

Title: Even in the valley  
Text: Isaiah 24-25  
Theme: God's purposes through the valley  
Series: Isaiah #24  
Prop Stmt: Even in the Valley, God is good.  
Aim: I aim to help my people trust God in the midst of the storm.

Read Text:

A Christian funeral is a time of grief and hope. The one whom we have lost, is not lost, but is gone from us, for now. We know that we will see her again, but we do not see her right now. The knowledge of reunion is comforting and helpful, but the reality of the loss right now is deep. "Someday", is a great and wonderful thought. But "today", is tough. The promise of the gospel is real. It is the bedrock underneath the quicksand of grief. But, until the promise of the gospel is realized, that is, until faith is turned to sight, we live with the quicksand of grief.

Isaiah was a prophet to the nation of Judah who lived around 700 BC. As a prophet he was able to see and speak. He was able to see into the future. God enabled him to know of events that were yet to take place, but God did not reveal everything about those events to Isaiah. In some cases Isaiah knew that things were going to happen, but he simply did not know when. In other cases, God told him specifically when certain events would happen. Isaiah also spoke. God enabled him to see things and know things in order to speak to the people about these things. Isaiah represented God to the people. If the people had rejected the Word of the Lord, how do you think they were responding to Isaiah?

Being a prophet was not a 9-5 job that you did until 62 and then collected a pension. Being a prophet was inconvenient to say the least. You did not get invited to many social functions and there were many occasions when what you said, or what you did was socially unacceptable. For example, last week I read Isaiah 20 without much comment. It is a short chapter in which Isaiah is told by God to take off his clothes and go around naked, which he apparently does for three years. When you read that, you sort of hold your breath and look to the person next to you – don't you? We are wondering, "Does that say, what I think it said?" And, you expect me to comment on that; don't you? You are sort of hoping that I will tell you that in the Hebrew language that the word for naked meant that you had pajamas on and that Isaiah spent three years in his pajamas. The Hebrew word means naked. We know that Isaiah was married and had children. We can only imagine the conversation between him and his family as he tries to explain to them what God has told him to do. As tempting as this is to make a couple of humorous comments, the truth is that for God and for Isaiah, this was not a laughing matter. Here, Isaiah not only sees the message and speaks the message, but he has to be the message. He has to live the message. And what he does is, show the people what is going to happen to the nations of Egypt and Cush. The Assyrians are going to humiliate them. So, for three years, Isaiah lives in humiliation. He is the object of ridicule, scorn and derision. He

feels the weight of rejection. He lives his message. No, being a prophet was not a convenient job that earned you the respect of others. There is a weight that we bear because we know the truth. At times, the truth is heavy.

Now, many of you know this aspect of it. You know the truth of God's Word. You know the joy of the gospel, and you know the reality of God's law. Therefore, there is a weight that you carry because you are aware of the judgment that some people are under and you cannot pretend with others that everything is fine, when you know that they are not. This happens in conversations doesn't it? Some one, popular dies, or someone who was "nice" and you know it is coming. Someone will say, "Oh, I know they are with the angels now" and they look to you, in front of other people and say; right? And in that moment you are instantly on display. Do you say what the people expect you to say, or do you speak God's Word? That is not a pleasant position, is it? These chapters have a heaviness to them. There is no giddiness or light-hearted banter here, but just the reality of an infinitely righteous God responding to sinful people.

I remind you that in the first part of the book of Isaiah, we see that God is going to judge sin. He has to. He has to do what he said he was going to do. But, we are struck with how heavy that is. But, this first part is not all about judgment. There are times, when Isaiah points us to the hope that God holds out for those who will trust him. In fact, we are seeing that there is hope in judgment. God is using judgment to drive people to trust him. But, even though some people will respond to pressure by repenting and trusting God, most will not. (22.11b-14)

Isaiah 24 is both a summary of these warning messages from God and a link to what follows. The summary is like this: 1) Intense Judgment is Coming. 2) Judgment will not have the final word. This pattern is repeated.

#### I. **Intense Judgment is coming.** (24.1-13; 17-23a)

The reason for this has been covered in detail in the previous messages (oracles). Back in chapter 19 we see that Egypt relied upon her gods, upon her natural resources (the Nile) and upon her wisdom. In other words, Egypt did not need God, she had figured out a way to live affluently, predictably and with the respect and esteem of others. If you have all that, who needs God? But God says that he is going to destroy her idols. The Nile will dry up and her wise men will be revealed to be fools. In the end (19.15) there will be nothing that Egypt can do about it. Egypt cannot save itself. The point for Judah is clear. Do not think that Egypt can save you from judgment. Only God can do that.

The same idea is presented in chapter 21.1-10 concerning the Babylonians. In spite of the dominance of the Assyrians, the city of Babylon enjoyed a time of independence and rebellion that lasted for about 10 years. But before Babylon arose as an empire, Babylon as a city was destroyed by Assyria. The same message is given

to Judah. Do not think that Babylon can save you. In fact, as we will see, Babylon is the empire that is going to crush you. Only God can save you.

Other nations are mentioned. Edom and Arabia are of no help and neither will Jerusalem be able to save itself, only God can save. But then, (22.15-25), Isaiah gives us an account of two men who illustrate this truth. The one is a guy named Shebna. He is called a "steward" which is like a palace administrator. He has responsibility for the well-being of many people, but instead of caring for them, he is overseeing the construction of a monument to himself. He is everything bad that we associate with the word politician. He uses his position to advance himself instead of caring for those entrusted to him. God sends Isaiah out to the work site in order to greet Shebna and to tell him that he is going to die, but it will not be in glory, but in shame. But then Isaiah writes about Eliakim. As bad as Shebna was, Eliakim is good. This guy is so good, that everyone comes to depend on him. He is the guy that can be trusted, who can get things done, who takes care of people, and who always comes through. (22.14) says "they will hang on him the whole honor of his father's house." That is, everyone in his family will depend on him to fix everything. And what happens? He is only human. He cannot save everyone, but in fact breaks under the pressure. Only God can save. Not even good people. The best mayor cannot save Detroit. The best governor cannot save Michigan, nor the best president save America. Only God can save.

Tyre and Sidon (chapter 23) are two historic cities whose harbors were stopping points between Egypt and other countries. They became wealthy and strong, but their wealth and fortifications could not save Judah. They could not even save themselves. Do you see the point? So, when we get to chapter 24, it is not surprising that the word "earth" appears 16 times in these 23 verses. The entire earth is under the judgment of God. It is not just these countries that are mentioned but everyone. The opening verses bear it out, that it does not matter which people group you are in, you are under the judgment of God. (Just like Romans 1.18-3.20) It really is interesting to see the similarities between these two passages. Here in Isaiah 24, the prophet makes it clear that people all over the world have the law of God written on their conscience. They know God's laws.

Can you think of a society that did not have any laws? NO! Why do people need laws? We need laws because we are sinners who will destroy each other unless we are given boundaries. What do those boundaries look like? Every society has laws against stealing and lying. Why? Because no group of people can function for any length of time if stealing and lying are not punished. The whole thing will completely break apart. Where did the idea of lying (being a bad idea) and stealing (being another bad idea) come from? Where did the categories of good and bad come from? God wrote them on the DNA of every human being. But, as v.5 indicates, mankind has ignored those. God was not kidding when he said that sin is a serious matter.

## II. **Judgment will not have the final word.** (24.14-17; 23b)

### A. **Someday** (14-16a)

There is an abrupt change in v.14. Isaiah speaks of the day when people are singing for joy! In fact, they are shouting in response to the majesty of the LORD. These, it would seem are the true people of God, who for a long time have been under the cruel boot of oppression, who, like the martyrs in Revelation have cried out, "how long oh God?" "How long until you come and hold the guilty accountable and put this world back into order?" "When will you come and rescue your children and vindicate your name?" And now, Isaiah speaks of the day when God comes and the result is that "*From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One*" (16). That is the vision that Isaiah has been given because that is the plan that God has established and God will not be denied.

Someday, the time of judgment will be over, and the time of glory will come. But, there is another silver lining to that cloud. Over and over we see how God uses judgment as a means to drive people to trust in him. This is not only true for the Jews, but it is true for the surrounding nations as well. Go back again to chapter 19. Right after speaking about the intense judgment that is going to come to Egypt, Isaiah mentions that there is coming a day when people in Egypt will actually turn to the Lord and trust him! (19.16-25) Not only that, but the people of Egypt and Assyria and even Israel will join together in their worship of God! This not only fits the pattern of judgment, hope and then reality, but if we are hearing Isaiah say this, our natural response would be – "You've got to be kidding me!" There is no way the Egyptians, Assyrians and Israelites are going to worship God together! Now, by the way, that is the point of the message isn't it? Isaiah is saying, do not trust these other nations, do not trust their gods, do not trust their plans, but trust only in God. Besides, they are going to trust God someday! But, this is huge! Someday, some of the enemies of God will become friends of God and worshipers of God and they will all do that as the people of God. This is a preview of the church and a preview of eternity.

### B. **But now** (16b)

But then, right in the middle of v.16, Isaiah abruptly changes from speaking about the glory of God over all the earth to a cry of despair over his circumstances. What he has just said is true. It is going to happen. It is a cause for rejoicing, but he is not living that – yet. He is living in the midst of betrayal. He feels the wasting effects of living with a people who have turned their back on God and Isaiah knows that he is going to feel the weight of God's judgment on his people because this is where he lives and serves. This present darkness that the prophet is in does not cause him to deny the glory that awaits. He just can't flip a switch and disconnect himself from the reality of living in a world that is so full of sin.

This is a pattern of Isaiah: Judgment, hope, judgment, hope. In the end, hope wins. But, right now, we, like the prophet, live in a world that is still under the curse. And we live in a country that is hell-bent on destroying itself. Like Isaiah, we rejoice in the hope of the gospel. We anticipate the day when Christ returns and long for that, but meanwhile, we grieve. We do not grieve without hope, but we grieve. Our grief and heaviness of spirit is not a lack of faith, it is an acknowledgement of our present condition. We grieve because life is not yet what it is supposed to be. We hope, we anticipate, we even rejoice because God is coming to make things new. And sometimes we grieve and we hope all at the same time.

Imagine that you are standing next to the casket of your spouse or your child. Your heart is breaking and you feel absolutely overwhelmed with the sense of loss. Because your spouse or your child had a clear conversion to Christ and gave evidence of that in life, you know that they are with God and you know that you will see them again, and so, standing there all by yourself, you begin to sing, "In Christ alone, my hope is found", but part way through the song, you break down. You can't sing any more. It's not that you don't believe; it's just that the promise of future joy does not erase the present loss. The rest of the chapter repeats this pattern. Intense judgment is coming (17-23a), but judgment does not have the final word (23b).

Do see what Isaiah sees? Do you feel the weight of this world like he does? This week a high school student in Ohio kills three other students. The government of Syria continues to slaughter its own people. Nigeria and Sudan are in great unrest and a pastor in Iran is sentenced to death because he will not renounce the gospel. So, what are we supposed to do? This text provides two responses: 1) We sorrow and 2) We sing. That is what Isaiah does in 25.1 (and the elders of 24.23 do as well). This is personal. The LORD is not just the Sovereign God of the nations, he is Isaiah's God. And in the midst of this valley, Isaiah is choosing to affirm the goodness of the Lord. In the midst of the sorrow, Isaiah sings. There are times, like in chapter 24, when his sorrow interrupts his singing, but yet he sings again, in faith because he knows that in the end, sorrow will end, but singing won't. In the end, God will swallow up death forever (25.7). In the end, God will wipe away tears from all faces (25.8). In the end, the reproach of God's people will be removed.

Isaiah wrote all of this, not knowing exactly how God was going to do it. Isaiah did not yet know of Christ whose death and resurrection would be the death of death for all those who come to faith in Christ. But we know. Isaiah anticipated, what we now see as being accomplished. Christ died for our sins and rose again so that all those who would trust in Him alone might be declared righteous and made part of the people of God – forever.