

Title: A Song of Peace
Text: Isaiah 26-27
Theme: Trusting God to be true to his promises
Series: Isaiah #25
Prop Stmt: The city of God is the only place where it will be safe forever.
Aim: I aim to encourage my people to live now in anticipation of the peace and the security that they will experience forever.

Read Text:

Chapters 24-27 form a unit.

1. Destruction is decreed by God over the earth - 24
2. Response to this is a song of the redeemed - 25
 - a. Song of thanksgiving over deliverance
 - b. An announcement of the feast
 - c. Song of joy over deliverance
3. A Song of Peace and Deliverance – 26-27 (w/ 4 verses)

In these four chapters there are some familiar themes, such as: Our God reigns over his enemies and for his people. God does not react to the nations. The nations respond to him. He is God and all people will answer to Him. We also see how Isaiah builds on a related theme that runs throughout the Bible and that is, the city of man vs. the city of God. In this text all of the nations equal the city of man. In these judgment oracles (pronouncements) by God, we are told how the empires of this world (city of man) are doomed. Do not put your hope in them. Do not trust this present world and her titles, her possessions, her prestige, her economies, her diplomas to be your security or your hope. They cannot and will not save you. Only God can. And God has promised ultimate deliverance for those who trust him.

Imagine that you are performing a trapeze act for a circus. You jump from the highest ledge swinging on a bar in an attempt to perform a quadruple somersault before you land grab hold of another swing that is being sent your way. In order for this to work you have to go at exactly the right speed, release at exactly the right place, tuck and spin in exactly the right form, while your partner releases the other bar at exactly the right time so that you grab it in exactly the right spot. There is no room for error. But, what if there is a net underneath? A net underneath makes all of the difference, doesn't it? You are now free to focus everything on this stunt, because the net takes away the fear of death. The net says, "you are safe" and "you are free". Isaiah 26-27 is a song. I call it a song of peace, because it tells us of the net that God has made for his children. It tells us of the place that he is preparing for us, so that, no matter what happens in this life, we will be safe.

This song begins by saying, "we have a strong city." One of the themes in the Bible is that of the city of man vs. the city of God. Often, Babylon is used to symbolize the city of man and Jerusalem is used to symbolize the city of God. The city of man refers to this world's system and way of thinking. It is a place of violence, filth, crime, disease,

despair, lies, bitterness and broken lives. The music and parties are temporary and painful. They can only mask for a while the false foundations and cracked footings upon which the city is built. The city of God refers to the place where God lives with his children, protecting them and enjoying them. It is a place of joy, laughter, trust, security, purity, safety, wholeness and never-ending life.

Jerusalem was supposed to stand for the city of God. That was easy to see when the Temple was there and the people were living in harmony with the law of God. But, when the children of Israel lived in rebellion to God, then Jerusalem looked like any other city and in that regard was like the city of man. Ezekiel, Isaiah and Zechariah speak of the day when God will receive the gifts and worship of people from all over the world at Jerusalem. I happen to believe that this is a literal city, but the big idea is that Jerusalem represents the people who enjoy their salvation with God. This city of God is the place from where the Word of God goes out, where the King reigns, where the people worship God together as one people, under one King, in one Kingdom, from every nation. It is the city that cannot be shaken. It is the city that will be forever. However, Babylon is usually portrayed as the city of man. While there is a lot of wickedness and idolatry, it is fundamentally portrayed over and over as being a proud city. Throughout the OT we see this contrast. The city of man, right now, looks impressive and strong. The city of God, that is the people of God, look scattered and weak. But, don't let that fool you. The task of the prophets is to take you into the future and show you what is going to happen to the city of man and what is going to happen with and in the city of God. Our text is a song about that. Isaiah is writing at a time when Jerusalem was falling apart spiritually, morally and was threatened militarily. The message for the people of God is clear: There is a place of peace in the eternal city of God that will never end, will never fall, will never crack, and will never die. This is your net. This is your eternal safety. Live bold!

1. **Verse one: Deliverance and Destruction.** 26.1-6 (rescue and judgment)

In chapter 24, Isaiah described the city of man (v.10) as “the wasted city.” It is broken down, the houses are boarded up, there is no gladness, there is no music, and there is no joy. The wine that used to flow in celebration and mirth, like the life of the city is gone. Look and grieve over what she is, in contrast to what she used to be.

This is difficult for us to come to grips with, isn't it? We tend to think that the arrogance of the city of man and her self-reliance is what characterizes cities like Babylon, Rome, and Samaria. It is humbling to realize that this describes Detroit and our neighborhoods. But, that is what is so hopeful about this text. We love our cities, but our hope and security is not found in them. We are free to live bold in seeking to rescue people with the gospel and seek to cause good things to happen in our cities because we are free to take risks. There is a net under us. “*We have a strong city; he sets up salvation and bulwarks.*” (1) Our might and claim to fame is NOT found in what we make, nor in what we build. Our security is found in the city of salvation that God has made. We come to God through Christ. We find in him our refuge, our defense and our eternal home. This place of refuge, this eternal place of rest, of joy, of worship, of celebration, of complete and utter satisfaction total bliss is open to those who are righteous. And here is the

tension. When people think of personal righteousness, they usually think of someone who is a rule-keeper, or someone who is holier-than-you. But, that is not how God thinks of righteousness.

The entire story of the Bible is linked by this thread. No one, seriously, no one can come into the presence of God and live, unless something is done about their sin, because every single person is so polluted by their sin, that they are nauseatingly offensive. I know that this is difficult to hear, but it is so necessary that you grasp this. Let me put it this way. I spent some summers working at a camp. This camp had a sewer system that was prone to problems, which meant that someone had to literally go down into the cistern and clean out the pumps that had become jammed so the pumps could resume their task of removing the waste to a leech-bed. There was a group of us, who would draw straws to see who had to go down. The stench was overwhelming. And when you were done, your stench to the others was overwhelming. You did not ride back to the dorm, you walked for obvious reasons. Now, understand this. My sin is so offensive to God (even the “little ones”), that I am a stench to him. He is repulsed by my sin, and yet God, as my Creator, loves me, but there is nothing that I can do to wash my heart. We see this over and over, where religion is nothing more than trying to spray cologne onto a corpse that is decaying. There is not enough cologne in the universe to cover up the stench. So, what God has done is this. He has provided righteousness for you. You do not have it, so he made it available for you through Christ. But you have to trust him for it. You have to come to Christ and believe him for it. Now, back in the Old Testament, God was in the process of revealing Christ to the world. He used Israel as the means to do that. So, when God set up Israel’s worship life, God established a tabernacle, in which he lived. But, no one could approach him, unless cleansing had taken place. And over and over and over you see that cleansing was based upon sacrifice. All of that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that Christ would make in order to pay for your sins. He, who knew no sin became sin, meaning, he willingly became a stench to God, he willingly became offensive to his Father, he willingly became credited with our sin, and counted as guilty so that he could bear our punishment, so that we could be forgiven and declared righteous. The perfect life that Christ lived was lived in your place so that not only would his death be sufficient to pay for your sin, but his life was sufficient to provide you with infinite righteousness. When you come to faith in Christ, your nauseatingly offensive sin is taken from you and you are given a sweet, delightful righteousness that God delights in. But, this only comes to you through faith, not because you are good, not because you earn it and not because you perform for it. Even that is clear here in this opening section. What is the “righteous nation” (2)? Who are the righteous people? It is those whose mind is stayed on you, fixed on you, fastened on you, looking to, trusting in, hoping in, relying upon God. Those are not only the ones who are now righteous, but as a result they are kept in perfect peace (3).

When we get to the New Testament, this is exactly what the apostle Paul writes about in the book of Romans. 3.21 – a righteousness from outside of you is made available to you through faith in Christ. This righteousness must be received by faith alone (chapter 4) and when it is received by faith alone in Christ alone, then all those who receive it are justified and are at peace with God (chapter 5.1).

Do you see the point? If Judah was going to be saved, she had to trust in God alone. She could not go through the motions of trusting in God (religious festivals) and make treaties and cut deals with other nations, and accept their gods, because she did not think that God was going to come through. Her salvation was not based on a little belief in God and belief in what she could do. She had to throw herself completely at the mercy of God, nothing else! Why is this story here? Why, out of all of the nations and empires of our world that have ever existed, does concern himself to tell us about some little two-bit country that for most of her life was nothing more than a doormat for other nations to wipe their feet on? Really, does anyone really care about Judah? God used her to show us about how relates to people. If you trust him, he will rescue you from your worst enemies. Your worst enemy is your sin. Your worst enemy is not what is outside of you, but what is inside of you – and God has provided you with a Redeemer to save you from that. *“Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD God is an everlasting rock.”* (4)

Now, notice the contrast in this opening section. In order to trust in God, you have to stop trusting in yourself. You have to give up all attempts at self-rescue. You have to admit that you stink before God. You are offensive to God and that you cannot to a blessed thing to change. Only God can change you. When you do that, you are humbling yourself. That is what the prophet is calling his own people to do. Humble yourself. Here is what happens to those who humble themselves – they are exalted by God. And, here is what happens to those who do not humble themselves – they are crushed by God. And then, notice how the section ends. The humble, the needy, the ones who could not rescue themselves and admitted it, are rescued by God and in the end are walking around the ruins of the city of man and surveying her destruction. The strong, safe, peaceful city of God stands in stark relief to the city of man (5). Look at the language in v.5. *“For he has humbled (brought down) the lofty city. He lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust.”* (repeated for emphasis) We are left with the fact that not only is the city of man foolish to trust in, but if you are follower of God, your citizenship is not in the city of man. Only the meek will inherit the earth, Jesus said.

2. **Verse two: Dependence and Perseverance** (26.7-19)

The song shifts from giving thanks to making bold declarations. But, these bold declarations are not the statements of bravado by an athlete trying to psych himself and the team and fans into a frenzy. These are bold declarations that are made by someone who is in the night-time of soul and is himself emboldened to be faithful, but not by his own strength, but by the promises of God. As followers of God the psalm writer (this is a psalm – a song to God) is staking claim to the promises of God and is singing them. Notice that v.7 speaks of the path for the righteous being level. That may not seem like a big deal to us, but if you are walker or jogger or runner, it means a big deal to you. Hills are killers when you are on a long run. The promise is that for the righteous, while the way may not be easy, it is not full of twists, turns and deceptive holes. But, this level path is governed by the judgments (Word) of God (8), where the writer is waiting. What is he waiting for? How is he traveling on this road? He is looking for God. He is living his life in view of his goal. Do you see what he is doing? He is saying that I am waiting for God

in the midst of his promises. Note that he is not just waiting for God to deliver him; he is waiting on God. He is looking for God. God is what his soul longs for!

Have you ever heard someone say that “its not the destination that counts, but the journey.”? That is neither profound, nor even remotely logical. That is the vain attempt to make up a respectful excuse when you are lost. It is the destination that gives meaning to the journey. God is the destination. And he reminds himself and reaffirms that God’s ways, God’s glory; God’s fame is the desire of his soul. Even in the night. Even in the long night of the soul, he waits for God and you see the pressure that he is under. The wicked appear to be getting away with their sin, the public are mocking God and God’s reputation appears to be suffering for it. But, Isaiah is not discouraged, is he? He knows (v.11) “*O LORD, your hand is lifted up*”. He knows God is poised to act. He knows that God will display his love for his people and fulfill his promise to judge the ungodly. He knows “*O LORD you will ordain peace for us*” (12). In fact, as you read this, it seems that Isaiah reminds himself of God’s plan and authority (11) and now (12-15) he expresses confidence in God.

In spite of the immediate darkness, the ultimate end is bright. Beloved, that is it! We live with a present darkness, but an eternal light. We live with a present struggle, but will one day enjoy an eternal rest. Those who make this present darkness their rest, have no eternal hope. All that they have is here and now and that is it. Look at v.14. Isaiah is speaking about the powerful people of this present world, who think that they are in charge. The truth is, death comes to us all. No mortal man can replace the immortal God. In fact, (15) the irony of the people of God is that the more you try to wipe them out, the more they expand. This was not only true of Israel in Egypt and then in Canaan and then in Babylon, but it has been true of the New Testament people of God. The church has grown in depth and purity during times of persecution, which usually ushers in a time of peace during which she expands exponentially in size. Then comes laziness, worldliness and accommodation and the church loses its message and mission, and loses sight of its purpose and its true influence is gone. Do not pity the Christians who going through persecution, pity those of us whose confession of faith has cost us so little. If it doesn’t cost you anything, you tend not to treasure it.

I love the honesty of verses 16-19. After reminding us that there is no hope for those who do not trust God, Isaiah faces his own mortality, his own weaknesses, his own brokenness and failures and states that even though we trust God, we do not trust God perfectly. Even though we trust God, circumstances do not always turn out as we want. For most of us, we look at our lives right now and can say, “This is not what I had planned.” “This is not how I expected things to go.” And we get tired. We get tired of the struggle, tired of the disappointment, and tired of discouragement. How long do I have to struggle? Can’t I just catch a break? Verses 17-18 are particularly descriptive. Isaiah says that we make plans and we work hard on them. It is like a woman who is pregnant and goes through all of the challenges of a difficult pregnancy, but when it is time to give birth, there is no child. It is all for naught. That is what happens to many of our plans in this present world. That is where some of you are – isn’t it? The job you have is not the job you thought you would be doing. The marriage that you have is not what you had planned on. Your kids, your

health, your finances, your home, your car.... You made plans, you worked on them, and in the end, it is like giving birth to wind, you have nothing, or next to nothing to show for it. What do you do?

I used to work as a custodian with a man named Richard. He was counting down the days to retirement and every day when we ate lunch he told me about the kiln that he had purchased and the pottery business that he was going to have. About a week before his final day, he had a heart attack and died, right there on the job. All of his dreams, and plans, were like giving birth to the wind. What do you do? Two options:

- 1) Look only at the now – and see how the ungodly seem to prosper.

Now, by the way, we generally do not look at the entire picture do we? We generally fail to consider all of the train-wrecks and broken lives. We tend to assume that behind the glitz that all is well. Frankly, it isn't. But, in the moment when we are struggling, that is all that we usually focus on.

- 2) Look at the future – and see how those who trust in God will be delivered.

Notice the contrast between v.14 and v.19. Both die, but only those who trust God will awake and sing for joy! This day has struggle. That day has joy. But this truth is not given to us for escapism. We are in this present darkness to be a light. We are in the midst of decay to be an aroma of life in the midst of death. We live for something infinitely greater than the narcissistic American dream. So, here is what we are to do. Think like this: Our confident expectation in that day is like the net under the trapeze. There is no risk for the follower of Christ. Stop believing the lies of this world. Stop living for the American dream which tries to convince you to waste your life on buying things, having false security so that you can be a little "god." Imagine standing before God at the end of life and saying, "Here God, here is my cabbage patch collection."

Look, if you have a choice between living 40 years and flaming out for the gospel, or living 90 years for cars, vacations and stuff, it's a no-brainer! Because, quite honestly 40 years of contentment is infinitely more satisfying than 90 years of disappointment. Besides that, what will you be doing a thousand years into eternity? The guy who wasted 90 years on himself will have nothing but destruction. All remembrance of him will be wiped out, wasted, and ruined. But, those who trust God, those who depend on God, those who look to God and persevere will awake and sing for joy!

Beloved, live bold for the gospel!

Next week:

3. 26.20-27.1
4. 27.2-13