

Isaiah 50 (10) – When the Feelings Aren't There

Here is a brief and general outline of the book of Isaiah. There is some overlap in each section, but it is basically written in three parts.

- In Isaiah chapters 1-39, the prophet Isaiah is speaking to his own generation, confronting their sin, and ending with the prophecy of a coming captivity
- In chapters 40-55, the prophet is speaking to the future children of the Babylonian captivity (who were ensnared by the world) and he prophesies about a coming Messiah, their deliverer
- In chapters 56-66, Isaiah is speaking about the restoration of God's people to their homeland

So, here in chapter 50, Isaiah is speaking about his people who have become ensnared by the world. They are in captivity, and they are having a hard time. They are in doubt, they are in darkness, and they have lost their feeling of God. They receive a hope and a warning. Trust in God, in his character, even when it looks bad and it feels empty. Otherwise, you'll get burned.

God will sometimes place you in training sessions and seasons so that you'll know and trust God when you need him most but understand him least. It's not punishment, it's preparation. But it can certainly be a hard road. Where is God? What's he doing? I can't sense God in all of this, or even in any of this. I don't feel God, and it just doesn't feel right.

Well, you don't have to know every bump, curve, and obstacle in the road when you are following Jesus, because he does. You can keep following him even when it leads through trouble. Stay the course. Jesus knows the way. Make sure you continue to follow him.

God knows what he is doing. He will allow you to be tested so you'll learn he can be trusted. God is working not just for your good but for the good of

others through you. As you go through the dark and seeming emptiness, and yet you remain faithful, that faithful witness strengthens others' faith.

Look at vs.11. There can be seasons of your life where it seems like a dark cloud is always above you, or like you're walking right in the middle of it, or you may even feel like you're wearing a blindfold. Maybe it's your finances, marriage, losing loved ones, lost loved ones, unbelieving loved ones, sickness, work, ministry, or trouble in the world, but you feel disoriented. You can't really tell where you are, where you're going, what's going on, or what God's doing. And instead of travelling through the darkness by following the voice of God, you look to light your own way. You don't see the light, and you want to feel the heat. And this is what Isaiah was warning about. Israel was discouraged, and drifting, and walking by their own lights. God was saying they would get burned by them.

Vs.1 – the people feel as if God has given up on them. But God says I didn't divorce you, and I didn't sell you to someone else. I haven't given up on you. Your mess is your own fault.

Vs.2-3 – When God's people begin to resent how he seems to do things, they can begin to grumble, and complain, and grieve God's Spirit, withdrawing from God's word, and God's people, and disobeying God's will. They feel and see only dark. This was Israel's problem.

Why do people turn back from God in the darkness? Because when your life doesn't go the way you planned, or the way you want, you are tempted to become sour and suspicious toward God. When life takes a turn for the worse, trusting God may seem dangerous, and God may seem distant, and disinterested. You know God is all powerful, so maybe you start to think that he is really the one to blame. And so, you start looking for another way to light your way. Another way to warm your day. You don't feel him anymore, so you strive to at least feel something. And when you think that's working, that's when you're in trouble.

When life gets hard, God doesn't want you to resent his ways. He says *"Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?"* His ear is not closed to you. His heart is not dark toward you. Yet you can refuse him, because the darkness around you seems to hide him from you. You're looking to light the flame of your feelings, and you're failing to follow God.

So, God says *"Why, when I came, was there no man; why, when I called, was there no one to answer?"* God says I was patiently waiting for you, but where were you? Their situation was not because of God's neglect. In vs.1 God told them it was their own fault that they were in darkness. But he says my hand can still save. You may have been unfaithful, but I will still be faithful.

The rest of vs.2-3 reminds you of the Exodus, and how God rescued the people from bondage in Egypt. But here in Isaiah, a physical rescue wasn't what the people needed most, they needed something far more than that. They needed a spiritual rescue from their disobedience against God and from their doubts about God. And so often, so do we.

Sometimes it is your own fault that you are walking in darkness. But sometimes, it is not your fault. Yet, in either case, God wants to use this season of darkness and lack of feeling to advance you in your knowledge and trust of him. There are some lessons you can only learn in the dark. There are some things you need to learn when you don't feel like it. But when the days are dark, you might have a hard time looking at God, or his people, or anybody else, for that matter. You are tempted to despair. What if I never get through this? What if my body or my relationships never heal? What if I lose everything I love? What if I fail again? What if I never feel again?

In moments like these, Satan tries to drown out God's voice with fears and doubts. Whether the darkness is your own fault, or even when you know it isn't your fault, a season of darkness can leave you desperate for God, yet deaf to God. So, instead of relying on God, you just light your own torch, or you learn to crawl on the ground, sort of going nowhere, licking the bitter dust.

Many people medicate themselves with distraction, using simple and superficial pleasures to keep them from having to deal with the darkness. They feel empty, and they just want to feel something. Some will just wallow in self-pity, falling in love with their sadness, and taking comfort in obsessing over their situation. Some turn it outward, and take the pain they feel and use it as a weapon to hurt others. Hurt people will hurt people. Some just want to see someone else suffering, so as not to feel alone. Many people simply get used to the dark, not listening to the voice of God, but learning to live a dark and empty life.

The lights you create expose your pet sins and your weaknesses. God says they'll burn you if you depend on them. You might be ashamed of them, but you trust them when you feel desperate. But if you look outside of the Savior for something to be your savior, that thing will end up being your master, and not your savior. That little pleasure you hoped would serve you will make you serve it. You might feel free, but you end up a slave. Pleasure isn't always a bad thing. It is good to enjoy God's good graces. Pleasure isn't the problem. What you ask of it is the problem.

So, what are you supposed to do in the dark? Listen for the one who has the true light.

Vs.4-9 – So many have closed their ears to God and are lighting up their own torches, but Isaiah says someone has arisen, a servant who can suffer injustice and still be strong enough to sustain the weak. While the others are being led by their own light, he walks by faith, and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). He listened for the light when he could not see it. He saw God with his ears.

Here is a person that has heard the voice of God in the darkness. You first see him in Isaiah 42. Then in Isaiah 49, he appears once again. And here he is in Isaiah 50:4-9. Finally, you see him in Isaiah 52-53. All of these passages are a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will be with his people, lead his people, and deliver his people. Through the prophet Isaiah, God was

speaking about the suffering servant, Jesus, and how God his Father would be with him, to carry him through. And this was God's promise to Israel. And it is God's promise to you. If God was going to hold the Messiah's hand, you can be sure God will hold the hand of the Messiah's disciples. Walk by faith, and not by sight, and faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Here his voice in this very text. And follow him.

Vs. 10-11 – The lesson is to trust God, and rely on him when it's dark, and when you feel empty. Trust his character. Trust his word. If you walk by the light of your own torch, you will be burned. Turn away from those old lights you're tempted to trust, and don't try to light some new fire to guide and warm you. Walk by the light of his voice – the voice you hear in his word. This is what I call the voice of vision. Turn, trust, and take the next step.

Look to the cross and realize Jesus has got this handled. And even if he were to tell you exactly what he's doing you wouldn't have the vocabulary to actually understand it. The truth is you just don't know all the stuff that he's doing. But it is not your job to know everything, it is your job to trust him in everything. Even when you put yourself in the darkness, God wants to use that to train you to hear his voice in Scripture rather than trying to light the way on your own.

Consider how it is with a man and his wife. She has a hard time with something, she feels dark, and she wants to talk to him about it. He listens, but only so as to try and find a way to fix it. But she just wants him to be there with her, not fixing the dark, but loving her in the dark, right there with her. To enter into her world, and not just stand aloof and say this is the way out.

And that's what God wants. To be right there in that darkness with you, to show his love for you, to be a light for you, to teach you to hear him. He wants to show you that he can be trusted to lead you even in the darkest places and empty spaces. And to hear him in the dark and to be warmed by the fire of his word is the most comforting thing you can imagine.

Jesus says, “Do you feel me now?” Even when you don’t you can trust me. Feedings are gauges, they are not guides. You’re not supposed to follow your feelings, you’re supposed to follow me. When you’re not feeling me, have faith in me. It’s time to learn the lesson.

Psalm 119:105 – *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* God’s word shows you what you’re walking on and where you’re going to. Psalm 18:28 – *For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness.* Proverbs 6:23 – *For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.* Reproof means convict. God’s discipline is training. And God means to use your time in the darkness to show you what you have been depending on as a light instead of him, and to guide you to and by his light. This is the life of a maturing disciple, to be continually exposed to God’s light so as to depend more on that light than on yourself. Micah 7:8 – *...when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.*

Sometimes it is your own fault that you are in darkness, but sometimes it is God who has put you in darkness, not to punish you, but to train you to be able to hear his voice when you can’t see. But in either case, it is God’s design to lead you in the darkness, to learn to hear him and follow him and trust him in the darkness. To follow him through the emptiness. To have faith when the feelings aren’t there. Even in the darkness, you can live as a light, and help others to follow the light of God’s voice. The Devil says look, God has left you alone in the dark. But faith says, my God is with me in the dark, and I don’t need my own light to see where I am and what to do. I can follow God’s voice in the Scripture. And God is lighting my fire! What a victory over the Devil and a glory to God!

Faith can help you see in the dark. Faith can help you hear a voice others can’t hear. And faith can warm your soul in a supernatural way that is beyond a mere feeling. So, always remember the lesson: When the feelings aren’t there, Jesus still is.