

Title: Be Careful what you ask for
Text: Isaiah 65.1-16
Theme: Grace for the humble, justice for the proud
Series: Isaiah #55
Prop Stmtnt: God responds on his terms, not ours.

Read Text:

I was talking with a neighbor once who asked me the difference between what I believed and the religion that she had been raised with, but was, admittedly very casual towards. I paused for a minute and then asked her, "Are you sure you want to know? Because I am happy to tell you, but I need to warn you. The answer will shake you." I knew that she did not take issues of doctrine seriously at all and she was simply asking a question as a matter of polite conversation thinking that I would give some surface answer about different traditions and different rules. After all, what do you talk about when a "pastor" is in your house? She was being kind. But I thought that she ought to know that what I was about to say was no casual, "you have your way, I have my way, we're all ok" kind of an answer. She was asking a question that led to the most important truth that she could ever know, and I knew that she did not realize what she was asking. Her eternal condition would depend on how she responds to the truth that I shared.

Last week we looked at Isaiah's prayer. He complained, appealed, confessed and humbled himself before God. His prayer can be summarized by his desperate plea in 64.1, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down..." I think that Isaiah is not only crying out to God because of the crisis that his people are facing, but I think that Isaiah is also speaking on behalf of them. I assume that through the years that Isaiah spoke to the people on behalf of God, that Isaiah would have to field questions from the people about God. So, I take Isaiah's plea to be both personal and on behalf of the people. In essence he is asking God to come down and straighten out this mess. Now God answers that prayer and says, "I am coming. But, you need to realize something Isaiah. When I come, I am not going to do, what you think. In fact, I am going to do something that is going to completely baffle you and you need to be ready for it because I am going respond on my terms, not yours. And you need to set aside your demands and assumptions, and be willing to accept mine.

Now, before I go on with this sermon, I think that I need to warn you. The answer that God gives to Isaiah may make you very uncomfortable. It may reveal some really personal stuff. You may struggle with some of the implications of this. But I also want to encourage you. If you are willing for God to do some soul surgery and willing for him to do some rearranging of your perspective, and are willing listen to this word with your affections and priorities in open hands before God, then while the surgery may be difficult, the healing will be glory.

This text is God's answer to Isaiah's prayer. God does not tell Isaiah what he wants to hear, but what he needs to hear. His answer reveals things about God, about

Isaiah, and about us, that we need to face. We need to be honest and we need to recognize that it is hard for us to be honest because it is painful. But, honesty about our true condition is what turns the valve that releases the flood of grace and a fresh vision of the glorious purposes of God. So, Isaiah challenges God to act and to do something about the mess that the nation of Judah was in. "God, you need to come down and fix this mess!" And God says ...

I. **You may not like the answer now.** (1-7)

What are Isaiah's assumptions?

- My country and my people are better than others.
- We are the nation of God's chosen people; a gift, a light to the world.
- God will protect us against our enemies.
- We have some problems, but others are worse. (Habakkuk's struggle)
- Our history counts for something.

What is the biggest challenge that Isaiah was facing? (entitlement)

- Entitlement blinds you to the seriousness of your sin.
- Entitlement causes you to question the righteousness of God.
- Entitlement causes you to question the Sovereignty of God.
- Entitlement blinds you to reality.

A. **"Your enemies" are going to become "My People".** (1)

What is God saying here in v.1? He is saying that the problem is not his refusal to listen and respond. Oh no! He was listening before anyone was asking! He reveals himself even to those who are not looking for him. You cannot blame God for this mess. Go back in history and look. What happened in Egypt? God revealed himself to Moses and then through Moses he revealed himself to the children of Israel. They were so clueless, God had to tell them what his name was.

So, the problem now, in Isaiah's day is not God's refusal to listen, but Judah's refusal to follow. So, what does God do? He does to the enemies of Judah, what he did originally to them. God is going to reveal himself to the peoples of the world that the Jews consider to be their enemies (Gentiles) and he is going to make them his people.

Now, let's stop here for a minute. I just said, that based upon v.1, God is saying that "the enemies" of the Jews are going to be come the people of God. How can I say that based on the wording of v.1? Does it actually say that or imply that in v.1? Not really, however, that is how the Spirit of God directed the apostle Paul to understand this verse, when Paul was writing the letter to the Roman Christians. (10.20)

So, the main point that Isaiah understood was that Judah's problem was their own fault. God could not be faulted for this. However, Paul understood that this was also applied to the fact that even though the Jews refused to trust the God who sought them, many of the Gentiles did not refuse. They believed!

God does not hide himself. God reveals himself, not only through His Word, but God revealed himself through Christ. Like Judah, we have no ground on which to base an accusation that God is hard to understand. God is not hard to understand. The problem is, that we do not want to submit to what God has revealed about himself and us.

It is as if you purchased a brand new cell phone, but refused to buy a cell phone plan and then accused the manufacturer of selling you a faulty phone. Look, everything is there for your phone to work, but you have to operate the phone on the terms set forth by the cell phone company. The same thing is true with God. He is there. But you do not set forth the conditions of the relationship, he does and that is for your good. If you set the conditions of the relationship, you would be assuming that you are God and would want the prerogatives of that, and you couldn't handle it. Besides, God is not going to pretend that you are God and that He isn't. The conditions of a relationship with God begin with you acknowledging that He is God and that you are not. You need him; he doesn't need you. Which really messes with us, because we tend to love that which we need and assume that if we are needed then we will be loved. All of which drives our insecurity. If I am no longer needed, no longer useful, no longer a contributor, then I fear that I will no longer be loved. But, that is not true with God. God does not need you and yet He thoroughly loves you. Look at the cross! He loved you when you were his enemy.

B. "My People" are going to become my enemies. (2-7)

When people believe that because of a label or ethnicity, tradition or religious ceremony that they are entitled, they have this idea that they are bulletproof. But watch this. Entitlement is all about image. Entitlement and presuming to be fine, does not satisfy your soul. It may feed your ego and intimidate others, but it will not capture your heart. Entitlement leaves you empty. You keep looking for reality. These verses describe people who are using ritualism (spiritism, séances, etc.) and claiming that they are religious. Instead of pursuing God and submitting to Him, they are pursuing magic, and spiritism because those things promise influence and power. There's mystery in dealing with the spirit world and a false sense of being holy or better than others because you have experienced something that others have not. You see this in verses. Because of their rituals, they are claiming to be so holy that others cannot touch them or disturb them. They are incredibly blind!! God is so disgusted with the whole thing that he says (5b) that they are like smoke that gets in your nose and burns your lungs. These people who claim that they are calling on God to come are going to have their world blow up when he does show up, but not to reward them, but to judge them for presuming that they can approach him on their own terms.

God's people are never his people because of heritage, ethnicity, works, label, tradition or ceremony. God's people become his people by grace alone received through faith alone. When the grace of God is presumed and not received by faith, but is assumed and taken for granted and used as a license to live sinfully, then it is clear that the person who thinks that he is God's does not understand what it really means to be a child of God.

God used the Gentiles to discipline his people, not only so that they would return to him, and once again be his people, but also so that the Gentiles would be exposed to person and ways of God. Who do you think the Wise Men from the east were? How do you think they heard about the promise of God to send a King? It was through Daniel who went into exile. God's purpose in discipline was at the same time his purpose to expand his reach. The discipline is not pleasant, but the expansion of God's fame and the glory of Christ and his gospel is. That is why, we may not like how God answers our prayers now, ...

II. **But, you will understand it later.** (8-16)

These verses address a difficult issue. Within the nation of Judah, there were people of faith and people of unbelief. The people of faith demonstrated that faith by a desire to obey God and submit to His Word. The people of unbelief, did not trust in God, but instead trusted in the fact that they were Jews. Being an unbelieving Jew is no different than being an unbelieving Gentile. Conversely, a believing Gentile has a standing before God, while an unbelieving Jew does not. Now, this is not that difficult for us to see this because most of us are not Jews. But, what is difficult for us to see is how God, who has favored our nation appears to be removing that blessing from us and favoring other countries. While the United States has been a nation that has a history of acknowledging God, in the pure sense of the phrase, we are not and have never been a Christian nation. Today, there is a concerted effort to eliminate all historical and even cultural references to God, Christ and His Word. We are viewed as outcasts. We are seen as a threat. Our willingness to speak the truth, even in love is twisted in such a way that we are accused of being hateful simply because we are not silent and are willing to speak the truth in love.

It was difficult for a Jew to be totally objective about the condition of his land and people, just as it is for us. For example, many of you are veterans. What do you do with the fact that just recently, the first same-sex, marriage ceremony was performed between two West Point Cadets in the Chapel on the campus? Is this the army that you fought in? The army is only catching up to what the Navy sanctioned a year and a half ago. Is this why you served? Did you serve so that a nation and fellow soldiers could invite God's judgment upon us? ? No. You fought to defend our right to assemble as believers. You defended our right to be able to speak the gospel and the implications of the gospel without fear. And you are baffled to see what has become of your/our army and navy.

If a minor, in the state of CA, is struggling with same-sex attraction and speaks to a licensed psychotherapist about it, CA has a law that is scheduled to go into effect that bans the counselor from being able to help that client deal with that. Two federal judges ruled this week on opposite sides of that issue and the matter is very confusing at the moment. Do you realize what this means? The country that you love is becoming a country that you can no longer support. We are getting closer to the point where the flag no longer represents what it used to. We cannot pretend that we are one nation under God. We are a nation represented by many in leadership and influence who reject God.

Meanwhile, the president of Uganda recently issued a proclamation confessing his sin and the sins of his people and publicly pleading with God for forgiveness and cleansing. A nation that used to be in spiritual darkness is now becoming a light for the nations, while our country that used to be a beacon for freedom, because we freely preached the gospel is moving deeper and deeper into darkness. The economy and tidal wave of debt are the symptoms of a mindset that says you are entitled to have whatever you want. Where does that come from? That comes from a collective will that fails to realize the nature of our own sin and our accountability before God. Will you shrug your shoulders and turn a blind eye toward the sins of our nation and defend her rebellion with silence and apathy, or will you show courageous conviction and risk being labeled unpatriotic because you stand with truth? It is coming to this. But, here is the good news in all of this. God's people will go on. God's plan will go on. Christ's Kingdom cannot be stopped. The true church cannot and will not be silenced. It may cost us everything, but in the end we will not lose a thing. That is what God is telling Isaiah here in verses 8-10.

A. I will deliver those who are truly my people. (8-10)

God says (8b) that he will not destroy them all. God always has a remnant. God always has a witness on this earth. Most of the people in this world are trying to find out how they can get God (or any god/power) to do what they want. Somehow and someday, God will carry out his plan. Sharon (10) and the Valley of Achor refer to areas west and east, and are probably a way of speaking of the entire country (e.g. coast to coast). God is going to restore his people in his land. Even though there is judgment on the horizon, God has always used the occasion of judgment to bring about rescue. He did that with the flood. He did that in the Exodus. He did that with the exile. Ultimately, he did that at the cross. So, even though judgment is coming, so is rescue. And those who trust in Christ have no reason for fear. There is always more to the story than what we can see at the moment.

B. I will judge those who presume to be my people. (11-12)

However, those who do not trust in Christ, but who trust in their own devices bring devastation upon themselves. Notice v.11. Those who forsake the LORD are forsaking their only true hope of comfort. So, what do they do? They set a table for Fortune. They offer toasts to the goddess of Destiny. What is this? This is nothing

more than trusting “chance”. What is chance? “Chance” is the atheist’s attempt to describe the Sovereignty of God. But in reality, chance is not a reality. People would rather trust chance, fortune, and impersonal “destiny” and do things in order to influence it. Gambling produces poverty, because it attempts to gain wealth apart from God. God establish work as the means by which we are to gain an income. What happens when a city, state, or country establishes a lottery in order to raise revenue? It is saying that chance or luck will save us. Do you remember when we were told that all of Detroit’s economic problems would be solved by casinos? Do you remember when an entire e group of pastors endorsed the casinos telling their members to vote for the initiative because it would bring jobs? What you may not know is that many of them were bought out by the casino owners. What sermon were they preaching? They were preaching a message of hope in the goddess of chance. Presuming to be pastors, in the name of God they said, “Luck will save the world.” It simply fuels this terrible idea that wealth can come from luck instead of from trusting in God to work like he ordained. So, now look at how Detroit has prospered – eh? Our casinos are extravagant and our neighborhoods are burned out. Oh, I know it is not just a gambling problem, but you cannot deny that the cancer of entitlement has destroyed the city. These verses speak of people who presume to be the people of God, but their lives, their affections, their true hopes make it clear that they do not rely upon God.

Think about it. What is behind the appeal of gambling? Is it not the lure of short-cutting the very means God established for gaining resources? Isn’t it the idea that I am entitled to power, to pleasure, to have it all? Do you realize that in order to win at gambling that almost everyone else has to lose?

These verses are describing people who, in the name of God, are pursuing their own religion.

C. **The contrast will be striking.** (13-16)

The day always comes when those who presume to have it all, are exposed for what they are and those who are mocked at having nothing are those who, because of their hope in God are revealed to have everything.

Conclusion:

The battle is between entitlement and grace. Most religion is an attempt to manipulate God so that I am entitled to something. You know that you are in bondage to entitlement when something good happens to your enemy and you are angered, or something bad happens to your enemy and you secretly rejoice.

Entitlement blinds us to how serious our sin really is. We expect God to overlook our sin, but to bring furious wrath towards those who are different than us.

You know you are starting to grasp grace when God pours it out on your enemies and you rejoice, because God poured grace out on you, when you were his enemy and he rejoiced. That is what God did for us, Gentiles. He used the rejection of the Jews as the means by which the gospel came to us. Our nation is throwing this gift away. However, God will leave a remnant. Are you willing?