

WAYPOINTS

MONDAY, 12/9

Read Isaiah 8:19-22.

¹⁹When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. ²¹Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. ²²Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

If you read this passage and felt lost, you're not alone. There often isn't an easy place to just dive into Isaiah without having to play catch up.

The book of Isaiah is a prophetic literature that more closely resembles poetry than narrative. He often employs rich imagery and dramatic statements to evoke strong reactions. If you don't do some work to understand the circumstances to which Isaiah is speaking, you will most certainly feel lost and confused.

So, what is happening here? Isaiah and God's people find themselves in a rather tumultuous time. They are facing enemies on all sides, and their future is anything but certain. Such times exposed the lack of faith for many of God's people.

In verse 19, some people apparently sought the counsel of the dead for guidance. The urgency they felt and internal panic left them grasping at straws. Isaiah contrasts the foolish practice of calling out to the dead with calling out to the Living God.

For Isaiah, such seasons should send us running to the Lord for counsel and wisdom. We must put our trust and hope in the One who lives and reigns. While we may not reach for tarot cards in a crisis, we sometimes have other things we run to for wisdom in such times, even if it is ourselves.

Isaiah needs the people—and us as well—to see how this can be shortsighted. Putting our hope in anyone or anything other than the Living God might leave us wandering around in darkness. I don't know about you, but I have trusted my own wisdom before

and found myself worse off than when I started. Even our best thoughts, intentions, and efforts can fall drastically short from what we need.

Our hope must be placed in the Living God, the One whom we know is good. The One who is worthy of trust. The One who has proven that He is reliable and faithful. The One who has shown the lengths to which He would go to express His love for us. He is to be trusted in our times of darkness. Only He can lead us into the light of a new dawn.

Sending prayer:

“Living God, we place our hope in You. We know You are good and faithful, which You have proven to us over and over again. Continue to help us walk in the light of Your love and mercy. Amen.”

WAYPOINTS

TUESDAY, 12/10

Read Isaiah 9:1-2.

“Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”

If you were worried about Isaiah getting really dark (which he can) it isn't long before we see the light break over the horizon.

“There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress,” he writes. That is some welcome news, especially to those who have been walking in darkness.

The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali referenced in verse 1 were tribal lands located in the northern portion of Israel. They were absorbed by the country of Aram and then eventually completely taken over by Assyria. They are used as examples of being caught in political flux.

The point Isaiah seems to be making (and I say it that way because there is some ambiguity here) is that God is raising up a king to bring stability to the unstable places. This king will serve as a light who shines over places once shrouded in darkness.

The lands mentioned here have often borne the brunt of cruel empires and corrupt rulers. Isaiah envisions God's raising up someone who will rule with justice, grace, and authority. The rule of this king will be like a welcome light after a long trudge through the dark night.

The question here that we will continue to ask throughout the week is who exactly was Isaiah imagining? Did he envision an actual king of Israel who would help consolidate just rule over the nation and for the nations surrounding Israel, or was he longing for One to govern beyond this world, who used a different vehicle to rule from rather than the broken political systems that make up our world even today?

I ask this because there isn't an easy answer. Isaiah rarely gives us easy answers, but rather invites us to wonder. As you read through Isaiah 9 with us this week, let's consider what Isaiah was really hoping for, and how we believe it will be fulfilled.

Sending prayer:

"Father, open our eyes and minds as we look into Isaiah this week. Help us see what You want us to see. May these words wash over our weary hearts. May we see You and Your perfect plan more clearly through them. Amen."

WAYPOINTS

WEDNESDAY, 12/11

Read Isaiah 9:3.

*³You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.*

Let the poetry begin! The rest of our verses this week will be strictly poetry and must be read as such. We will miss the point if we just try to read these words as if they were a story. Isaiah wants us to soak in these words and images. They are to create a picture in our minds and hearts of the wondrous thing that God is doing. Let's wander through these words together.

“You have enlarged the nation,” he begins. For a nation that was split in two and still reeling from that painful division, these words would have been a salve. A break in relationship is always painful. We feel the loss. It sticks with us. These words lead us to imagine that this good ruler has brought people back together, that he has found a way to heal and mend divisions. There is restoration where there was once division.

What is the result of this work of a nation, once divided, expanding again? Joy! Lots of joy. In fact, Isaiah mentions “joy” or “rejoicing” four times in verse 3 alone. He says the nation will have joy and rejoice before the Lord like people harvesting their field for crops and warriors picking through the plunder after a hard-fought battle.

These are vivid images. Each of them captures the sense of reward we get after persevering through a struggle. Farmers spent entire seasons working long days to get to the harvest. Soldiers endured the constant threat of death and have come out to the other side to now enjoy what was theirs. Again, resisting the need to blitz through these verses, Isaiah invites us to put ourselves in their places. I wonder about the joy you would feel reaping the fruit of your hard labor in the field. I wonder what it would feel like to have the troubles of war behind you.

God is in the business of expanding our joy. That isn't to say that life will always be enjoyable. We will undoubtedly go through seasons of loss, hurt, and, like Israel, division. Happiness will long fly out the window, but our joy can still remain.

How is that, you might ask? Joy is a gift God gives. When our joy is rooted in Him, it doesn't have to be subject to our circumstances. We can live out of a sense of joy even in times of sorrow.

The key is to be both joy-filled and joyful. To be joy-filled is to ask and allow God to fill you with His joy. He is the Giver of Joy. To be joyful is to worship and praise the Lord. In Philippians, Paul repeats the command, “Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again, rejoice.” Worship is putting our hearts and minds upon the Lord. It is looking at His faithfulness and goodness rather than focusing on our circumstances.

So today, practice being both joy-filled and joyful in the Lord.

Sending prayer:

"Lord, we rejoice in You. Whether our circumstances are good or bad, we choose to find our joy in You, the One who is constant. You have done so much to bring us joy. You have given us Your Son that we might live through Him and have final victory over all the troubles of this world. Fill us with Your joy as we practice joy in You. Amen."

WAYPOINTS

THURSDAY, 12/12

Read Isaiah 9:4.

*⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.*

Before we delve into the imagery, let's define the significance of the reference to Midian's defeat.

Midian was a country near Israel. In the book of Judges, Midian became an oppressive force over Israel. Judges 6 tells us that God's people had done more evil, so the Lord gave them over to the power of the Midianites. They were so oppressive that God's people took up temporary residences in the hills and caves. Driven to poverty and uncertainty by Midian, the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help. God promised to deliver them from Midian through the warrior Gideon, which was accomplished in Judges 8.

You can only imagine the relief Israel felt to have their oppressors be defeated. Now they could go back to their homes. They no longer had to worry about where to get water or where their next meal would come from. The "yoke" that burdened them--"the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressors"--was no more. They were free, free to live as they had before.

I wonder if you have ever experienced something oppressive, something that placed a tremendous strain on your life. It could be a sickness or depression. It could be an addiction or grief. Whatever force it was in your life, you know how unwelcome such things can be and the relief that comes when they are no longer a part of your story.

God is in the freedom business. When Jesus announced His ministry in Luke, He used the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah, declaring, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Did you notice how much of what Jesus says focuses on freedom? He has come to set us free from the oppressive forces in our lives, whether that is sin, despair, addiction, isolation, etc. While the enemy will use such things to "steal, kill and destroy," Jesus has come that we may have life in Him, and through Him, "life to the full measure".

I wonder in what ways you need to experience the freeing power of Christ in your life.

Sending prayer:

"Jesus, You have the power to free us from sin. You have the power to bring hope and healing in whatever our struggles might be. May You minister to us and free us to experience anew the abundant life that You possess. Amen."

WAYPOINT

FRIDAY, 12/13

Read Isaiah 9:5.

*⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.*

I must confess that I've never set foot on a battlefield. I know many who have. They have all expressed that war is tough. It's rough and ugly.

All of those descriptors fail to capture the brutality of war, especially human-to-human combat. It's impossible for those that haven't been there to imagine what it would be like to wake up day after day putting on the same bloody clothes you wore for the fight the day before. The clothes with their stench and appearance would plague you with reminders of what you've been through.

After the blood had been spilled and the dust now settled, I have to imagine that the first thing you would want to do is get rid of the clothes and boots you wore in the fight. You throw them in one of the many fires lit to warm the soldiers. You don't want to carry those with you back home. You want to go back to life as you knew it before war became a part of it.

Of course, you can do this only during a time of peace. If there is no promise of peace, then you might need them.

Isaiah imagines the gracious and good rule of this king as a time of great peace. There will be no need for warriors to keep their filthy clothes. It will be a time of unprecedented peace.

This image alone gives us a clue that Isaiah's vision might be otherworldly. By that, I mean something that takes place beyond the world in which we know here. Peace is not exactly a constant in our world. Whether on a large scale or on smaller ones, conflict is a part of life in this world.

How wonderful it is for us to imagine a day where peace reigns, a time when people are no longer divided by their differences but become one under the rule of a good king. This can only be accomplished ultimately through Christ, the One before whom "every knee shall bow and tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of the Father."

Sending prayer:

"Jesus, You are our peace. You are working toward a day when You will usher in untold peace in our world. Your renewing work will unite everything and everyone in You under Your gracious rule. We long for such a day. Amen."

WAYPOINT

SATURDAY, 12/14

Read Isaiah 9:6.

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Here is the promise. All of the imagery about light, freedom, and peace comes to its climax with the birth of a Child, a Child who will grow up to take a throne where He will rule justly.

When Israel welcomed a king, there was the belief that such a man was a son of God. They were believed to be unique vessels through which God would accomplish His will. Now read through the Old Testament, and you will find king after king fail to live up to that call.

Even David, the highest regarded king, crumbled underneath the call. Where he once sought God's wisdom, he soon began to turn to his own ideas. Where he once pursued God's will, now he looked out for his own agenda. He was once driven by God's glory, but, at the end, fell prey to his own desires. His once promising rule fell into chaos.

Isaiah gives us the picture of another kind of king. This king would rule as God intended. The weight of the expectations wouldn't crush him either; instead, His wisdom would provide life-giving counsel for His people. He would serve as an extension of the Mighty God Himself, a true vessel who does God's will. The rule this king would establish would be everlasting, much like the rule of God our Father. He will usher in peace unlike anything the world has ever seen.

Again, we haven't seen any ruler who can accomplish such things, and we won't here on this earth. Political systems on earth will always be marred by sin. They will protect some and be driven by selfish gain. We won't ever get around that, which is why Jesus put little hope in political systems. In fact, I can't find anywhere that suggests He put any hope in them at all. While they are necessary, they are limited in exercising God's good and just will.

This is why our hope exists not in government or a form of governance or anyone who governs. They are all destined to fall short because we all "fall short of the glory of God". We are no different. Our hope is captured in Jesus, who, out of His perfect humility, comes not to impose His will but to do God's will. It is in the One who chose not to assert Himself but offer Himself as a sacrifice. Our hope is in Christ who is able to love perfectly, serve faithfully, uphold justice in its truest form, and selflessly pursue God's will.

This is the rule of Christ to which we submit today. Jesus' rule won't just begin in the future. It is here and now. We are simply waiting for it to be fulfilled when He returns. This is why the church is always able to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

Sending prayer:

"King of kings, what joy there is under Your good and gracious rule. We know that we can trust You. We thank You for perfectly living out God's will. We yield to You and Your faithful leadership of our lives. Amen."

WAYPOINT

SUNDAY, 12/15

Read Isaiah 9:7.

*⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.*

He will reign on David's throne

and over his kingdom,

establishing and upholding it

with justice and righteousness

from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty

will accomplish this.

There is a saying that goes, "All good things must come to an end." That is not the way the prophet Isaiah sees it.

Here, Isaiah expands the scope of this good king's influence. "Of the greatness of his governance and peace, there will be no end," he says. He envisions an everlasting kingdom being established by this good king who takes God's throne.

This follows the promise that David's throne would continue. There was much hope for David's leadership, but, in the end, his legacy devolved into a mess. Justice and righteousness were not the marks of how his reign came to a close. I'm not trying to pick on David. Lord knows we are just as capable of making a mess of things as anyone else. The story stands as a reminder of human frailty, which, in turn, emphasizes our need for Jesus to be who He is and promised to be.

The final line of Isaiah's prophetic poem says, "The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." The word for zeal is unique and worth studying. It means "passion or jealousy." It implies even the change in color in our faces at our most passion-induced moments.

Isaiah is capturing God's driving desire to see this promise to its fulfillment. God isn't kind of interested in this plan coming into action. He will see to it, and nothing will get in His way.

It is refreshing to know that nothing or no one can prevent God's accomplishing what He wants to do. Here is why I say that. God's ultimate desire was to live in fellowship with His creation. He wanted us to share in His life, yet we rejected Him. God would not be deterred, though. He pressed past our stubbornness and sin to make a way for us, even when the way came at a terrible cost. His will would not be thwarted, not even by our best efforts. All we can say is thank You, Lord, for being determined to accomplish good for Your creation.

Sending prayer:

"Father, You are so very good. We don't deserve the zeal with which You have carried out Your good will. You are so faithful and just. We praise You and continue to offer ourselves to Your gracious care and leadership. Amen."