

Isaiah 24-27: Isaiah's Apocalypse

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In 730 BC, Israel and Judah were surrounded by enemies and threats of every kind. With their very existence at stake, they were faced with the most important question, "Who do you trust?" God had sent many prophets to Judah to warn the people to repent and return to The Lord. So would they trust The Lord their God, or would they seek help from the evil idolaters, Assyria and Egypt? Behind that immediate question was a bigger eternal question, "Will you trust God, or His adversary who is behind all the evil empires like Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon? This sounds like an easy answer, but actually the adversary is very appealing and what he offers is desirable. The adversary of God seems to be offering everything you think you want and need--success, money, stuff, popularity, pleasure, happiness, power, and fulfillment. Like the siren's song drawing the ships to beautiful waters, which cover the rocks of their destruction (The Odyssey), mankind has answered that luring call for 6,000 years of recorded history. The ruins of all our ships lie piled up on the jagged rocks of destruction. By that, I mean that all the great empires, civilizations, and great cities are now just a pile of rocks. What is man's continuing problem behind all of history's failures? Man's basic problem is our steadfast determination to remain independent of God and still make life work in a world God has rigged so that it won't work.

As a race we believe the lie, we chase the dream, and we are like actors on a world wide stage. As we act out this great drama, messengers from God like Isaiah bring the Word of God warning us, even entreating us to repent, because God has set a day of judgment referred to by the prophets as "the Day of The Lord" in which Gods righteous wrath against evil will be poured out. I have seen cynical comedians yell up at God and dare Him to strike them with lightning, but what they don't realize is that God is not interested in such partial piecemeal judgment. This would violate our free will and negate our responsibility. God has determined a day of total and complete judgment in which evil will be completely ended. Isaiah 24-26, is primarily about that day--the end of the world as we know it.

It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World

One of the great comedies of all time was the movie above, and it had all the great old time comedians like Sid Caesar, Jonathon Winters, Milton Bearle, Mickey Rooney, Jimmy Durante, Buddy Hackett, Phil Silvers, etc. The 1963 movie accurately portrays the human race as easily tempted greedy people chasing their foolish dreams of riches and pleasure. In the opening scene, Jimmy Durante plays a bank robber, Smiler Grogan, who has a bad car wreck on the highway. A group of people stop to help, and Smiler tells them that he has buried his ill gotten riches under the big W at Santa Monica. He says, "You can be rich, have it all, live like a king, and have all your dreams fulfilled". The treasure is the bait of the stolen money that causes these seemingly innocent and kind people to spin out of control. The police come and then the lying and deception begins. First they rebel against authority, then they unite against the law, and then they enter into a ruthless competition with each other. Jimmy Durante is like the devil who began the fall of man by throwing out the original lie that they could know what God knows and be like God. They enter into a lifetime of chasing after something that's not there. Life becomes a competition that none of them are qualified to win. What could cause Sid Caesar who has a fear of flying to get in a 1917 Sopwith Camel biplane flown by a 90 year old man? Why would Mickey Rooney and Buddy Hackett get in a plane flown by a drunk Mr. Magoo? Why would Jonathon Winters attack and destroy an entire gas station? The answer unfolds before us all every day in our normal lives--the lust for stuff, desire for pleasure, and pursuit of personal significance and security. Even though we all know money can't buy happiness and we can't "take it with us", people are still on the treadmill as the rat race continues. The ending of the movie is a classic. As all the characters watch, the stolen money ends up fluttering away in the wind. All their hard work was just chasing after the wind. Solomon said it well in Ecclesiastes 2:11, after a lifetime of chasing pleasure and riches, "I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and chasing after wind".

Isaiah 24-27--The End of the World as We Know it

God created time and He will bring it to an end. Isaiah 24 is concerned with the last things and the end times. This end of the world scenario is bad news for the greedy ruthless power brokers, but good news for the redeemed of God. Isaiah 24 moves from the destruction of the evil world to the promise of restoration for Gods people in Isaiah 26. There is a choice for all to make and no one is exempt. Destruction is coming because the human race has violated the purpose of their creation to love, serve, and glorify God.

In Isaiah 24:1-3, we read of the ruin of the whole earth. The earth will wither and be laid to waste. In v.4-5, the supposedly important people will not be spared. Why? The people have defiled the earth by violating all Gods laws. In v.6-13, they must bear the consequences of their guilt, and only a remnant will be saved from the ruins and devastation. The righteous remnant of v.14-16 will praise God, and they will view Gods judgment as a righteous act. In Isa.24:17-23, the unbelievers will try to escape, but the author uses the images of unavoidable traps that they will fall into. They then will all be gathered together in a terrible place according to v.22. Meanwhile, The Lord will reign in all His glory.

Isaiah 25-26

These two chapters are praise psalms of the redeemed thanking God for their deliverance. Isaiah is describing the praise to God in the Kingdom after God judges the world and sets up His kingdom. They praise The Lord for all His attributes, his righteousness in judgment, and deliverance of His people. There will be an amazing reversal of fortune whereby the humble will be rescued, but the ruthless will be silenced. It will be a great banquet and celebration for the people of The Lord. There will be no more death, no more pain, no more tears in the kingdom. The great military machines and fortifications of the warrior nations will be destroyed, and there will be peace in the Kingdom of God. I believe that Isaiah 26:19 is a clear passage on the resurrection of the dead into the kingdom. Death will not win, and the dead will rise and shout for joy.

Matthew 13:24-30--the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

If we know that in Genesis 3, and continuing until now, the creation has gone wildly astray from God's original design, then we must ask the question--What will God do to fix it? He could destroy it completely and just start over, but God has chosen a different and better way. God has chosen to let the human race go its own way and make its own decisions, but out of love God has chosen to provide the way of salvation through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares in Matt. 13:24-43, reveals that God won't judge and destroy the earth until the fullness of time determined by Him. A full harvest of both evil and righteousness will eventually be reached, and as Peter said in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise (concerning judgment), but is patient toward you not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Therefore God is patiently waiting for all who will come to Christ, to come, thus giving everyone the chance, and establishing responsibility.

In the parable of The Wheat and the Tares, Jesus explained the delay in judgment and the setting up of the Kingdom of God. A good farmer planted good seed in his field and expected a good crop to grow, but an enemy (the devil) snuck in and planted tares (weeds) during the night. When the good wheat grew up the bad weeds grew up also. Tares are a form of winter grass that looks exactly like wheat until the wheat ripens with heads of grain. Therefore if you tried to pull out the tares you might also damage some of the wheat. Naturally the diligent servants of the farmer offered to pull out the weeds, but the farmer wisely said no, but allow them both to grow together until the time of the harvest when they can be clearly distinguished. In Matt. 13:37-43, Jesus gathered His closest disciples together to explain the parable. The farmer represents Jesus, the field is the world, and the good seed are the believers who will be in the Kingdom. The tares are unbelievers depicted here as "the sons of the evil one". The enemy that planted the tares is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the world on judgment day. The Son of God will come with His angels and they will gather the righteous into the Kingdom, but they will gather the tares into that place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Our current time is that time in which the crop is growing and it is not perfectly evident who is the wheat and who is the tares. This will be up to Christ to determine at His second coming. Now God delays that, patiently waiting for all who will come, to come. Jesus' concern now is not to separate the wheat and tares. Jesus' concern is that none of the good harvest be lost. Meanwhile, lets not forget that we can't necessarily distinguish the wheat from the tares, and we are responsible for giving all those who appear to be tares the chance to become the good seed and be harvested into the Kingdom.

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