

Show My People Their Sins

In chapter 40 the Lord instructed Isaiah to comfort His remnant people by reassuring them that the Messiah would come and Immanuel would be born into the world. Harsh times of conquest and exile were yet to afflict Jerusalem and the Jews, nevertheless the coming Christ would deliver God's promised salvation. As we have seen, the faithful prophet fulfilled his task by consistently pointing forward to the Messiah. He wrote of the suffering which Christ would endure and the success He would enjoy. Believers are always comforted when they see Jesus.

The sins of God's people

Now, however, the Lord God has an additional message for His prophet-preacher. Isaiah must declare loudly and strongly the transgressions of God's people and show the house of Jacob their sins. These two tasks, comforting and convicting, seem at first to be at variance. Trumpeting the presence of sin is more likely to stir up dismay than create calm. Yet here, too, the Lord's wisdom is revealed. For God's people to properly esteem Christ they must know their own nature and rightly discern the state of their own heart.

Whom the Lord loveth ...

Though we are God's people yet we are still sinners. It is because God loves us, as a father loves his son, that we are chastened and corrected for our misconduct, and re-directed in our service. God has redeemed our souls by the blood of Jesus Christ. He has cleansed us from sin and imputed righteousness to us. Nevertheless, for a little while He has wisely decreed that His people remain attached to sin in our bodies so we might feel the effect of evil in our flesh. We shall not be permitted to neglect our sin, or allowed to forget it.

Worshipping correctly

Isaiah's description of the church is very interesting. He speaks of those who relish worship, 'they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways'. They enjoy preaching and uphold gospel ordinances, but they have become detached from the Lord in their personal communion. Is this me? Is it you? This people delight in their scriptural orthodoxy and take pride in their precise traditions but like the church at Ephesus they have lost the intimacy of their first love. Like the church at Sardis they have a name that they live, but are practically dead.

Living faith

Let us be clear, the Lord no more values thoughtless Christian worship, be it ever so exact, than He accepted the ritualised performance of Old Testament sacrifice that was offered without care or understanding. The Lord seeks heart-worship. He seeks such as will worship in spirit as well as in truth. He seeks more than mere talk about serving the Lord and loving our neighbour. Our Lord looks for outward evidence of the inward transformation and lively faith He has worked in the lives of His people.

Christ's presence will out

Our Saviour spoke much of loving our neighbour and caring for the weak, the helpless and the needy. Such activity does not merit God's blessing but it reveals the presence of Christ in a believer's life. Christ is the light in our soul that breaks forth as the morning. He is the source and evidence of our spiritual health. Inward grace in the heart of a believer cannot be hid. It will out in the form of likeness to our great Pattern and Example.

Repairing and restoring

The remnant believers of Isaiah's age were encouraged to foresee a time when the church would grow and be enlarged. Christ's apostles, successors of these Old Testament saints, would build the old waste places and raise up the foundations of many generations through gospel preaching. Just as our Saviour is Repairer of the breach that occurred at the Fall, and Restorer of the way of access to God, so the true gospel effectually unites the body of Christ and leads the church in the path of life.

Christ our delight

Calling the sabbath a delight is not an advert for sabbath-observance in gospel times. As we have seen before, sabbath-keeping was used by Isaiah as shorthand for honouring and observing the whole law. Believers delight in the law of God as we see it fulfilled in and by the Lord, our Saviour. In Christ the law is glorified. He honoured and satisfied all its

demands, proving Himself worthy to represent His people.

Called to serve

Believers honour the Lord by faith. We trust in the One whose obedience at the cross redeemed our souls and reconciled us to God. Every debt has been paid for us by our great Substitute and Surety. The indwelling, converting and transformative presence of the Lord in a believer's life is marked by spiritual worship, a desire for righteousness, and willingness to serve God's cause in this world.

An exceeding great reward

Far from being impoverished by serving the Lord, the opposite is true. In loving our neighbour – by the grace of God – and caring for the poor, the Lord's people will be blessed in their service. He will cause the true church to ride upon the high places of the earth by exposing the barrenness of false, man-made religion. He will feed us with the heritage of Jacob by bringing success in preaching and fruit for our gospel witness. These are the promises of God.

Amen

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