

I Am Holier Than You

Once again we are in the happy position of not having to wonder who the speaker is in these opening verses. The Apostle tells us in Romans 10 that these verses speak of Christ gathering His elect people from the nations of the world. It is Christ, not Isaiah, who was found by poor Gentiles. The gospel was sent into all the world to be preached among the nations when the rebellious people, that is, the Jews, rejected Christ.

God is not mocked

This chapter prophesies judgment of the Jewish nation which long had despised the Lord's overtures of divine goodness. If the Jews of Isaiah's day should wonder why their nation is to be overthrown and carried into exile the prophet provides the answer; a catalogue of crimes for which they are condemned. The common threads in all their offences from verses 2-7 is idolatry and pride. 'Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.'

Yet, – a blessing is in it

However, we read too of the preservation of a remnant from amongst the Jews who shall not be destroyed 'for a blessing is in it'. This 'remnant according to the election of grace' would be saved from the general ruin. The blessing 'in it' was the line of Christ the Messiah by whose coming salvation would be accomplished and the gospel sent into all the world for the redemption of many. The man Jesus was the seed brought forth out of Jacob, out of the tribe of Judah, to inherit God's 'mountains' the church.

Help in Sharon and Achor

Christ is the Father's first and principal chosen One. His people are chosen in Him. Grace is bestowed on God's elect people in their state of nature to bring them to know and ask for Christ. Finding Christ is finding rest from our own works. He is a fold to safeguard His flock when they dwell and feed in fertile Sharon. The valley of Achor represented past shame and distress. Now, in the Lord, it is a place of grace and peace. Here Isaiah is again preaching a gospel message of redemption, protection and provision for God's people in Christ.

Transforming grace

Isaiah compares and contrasts outcomes for Christ's church with those who perform evil in the sight of God. 'Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit.' The repeated use of 'behold' highlights the amazing nature of grace.

God shall supply all our need

Eating and drinking, rejoicing and singing do not primarily mean physical blessings though the Lord does providentially supply the daily needs of His people for their good. The provision of spiritual food and drink is in view. Christ, the bread of life, and redemption by His blood, brings joy to a believer's heart, even when trials abound. The Saviour implants a new song in the soul of the church to the praise of His glory and success.

Cursed forever

The Jews who despised God in their own lifetimes, with those who denied Christ in His lifetime, will carry their curse forever. The Lord's people, on the other hand, shall be called by a new name. Perhaps Isaiah is alluding to 'Hephzibah' and 'Beulah', from chapter 62, in whom the Lord delights, they being married to Him. Or, perhaps the name 'Christian' is here anticipated by Isaiah, first given to the disciples at Antioch, and continued ever since.

All things new

In the final verses of the chapter Isaiah foresees the new life and new covenant that is revealed by Christ. Jesus makes all things new, culminating in new heavens and a new earth. It is again remarkable how full and far-reaching was the gospel revelation granted to these Old Testament believers. Not only were they informed about the Messiah and His personal accomplishments, they also glimpsed scenes from the end of time and eternal glory to come when Christ will restore all things according to promise (Acts 3:21).

Happy prospect!

These themes of joy – the end of weeping, long life, building, planting and enjoying the fruit of labour – are pictures of the spiritual experience of those who have faith in Christ in this world and also of the heavenly promises and eternal inheritances God has laid up in store for His people when they enter fully into the presence of their Saviour. Isaiah's remnant-Israel must yet endure much trouble but their prospect thereafter is joyous. We, too, must face hardships in time but our blessings in eternity far outweigh the troubles we face today.

Amen

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