

Title:	Heart-felt Tribute
Text:	Isaiah 17.12-18.7
Theme:	Recreated for Worship
Series:	Isaiah #22
Prop Stmt:	God has a worldwide plan to hijack the hearts of people from all over this world to make them a people who live with him and enjoy him (and each other) forever.
Aim:	I aim to help my people enjoy God's design for rescue and long for the rescue of others (even their enemies.)

I was recently in a large hotel in a meeting room when the fire alarm went off. No one moved. We assumed that we were fine. We never moved. Many public buildings are required to post escape routes in case of fire. Yet, most people do not pay any attention to them, so, even though they are thought out, documented and posted, unless you are convinced that the building is on fire, you have no motivation to even look at them.

The Scriptures provide for us the detailed plan of God for the rescue of our lives from judgment, from sin, from lostness, from emptiness and from isolation. But, this plan does more than rescue us from danger; it rescues us for joy, for glory, for identity, for security, for satisfaction, for blessing and for relationship. The first part of the Bible is weighted on revealing to you that you have a problem and you need to be rescued, while the second part of the Bible is weighted upon the solution that God alone has provided. But, even when we are studying portions of the first part (like Isaiah), we not only see the seriousness of the problem of our sin and rebellion against God, we get a taste of why sin is so seriousness, because we get a taste of what God originally made us for and we realize, at least a bit of how much we forfeited because of our sin.

Read Text:

The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design, thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. The words of that hymn reflect the truth of this text. God causes events to come into our lives to either correct us or to cause our joy in Him to be increased.

Now, before I go on, I want to speak to those of you who are not yet followers of Christ. I am thrilled that you are here and hope that what you hear stirs up a curiosity to know more that drives you to investigate why your life is as empty as it seems. I recognize that when I say things like “God causes events to come into our lives to either correct us or to cause our joy in Him to be increased” that you have great difficulty even grasping such a statement and from the very outset of this sermon you may already feel more than a bit disconnected. Let me explain why that is, for just a bit, and then I will resume with the sermon.

You were made by God with the capacity for and the need for God. Without Him, you do not have meaning nor ultimate purpose and value. You desire that. You long for that. You search for that. It may be even why you are here. But, like every person in this gathering, and every person alive on this planet, you are a rebel against God. You are self-centered

and therefore you try to twist things to make yourself look acceptable and you are threatened by the truth. Your rebellion brought about the loss of intimacy between you and your Creator. Instead of being in harmony with Him, you are lost. That is why you can be in a crowd of people and still feel all alone and feel like no one really understands you. You feel isolated and disconnected. It is why in times of quiet you wonder who you really are and what your life is really about and what happens after this life is over. It's like having all of these spokes, but not having a hub that holds them together. You simply do not know what to do with these spokes and it is confusing. If you think about it even more, it is frustrating and if you really think about it, the emptiness is overwhelming. Fortunately, most people don't think about it that much, or if they do, they medicate it with parties, sex, stuff, sports, concerts or other things to dull the pain or mask the fears. But there are some who really try to think about it. One was Jean-Paul Sartre the French philosopher and writer, who famously wrote: *It was true, I had always realized it – I hadn't any "right" to exist at all. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, a microbe. I could feel nothing to myself but an inconsequential buzzing. I was thinking . . . that here, we are eating and drinking, to preserve our precious existence, and that there's nothing, nothing, absolutely no reason for existing.* But that is all he has to say! This Nobel prize winning writer could only say that! We already know that! What do we do about it? Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston and scores of others make it clear that fame and wealth are not the answer. They are the wrong dream! Fame is an idol that will betray you, like all idols.

Your sense of lostness and search for meaning is not something that is unique to you. But, you are not a victim. The truth is your lostness is the result of being in rebellion to God. You are in rebellion to the One who made you and cut off from the only One who can give you meaning. But God is not only Sovereign Creator and righteous Judge, He is our gracious Redeemer. He made a plan to rescue you from your sin and the lostness that it brings. God, himself came to this earth in the person of Jesus Christ, in order to do what we should do, but could and cannot. He lived a life of perfect trust, and perfect obedience to the laws of God. Even though we deserved to die because of our sins, Christ, having never sinned, was never under the sentence of death. And yet, he chose to die. He chose to be sentenced, in your place. He chose to die in the place of every single person who would ever trust him. Every person who repents of their sin and trusts in Christ is not only rescued from the just condemnation of their sins, but they are placed into the family of God's people. These people are from every tribe, language and nation on the earth. That has been God's plan from the beginning.

God's plan is full of these – "Whoa! That is Amazing!!" points. Because, quite honestly, God Himself is amazing, so I guess it is logical that what he does is amazing, but, when you see it, it really is amazing. For example, God knew that the result of our sin and rebellion had so completely ruined our lives, that we were absolutely powerless to rescue ourselves. We were in that deep. So, in God's plan he chose, in history, to give us a picture of what he intends to do with people from all over the world. He chose the nation of Israel to be an illustration of what can happen to a people who will trust him. These people were slaves in Egypt who were in bondage and had no rights, no resources, no power, and no hope. God sent them someone who would rescue them. God sent them

Moses. He was one of them, who, by means of the power of God, led them out of bondage in Egypt, formed them into a nation and led them to their own land in Canaan. They were formed into a nation on the basis of a covenant with God, part of which meant that they did not worship any other god, because all other gods are imposters, frauds and lies. There is only one God. Besides, the worship of other gods ultimately destroys the worshiper. God finds no delight in people destroying their own lives. He made you! You bear his image. In spite of your sin, you still bear a resemblance to him, which is why your heart on one level is not at rest, because you are not at rest in him.

For example, the land of Canaan was populated by various people groups who had created their own religions and therefore, they worshiped false gods. Most religion, to this day is no different than that of the Canaanites. It was simply organizing rebellion against God with ceremonies, traditions, secret words and sacred-sounding words; all of which is offensive to God, who removed them from the land and put his people in it. But, these people, known as the Israelites, were now about to lose their land because they were acting just like the Canaanites. God warned them about what was going to happen. He warned them that just as He had used them to remove the Canaanites from the land, he was going to use another people to remove them because he is absolutely serious about them trusting him, loving him and following him. The very fact that he chose them as a nation for his favor was not because of their skill or strength, but because they were so hopeless that they gave him the opportunity to show through them to the world what God can do with anyone who will trust him. He wanted to use Israel as a billboard to the world to display his glory. He wanted them to trust him and love him and follow him, knowing that if they did it would result in them living with unbelievable joy and harmony with each other. Over and over they refused.

This book that we are studying is called Isaiah. It is from the first part of the Bible that is called the Old Testament, or the Old Covenant. Isaiah was a prophet who spoke and wrote God's words to the nation of Judah, which by now was only one part of the original nation because of a civil war. Isaiah is warning them that God is about to bring in the heat. If they do not stop worshiping the gods of the nations around them, God is going to use another nation to remove them from their own land. Over and over he warns them, "do not be impressed with the gods of the other nations" because they are not real. They do not last. They are a fraud. Do not think that you can form alliances with these other nations and that they can rescue you because I am the only one who can rescue you. God is the only one who can save you, trust him.

Even though we are only about a fourth of the way through this book, we have seen this theme pressed upon us over and over and over. But, here, Isaiah writes of something that is really amazing. In this text, he only drops a hint, but by the end of the book, and certainly by the end of the Bible, what is only hinted at here, is on full display with the promise that it will only get better in eternity. You see, God's plan is not simply to rescue the Jews from their own sin and rebellion, and to rescue them from idolatry and rescue them from the ravages of the other nations, but God plans to rescue people from these other nations as well.

Our text breaks down into two parts; 17.12-14 and 18.1-7.

1. **Compared to what?** (17.12-14)

This text is obviously a comparison. Isaiah is giving us a reality check. The Assyrians who were threatening them were no idle threat. They were a ferocious force that flattened about anything and anyone who stood in their way including the northern kingdom of Israel. But, notice the wording here. Isaiah speaks of peoples (plural) and nations (plural). Here's what he is doing. He is using the threat of the Assyrians as the opportunity to talk about how big and frightening the power and influence of this world seems to be. His point is...

A. **Big people look huge compared to little people.** (12-13a)

From little Judah's perspective, the nations of the world sound like the deafening thunder of the sea and the roar of Niagara. What are we in comparison to them? But that is not the whole picture.

B. **Big people are insignificant compared to God.** (13b – 14)

What you see as an unstoppable force of power, is in reality chaff that is blown off the sides of the mountains by the currents or like the swirling dust that is being driven by the wind before a storm. Both the chaff and the dust have no force in themselves and neither chaff nor the dust really matter. What is the point that Isaiah is making to his people? It is this. When you look at the nations around you, it is easy to fear because you wonder, "what is going to happen to me?" The issue is not, what is going to happen to you. If you trust God, the issue is, what is going to happen to them? They are toast. Verse 14 literally happens, as we see, to the Assyrians in chapter 37. The citizens of Jerusalem go to bed surrounded by the Assyrian army and wake up to find that their dreaded enemy is dead! And God did not even break a sweat.

Our world is impressed with the wrong thing. Our world is impressed with the "big people" and we are not only tempted to be impressed, but what is so dangerous to the message of the gospel, is when we equate the world's idea of success with true success.

This week was the funeral for Whitney Houston. Like many, I thought she had an incredible voice. But an incredible voice, great looks, big house, huge fan base does not mean success. In spite of how she was eulogized, the truth is, she destroyed her life. She made very bad decisions and pursued the wrong goals. She failed at life. It's over for her. There is no reset button after death. You get one life and you had better get it right. Our culture has an idea of what that is, but they are wrong. Isaiah's culture had an idea of what that was and they were wrong.

The message in verses 1-7 is also like the previous message in that it has the world in view. Cush is a reference to the area that we know of as Ethiopia (at least a portion of it). The Cushite Empire was fairly prominent but for the most part never had an expansionist

plan, so they protected what they had and did not usually go after more. They were known for their ships and trading, which is what verse 1 is probably referring to. It is probably speaking of the boats with sails (wings) that whizz up and down the waters. As a kingdom, the Cushites had an interest in international events. In fact, we find out that when Jeremiah was ministering as a prophet that a man from Cush held a prominent role in the palace and even saved Jeremiah's life. Since Cush was viewed, at the time as being at the edge of the earth, the picture that Isaiah is painting is that of emissaries who are coming from around the world, who are in high level talks about how to deal with the current world crisis. When these heads of state gather, there is much fanfare and pomp and people expect grand plans and formal announcements.

In our day, these events are carefully staged, photographed, choreographed, and then released to the press for maximum impact and hopefully to raise a leaders level of influence. Verses 1-6 are essentially God saying that you can send your ambassadors, you can speak of your important messages, you can make your important pronouncements, but they are irrelevant. Your words do not last, because you do not last. Please, please understand this. God's word lasts, because God is eternal. And when he speaks his Word is eternal. I've summarized these verses with...

2. **Who says?** (18.1-6)

A. **Important people sound intimidating to little people.** (1-2)

Let's say that you are in the third grade and there is a boy who is bigger than everyone else and everyone is sort of afraid of him, so when he makes fun of someone, everyone else is quick to make fun of that person too, so that this boy won't make fun of them. That third grade boy is intimidating. He's a little scary, isn't he? But what if he stops growing in the third grade? Seriously, what is he compared to God? Don't worry about him – really.

That is what God is telling his people about the powerful nations of the world. They look tough, they talk tough, and compared to you, they probably are tough, but put your hope in me. Trust in me. Find your refuge, your security, your identity, your life in me. I have no rivals. There is no other. And therefore...

B. **Important people are insignificant compared to God.** (3-6)

The calm, measured, deliberate reaction of God (v.4 – "I will quietly look from my dwelling...") is a major contrast to the panic in the streets of Jerusalem and the intensity of the high level talks. The prophecy of v.6 was fulfilled in part when Assyria did finally invade Judah, surrounded Jerusalem and then in a single night 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, mysteriously died. It would take a really long time to bury 185,000 bodies, which means that the birds and the beasts (v.6) were kept rather busy.

But, that is not how this prophecy ends. Let's go back to the beginning. Remember? God raised up Israel to show the world what life with Him was designed to be. They really

messed it up. Instead of living as the people of the covenant, they ended living more like the people of the rebellion. So, God had to bring in the heat. Oh, there were a few who were faithful to God, but for the most part, they really messed up. You see, God's desire was to use Israel to be a magnet. The other nations were to see in the lives of the Israelites, the glory of God displayed by the glad obedience and satisfying trust of the people. The delight of their souls was available to them if they would only trust God. But Israel did not reflect God; instead she reflected the idols. She turned from God, so God set Israel aside and then established a new covenant, with a new people. The new covenant people are the church; those who have trusted in and have been welcomed by Christ into his family. The new covenant people are not from one nation, but are a nation for God comprised of people from every nation. In Isaiah's day, this was not clearly understood. But verse 7 tells us about it. In Isaiah's day, it was still a long way off, but Isaiah dreamed of that day when the world would come and bring tribute, come and worship the One true God.

3. **Our God saves!** (18.7)

The opening chapters of Genesis are so grievous. Adam and Eve leave the land that God designed for them because they rebelled against God. They were separated from God, and they experienced separation from each other. The human race did not learn the lesson. The most powerful among them got together in order to formally rebel against God. They decided to build a tower to make a name for them selves, in an effort to replace The Name. The result of their rebellion at the tower of Babel, led to them being scattered into various language groups that became the basis for nations and nations and nations. All of these divisions have been the occasion for wars, ethnic violence, arrogance, greed, genocide and unspeakable horror. Will it ever end? Yes.

That is what v.7 is saying. The day is coming when these “people” (i.e. these nations) will not be sending emissaries and ambassadors in order to plot strategies of war, but will bring tribute to the LORD of hosts. The day is coming when people from every tribe, language and nation will gather together as one because God has come to live on the earth as King, and his glory will fill the earth. That means that one day, these nations, who are now attacking you, will one day join you. What Isaiah has not told us yet, but will in chapter 53, how this can be possible. But, what we know today is that because of Christ and through Christ, God is a calling a people unto himself from all over the world who will be his people, and will be citizens of his kingdom and will live with him. Every person from around this world who comes to God through Christ, is re-made, re-born, re-created and placed into his family forever. As citizens of his kingdom, we see the earthly powers in Washington DC, Moscow, and London, but we see true power and true glory in the eternal city of our great God. We look forward to the day that Isaiah spoke of, and that John wrote of and we desire to live today in a manner that anticipates the fulfillment of that day.