

11. Waging Love (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

Biblical Material: Isa. 55:1–7; Isa. 55:6–13; Isa. 58:1–12; Isa. 58:13, 14.

Quotes

- How do we wage love in the face of hatred and violence? How do we reach courage and understanding, compassion and bravery in ourselves and in our communities while surrounded by the distracted confusion of fear and ignorance? I ask these questions after yet another senseless act of hatred and violence has ripped through the hearts of our country. I recognize the seeds of grief, fear, and anger that are touched within me. I hold them gently with mindfulness, allowing these energies to transform into compassion. I invite the energy of compassion to guide my actions into working towards the solution, towards peace. *Joe Reilly*
- Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding: it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Questions

What does God call us to “buy”? Why is there this emphasis on what we are to do, and the costs involved? How does God make it possible for us to be saved? What are the consequences of following God’s value system? Can we claim to be followers of God and not act in the way he does? If God’s ways and thoughts are not like ours, what does this tell us?

Bible summary

Isa. 55:1–7 is God’s invitation to come to him and receive his gifts—at no cost! The appeal is “Come back to our God, because he’s generous with his forgiveness.” (Isaiah 55:7 FBV). Isa. 55:6–13 explains that though God’s thoughts and ways are not like ours, God will achieve his objective and help his people. Isa. 58:1–12 calls for a true religious experience rather than outward observance, and defines salvation as healing. Isa. 58:13, 14 is the plea to honor the Sabbath, and “you’ll find the Lord is the one who truly makes you happy.” (Isaiah 58:13 FBV).

Comment

The lesson asks the question, “What was the price for our salvation?” That is a frequent question, especially to human minds that are accustomed to financial transactions, contracts, and bargaining. While Scripture certainly identifies the fact that salvation had a high cost, it does not go into details as to whom the payment was made, what the currency was, or other issues that we might like to discuss. Most of all the perspective is that God gave incredibly of himself. But let us not get sidetracked by wondering about the details of this “transaction.” In fact to see this as some kind of contractual process (like buying something in the store) means we miss the main aspect—that salvation is from the freely given graciousness of God himself.

In fact Isaiah 55 says the exact opposite of contract and bargaining! We are invited to come and “buy” without money and without cost! We are encouraged not to spend what we have (our time, talents, selves) on what is not bread. In a world preoccupied with material possessions and physical satisfaction, this is an essential corrective. God wants to have us eat what is good, the spiritual bread of eternal life. And in case we get all philosophical and other-worldly, he explains the practical results of God’s way: “This is the fast I want: set free those who have been unjustly imprisoned, untie the cords of the yoke used to burden people, set free those who are oppressed, and get rid of every form of abuse. Share your food with the hungry, take the poor and homeless into your house. When you see people naked, give them clothes, and don’t reject your own relatives.” (Isaiah 58:6, 7 FBV).

In the lesson we’re referred to religious rituals, and the fact that God did require them and Jesus did follow them. We’re reminded that this what the Lord wants. However, we might say that is not *at all* what the Lord wants. Rituals and formulas do not save, as the religious authorities in Jesus’ time proved.

How are we to understand the verses that the Lord’s ways are not our ways, and his thoughts not our thoughts? Does this mean we should not try to understand God? Is he telling us he is not to be questioned? These would be false conclusions. God frequently calls for our understanding, and invites our questions. This is not some oppressive appeal to overwhelming authority—rather this is a comfort (in the context) that God *does* know, and that his understanding and actions are not like us in all our frailty and fallibility.

Jesus turns our value systems right around: inside out and upside down. His values are the mirror-image of this world’s—the exact opposite. All that this world sees as important is reversed in God’s kingdom. Priorities are inverted; “reality” is back-to-front. Mirrorland. Or is our world the mirrorland, and God’s kingdom the true reality?

For example, in Jesus’ “Charter of the Kingdom”—the Sermon on the Mount—those who are truly blessed are those who do not conform to the ways of the world. Those who are the “have nots” are the “haves” in God’s kingdom, says Jesus. Those who are proud of what they have—whether it’s material possessions or presumed spiritual wealth—will be disappointed. The mirrors of mirrorland show us the *way* we are and point out *who* we are. They show us that what we most value is worthless, and they also point out the real nature of God’s kingdom. True and lasting treasure is in knowing and trusting God, in valuing His system and His ways, and accepting his eternal salvation.

Ellen White comments

[Isaiah 55:1-3 quoted.] In word and in deed the Messiah, during His earthly ministry, was to reveal to mankind the glory of God the Father. Every act of His life, every word spoken, every miracle wrought, was to make known to fallen humanity the infinite love of God. {PK 6962}

The piety and advanced spiritual knowledge and growth of a church is proportionate to the zeal, piety, and missionary intelligence that has been brought into it, and carried out of it to be a blessing to the very ones who need our assistance the most. Again I urge you to consider Isaiah 58, which opens a wide and extensive vineyard to be worked upon the lines which the Lord has pointed out. When this is done there will be an increase of moral sources and the church will no more remain almost stationary. There will be blessing and power attending their labor. The selfishness that has bound up their souls they have overcome, and now their light is being given to the world in clear, bright rays of a living faith and godly example. The Lord has His promises for all who will do His requirements. {4BC 11487}

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