

Title: In that Day
Text: Isaiah 4.2-6
Theme: Faithfulness will be worth it
Series: Isaiah #7
Prop Stmt: God is preparing us now for what lies ahead
Aim: I aim to encourage my people to be faithful now in preparation for trial tomorrow.

What is the mountain that is facing you right now, that looks impossible to climb? You know there is more behind this one, but right now, this is the only one that you can see. God does not make us face all of the mountains at once, but puts valleys in between. But even facing those mountains is daunting enough.

Isaiah was a prophet of God, who revealed God's word to the people of Judah around 700 BC. The nation had just come through a time of prosperity and was about to face a time of severe trial. What God told Isaiah was that it was more than just one mountain that was coming, but an entire series of them, which no doubt weighed heavily upon him. These opening chapters (1-5) are, in my opinion, a preview of the rest of this book, which itself is an overview of the entire plan of God. Chapter 3 tells us that God is going to bring a judgment that will stagger the imagination. Chapter 4 tells us that God is going to bless beyond belief.

Read Text:

In view of the brevity of this chapter, but more importantly, in view of what it says, I thought that this would be a good opportunity to show you how I look at and understand the message of Isaiah, (and the rest of the prophets for that matter). And then, armed with this, we will be in a position to look at this text and dream and hope and then persevere like God wants us to. When I study in order to preach, there are basically 4 questions that I am seeking to answer: 1) What did it mean back then? – How would Isaiah and his audience understand this text? 2) What does it mean now? (in view of the rest of the Bible and NT that they did not have) 3) How does it apply? 4) What does this say about Christ? (since he is the hero of the Bible)

Verse 2 begins with a phrase, “in that day” that appears throughout Isaiah and throughout the prophets. For example, we have already seen it in 4.1, 2.20 (which refers back to 2.12); 3.18 and a related phrase in 2.2 (“in the latter days”). In chapter 7, this phrase occurs in 7.18, 20, 21 and 23. On and on it goes throughout the book. Sometimes “that day” refers to judgment (4.1) and sometimes it refers to blessing (4.2). So, when we read about “that day” or “the day of the Lord”, how are we to understand it?

1. **The Day of the Lord is a time of Judgment and Blessing.** (4.1; 4.2)

(Slides) Judgment then Blessing

The day of the Lord refers to a time of direct intervention on the part of God in the earth in order to accomplish his plan. As such, there are days of the Lord that are previews of the final day of the Lord. For example, in Joel's prophecy, he warns about the coming of a locust plague that is going to wipe out all of the crops. He calls it, "the day of the Lord" (Joel 1.15). But Joel's prophecy continues. And in essence he says that the locusts are the least of your problems. The locusts are only a sign of a greater judgment that is coming. And that greater judgment that is coming is the real Day of the Lord. Now, the same idea works the other way. God delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. That was great! But, while that deliverance enabled them to escape from slavery to Egypt, they needed to escape from slavery to sin. So, the deliverance by the hand of God through his servant Moses pointed to the deliverance by the hand of God through Christ, of whom Moses was a type.

Let's say, for example that you are at Auschwitz, the notorious Nazi death camp and you hear that the allied troops are one mile away and coming fast. What is your response? Well, that all depends on whether you are a prisoner or a guard – doesn't it?

Now, when you are in a valley looking at a mountain range, you can't tell what are ridges or what are actually different mountains. That is important to understand when you are reading the prophets, like Isaiah. Isaiah sees judgment that is coming. Is he referring to immediate judgment or to another judgment or to ultimate judgment? The answer is often, "yes". Remember, God did not give Isaiah everything. He gave him, what he needed to know in order to be faithful in that time. And, for reasons that we will look at in a minute, God did not tell him every detail. At the time that God revealed these things to Isaiah, Isaiah did not know how it was all going to work together. All that he knew is that it would work together. But, here is what we see.

A. Immediate judgment points to greater judgment.

The immediate judgment of the Assyrians, pointed to the greater judgment of the Babylonians, which pointed to the greater judgment of the Romans, which points to the ultimate judgment of God upon a people who refuse to listen to him. Therefore...

B. Greater judgment points to ultimate judgment.

Every valley in between the judgments is an opportunity for people to repent. Now, this is a hard and difficult truth to really own, but it is necessary for you to get this. God is not primarily concerned with your circumstantial happiness. He is concerned about your true holiness. He will use judgment as a kindness to bring about humility and holiness in us. But, if we do not respond to his judgment with humility and holiness, then the judgment will increase, and if our hardening increases, then the final judgment will be a confirmation of our rebellion and eternal estrangement from God in hell. Will you let the refiner's fire soften your wax or harden your clay? God's desire is for his judgment to cleanse, not destroy. But, as I said, it works the other way too.

C. Immediate blessing points to greater blessing.

God rescued Israel from Egypt. But that wasn't the goal. God tabernacled with them as they traveled to Canaan. But that wasn't the goal. God gave them a land, houses, flocks and crops. But that wasn't the goal. But, these immediate blessings were designed to point to greater blessings and...

D. Greater blessing points to ultimate blessing.

What did Isaiah see? He saw the Assyrians coming. What did Judah want? They wanted relief. They wanted deliverance. They wanted security. But, the problem of the Assyrians was nothing, compared to the problem of the Babylonians and Romans. And all of these empires together are no comparison to the problem of the enemy of our souls – our sin. So, here is the big idea of Isaiah. Our God Saves! He can rescue Judah from Assyria. He can save Judah from the Babylonians. He can protect the Jews for 1900 years after they are nearly wiped out by the Romans and return them to the very land. It is phenomenal. But, all of that rescuing is only a picture of the ultimate rescue that God can do – and that is rescue you from your sin.

My kids all took piano lessons and played in recitals, in church, in front of family members and in competition. My daughter Becca thought that piano competition was like the day of the Lord – and not the blessing kind. She lived in terror of that mountain. And she would practice, and we would pray and encourage her and seek to prepare her as much as we could, but it all came down to her walking up to that piano in front of the judge, and the crowd and remembering her notes and under that pressure, playing her piece. It never seemed to fail that just before she was to play, someone would either go up there and completely blank out which would spread faster than the flu to the contestants, or someone else would play like Paganini or Lang Lang and you would have to get the fire extinguisher out to douse the flames coming from the keys. Either way, Becca would feel the terror of the moment and would have to play through it anyway. Now, years later, she is in her senior year of college and is in the homestretch of a very demanding major. In the face of daunting tests, demanding teachers and difficult classes, she looks back to the stress of those piano events and says, “if God can help me through that, then He can help me through this. By God's grace, I'm a climber, not a quitter”

That is exactly what God is doing for us in this text. It is both warning and encouragement. You cannot face the final mountain if you don't learn how to face this mountain. If you cannot face this judgment, how will ever face the eternal one? Or. If God can deliver you through this adversity, he can deliver you through the next. This mountain anticipates THE mountain. The immediate events prepare you for the future events. The Day of the Lord was/is/will be a literal time and actual event. The time of judgment referred to in v.1 actually happened. The time of blessing referred to in v.2 will actually happen. At the time Isaiah wrote, he could not tell whether or not these events were simultaneous or not. In fact...

2. There can be significant gaps of time between the days.

These gaps are real in time, but God lives in the eternal present. Therefore, what seems long to us is always in the moment to him. I think that is why the language of the prophet is so vivid. When you read the words of judgment and the words of blessing as our text lays out, it is as if Isaiah sees it right now. He writes like he is already there, even though he isn't – yet. But, the gaps, while, at times are long, do not mean that God has forgotten about his plan. In fact, as we sang last week, there is a wideness in God's mercy. God is patient, not willing that any should perish, but wanting all to come to repentance. That is his desired will. He gives us a long time to repent, but during that same time, the vat of his wrath grows by the hour.

3. **God does not tell us every detail about the days.** (2)

God gives us enough detail to make it clear that he has a plan and that his plan is comprehensive, unstoppable and trustworthy. On the other hand, God never communicates in a way that is fatalistic and removes the mantle of personal responsibility from the shoulders of each person. God told the prophet Jeremiah that the Jews would be in exile in Babylon for 70 years. So, in Daniel 9, we read that Daniel, the prophet, who was taken to Babylon in exile at a young age, began to think about that promise. What Daniel wanted to know was, when did that 70 year clock start ticking? Daniel was taken in 606 BC. Another group went around 595 BC and then the rest of the bunch were taken in 586 BC. Daniel prays in hope that the clock started ticking when he went, since that means that it would be over sooner. Daniel was thinking about this mountain and the blessing of deliverance. But, when you read about God's answer to Daniel, he tells him, not 70 years, but 70 times 7, that is 490 years. This deliverance back to Judah is a preview of the deliverance that the Messiah is going to bring in 490 years from the day that the king signs a decree to help Jerusalem rebuild. Well, when did that happen? Actually there were a few that would qualify. So, the point is, God tells you enough so that you know that he has a detailed plan, but in such a way that we to have to trust in him, moment by moment. In fact, our response is used by him in real time to carry out his pre-established plan.

Now in verse 2, we read, "*in that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious.*" What is that supposed to mean? If you are reading Isaiah for the first time, then this reference to "the branch of the LORD" may seem to be a bit odd. Well, this much is clear. God is not done with his people. Judgment is not going to be the final word. God is going to bring out his people from the ashes of destruction, somehow, someday. That promise (verses 2-6) is enough for the faithful to hold on.

Now, later on (Christmas Sunday, I believe) we will look at chapter 11 that begins by saying, "*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.*" So, now we know a little more. Jeremiah 23.5-6 says, "*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David, a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: The LORD is our righteousness.*" The same wording is

repeated in Jeremiah 33 with the promise of an eternal kingdom from David's line and an eternal priesthood from the line of Levi.

Wow! Now, at the time of Isaiah's writing of what we call chapter 4, the people did not yet have these other writings. And we still do not have every detail of how things are going to unfold in the future, but we have enough to know that He knows. We have enough to know that nothing takes God by surprise, but at the same time, man is never treated in a fatalistic manner. Your choices are real. Your consequences are real and you are fully responsible for the decisions that you make.

4. **God's plan does not excuse man's unfaithfulness.**

God's sovereignty is never presented as an excuse for sin. *God's sovereign plan ordains the free choices of man in such a way that each man is fully responsible for his choices, yet no decision is ever outside of what God has already established.* God's promise of judgment is designed to bring about repentance, not fatalism. God's promise of blessing is designed to encourage faithfulness, not laziness. When you read about the judgment of God (v.1) you cannot use that as an excuse for a fatalistic attitude that you seek to hide behind in order to find an excuse for sin. Nor, can you use the promised blessings of God as an excuse to live however you want since God is obligated to bless.

5. **Man's unfaithfulness does not negate God's plan** – (2-6)

In spite of all of the judgment coming on Judah, God has not and will not abandon his plan and promises. After reading about the desolation that is coming on Judah, we read about this branch that is going to appear. Chapter 11 says that it is going to come from the stump of Jesse (father of King David). The picture is that of a stump that appears to be dead and useless. But you can only see the surface. You cannot see that in the roots and inside the stump itself there is yet some life.

A. **God is going to keep his promise to have a people.** (3)

Somehow, somehow, God is going to make sure that he has a people. And somehow, somehow those people are related to Jerusalem. While many would interpret that symbolically as referring to the people of God, (which I think is appropriate), I also think that Jerusalem itself will always be a focal point of God's activity on the earth.

B. **God's promise comes about through a holy remnant.** (3)

Only a portion of "the people of God" are the real people of God. This remnant is written down by name for life! But if you are Isaiah, this raises some big questions: How can they be holy? How can they be written down for life? How can they be permanently, finally, and forever holy? The answer is given in the next verse.

C. **Permanent holiness can only come through a full and final atonement.** (4)

God's plan to have a permanent people for his name is linked directly to God's provision for their atonement. Verse 4 speaks of the day when the sins of the daughters of Jerusalem (haughtiness) and the bloodstains (consequences from war) are washed away and cleansed by a spirit of judgment and burning. In other words, God is going to provide an atonement that is white hot in its intensity and purity. Now, at this point in Isaiah, we do not know what that atonement is. The more we read, the more we find out. We are looking for this branch and when we open the pages of the NT and we read Matthew's opening chapter we are confronted with a genealogy, we may wonder – why? Why start with a genealogy, until we see that this is the line of David. The dead-looking stump is not dead. A king has been born! But this is not just any king. This is a priest/king. This is a king who is not only the Son of David, but he is the Son of God. He is God tabernacling amongst man. He is God living with his people. And not only lives with, but dies for them. He does for his people what they cannot do for themselves. Not only that, but God's people are from every nation. Which means that He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He lives in our place and he dies in our place. Christ is, in his death, the recipient of the most intense expression of the judgment of God. And because he takes our sin and our judgment upon himself and satisfies the just and righteous wrath of God, full pardon is not only available, but with that pardon now comes the freedom for God to dwell with his people.

D. God will provide permanent protection for his people. (5-6)

As I read verses 5 and 6, I believe that this is referring to a wedding canopy. I believe that these verses speak of the day when the bride of Christ is gathered from all over the world, from every tribe, language and nation to come together as the bride for the Son of the Father. And here, in Jerusalem, where there was destruction, there is now delight and inestimable glory. The blessing of deliverance from the Assyrians cannot compare to the blessing of the people of God from all over the earth being one bride, one people, and one nation under and with the King.

6. We have more than Isaiah, but are not yet at the end.

Today, we are many years past Isaiah. The Assyrians came and went. The Babylonians came and went. The Romans came and went. The final tribulation is yet to come. Those judgments were real, and the only rescue was through faith in what God had revealed. Today, we know what God was revealing. He was revealing Christ, and indeed he revealed him. We have seen how faithful God has been to his promises. We have even more reason to trust God. And yet, we are not yet at the final mountain. The final judgment is yet to come. Today, God puts mountains before you, just like he did to Isaiah. These mountains are previews of the big one. He puts them before you to teach you to lean on him. When you lean on him, he will help you climb them. How you respond in the valley will determine how you climb the mountain. For the believer, there is this day, and that day. We climb today, because that day is what ultimately matters.