have learned that pride is not only sin, but the root of all sin, and that humility is not only a virtue, but the root of all virtue... All true remorse, all genuine repentance, springs from humility, and is sorrow for having offended God, not for having offended ourselves.¹

Hawthorne would have done well to spend time in Isaiah. For these critical missing pieces are core themes reverberating throughout Isaiah's 66 chapters. Our review of Isaiah started by considering the Assyrian invasion through Isaiah's eyes. This week we continue to study Isaiah, but our approach is different. This week we consider major themes in the book.²

ISAIAH'S THEMES

Isaiah is a bit like *The Scarlet Letter* in that there is no listing of themes by the author. One can study the themes "announced" by scholars who have written on the book, or one can simply read and study the book highlighting recurrent ideas. Either way, there are a number of regularly occurring and repeated ideas that work their way through various passages. We are highlighting several of the most apparent and well known/discussed, but we readily urge personal study to consider others as well!

YHWH: The Holy One of Israel

We begin our consideration of the themes with the theme of YHWH, the one true God who reigns over all. In twenty-eight verses, Isaiah speaks of God as the "Holy One of Israel." This is not a typical phrase. It occurs only seven other times in the entire Bible!

¹ From *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, (Oct. 1850): 528ff. Reprinted in Murfin, Ross, *The*

² There are important scholarly discussions about the structure and authorship of Isaiah that merit attention and consideration. These discussions even assist in understanding aspects of the book's passages. We are not ignoring those issues. Rather than put them at the front of an Isaiah study, like most books do, we are putting them a bit further down the line. After gaining greater familiarity with Isaiah's passages, we will consider authorship and structure.

One is not surprised that Isaiah uses the phrase four times more than the rest of the Bible considering Isaiah's early encounter with *YHWH* on his throne. Isaiah 6 records Isaiah seeing the Lord on his throne and the Lord was "set apart" (or "holy") visually, he was "high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1). The Lord was also set apart audibly, surrounded by angelic Seraphim who cried out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (Is. 6:3). This left Isaiah realizing how profane and common he was in comparison. His proclamation "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of unclean people" (Is. 6:5), carries with it recognition of being "lost" and self-realized "woe" in comparison. It brings the recognition earthward as we see God not only holy and set apart in heaven, but also on earth.

The Hebrew word for "holy" is *qadosh* (קדוש). It denotes something that is "commanding respect, awesome, treated with respect, removed from profane usage." The word emphasizes the "otherness" of that which is holy. That which is *qadosh* is not common, but is set apart and different in an awesome way. There is a 21st century tendency to think of "holy" as a description of very ethical behavior. While actions can certainly be "holy" or "profane" (common), the word goes beyond simple behavior. It is rooted in something extraordinary. See, Koehler, L., Baumgartner, *et al.*, *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Brill 1999).

This comparison continues in narrative and poetry throughout Isaiah as the Israelite people, even though "chosen people," are profane when compared to the unique holiness of God. The people "despise the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 5:24). The people are a "sinful nation" and "laden with iniquity." They "have despised the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 1:4). Even as the prophet proclaimed about the Lord, the people did not want to "hear about the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 30:11). In crisis, the people look for help to other profane and ordinary men, rather than the Lord who is set apart and holy:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD! (Is. 31:1).

The actions of the people are ones that "mocked and reviled...the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 37:23). In spite of what the people thought, though, God remained God, and *as God*, was the Creator of Israel!

I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your king (Is. 43:15).

The people pretend to be ignorant of God and far off from the Holy One, but he I is their Creator! Isaiah follows this theme through another illustration from the everyday world of his day, that of a potter making pots:

Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?" You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"? (Is. 29:15-16).

Paul will later seize this theme, echoing Isaiah as he scolds those who “disagree” with God’s purposes among mankind:

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? (Rom. 9:20-21).

Even as the people are far from holy and are ignoring God their Creator, the Holy One of Israel continued to reach out in promise to his people. The contrast is between a faithless people and a separate unique God who was faithful. So as the people were mired in sin, the Holy One of Israel was constant in his holy love and redemption:

Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel (Is. 41:14).

The promises of God were not profane promises of men whose word is only as good as the circumstances that surround the promise. The promises of God were set apart and holy as well. In Bob Dylan speak, “God don’t make promises that he don’t keep!”³ Israel’s future was secured not by their good works or wisdom, but by the unique integrity of God!

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." (Is. 49:7).

YHWH, the Holy One of Israel, was unique and set apart in Israel, but was never to be understood as simply the God of Israel. Part of God’s holy uniqueness was that he ruled and reigned beyond the borders of Israel. In a time where people set aside certain locations for worship, thinking those were locations where divinity reigned as opposed to locations where he was missing, such was not the case with *YHWH*. *YHWH* chose Jerusalem and the temple as a special place, but it was always *YHWH*’s choice, for *YHWH* truly reigned everywhere. This truth was

³ Dylan, Bob, “When You Gonna Wake Up?” from the Slow Train Coming album (Aug. 1979).

apparent in Isaiah's vision noted in Isaiah 6. The angels were constantly proclaiming that the "whole earth" was full of the Holy God's glory.

Accordingly, Isaiah had visions and oracles of *YHWH*'s judgments on the foreign nations. In Isaiah 13:1-22, Isaiah delivers an oracle of God's judgment on Babylon. In the oracle, God commanded his "consecrated ones" to execute his anger. The word translated "consecrated" is *qdsh* – "holy." The Holy One of Israel enthroned over all the earth has a Holy Army to do his bidding! More oracles detail the reign and authority of God over Assyria (Is. 14:24ff), Philistia (Is. 14:28ff), Moab (Is. 15:1ff), Damascus (Is. 17:1ff), Cush (Is. 18:1ff), and Egypt (Is. 19:1ff). The gods of these other lands are mere idols that "will tremble at his presence" (Is. 19:1). The real God of all is the Holy One of Israel!

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, *the God of the whole earth he is called* (Is. 54:5).

YHWH was further set apart as the God of history: past, present and future. Unlike all who are captive in time, God uniquely reigns beyond time. It was the Holy One, the Lord of Hosts, who had "struck Midian at the rock of Oreb" and who lifted *his* staff (not Moses' staff!) against Egypt and over the parting sea (Is. 10:26, 27). In the present, it is the Holy One who was moving:

Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel (Is. 12:6).

As to the future it was also the Holy One writing history. God promised to "open rivers," "make the wilderness a pool of water," so that:

they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it (Is. 41:20).

As Old Testament scholar John Watts has written,

The Vision [of Isaiah] also teaches God's control of the forces of history, no matter how great and powerful they are. They, too, are and must be ultimately responsible to God.⁴

God was Israel's Holy One. He was, and is, bound to no one, working his purposes through people as he brings history to a close, keeping his promises, and

⁴ Watts, John D. W., *Word Biblical Commentary Isaiah 1-33*, (Word 1982), at xxxvii.

working things out for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes!⁵

Man's Appropriate Response to YHWH

Just as Isaiah constantly considers the implications of *YHWH* as the Holy One of Israel, he is readily reminding (and warning!) humans of their proper response to *YHWH*. Isaiah does so by reinforcing the right responses, and by pronouncing judgment on improper responses. The proper attitudes of people living under the Holy One of Israel include humility, repentance, trust, and a desire to serve. People should live constantly remembering God for who he is, rather than fearing man and the world. To oppose God will bring destruction, whether you are one of the chosen of Israel, or in a pagan land. Pride, arrogance and self-importance have no place before the Holy One.

Isaiah experienced this first hand in the vision before God's throne. The vision was "in the year King Uzziah died." Uzziah (also called "Azariah"), we remember, was the king who arrogantly went into God's temple to burn incense, and was left with a legacy of leprosy. No doubt Isaiah was concerned about the results to him as he was beholding the Lord sitting upon a throne. Isaiah did not suffer from Uzziah's proud heart. Isaiah's reaction was to fall to his face and cry,

Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips (Is. 6:5).

This humility is what God calls for throughout the book of Isaiah. But humility is not the hallmark of the people; instead, it is self-importance and self-determination. The people live in rebellion to God, the Holy One:

Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity...they have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel (Is. 1:4).

While the people should be asking to learn "his ways" that they might "walk in his path" (Is. 2:3), that day is in the future. It was not the way of Judah at the time. The failure of people to live humbly before God, left God to bring humility to man!

The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty. Against all that

⁵ While this sentence merges into a quote of Paul's from Romans 8:28, the thought is core to Isaiah's teaching. It is God, the Holy One of Israel doing this very thing!

is lifted up... And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low (Is. 2:11-17).

The absurdity of man's haughtiness is underscored in the simple challenge:

Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? (Is. 2:22).

Even as the prophets were calling the people to repent and to trust God, the people refused. They would not "turn aside from the path" they were on. The people's response was the rebellious cry, "let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel." The people needed to respond to God's holiness in repentance and trust, but instead placed their trust in "oppression" and "perverseness" (Is. 30:11). In the face of this wrong attitude, Isaiah reinforced over and over the correct response to the Holy One:

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning ["repenting"] and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Is. 30:15).

Over and over, Isaiah makes the plea for repentance:

Turn to him from whom people have deeply revolted, O children of Israel" (Is. 31:6).

Hand in hand with this, we read Isaiah charging people to move their trust from people and material things, to the Holy One.

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots...but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD! (Is. 31:1).

All the efforts and best reasoning of man, amount to nothing if they are not aligned with the will of God. Isaiah draws the obvious, yet seemingly forgotten distinction:

The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will perish together (Is. 31:3).

The Holy One finds the meek and humble, the repentant and contrite, to be in his fellowship and protection. This is an interesting contrast Isaiah draws. The high and Holy God brings judgment on the humans that think themselves high and holy. But those people who know their own lowliness, God loves and revives:

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him

who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite (Is. 57:15).

Humility leads to Isaiah's emphasis on another proper response of man: a role of service. Isaiah taught repeatedly that God had called the Israelites to a role of service. As servants of God, they would appropriately be servants to man. This service theme ran contrary to the prideful arrogance of those who wanted to chart their own course and be independent leaders, rather than humble servers. The call to service was one placed on Isaiah in the same vision to which we keep returning. After Isaiah's repentance, at the Lord's command, an angel took a coal and touched Isaiah's lips, pronouncing him clean. Then the voice of the Lord called out for a servant:

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?

Isaiah responded quickly with a servant's heart:

Here am I! Send me (Is. 6:8).

This begins a directive for Isaiah to take a message to the people. Repeatedly, the message Isaiah takes is one of the value of servanthood. Rather than assume a servant role, one where the people bring blessing upon the other nations, working to worship God and living holy before him, the Israelites arrogantly were more concerned about their position in the world economy and political arena. They expected God to conform to their agenda and vision for their future. The people were,

a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually (Is. 65:2-3).

A number of passages have garnered reputation as the "Servant" passages in Isaiah, although the theme echoes throughout the book. In one sense, the "servanthood theme" deserves its own section in this or any other lesson. We are not setting it our separate, however, for a reason. Isaiah showed servanthood to be the proper response to the Holy One of Israel. All other responses come from pride and self-importance or self-direction. Only service comes straight from the humility of one before a Holy God. God was seeking Israel to be his servant. Then as God's servant, Israel was called to serve the world. Israel was not to be the big political player. Nor was Israel to become the superpower that Assyria was (or even Egypt). Israel was to be God's servant and to serve the world on God's mission. This is the way of God's leadership and rule, and it should be the hallmark of his people. It is the polar opposite of setting one's own agenda. It runs contrary to thinking that God has prepared the world to serve his people. Still, it is the truth!

Isaiah recognized his own role as a servant beyond the summons and response in the Isaiah 6 vision. Isaiah⁶ knew his calling came from the Lord even in his mother's womb to be God's servant not only to Israel, but also to the world.

The LORD called me from the womb... And he said to me, "You are my servant"... And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant... he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations" (Is. 49:1-6).

This passage seems to cover not only Isaiah as the Holy One's servant, but the people of Israel and Judah as well, at least in their role in the future. Frequently in the later chapters of Isaiah, Israel and Judah will be referred to as a single person. On yet another level, many scholars see this prophetically fulfilled in the life of Christ, marking it as a Messianic prophecy.⁷ The passage continues to speak of the future restoration of Israel noting:

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." (Is. 49:7).

Through prophecy, Isaiah explained about a coming servant who would follow God's will and commands, seeking to serve God's agenda rather than his own. In the famous Isaiah 52:13-53:12 verses we read of God's "servant" who revealed "the arm of the Lord." This was not one high and mighty in the world's eyes, but one who "had no form or majesty or beauty." Rather than leading man in a stately and powerful way, he led even as he was "despised and rejected." He was a servant who bore "our griefs and carried out sorrows." He was "wounded for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities." He was taken away "by oppression and judgment," cut off from the land of the living for the transgressions of others, yet this is the one that God calls "my servant." This is the preeminent example for the people hearing Isaiah. Rather than asserting a life of independence and self-determination, the people were shown the way of service, service to others by serving God. This was not the normal way of thinking, but it was the right way to think! It was a higher way to think!

⁶ Some will call this "Deutero-Isaiah" or simply "DI," on the premise that Isaiah 40-55 (or 40-66) is a product from other(s) much later than Isaiah 1-39. These are issues we will consider later, and for now we simply refer to the narrator, announcer as "Isaiah."

⁷ See, e.g., Knight, G. A. F., *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40-55*, (Eerdmans 1984), at 125.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Is. 55:8-9).

While Isaiah sets out the right responses to the Holy One, he also sets out the wrong responses! Those who oppose God and the ways of God will face his anger and a coming destruction. Typical language is found in Isaiah 5:3-7, where God says he will treat the rebellious like a vineyard⁸ that does not produce as it should. He will:

- “Remove its hedge” (the border and protection of the vineyard),
- “It shall be devoured” (with no hedge, any grazing animal can come in and eat),
- “I will break down its wall” (this takes a vineyard and makes it a pathway for people and animals alike),
- “It shall be trampled down” (the result of no fence),
- “I will make it a waste” (useless),
- “It shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up (it will be counterproductive rather than useful), and
- “I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it”

The rebellion of a profane people to the Holy One of Israel makes the destruction of God more than warranted. They were “writing oppression” and turning “aside the needy from justice.” They “robbed the poor” and made “widows their spoil” (Is. 10:1-3).

In working through this theme, the Holy One of Israel deserves the humility and service of his people. Arrogance, pride, and self-serving rebellion will not be tolerated in the presence of the Holy One. So he will sit in judgment, even as he promises to bring about examples of servant leadership, including an ultimate servant who will bear the iniquity and sin of the people. This leads into the next theme for consideration.

⁸ This vineyard metaphor was used by Jesus in multiple settings. Jesus used the vineyard parable setting God as the vineyard owner whose vineyard was usurped by his tenants (even killing the owner’s son) (Mt. 21:33-46). In Matthew 20, he taught on the selfish focus of the vineyard workers who were not satisfied with their pay and hours, when compared to other workers. Then in John 15, Jesus spoke of himself as the vine and God as the vinedresser, pruning away branches that do not bear fruit. The branches must abide in Christ in order to bear necessary fruit!

The Remnant

Throughout the book of Isaiah, there is the prophetic word of judgment on the haughty and rebellious as mentioned in the previous section. There is also a theme constantly echoing forth God's promise of a remnant that he will bring forth from each act of judgment. This remnant is frequently spoken of as something happening "in that day."

In Isaiah 10:20-22, the remnant is spoken of as those who will come forth no longer in rebellion, but leaning on the Holy One:

In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return.

Isaiah even named one of his sons after this theme. Isaiah 7:3 has the Lord telling Isaiah,

Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to Washer's Field.

"Shear-jashub" means either "a remainder turns back" or "but there will be some who remain."⁹ The E.S.V. footnote translates it as, "a remnant shall return." Isaiah takes his son with him signifying God's promise of a remnant. This promise comes through Isaiah as long as Shear-jashub lived!

This remnant theme ties closely with the earlier theme of needed faith by the people, and God's kept promises. Even with the judgment called down upon the arrogant and disobedient, the Holy One of Israel was writing a history that would vindicate his word and promise. In the prophetic vision of Isaiah, this remnant will not be simply one group, but it will be thorough, calling God's people from all corners of the world, doing so at a time and in a way that draws the attention of the Gentile nations.

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples – of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the

⁹ Koehler, L., at 1379.

banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Is. 11:10-12).

This verse is quickly recognized by Christians who remember that Paul cites Isaiah's reference to the root of Jesse as Christ (Rom. 15:12). It makes it important to highlight Isaiah's word choice in writing that God would extend his hand to "recover" the remnant. The Hebrew word *qnh* is used for "recover," but the word has a more direct meaning. The Hebrew means to "acquire" or "buy."¹⁰ God would not simply have this second remnant mosey on back to Israel. Instead, they would be purchased or acquired by an unspecified payment of God.

Even as there is a promised remnant, there is also in Isaiah an assured future and purpose for Jerusalem. Here, we note additional themes that we do not have space to cover in this lesson. There are themes about God's central role for Zion and Jerusalem. These are current promises for Isaiah and also future promises, as the hill citadel takes on importance far beyond what might be expected. The Messianic themes will be considered in a future lesson as will the related themes of the role of a king in Judah and Israel's future.

Isaiah as a book ranges over a large period of time and reaches back in history to discuss the earliest call of God on his people, even as it reaches into the future to proclaim the coming latter days. Tied neatly within all these passages is a consistent recognition of God as the Holy One of Israel, before whom we should all fall unclean until cleansed by him. Of course Isaiah is replete with many more themes than these, but these themes set us into a good understanding of Isaiah's core message. He teaches that our role is to humbly seek to serve the Holy One, and in so doing, serve the world. In this, we find ourselves working in God's service rather than blindly and recklessly living for our own reasons, in our own foolishness, to no good end.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. "*I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator*" (Is. 43:15).

It all seems so simple. God is the Lord. He reigns over everyone and everything. He made the world and cares for each of us. He desires the best for us. He gave the ultimate price to buy us back, yet it is not as simple as it seems. For like Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, we get caught up in the here and now, ignoring the Holy One. We live in the moment, scared by whispers in the wind, falling for personal pleasure or gain, seeking to maneuver a future of our liking or making. This is plainly

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, at 1111.

rebellion, and patently foolish, but it is the course we repeatedly take. Thankfully, the story does not end there, as we will consider in the next Points for Home, yet this point cries out for a response and action step.

The response and action step: Make the decision now to daily seek a vision of the Holy One. Renew your decision to regularly and daily open his word with a prayer on your lips, “God, please reveal yourself to me.” Read the gospels and see the revelation of God on earth in Jesus. Make a weekly commitment to join others in corporate worship, seeking to encounter God. He is the Holy One, and seek to dwell in the midst of this great truth.

2. *“In trust shall be your strength”* (Is. 30:15).

What is our response to the Holy One? Can anyone see him and ignore him? Can anyone see him and decide him untrustworthy? Can anyone really see him and decide to put their trust in any place but him? The questions, like those in our first Point for Home seem absurd to even contemplate. Again, we miss this over and over in our lives. We all have need for the road Isaiah set out of repentance and faith/trust. This is a road that Peter explained for the people of Pentecost who, for the first time, realized and saw God in Jesus, and understood that they had crucified the God they had dedicated their lives to. They asked Peter, smitten to the heart, “What shall we do?” It was Peter who echoed Isaiah’s teaching, to repent and be baptized, to put their trust in God rather than man. As Paul would later write, they were to walk by faith rather than sight. This repentance and faith then move us to a place ready and willing to serve God. Our service to him is on his mission, not our own. We will gladly be his servants in the world. As Paul wrote, we will be the body of Christ, his hands, his feet, going where he wants, and doing as he commands. We will follow the example of Christ on earth, washing the feet of others. We will esteem others better than ourselves.

How do we personalize this? I am making a list of worries, issues, struggles, and chores. With prayer, I will seek humility to offer up myself in service to God, trusting him to accomplish his will through me. The worries are not mine anymore; they are his! The issues are not mine; they are his opportunities. The struggles and chores I place before him, seeking to take up my cross and follow him.

3. *“The root of Jesse... shall stand as a signal for the peoples”* (Is. 11:10).

Here, we have the final piece of the puzzle. We are not simply left reading the words of Isaiah; we have a true signal we can read, learn, and copy. We have the root of Jesse, Jesus. In Jesus, we see the fulfillment of God’s promised servant, who would bear our transgressions. In Jesus, we have

vision and understanding of the coal on God's altar that atones for our sins, just as for the sins of Isaiah.

What do we do with this signal? We walk to it, and follow it. We will do as instructed by our Savior:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (Lk 9:23-25).

Lord, may we see you and may we follow you, by your grace and in your Spirit. Amen!

WANT MORE?

Get ready for the Isaiah Challenge! Coming next week!!! This will be fun, instructive and interactive! A different type of class than we normally have. Your best preparation? Read a bunch of Isaiah this week! Even if you don't understand it, keep reading!

Meanwhile, if you are at a crisis place where you could use prayer, please email me at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com. Many of you have given me a chance to pray with you through the wonders of the Internet, a 21st century prayer link! I will keep your email confidential and be honored to pray for you.