

# No Righteousness—No Peace

Isaiah 48:1-22

*Halifax: 10 October 2010*

## Introduction

Today with chapter 48, we have come to the end of a great section in Isaiah's prophecy.

- It is the section that we began in chapter 40 where the prophet began comforting the people after bringing them a dreadful prophecy...
  - The prophecy that the Babylonians were going to destroy Jerusalem!
    - That the very city where God had chosen to reveal His name would be reduced to rubble...
      - no altar would remain to show that the God of heaven was reconciled to His people...
      - Even the very sons of David to whom the Lord had promised to bring forth a son that would reign forever and that would establish His kingdom of righteousness would be made eunuchs in the palace of Babylon.
- We have seen the comfort in this great portion of Isaiah to be in the form of a clear declaration that the sovereign God has a plan to redeem His people!
  - Babylon will not be the end of them.
  - He will bring them out of Babylon by a ruler named Cyrus that the LORD Himself will raise up.
    - This has been the great emphasis of these chapters,
      - But all along the way we have seen the promise of something that will go far beyond deliverance from captivity in Babylon!
      - We have seen the promise of the One who is called the Servant of the Lord who will come do the will of the Father... all that God requires.
        - When we move into chapters 49-57,
          - the Servant is going to be more fully revealed to us,
          - but in chapters 40-48 we have seen Him and we have seen that God has plans to bring righteousness to Israel through Him—
            - a righteousness that they clearly don't have on their own.
  - Chapter 48 brings this same message to us in a climatic way.
    - It shows that God is going to deliver Israel from Babylon, but that this will only be the first step in His great plan to redeem them!
      - It is, in a sense, a call to not settle for deliverance from Babylon as if that is all that is involved!
        - No, this in itself will not bring them the peace that God promises.
        - Look at the last verse—Isaiah 48:22...
          - Isa 48:22: "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

- A mere change of address from Babylon to Jerusalem will not give Israel the true peace that God has purposed for them.
  - Peace cannot come until their wickedness is dealt with.
    - Their release from Babylon cannot take away their sin or make the people righteous.
  
- Do you remember what we saw last week in Isaiah 46 and 47?
  - It was about Babylon, the city of man, and how Babylon seemed to have everything.
    - They seemed to have the peace (shalom) that everyone wants.
      - Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace
        - But it is much fuller than our English word.
          - It not only speaks of the absence of conflict and distress, it also speaks of a fullness of blessing, a prosperity, a perfection in circumstances.
          - It speaks of a state of total well-being where everything is just the way you wish it could be.
        - It is what we all want in our dreams!
          - Shalom!
  
- But you will remember that there was a problem with Babylon.
  - They did not truly have Shalom because the peace they had did not last.
  - Everything had gone their way for a time because God had raised them up for a time to chasten His people...
    - but Babylon had no righteousness.
    - They did not even care about righteousness.
      - The city of man never cares about righteousness.
        - If they can have shalom without righteousness, they could care less about righteousness.
        - We might even say that the city of man and the city of God both yearn for Shalom,
          - but the city of man wants shalom without righteousness...
          - and the city of God wants shalom by righteousness—
            - we want a kingdom of righteousness where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.
            - The true sons of God seek the kingdom of Christ and His righteousness—and everything is added to this.

- In chapter 46:12-13, the Lord showed that righteousness was the very thing that Israel needed—more than anything!
  - They were stubborn-hearted and far from righteousness.
    - But the LORD said that *He* would bring righteousness near!
    - He said that He would place His salvation in Zion!
    - Righteousness is the source of true shalom!
      - Man is an offence to God because of His sin.
        - He cannot have peace until He is reconciled in righteousness.
        - Things are never really right with us until we are saved.
- And because even God’s people don’t have righteousness in themselves,
  - righteousness is the thing that He promises to provide for them!
  - Righteousness is the thing that Christ brought when He came—a righteousness for Israel and the nations if they would look to Him for it.
    - Of course none of us look to Him unless He draws us...
      - We are too stubborn to come to Him even when it is offered...
      - But when God’s Spirit changes our hearts, nothing can keep us away from Christ...
        - We come with joy to draw from Him as the well of salvation!
- Then we care about righteousness and Christ gives it to us in two ways...
  - First, as our representative, He imputes it to us so that we are credited with His righteousness forever...so that God accepts us in Him.
  - And secondly, He transforms us so that we are renewed in righteousness by the Holy Spirit so that we are more and more enabled to live like Jesus.
  - It is through righteousness alone that true peace comes.
    - Again, as Isaiah 48:22 says, “There is no peace for the wicked.”
    - You will never have true and lasting shalom until you are righteous.
      - Deliverance from Babylon is not enough.
        - The Messiah must come and bring righteousness to us.

Let us look now at what Isaiah has to say about this in chapter 48, our text for today.

- We are going to consider three things we must never settle for as substitutes for righteousness.
- First,

**I. Never suppose that you are righteous merely by association with the church.**

A. This is a very common problem.

1. God graciously receives us and our children into His church when we profess our faith in Jesus.
  - He receives us and He establishes us with His people where we are taught and cared for according to His ordinance.
  - We are brought under His fatherly care and chastisement, and are partakers of the ordinances that He has appointed for our growth in grace...
    - We engage in corporate worship, in prayer, in praise, in the sacraments, in vows, and in the communion of the saints.
      - It is a place where we have His grace constantly held forth to us such that we are surrounded by it for our good.
        - As Paul puts in Romans, we have the oracles of God.
  
2. But there are many who are part of the covenant community in a merely formal way.
  - They are members of the church and they engage in all the ordinances of the church,
    - but they do not receive the word with faith.
  
3. Isaiah addresses such persons in verses 1-2!
  - In Isaiah 48:1, He says,
    - Isa 48:1: Hear this, O house of Jacob, Who are called by the name of Israel, And have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; Who swear by the name of the LORD, And make mention of the God of Israel, *But* not in truth or in righteousness;
    - You see here that they are very much numbered with the people whom God identifies as His own,
      - and they swear by His name as their God—they are in covenant with Him...
        - but it is all a sham—it is not in truth or in righteousness.
        - They are not really interested in serving Him and they do not really believe Him and seek Him.
    - In verse 2, Isaiah even says that they lean on Him as the Almighty Lord,
      - looking to Him for deliverance from their enemies and their problems,
        - but they are not really interested in the salvation that He offers—salvation from sin.
        - They are like the Jews of Jesus’ day who wanted to be delivered from the Romans,
          - and people in our day who want the Lord to give them the very things that Babylon seeks—prosperity and security—
            - but who have no interest in righteousness or holiness.

TRANS> If that is the case with you, you are only one of God's people outwardly...

- Do not kid yourself so as to suppose that you are righteous just because you are part of the church and call yourself by His name.
  - You are trying to make Christ into a priest of Babylon—who gives you Shalom without holiness and righteousness.
  - You are not seeking the kingdom of righteousness that He came to establish.

B. The LORD has something to say to you if this is how it is with you!

1. He tells you that He has given His word to you in such a way that it ought to convince you that He is the LORD.
  - a. He made sure that you would hear it...
    - And over and over He has done miracles—
      - like multiplying his people in Egypt and then delivering them...
      - like giving them the land of Canaan...
      - like sending forth His Son into the world to die on the cross and then raising Him from the dead, just as promised...
      - like calling the nations to come to Him and giving them eternal life.
  - b. We are His people, and He has given us His word in which over the centuries He has declared to us what He was going to do before He did it...
    - He did this because He knows how slow we are to believe—
      - He knows that we are obstinate (as it says in verse 4), and that our neck is like an iron sinew and brow like bronze.
      - He had made His word so clear and so powerful that it ought to be impossible for us to resist it and give glory to idols.
        - We ought to know that the kingdom He brings is a kingdom of righteousness!
2. Yet, in verse 6-8, He chides us (the whole church in general) for not profiting from His word...
  - a. In verse 6, He says that we have heard and we have seen what He has done—we have been fully exposed to it—but we do not declare it!
    - He caused us to hear of miracles that He would perform—
      - and He brings into being all that He has promised, but we seem to have missed it!
        - Hearing we did not hear and seeing we did not see.
          - Look at verse 8:

- Isa 48:8: “Surely you did not hear, Surely you did not know; Surely from long ago your ear was not opened.

b. He goes on to say that He knew we would deal treacherously...

- He knew that though we have made a covenant with Him, we would not keep it.
  - Remember in Deuteronomy 32 when Moses told the people that they would not keep God’s way?
  - God knows that we are transgressors from the womb!
    - There are none who are righteous, no not one.

c. So do not boast merely that you are part of the visible church.

- It is a place of privilege, but if you do not receive the word that God graciously gives to you and continue in it,
  - It is the place of treachery—of covenant breaking...
  - It would have been better if you had never even been a part of God’s people if you end up breaking His covenant.
- But if you will but receive the word that God has so kindly given to you—
  - the word of faith that tells you what God promised to do for your salvation in sending Jesus Christ to redeem you...
    - then there is no condemnation for you at all.
    - You have received God’s word and you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ whom God provided to take away your sins.
      - But sadly, most members of the visible church have rejected Him... the word is near, but they do not believe.

TRANS> Never suppose that you are righteous just because you part of the church.

- That is the first thing...
- Now let’s look at the second thing you must never suppose...

## **II. Never suppose that you have suffered the full penalty of sin apart from Christ.**

A. There is a danger of this whenever the Lord chastens His people and then withdraws His punishment.

1. There are always those who suppose that whatever they have suffered in this life is sufficient to pay the penalty of their sin.
  - You have probably heard people say that this is hell—right here and now.
    - But that is nonsense.
    - It dishonours God to even imagine such a thing...

- He is a holy God and He has sentenced the sinful human race to everlasting separation from His comfortable presence and most grievous torments in soul and body in hell fire forever!
  - It not only dishonours Him to suppose that our suffering here could satisfy for our sins,
    - It also dishonours the Son of God who Himself bore the pains of hell on the cross when He was cut off from the comfortable presence of His Father in heaven.
  - In our society, we know very little or real suffering such as Israel experienced in the exile...
2. But the LORD tells us that even His deliverance of Israel from exile was not because His punishment upon them had been complete.
- a. He says rather, in verse 9, that He deferred His anger and restrained it lest His people had been cut off.
    - If He had given them all that they justly deserved, they would have been utterly destroyed...
    - He says that He refined them, “but not as silver” is refined...
      - If He had left them in the smelting furnace until all the impurities were out there would have been nothing left of them...
        - There was no silver to purify—only dross.
        - So He brought them out before the process was complete.
  - b. He explains that He has restrained His anger for the sake of His own name.
    - You can see that in verse 9 and in verse 11.
    - He had taken these people as His people, and if He had consumed them under the oppression of their enemies as they deserved,
      - it would have been thought that He had been overpowered by the gods of the nations... they would have given glory to their idols...
      - And His promise to their fathers to bring salvation through their seed would have failed, making Him unfaithful.
    - So the LORD acted for the honour and protection of His good name so that all would know that He is LORD, the almighty, who keeps His promises.
  - c. This is exactly the argument that Moses used when he interceded for Israel after they worshipped the golden calf.
    - The LORD had threatened to destroy Israel and raise up another nation to replace them as His people,
      - But Moses reminded Him that the nations would think that He was not able to deliver them, and all would see that He violated His promise.

- Therefore, the Lord did not utterly destroy them.
    - Not because they did not deserve it, but for the sake of His name.
    - He brought serious punishment upon them so that many died in their sins, but He did not punish them as fully as they deserved.
3. Learn from this where you must rest!
- Not in your own righteousness or in the silly notion that you have had enough,
    - but in God’s promise and reputation that would be all the more profaned now that Jesus has come...
    - The question would be asked,
      - “Was Jesus’ sacrifice not sufficient to take away their sin?”
        - And the Lord would not have such a charge to stand.
  - Though we deserve to be utterly consumed for our sins,
    - He delivers us for the sake of His holy name.
- B. The LORD has plans for our deliverance—ultimate plans—plans that will not fail.
1. In verse 12-13, He calls His people—all of us—to listen...
- And He says,
    - “I am He, I am the First, and I am the Last”
    - He alone is God...
      - He was the one the started this world and He is the One who will bring it to its final destiny.
      - As the one who laid the foundation of the earth and who stretched out the heavens,
        - all things are at His beck and call.
  - He has a master plan that He is carrying out and in that plan by which He will save His people.
2. And in verse 14-15 He reiterates what He has told them over and over again...
- He is going to raise up Cyrus to deliver them from Babylon.
    - He has loved Cyrus in the sense that He is going to prosper him in such a way that he conquers Great Babylon with ease.
      - God is the one that calls Cyrus and God is the one who will make him prosper.
  - The LORD calls His people to assemble together to hear this!
    - He is telling them before the fact what He is going to do.
      - He is making it very clear by repeating it over and over so that they cannot miss it—
        - at least they cannot miss it unless they are extremely stubborn and blind.



- They must understand that deliverance from Babylon does not mean that they have suffered the full penalty of their sins!
    - God has delivered them, but He has done it before satisfaction has been made for their sins.
    - We saw it back in chapter 40...
      - The LORD Himself must come to save them.
      - They do not receive double for all their sins until He comes and bears the penalty for them.
3. You must see this my brothers and sisters!
- a. We and our children may have some very hard times ahead because the sins of the church in our land have been great...
    - but no matter what happens to us,
      - know that God has a great plan that He is going to accomplish...
      - He has it all planned out from the first to the last.
  - b. And His plan is a plan for the deliverance of all His people—all His elect.
    - But not because we deserve to be delivered...
      - Even if our sufferings are intensified a hundred times over—
        - we are not delivered because we have made satisfaction by our own sufferings...
        - it is not because of our sufferings but because of His promised mercy in Christ.

TRANS> And this brings us to our third point...

### **III. Never suppose that beginning deliverance is full deliverance.**

A. There is always a danger of this...

1. A danger that we will settle for far less than what God has promised!
  - Sometimes those who have suffered in war times or in economic collapses have been so keen on deliverance that all they want is deliverance from these calamities!
  - This is a huge error.
    - As God's people we must not settle for mere deliverance from poverty or deliverance from addictions or deliverance from a bad relationship or from war or even from an immoral life.
    - Our deliverance is not complete until we have received all that God has provided for our true peace!
      - Above all things, we must obtain complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ...in which His righteousness is imputed to us...

- And we must also continue to pursue complete sanctification until we will become like Jesus, perfectly conformed to our heavenly father's will.
    - It is not just a matter of getting rid of a few sins that you don't like—such as an anger problem or an addiction.
  - And we must attain to the resurrection from the dead when we will put off this body of death and put on immortality!
    - Do not be content with anything less!
      - This is what your heavenly Father has promised you.
2. There was a danger for Israel that they would suppose that deliverance from Babylon was the final goal!
- It was not.
    - The overall thrust of verse 16-22 is that even though Israel should be delivered from Babylon,
      - They are still in need of righteousness if they are to have peace.
  - The LORD has made it clear in what we have already seen that His deliverance of them from Babylon was not because of they had made satisfaction for their sins there.
    - If they were to have true peace, true shalom, they would need to have righteousness...
      - Because, as verse 22 says,
        - Isa 48:22: "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked!"
  - Look at verse 22 and what comes before it...
    - The LORD has just told them that He was going to bring them out of Babylon in a most remarkable way in verse 20-21...
      - He would work miracles to do it and to provide for them to return.
        - And then verse 22 suddenly comes along and says,
          - "There is no peace for the wicked!"
    - The LORD has been telling them that this deliverance from Babylon is not because they deserve it—
      - They are unrighteous—
        - It is only because of His promise.
        - So He seems to be telling them that something much more than deliverance from Babylon is needed—
          - They need righteousness.

- A mere change of address is not God's shalom.
  - Their problem is wickedness, not Babylon.
    - They can be delivered from Babylon, but there is still no peace as long as they are wicked!
    - The problem of wickedness much be dealt with.
- B. It is not as though the LORD has been secretive about the full salvation that His people really need—much more than mere deliverance from Babylon!
1. The LORD reminds us of this in verse 16.
    - Verse 16 says:
      - Isa 48:16: "Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning..."
    - This is very true, is it not?
      - No sooner did we fall than the LORD came to Adam with the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent...
      - God told us right from the beginning of His master plan of deliverance and salvation.
        - He told Abram that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.
        - He repeated the promise to Moses and gave him ordinances for the people to set forth the promise to them...
        - And to David He promised a son that would reign until His kingdom of righteousness was fully established.
        - And in the promise of the New Covenant spoken of by the prophets, He spoke of the complete forgiveness of sins and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to give us new life when David's Son came.
    - The Lord has not been secretive or esoteric in revealing His salvation...
      - He has openly declared His promise in all ages,
        - and now that Jesus has come, He has made known His salvation in all the earth!
      - Yes, the LORD had told Israel of His plans to deliver them from Babylon...
        - But He also spoke of a much grander plan of which deliverance from Babylon by Cyrus is but the beginning!

TRANS> And look,

2. As verse 16 continues, the One whose task it was to bring us this great salvation speaks!

- He says,
  - Isa 48:16—middle: “From the time that that it was, I was there. And the LORD God and His Spirit have sent Me.”
- a. This is the Servant of the LORD that we met back in Isaiah 42!
  - He is the One whom the Father is going to send!
  - The One who will not give up until He has established righteousness for Israel and for the nations in the earth!
  - The One who is anointed with the fullness of the Spirit!
    - And let me point out that the Spirit who is mentioned in verse 16 can grammatically be taken with the Father as a double subject:
      - as in the NKJV “And the LORD God and His Spirit have sent Me.”
    - Or He can be taken with the speaker (the Son) as a double object...
      - as in the NKJV margin “And the LORD God has sent Me and His Spirit.”
    - This second way is preferable because the Spirit does not send the Son, but is sent when the Son comes...
      - The Spirit comes to anoint the Son beyond measure and then to baptise His church at Pentecost.
        - The Servant of the Lord has already been described as One who is anointed with God’s Spirit, so it only makes sense to translate it this way.
- b. God has not hidden His great plan to bring righteousness to His people!
  - And here is the One that has been with the Father all along that the Father is going to send—to accomplish this purpose!
    - Deliverance from Babylon apart from His coming to save His people from their sins is nothing...
      - If the people are delivered from Babylon but still in their sins, there is no hope for them...
      - Their only hope is in this one that the Father is going to send to establish righteousness...
        - This one who pops up at the end of verse 16 to speak to us...
  - Isaiah is preparing us for chapters 49-57.
    - He is going to tell us all about this servant and what He is going to do to bring us righteousness!

- Deliverance from Babylon is worthless if He does not come.
- C. Isaiah goes on to describe what peace Israel might have had if only they had received God's word of promise concerning Him!
1. This is laid out in verses 17-19...
    - a. In verse 17 the LORD reminds them that all along He has given them His precious Word for their benefit...
      - to profit them and to lead them in the way they should go.
      - He had constantly set Christ before them in His promises and ordinances and it was their part to simply receive His word that was so near to them...
        - so accessible if only they would have it.
    - b. In v. 18, the LORD laments that they did not receive His word—
      - He laments in the same way that Jesus later lamented over Jerusalem when He spoke of what might have been if only they had listened...
        - Luke 19:41-42: Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.
        - Yes, this is a might have been passage—a passage in which the LORD Himself speaks about what might have been if only they had listened!
      - Look at what He says in Isaiah 48:18-19:
        - Isa 48:18-19: "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants also would have been like the sand, And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; His name would not have been cut off Nor destroyed from before Me.""
      - They would have had peace and righteousness for many generations and would never have gone to Babylon at all if they had received His word...
        - If they had received His word, they would have been trusting in Christ promised.
          - The fact is that most of them did not, just as most Christians do not trust in Him today for their righteousness.
          - They trust him for other things, but they not trust Him for the principal think that God sent Him for!
            - And so they do not have peace and they do not have righteousness.
        - But don't misunderstand.
          - It is not that none of them trusted in Christ-promised...

- There were many who did—but as a whole they did not, such that when the nation was spoken of as a whole,
  - they could rightly be said to have rejected the grace of God that was offered to them...
  - Just as Jesus said of Jerusalem in His day even though there was a remnant that received Him.
- And so I would beseech you in our day to see to that you seek righteousness and peace from Jesus Christ...
  - Do not be among those who forfeit the blessing by unbelief, by indifference to this one that God has provided to give us what we need!
  - How can you ignore Him—now that He has been revealed so clearly in the world!
    - Don't you see?
    - He went to the cross for you—to bear the curse for you so that you might be forgiven and have God's peace!
      - Will you neglect so great a salvation when God has brought it so near to you?
      - Believe, receive, follow Him!
      - Why would you forfeit your own peace?

TRANS> But do not think for a moment that seeing that there is a greater promise than Babylon should make you despise deliverance from Babylon...

- or any deliverance that God provides.

2. Isaiah calls for great rejoicing about deliverance from Babylon...

- You can see this in verse 20!
  - a. He calls them to go forth from Babylon with great joy and rejoicing, declaring to the ends of the earth that God has redeemed His people!
    - I said before that we *must not settle* for deliverance merely from poverty or deliverance from addictions or deliverance from a bad relationship or from war or even from an immoral life.
      - Because these are nothing if they are not connected to the complete deliverance that we need in Jesus Christ.
    - But if you are resting in the deliverance of Christ,
      - your rejoicing ought to be all the greater for deliverance from Babylon and all other such things—
      - You ought to look at Babylon and these other deliverances as so many tokens and forerunners of the great deliverance that we have in Him

- b. The joy that Isaiah calls for is excessive if it is only for deliverance from Babylon—
- Cyrus released other nations to worship their gods also...they had similar release from Babylon.
  - Even Isaiah's description about the rocks splitting open to give drink to His people is looking more at Christ who will give His people living water than at what actually happened when they came out of Babylon!
  - The greatness of the deliverance from Babylon is in what it leads to for all those who were looking to God for salvation from sin!
  - Isaiah sees deliverance from Babylon as the first step in God's great plan that will lead to the appearing of Christ...
    - who will establish His kingdom of righteousness into which He will gather the nations unto His salvation.
  - Our joy in our smaller deliverances is greatly enhanced because we see the big picture of what God has promised to do!

### **Conclusion**

And so my brothers and sisters, enter into this joy in God's deliverance in Christ!

- There is no substitute for it!
  - In Him alone is our righteousness and peace.
  - What a dear friend He is who has come to bear our penalty that we might have complete forgiveness and eternal life through His Spirit!
  - The rock is split and the water of life flows freely!
    - Come, drink, quench your thirst with all His fullness!