

Thy Dead Men Shall Live

Isaiah repeatedly returns to the prospect of the coming day of the Lord, a day that will reveal God's glory and vindicate the patience and perseverance of the Lord's people. The day in view is the gospel day, an extended age beginning with the first coming of the Lord Jesus and culminating in the return of Christ in power to judge the world and bring His church into heavenly joy and peace. Isaiah foresaw this day and wrote of it to encourage and comfort the remnant of every age amid the challenges they face.

Gospel expansion

The opening verses of this chapter speak of the Lord gathering His church by the gospel and bringing His people into Zion, the city of God. 'Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.' What makes us righteous is the righteousness of Christ. The truth which is kept is the faith of Christ. The strength of the city is the salvation that comes from the Lord. It is not our own strength and ability but the goodness of God which defends, protects and secures the poor and needy. Believers are weak and feeble folk who find refuge within Zion's walls.

Comfort in trouble

Isaiah encourages the Lord's elect always to trust in Jehovah who is the rock of ages and our unique source of everlasting strength. Every difficult experience encountered in the lives of the remnant people; be it war, exile and slavery of past times or more subtle troubles that we face today, finds relief and comfort in the everlasting strength of our unchangeable Saviour. Not all the Lord's people live to see their enemies fall and their temporal difficulties removed but those who trust in the Lord always find peace and are never disappointed.

Distinguishing grace

Let us remember, there is not a providence in the experience of men and women in this world that does not directly affect the Lord's elect in common with unbelievers. Believers are not immune from disease nor preserved from hardship nor saved from sorrow. We bleed and decay in common with all flesh and we mourn for the loss of things loved. God's remnant people suffered in the days of Isaiah and have done so ever since. Yet, even in the depths of despair a portion of grace and love is divinely ministered to the elect which distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever. When trouble draws near the Lord draws nearer.

Preaching the cross

Nevertheless, we have these promises. All God's enemies and ours will be ashamed and all worldly glory will be trodden down. Here, Isaiah reveals a pattern often employed by the Lord. To rebuke the pride of man the kingdoms of the earth fall under the feet of the weak and despised, 'even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy'. This, again, is a picture of gospel success, Paul says, 'the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God' for 'it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe'. This is God's great salvation.

Raised together in Christ

We do not seek the formation of a fleeting earthly kingdom but we look in faith for an eternal heavenly kingdom. The kingdom of Christ was conceived in God's eternal purpose and committed to Christ by covenant promise. The Father gave His Son a people and made them His inheritance, saying, 'Thy dead men shall live'. When redemption was complete and the Saviour's success confirmed by His resurrection, all for whom He died were raised together with Him and their eternal life assured.

'Come my people'

This is the message of the gospel. The preaching of the cross brings Christ's people to conversion, reveals God's elect and secures our souls against our foes. When the trials of life befall us, when the enemies of Christ assail us, the Lord declares, 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast'. This is your comfort and mine when we are tried and tempted. Christ invites us to shelter our souls under gospel promises. Our chambers are God's grace, love, mercy, peace and Christ's presence with us. In such chambers the Lord's people find security and rest when the storms of life break around us.

A message that endures

Isaiah had a word from the Lord for all God's people in every age. Some, such as in Isaiah's own day, looked forward in faith to the coming of Christ and the victories He would win. Today, we look back on Christ's success and the wider opening of Zion's gates to the Gentiles. We have witnessed the gains of the apostolic ministry through preaching Christ crucified. By grace the in-gathering of Christ's redeemed church continues and soon all will be revealed in glory when the Saviour comes again.

Amen

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