

Willows By The Water

There are a lot of trees in our chapter today. Isaiah speaks of cedar, cypress, oak and ash; all valuable trees of the forest, all prized by woodsmen and craftsmen for strength, grandeur and utility. Then the prophet speaks of another tree, the willow, not so grand or valuable, in fact, often little more than a weedy shrub. Isaiah likens God's elect to the willow and pictures the Lord suppling the water-loving tree with all the moisture it needs. It is a type of distinguishing grace. In the gospel age, the spiritual descendants of Isaiah's readers will be quickened with grace from heaven and 'shall spring up ... as willows by the water courses'.

Jesurun, my beloved people

God the Father dedicates Himself to redeem, save, preserve and provide for this people. He promises never to forget His elect saying, 'Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen'. If these words are considered as being addressed first to God's Son in His mediatorial office and thereafter to all His people formed in Him, the full gospel import of this passage will begin to appear. Jesurun is another name for spiritual Israel, and carries the sense of the beloved and upright One.

Spiritual Jacob and spiritual Israel

As God's remnant people in Isaiah's day faced the wrath of Assyria and exile in Babylon the every-mindful Saviour comforted them with views of His great salvation and promises of spiritual deliverance. Our God still calms our fears by protecting those He delights to bless, nourish and refresh with views of Christ's mighty redemption. God's elect are again named with names symbolical of God's everlasting love and free grace. Jacob and Israel are appellations for God's spiritual church, chosen in the Beloved, created and formed in the womb of the morning to be Christ's eternal companion. A people to honour His glory, witness His beauty and serve His cause.

Sins blotted out

Divine redemption is asserted by the blotting out of transgressions and the taking away of sin. The Messiah's purpose is set clearly before the Old Testament people. Alluding, no doubt, to earlier evidences, the Lord the Redeemer describes the buying back of spiritual Israel from sin, Satan, and the law as having already occurred. The redeemed people are already bought; the purchase price already paid. It is true the Lord Jesus had not yet come, nor yet shed His blood but in the mind of our eternal, ever-present God, Christ is the Lamb of the everlasting covenant slain from the foundation of the world.

'Have not I told thee?'

God's promises are to be received by faith as if already performed. The Lord 'confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers'. Being assured of their deliverance, redemption, restoration and ultimate glory the people of God are to sing, shout and praise the Lord. The angels sang in heaven at the incarnation of Christ. The Gentiles sang in the lower earth when the gospel went forth by the apostles. Kings and commoners, great and small, sing praises to the Lord for His great salvation. On the basis of God's sure mercies the Lord's people sing the Lord's song in a strange land.

'He hath shut their eyes'

Once again, in setting forth what He shall do for His church the Lord strongly denounces the foolishness of idolatry. A man cuts down a tree, burns some to keep warm, more to cook his meal, then carves what remains into an idol before which he bends to worship. These are ignorant, blind people but so that all spiritual wisdom may be seen to be by grace it is said, 'They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand'.

Cyrus, my shepherd

In the final verse a significant and detailed prophecy concerning a future Babylonian monarch is begun. A king called Cyrus will ascend to the throne whose lot it will be to fulfil God's will and restore the Jews to their own land to rebuild their city and temple. Just as previous Assyrian kings had been tools in God's hand for punishment, Cyrus would be a shepherd to nourish and preserve. He would be the means of bringing the Jews from exile that the Lord Jesus Christ

should be born in Bethlehem and walk in the courts of Jerusalem's temple.

Amen

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