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God's Plan to Redeem Sinners

After being informed of the very difficult road that lay in front of him, a road which included being crucified-, Peter wondered about John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

> John 21:21, "Peter therefore seeing him said to Jesus, 'Lord, and what about this man?'"

What is it about men that we are not content with knowing God's will for our life? It seems as though we must know God's will for others. Think of the laborers in the vineyard. When they were first hired, they were content to work for a denarii. But when they found out that others who worked far less received a denarii, they rebelled (Matthew 20:12).

For example, let's assume that it is year-end bonus time and you are going to receive $2,000.00. Initially you are thrilled, until you discover that a co-worker got $3,000.00 and others got $5,000.00. Amazing! And yet, God's response to Peter essentially was, "Don't worry about others! Worry about how you ought to follow Me!"

> John 21:22, "Jesus said to him, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!'"

Truly, we ought to take this as the biblical standard and calling for all of God's people! And yet there are times when God is pleased to give us the big picture and reveal to us His plan for other people. And Isaiah 19 is one such a time. Israel had just been taken into exile, and evil and wicked nations seemed only to strengthen their position. So what was God doing? *Lord, give us the big picture!!*

It clearly was Isaiah's belief that if Judah had the "big picture," they would not be shaken in the difficult days that lay in front of them. Rather, they would cling to God. And so as he closes out this section, Isaiah gave the nation of Judah God's unthwartable, mind-blowing plan for the nations and Israel (which now was in exile).

The Scope of God's Plan Involved Egypt

> Isaiah 19:1a, "The oracle concerning Egypt…"

With the exile of the Northern Kingdoms of Syria and Israel AND with the submission of the remaining Palestinian nations to Assyria, the political center of gravity in Palestine shifted to the south. As we saw last time, from 715 BC onwards Egypt became "the power" and so the fomenter of an anti-Assyrian bias in the region. As a result, the temptation remained strong for Judah to ally themselves with this nation, which is why Isaiah frequently spoke against an Egyptian alliance. From this we see that alongside the Assyrians (Isaiah 19:23), Egypt emerged at this time not only as a world power, but one for which God had very specific plans!

It Involved Tyre: the Religious Corrupter

> Isaiah 23:1a, "The oracle concerning Tyre…"

Who and what was Tyre that this city should receive an entire chapter dedicated to it?

"Tyre" was the principal seaport on the Phoenician coast having two separate harbors. It is believed to have been founded in 2,700 BC. It took an early and active part in sea-commerce, specifically with Egypt. Accordingly, early on Egypt endeavored to control the Phoenician coast. The city itself was on an island off the coast of Palestine which made it rather impregnable. Because of its location, it became the friend of many a refugee fleeing the ravages of war.

In fact, it became a friend of God's people during the reign and rule of David! We are told that Hiram of Tyre "always loved David." This love of David and so his household continued when Solomon became king (1 Kings 5:1–12). Now while God's people benefited from Tyre's support, they also suffered as a result. For example, because of Israel's close relationship with Tyre, many an Israelite leader became corrupted on account of the city's culture and women- chief of which was Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 11:1-5[1]).

In fact it wasn't until Isaiah's day that the impact of Solomon's Tyrian compromises were addressed (2 Kings 23:13). In the northern kingdom, Tyrian Baalism made a bid to replace Yahwism during the era of

Jezebel (1 Kings 16–18). From this and more, Tyre became a religious stumbling block for God's people, which is why this city received the special attention of this chapter. Notice finally, the last "player" referenced in this section.

It Involved Israel: the Religious Compromiser

> Isaiah 27:9a, "Therefore through this Jacob's iniquity will be forgiven…"

I'll make reference to this again, but Isaiah 27 is a chiasm whose center and focus is vv. 7-11 detailing God's plan for the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This was a very important question since the people of Judah just witnessed Israel's demise!

In 931 BC, Solomon died and the people of God were ready for a break. They had been delivered from Egyptian slavery a good 600 years before, but with the ministration of Solomon, Israel found themselves enslaved all over again (via the forced labor/draft which Solomon imposed upon God's people at the time). Accordingly when Solomon died, Rehoboam his son became king. Now he faced a rather tense situation. The nation was fed up with the conscription practices of Solomon and they said as much. They wanted to know what Rehoboam was going to do.

After discussing the matter with two sets of advisors (his father's and his own peers), Rehoboam took the advice of his peers and essentially said, *"You thought it was bad under my father… you haven't seen anything yet!"* The majority of the nation could not bear this response, and so they broke away and started their own country, maintaining the name, "Israel." Those left in the southern part became known as "Judah."

Now if you read the history of the leaders who sat on the throne of Israel, you will note that they were all bad kings. Each served themselves and the gods of Canaan, which represented nothing less than a violation of the National Covenant which God established with His people in the days of Moses/David. Accordingly, the Northern Kingdom would not last. In 722 BC it was wiped off the face of the earth! These are the nations which prompted the question, "What is God doing?" Notice the immediate answer.

An important part of God's plan is discipline. Consistent with Isaiah's earlier prophecies, God's plan for each of these groups involved severe trial and difficulty.

> Isaiah 19:1-4, "'The oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them [this passage lays stress on the sovereign rule of God in whose hand lays the heart of the king (Prov. 21:1)]. So I will incite Egyptians against Egyptians; and they will each fight against his brother, and each against his neighbor, city against city, *and* kingdom against kingdom. Then the spirit of the Egyptians will be demoralized within them; and I will confound their strategy, so that they will resort to idols and ghosts of the dead, and to mediums and spiritists. Moreover, I will deliver the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel master, and a mighty king will rule over them,' declares the Lord God of hosts."

This is but a sample of the focus and tenor of this entire passage which details the judgments that God

was going to bring on Egypt on account of their attempts to compromise God's people's trust in the Lord. Now it was important that Isaiah boldly present God's plan for Egypt, lest in their folly Judah reject God in favor of trusting the Egyptians, which as we've seen was a very real threat! In a few short years following Isaiah's message in Isaiah 30 (701 BC), Hezekiah would be faced with the threat of the approaching armies of Sennacherib. What did he do? His knee-jerk reaction was to take Egypt up on their standing offer of protection.

> Isaiah 30:1-2, "'Woe to the rebellious children,' declares the Lord, 'Who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin; who proceed down to Egypt, without consulting Me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!'"

Truly, Judah must know that any alliance with Egypt was destined to end in misery and destruction for God's plan for this nation involved its undoing. Now what is "real" and what is "portrayed" most often are two different things. For example, the presentation/show that Egypt put on when talking with Judah was obviously quite impressive. Egypt looked good! They had wise men and counselors! Why should God's people distrust them in favor of the "nut" that endeavored to counsel the Judean king? You say, "What nut are you talking about?" Isaiah 20 shows the historical account occurred at the time Isaiah was giving this prophecy to his countrymen.

> Isaiah 20:2-4, "At that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, 'Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips, and take your shoes off your feet.' And he did so, going naked and barefoot. And the Lord said, 'Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt."

Talk about a credibility problem, especially when compared to the sophisticated and educated counselors of Egypt! But that is why Judah must know that as glorious as the Egyptian officials may have looked, they were horribly wrong and ought not to be followed!

> Isaiah 19:11-14, "The princes of Zoan [essentially the capital city in Egypt at this time] are mere fools; the advice of Pharaoh's wisest advisers has become stupid. How can you *men* say to Pharaoh, 'I am a son of the wise, a son of ancient kings'? Well then, where are your wise men? Please let them tell you, and let them understand what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt. [See, they couldn't know… but Isaiah did! And Judah must understand that…] The princes of Zoan have acted foolishly, the princes of Memphis are deluded; *those who are* the cornerstone of her tribes have led Egypt astray. The Lord has mixed within her a spirit of distortion; they have led Egypt astray in all that it does, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit."

Clearly the future for Egypt did not look good. The nation would be severely tested such that a foreign king someday would sit on its throne and harshly rule! And again, why was this going to be the case? Because like Balaam, this nation incited God's people to forsake God and trust in Egypt! That is what God had planned for Egypt… what about Tyre?

Concerning Tyre: the Religious Corrupter

> Isaiah 23:1, "The oracle concerning Tyre. Wail, O ships of Tarshish [most likely this was a city in Spain], for *Tyre* is destroyed, without house *or* harbor; it is reported to them from the land of Cyprus [the Island in the Mediterranean]."

As referenced earlier, Tyre truly was the friend of the fugitive in the ancient world. Its location on an island made the city virtually impregnable. As such, it became a powerful city whose influence and impact could be felt all the way to Spain! Egypt loved this city as did any and all engaged in commerce. Yet as we saw, this city did far more than simply export goods, it also was a leader in the exporting of sin! As such, Israel and Judah both fell under its power.

This no doubt is why so many of the prophets verbally attacked this city: Jeremiah (47:4), Amos (1:9-11), Joel (3:4), Zechariah (9:2-4), and here, Isaiah (23)! And because of this, God deigned to punish this city for its wickedness. Skip down to Isaiah 23:8 where we see God's plan in detail.

> Isaiah 23:8-11, "Who has planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns [Tyre was so important in the ancient world that the city had become "King makers"!], whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth? The Lord of hosts has planned it to defile the pride of all beauty, to despise all the honored of the earth. Overflow your land like the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish, there is no more restraint. He has stretched His hand out over the sea, He has made the kingdoms tremble; the Lord has given a command concerning Canaan to demolish its strongholds."

Though he no doubt looked nutty proclaiming this message stark naked, nevertheless Isaiah's message was a strong one! Tyre would fall! This most influential city someday would be no more. Historically we know that though the city was attacked on numerous occasions throughout its history (in 586 BC in vain the Babylonians held it under siege for 13 years!). It wouldn't fall until 322 BC when Alexander the Great built a causeway out to the city and destroyed it in seven short months! It was this doom that God had planned for this city. The Lord takes very seriously His Covenant plan for His people. When others mess with them, they will not go unpunished. Speaking of the covenant community, God said this:

> 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."

In light of this, Tyre would be the special object of God's displeasure. And that brings us to God's plan for His compromised people, Israel, who already had suffered greatly (they were in exile). What was God doing here?

The Religious Compromiser

> Isaiah 27:7-8, "Like the striking of Him who has struck them, has He struck them? Or like the slaughter of His slain, have they been slain? Thou didst contend with them by banishing them, by driving them away. With His fierce wind He has expelled *them* on the day of the east wind."

As I referenced before, this chapter was written in the form of a chiasm.

> Isaiah 27:1, "In that day…"- referencing the Lord's victory in the heavenlies

Isaiah 27:2-6, "In that day…"- referencing the vineyard people
Isaiah 27:7-11, we read of God's Plan for Israel.
Isaiah 27:12, "In that day…"- referencing the harvested people
Isaiah 27:13, "In that day…"- referencing the Lord's victory on earth

As such, Isaiah 27:7-8 is at the heart of God's plan for Israel, the Northern Kingdom. And what was that plan? As with Egypt and Tyre, it involved severe punishment/discipline. Yet the language Isaiah used here was blunted!

> Isaiah 27:7, "Like the striking of Him who has struck them, has He struck them?"

In essence, Isaiah was asking, "Did the Lord smite Israel to the same extent as he smote Israel's smiters?" The answer was, "No!" Or like the slaughter of His slain, have they been slain? In essence, Isaiah here was asking, "Did Israel ever suffer such casualties as the Lord inflicted on those He defeated?" Again, the answer was, "No!"

Family of God, don't miss it! The Northern Kingdom at this time was removed as a nation because of its sin, true! But the people of that nation who genuinely loved the Lord were not lost; they were just relocated! That's the emphasis here. From this we see that God had compassion on His people.[2] Yes, there was wrath! But "in His wrath the Lord truly remembered mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2)! In fact notice the next phrase:

> Isaiah 27:8, "Thou didst contend with them by banishing them, by driving them away. With His fierce wind [which means it certainly wasn't comfortable] He has expelled *them* on the day of the east wind."

This is a most important statement. For once again we do not read of condemnation, but relocation. God says that He "shooed His people away!" He hadn't forsaken them personally; they still were His. Rather, He moved them away from where they lived as a nation! And here is a contrast between God's people and the nations:

- When God deigns to discipline the Gentile world, large, dramatic chaos ensues- think of the Assyrian army at this time who soon would lose 185,000 soldiers in an evening (Isaiah 37:36)! Or the Egyptian army at the time of the Exodus, all were lost (Exodus 14:27-28)!
- In contrast, when God disciplines His people, grief no doubt follows, but not condemnation! Again, the language here is gentler.

Alec Motyer[3] put it this way:

> [This is] not a reference to the Babylonian exile only but to all occasions when an enemy invaded and took prisoners. On all such occasions, divine wrath could have exacted a full penalty from Israel but forbearance intervened- and even when the major exile came, it was cushioned with a promise of return. (Motyer, 1993, p. 203)

From this we see a very important theme when it comes to the outworking of God's will in this world. Sin has a wage and that wage will be paid to every sinner! If the sinner in question does not have a love

relationship with God, they will suffer greatly. If the sinner in question does have a love relationship with God, they will know pain, but not unto their ultimate destruction. So it is in the times of national tragedy, let us not fault God. The trial and difficulty is but the wages of sin!

Is there anything beyond these wages? Is it wrath for the sake of wrath? Is it vengeance, for the sake of vengeance? What is God doing in His judgments? With this we come to God's ultimate plan behind the suffering sorrow of this age.

The End of God's Plan

The telos of God's plan is shown concerning Egypt, the political oppressor is shown in Isaiah 19.

> Isaiah 19:16-22, "In that day the Egyptians will become like women, and they will tremble and be in dread because of the waving of the hand of the Lord of hosts, which He is going to wave over them. [Heretofore Egypt had been the oppressor… now it would be the Lord, and He would do it by simply waving His hand!!! Notice what this would look like…] And the land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt; everyone to whom it is mentioned will be in dread of it, because of the purpose of the Lord of hosts which He is purposing against them [in Judah's prior relations with Egypt, Egypt had been the terrorizer; now Judah would do the terrorizing. Would it be with bombs strapped to their chests? Would it be through plottings and assassinations? Notice…]. In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan [that is, the language of the people of God] and swearing *allegiance* to the Lord of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction [IOW, a city devoted to destruction will fall down and worship the Lord!!!]. In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord near its border. And it will become a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the Lord because of oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Champion, and He will deliver them [here we see the design behind God's temporal expressions of wrath… salvation!]. Thus the Lord will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day. They will even worship with sacrifice and offering, and will make a vow to the Lord and perform it. And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the Lord, and He will respond to them and will heal them."

This is a most amazing plan! Based on this passage we conclude that the words of Jeremiah apply to people groups outside of God's people.

> Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

What an important message for the people of God! It is so easy to have a we/they mentality by which we look upon the world as the enemy. There is not a nation/people group whom we ought to view as beyond the scope of the gospel. The Great Commission calls us to be about "people groups!"

> Matthew 28:18b-19a, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [literally, people groups]…"

Notice God's plan for Tyre.

> Isaiah 23:15-16, "Now it will come about in that day that Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years like the days of one king. At the end of seventy years it will happen to Tyre as *in* the song of the harlot: 'Take *your* harp, walk about the city, O forgotten harlot; pluck the strings skillfully, sing many songs, that you may be remembered."

Isaiah references the lot of a washed up prostitute because that is exactly the place that Tyre held in the ancient world;: for money, Tyre willingly corrupted the world! Accordingly, it was God's plan to humble this city! Notice the song:

> Isaiah 23:16, "take your harp, walk about the city, O forgotten harlot."

When a prostitute is in her prime, she doesn't need a harp to attract customers. Yet this once famous prostitute is washed up. And so she endeavors to earn a living in a completely new way.

> Isaiah 23:16, "Pluck the strings skillfully, sing many songs, that you may be remembered."

The idea behind this is that the role of this prostitute has changed. She whose service formerly corrupted her cliental (e.g., Proverbs 7:21-23), now resulted in their being built up/cultured! Good has replaced the bad; that's the idea.

> Isaiah 23:17-18, "And it will come about at the end of seventy years that the Lord will visit Tyre [the idea behind this is NOT a visitation of judgment, BUT a visitation of blessing (cf. James 1:27)]. Then she will go back to her harlot's wages [in this case, a metaphor for commerce], and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth [at first glance this is rather confusing."

God redeemed the city and it returns to being a prostitute? Sort of, but again the language of "prostitution" was a metaphor for commerce. From this we conclude that Tyre once again would participate in commerce, but now her wares would not be to the destruction of the nations, BUT their blessing!]. And her gain and her harlot's wages will be set apart to the Lord; it will not be stored up or hoarded, but her gain will become sufficient food and choice attire for those who dwell in the presence of the Lord." In other words, Tyre now would work for the advancement of God's purpose, glory, and Kingdom! Its commerce would be for the Lord!

Talk about a transformation! That which formerly was useless from the perspective of eternity has now been made to be useful to the Lord and man! This was and is God's plan for the sinner! Well what about the spiritual back-slider? The one who names the name of Christ, but falls horribly into sin? What is God's plan for them?

Concerning Israel, the religious compromiser we read the focus of the chiasm.

> Isaiah 27:9-10, "Therefore through this Jacob's iniquity will be forgiven; and this will be the full price of the pardoning of his sin: when he makes all the altar stones like pulverized chalk stones; *when* Asherim and incense altars will not stand. For the fortified city is isolated, a homestead forlorn and forsaken like the desert; there the calf will graze, and there it will lie down and feed on its branches."

This passage indicates that God's plan for His sinning people is threefold: Discipline unto Correction,

Repentance, and Removal of Prior Hindrances.

Discipline unto Correction

> Isaiah 27:9, "Therefore through this [the exile] Jacob's iniquity will be forgiven."

This passage is NOT saying that the cost of forgiveness was exile; RATHER it is saying that the path of forgiveness was exile. There is a huge difference between the two. When God grows His children, He disciplines them. He sets, as it were, thorns in their way that they might not have the sin they so desperately want (Hosea 2:6-7). And that is what God did with Israel in the exile!

Repentance

> Isaiah 27:9, "And this will be the full price of the pardoning of his sin."

When he makes all the altar stones like pulverized chalk stones; *when* Asherim and incense altars will not stand: once again we are NOT talking about the cost of pardoning, as if it could be bought. RATHER Isaiah is talking about the path by which pardoning/restoration occurs. What is that path here? It involves God's people forsaking/abandoning that which led them to sin!

Removal of Prior Hindrances

> Isaiah 27:10, "For the fortified city is isolated, a homestead forlorn and forsaken like the desert; there the calf will graze, and there it will lie down and feed on its branches."

Israel as a nation wasn't able to handle independency. When this group separated from God's people, they dove headlong into sin. God's response? *"Never again!"* Call this the national limp of Israel, but in their wrestling with God the Northern Kingdom lost their sovereignty! This is what God does with a wayward child!

So why trial and hardship? Why National tragedy? Because God will not allow the sinner free access to His sin.

- First the Lord disciplines the sinner and so gives him grief and pain. This may be harsh, but it is the wages of his sin and a most necessary sting unto his preservation (Hosea 2:6-7)![4]
- But ultimately the Lord about bringing the sinner into a love relationship with Himself![5]

That is what God is all about. That is God's unthwartable, mind-blowing plan! And yet for the child of God who is not living in unrepentant sin, what does this message mean? What ultimately did Isaiah have in mind when he shared this with his countrymen? If that is how God treats a guest, how do you suppose He will treat His children? If that is how God treats a sinner, how will He treat the one He has saved?

> Romans 5:10, "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

When trial and difficulty comes our way, can there be any question as to God's goodness or His plans? Is God on your side or not? Where will you go to answer that question? Isaiah's response was this:

> *Let us not look at providence for our answer. Rather let us look into the heart of God- specifically as it is reflected in His plan for the rebel. If God could love them… how much more will He continue to love you?!"*

End Notes

[1] Sidon and Tyre were quite close!
[2] In fact we know that prior to 722 B.C. many moved to Judah where they were welcomed back to what now was a restored Kingdom!
[3] *Isaiah*, TOTC, p. 203.
[4] In light of this, let us not resent bitter providence; let us embrace it! In times of national crises we have an important message to share: the trial is not a sign of God's abandonment, but of His redeeming work by which He deigns to humble us and so bring us to the Lord (Lk. 13:2-3)!!!
[5] According, when hardship comes your way you must NOT conclude that God has in some way abandoned you. It couldn't be further from the truth. Rather, the trial is the call of God, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy ladened, and I will give you rest!" (Mt. 11:28-30). This is how Christ was equipped and prepared to be God's servant (speaking of Christ), "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). And this is how God will equip you!

Sources Cited

Motyer, J. A. (1993). *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary.* Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 23, 2012. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.