

12. Desire of Nations (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

Biblical Material: Isaiah 59; Isa. 59:15–21; Isa. 60:1-3; Isaiah 61; Isa. 61:2.

Quotes

- Christ is the desire of nations, the joy of angels, the delight of the Father. What solace then must that soul be filled with, that has the possession of Him to all eternity! *John Bunyan*
- Come, Desire of nations, come, Fix in us thy humble home. *Charles Wesley*
- Come, Desire of nations, bind/ all peoples in one heart and mind;/ bid envy, strife, and discord cease;/ fill the whole world with heaven's peace./ Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel/ Shall come to thee, O Israel. *9th century hymn (Latin).*

Questions

What causes the separation between us and God, and why? Is it true that God cannot hear us? What do the words of Isaiah 59 tell us about sin and its inherent consequences? In this lesson there's much talk about justice—what does this imply? Why did Jesus choose to quote from Isaiah 61 at the beginning of his ministry? How does this apply to us today?

Bible summary

Isaiah 59 explains the problem—“It's your guilt that has created a barrier between you and your God”—and the solution—“The Redeemer will come to Zion.” (Isaiah 59:2, 20 FBV). The whole chapter is God's concern over injustice and exploitation, and how he will come at the end to bring complete resolution. Isa. 60:1-3 calls for his people to “stand up and shine” and “nations will come to your light.” Isa. 61:1-2 is what Jesus used to announce his ministry in Luke 4:18, 19 (note the differences). The chapter details God's pleasure in his people when they do what is right, and his condemnation of robbery and injustice.

Comment

The twin themes in this lesson are the consequences of sin and God's answer. Isaiah contrasts the hopelessness in which we find ourselves, and the glorious salvation that God offers.

He points out that it is not because God does not want to help, but that because of our freedom of choice God does not intervene unless we wish. The poetic picture is not of an offended deity who pouts because of our disregard of his rules, who is sulking and refusing to hear what we say, but rather of a loving Father who cannot act because we have turned our backs on him (59:13). The separation is a result of our choice. Through our actions we have separated ourselves from the only Being in the universe who can truly help us. The separation can only be ended through our choice to return to him, and to accept his offer of salvation-healing.

The lesson speaks of this sin-caused separation. It's essential to note is that it us who have put up the barrier, not God. This is very important—because some have taught that the problem is on God's side. The Bible makes it very clear that the problem lies with us, not with God or with some misunderstood concept that God needs to be propitiated (“paid off”) before he can end the separation.

Jesus in announcing his mission (see Luke 4:18) chose to quote the words of Isaiah 61, so we should pay close attention to what is said. First of all, it is *good* news. All too often, God is seen as *bad* news! The concepts that are stressed are healing and freedom—exactly what you

would expect of a loving, caring, trustworthy God who values freedom above all. The consequences are comfort, gladness and praise (61:3). “I will happily celebrate in the Lord! My whole being will shout praises to my God. For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation, and has wrapped around me in a robe of goodness.”(Isaiah 61:10 FBV).

If someone has some kind of mental illness, do we worry so much about their odd actions, the way they behave, what they do? Or do we try to help by curing the internal disease, trying to heal what they are, not fix what they do?

It’s the same with sin. Jesus is not after outward conformity. He wants a cured heart. Over and over again Jesus re-emphasizes this point. How did Jesus announce his ministry? He quotes from Is. 61:1, which in the original in Isaiah says, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me ... he has sent me to *heal the brokenhearted*.” What a promise! What a clear demonstration of what he wanted to do for the downtrodden, sick and spiritually diseased people around him. And what a promise for us too! Jesus doesn’t want to “clear your bank account of the sin overdraft.” Rather, he wants to free you from sin sickness. That is true salvation—for in the end, you will be healed completely, and sin’s disease will be gone.

God has always been like that. He has always been “the Lord who heals you”. He promises in Jeremiah 3:22 and Hosea 14:4: “I will heal their unfaithfulness.” He says in Psalm 147:3 that “He heals the broken-hearted, and bandages the wounded.” David cried out to God in Psalm 41:4: “Please heal me.” In that prophecy of the healing Messiah we hear: “But he was wounded because of our rebellious acts, he was crushed because of our guilt. He experienced the discipline that brings us peace, and his wounds heal us.” Is. 53:5 FBV.

“The sun of God’s salvation will rise with healing in its wings.” Malachi 4:2. No question about it. Sin is a terrible sickness of the soul, and God is the only one who can heal us.

Imagine you’re sick. Maybe you don’t even know. There are many dread diseases in our world today, despite medical advances. But the doctor diagnoses some major problem. Do you ignore it and hope it goes away? Do you pretend nothing’s wrong? Or do you go to the only one who can treat you and make you well again? Obvious, isn’t it? Even children can see that. Yet when it comes to our spiritual sickness we should listen to the children. They know more than we do, for we so often turn away from the God who promises to heal us.

Ellen White comments

Had the people in sincerity studied the word for themselves, they would not have been misled. The sixty-first chapter of Isaiah testifies that Christ was to do the very work He did. Chapter fifty-three sets forth His rejection and sufferings in the world, and chapter fifty-nine describes the character of the priests and rabbis.

God does not compel men to give up their unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which they will accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture. Had the Jews laid by their prejudice and compared written prophecy with the facts characterizing the life of Jesus, they would have perceived a beautiful harmony between the prophecies and their fulfillment in the life and ministry of the lowly Galilean. {DA 458}

The gospel which He taught was a message of spiritual life and physical restoration. Deliverance from sin and the healing of disease were linked together. {CT 465-6}