

WHAT ON EARTH IS THE LORD DOING?! (Is. 5 & 6)

Someone has said it before ☺ ... we live in interesting times! There is chaos in society. There is chaos in business. There is chaos in politics. ... As I was studying in preparation for this evening, there were great discussions on the news about a word I hadn't heard before, 'Cryonics'. This is where they prepare your body immediately after death for a possible return to life sometime in the future. ... And there is another new term they are planning to introduce to the young children in Scottish schools, 'Gendersaurus Rex'. It is a project that invites young children to explore and question whether they are a boy or a girl. The exponents tell us they are to oppose 'heteronormativity' which they claim is "destroying children's lives". ... Indeed, the world is going crazy!

That is also part of the reason we are presently looking at the prophets on Thursday evenings because, - even though there are something like 2,500 years from then until now, - 'there is nothing new under the sun'. On Thursday evening past we were taking a 'bird's-eye view' of the prophecy of Isaiah, and that is where we are returning to consider *what in the world is God doing!*

As we saw, the times in which Isaiah lived were in disarray ... but the really sad thing was that the majority of the people did not realise how much of a disaster they were facing! They were so caught up in themselves and their own pursuits. For example, they were not aware Babylon was sharpening their swords and spears in preparation for attacking Jerusalem. And neither did they realise that what they were about to suffer was the consequence of their defiance against God. They were in such a poor spiritual state.

When things are as bad as that, what do you do? Well, doing nothing exacerbates the problem ... To do nothing is to continue as before, and it will get worse! ... To do nothing was not an option Isaiah was prepared to consider.

In chapter five he introduced a song, - a dirge, a lament, **Is. 5:1** *Now will I sing to my wellbeloved [yedyd] a song of my beloved [dowd] touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: ² And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.* ... Everyone would have understood the purpose of a lament, and they also would have pictured this very familiar illustration in their minds. This was a farming culture, and they knew the 'ins and outs' of investing in a vineyard (for example, remember Naboth, and also the young woman in the Song of Solomon). They knew they had to purchase suitable land,

clear away the stones, plant the best vines, build a protection around them, and hire the right workers to make it successful. However, it turned out a disaster for the grapes were sour.

Then, God drew the parallel, ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. ⁴ What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? ... This was very personnel to God for He was using this to show the people how disappointed He was with them.

Over the centuries since He had chosen them from out of the other nations (Dt. 7), He had invested in them so much, - more than any other people on the face of the earth ... and yet they took what He had done for them for granted. He could not allow it to continue, so He decided, - because He loved them, - to discipline them, **Is. 5:5** And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: ⁶ And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ... A fruitless unprotected vineyard, open to foxes and all kinds of scavengers ... It will surely be wasted and destroyed ... And God made it clear what He was saying ... ⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment [*mishpat, justice*], but behold oppression [*mishpach, injustice, bloodshed and wickedness*]; for righteousness [*tsedaqah*], but behold a cry [*tsa'aqah, distress, iniquity*]. ('a play on words'). Therefore, this is God cursing His own vineyard, Israel ... He is going to remove their defences, and lay bare their land to the invader.

Then in verse eight a series of six 'woes' begins, and these highlight the sins of the people,

- Materialism, - they could not have enough, ⁸ Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! So, God is going to take away their acquisitions, ⁹ In mine ears said the LORD of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. ¹⁰ Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah.
- Abandonment of morality and righteousness, ¹¹ Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! ¹² And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts [*i.e. 'partying'*]: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands.

- The scoffers who ‘shake their fists’ at God, **18** Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: *[they had carts which were loaded with whatever they were transporting; the cart would then be hitched to an animal by cart ropes, and the animal would pull the burden in the cart ... this illustrated the people who were like beasts dragging around a waggon-load of their sin ... and they never even wondered why they were doing it]* **19** That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it *[they, - in their silly predicament, - are shaking their fists at God, mockingly]*. They take pleasure in defying God.
- Right and wrong is ‘relative’ for it is defined by what you decide yourself, - nobody has the right to impose their moral criteria on you and tell you you’re wrong, **20** Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! What God says is not considered for basically, man is his own ‘god’.
- The self-opinionated and arrogant, **21** Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent *[discerning]* in their own sight! They themselves are their final arbiter. They have an opinion on everything, and it is their judgment that counts.
- Corruption in high places, **22** Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: **23** Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! The ‘mighty’ and the ‘men of strength’ refer to the rulers, and to those in authority. They are ‘a law unto themselves’ and there is none to call them to account, and they can do whatever they like without restriction.

In these six woes God identifies and presents before the people why He will destroy Israel ... Does anything sound familiar?! ... Outright materialism, abandonment of morality and righteousness, scoffers shaking their fists at and mocking God, confusion about what is right and what is wrong, the self-opinionated and arrogant, corruption in high places ... Now, here is the question ... If God destroyed this generation of His beloved Israel, - His covenant people, in whom He had invested so much, - ... what hope does any other nation have?!

... This is the same God *today*, with the same standards. ... Israel had covenant protection, because of God’s promise to Abram - we as a nation don’t have that privilege. Israel, - as a people, - had a special claim on God, again ... we don’t. ... Therefore, if God does not act soon, - in the way He acted towards this particular generation of disobedient Israel, - He is going to have to apologise to

them. As well as that, He will even have to apologise to Sodom and Gomorrah for what is going on in our society today has surpassed what was going on then!

Isaiah knew and accepted God was fully justified in speaking like this to His people because they deserved His judgement ... and that is what the “Therefore” is *there for* at the beginning of v.24, *Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust ...* Isaiah cannot be accused of not telling it how it is! ... And the reason why it is simply but very forcefully given is *because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.*

We could spend quite a while considering how those words could be applied to our nation and to many nations in the West today who have benefited from being made strong by obedience to God’s Word in the past, - our laws were built upon His Word. ... We are in debt to God, but we have been long-since denying it. It is the same God we are dealing with, as *they* were dealing with. He does not change ...

This warning to Israel was made all the more precarious because they had already been warned, *Is. 1:2* Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. *3* The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. *4* Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. *5* Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. *6* From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. *7* Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. ... They had no excuse, they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel (5:24).

Is the wrath of God justified? Since He is ‘the God of love’, should He not have kept on loving them regardless? No, He couldn’t for He cannot abide sin, and they had ‘pushed Him to the limit’! ... *Is. 5:25* Therefore [*on account of their rejection of His Law and His word*] is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. ... Anybody with any sense

would have been scared witless! ... And they would have listened ... but not these people because they were ‘so far gone’!

And when it eventually happens they will be in no state to confront it, ²⁶ And he [God] will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth ... God will ‘raise the flag’ and give them ‘the go-ahead ... and they will not come and be successful in their own right, but they will come and be successful because even these vile wretched foreigners, - these Babylonians, - will be the instrument of judgment in the hands of God upon His people: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly ... They will be on the Jews in Jerusalem before they know it! ... And when they come, - the mighty armies of the Babylonians, - ²⁷ None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: ²⁸ Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: ²⁹ Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. ³⁰ And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

... They will seem virtually unstoppable and invincible ... This is the same as God said to Habakkuk, **Hab. 1:6** For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. ⁷ They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. ⁸ Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. ⁹ They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. ¹⁰ And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it.

God’s Word is consistent. He does not become ambiguous or complicated for He makes Himself clear ... and Isaiah knew exactly the tenure of the prophecy. Despite everything though, the prophet loved his people. Yes, it is not beyond what they deserved ... and yet, he did not want to see them destroyed. What he was hearing from God would have been cutting through his heart, - he was so heavily burdened for his people. He didn’t stand back and ‘rub his hands’ and say, “You deserve it” ... No, his heart was breaking for Israel, just as God’s heart was breaking for Israel. ... Indeed, there was no way out for this particular generation of Israel. They were ‘beyond the pale’, and this horrified Isaiah.

But step back for a moment. ... Is God not in control? Is He not still on the throne? Is He losing the battle, - are the Jews too 'far gone', and are the Babylonians too powerful? ... Let's see what happens in chapter six ...

In the year that King Uzziah died (740 BC), Jerusalem had during his reign been enjoying times of peace and prosperity. The people were happy, and they were going about their usual religious observances with not too much commitment for they had managed to manufacture a form of religion suitable to their style and needs. ... They had a religion that 'worked round them'. But even though things seemed to be going well on the surface, underneath the people were practising those sins highlighted in chapter five.

It was the end of an era though when King Uzziah died because he had been on the throne for fifty-two years. As far as the majority of the population were concerned, they had not known any other reign. (It's like how many of us have never known any other reign but that of Queen Elizabeth II).

And so Isaiah goes up and into the temple, and as he stands there pondering over the future of his nation, his thoughts are interrupted for he records, *Is. 6:1* In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

This vision 'took him over'. He had never experienced anything like this before ... but what a message he was being taught for God was reminding him He is still on the throne. He has neither been removed, nor has He abdicated and gone away and abandoned His people. No, He remained in Jerusalem among them.

Outside, the Lord had shown Isaiah how everything the ungodly had built for themselves was about to fall apart. No matter how well the people thought things were going, they had turned their back on God and the terrible consequences were just waiting to happen ... but God was still in control, and. *that* is what Isaiah was being reminded as he stood there in the temple and surveyed the glory of God.

King Tiglathpileser III of Assyria was on his way. The priests and religion in Jerusalem were apostate ... It was all 'hotting up' ... and yet, the glory of the Lord had not diminished one iota! Heaven was untouched. God reigns. The angels continued in their service before Him. Heaven was not affected with earth's dilemma, ² Above it [*i.e. the Lord sitting upon his throne in the temple*] stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain

he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. ⁴ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. ... God's plans remained intact.

And Isaiah responded when He saw God's glory, ⁵ Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. What a sight!

In the midst of all that was going on, - in the midst of a world in crisis, - Isaiah was being reminded that God is sovereign, absolutely holy, never makes a mistake, and no one or nothing can usurp His authority. ... And in these politically, economically, and socially uncertain times *that* is the God we need to focus our eyes upon today for just as He was doing in Isaiah's day, He continues to be God! ... And what was the first word Isaiah said when he saw this ... he said "woe". Now, he knew what 'woe' meant for he had used it six times in chapter five. So, in the presence of God, he aligned himself as being in the same sinful category as the people he lived amongst, *because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.* ...

And then there comes the purification, ⁶ Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: ⁷ And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

What kind of person was the Lord looking for in this time of crisis? He was looking for someone who had experienced the vision of His glory ... Someone who knew their inadequacies and sinfulness ... someone who would be penitent and broken over the state of their fellow-countrymen, and yet, also someone Who realised His majesty, holiness, and power. ... And God found that someone in Isaiah.

It didn't matter whether Isaiah was rich or poor, educated or uneducated, powerful or just an ordinary man in the street ... But what mattered was that Isaiah *knew* God. It mattered that he saw his own need to be purged of his sin, and to acknowledge dependence upon God, and to trust God despite the circumstances around him.

And then when he heard the question asked, ⁸ Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. ... He knew the Lord had privileged him to be His servant and His spokesman.

And the Lord told him, ⁹ And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. ... What a formidable task! You are not going to have success. In fact, all your efforts will seem as if they are in vain. No wonder Isaiah replied humbly, in the form of a question, ¹¹ Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, ¹² And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. He has to keep doing it until Jerusalem and the land is desolate. Keep at it, no matter how bad it gets. Don't give up even though it seems you are making no headway. Keep telling them Hear ye, even though they won't listen and understand because that is their problem, - that is the state they have gotten themselves into! ... They won't believe you they are in danger from the enemy ... but you have to keep telling them nonetheless.

And Isaiah, here is your encouragement, ¹³ But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof. ... Not all my people will be destroyed for I will keep/save a remnant because I have promised Abraham, *Gen. 17:7* And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. ⁸ And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. ... and I am keeping My word. These will be a people who will come to realise their brokenness before me and repent, and you are part of my plan for their salvation.

A world in crisis ... What on earth is the Lord doing? ... That is what He was doing then, and it is what He is doing today also. He is here. He is present. He has His eternal plan. He has His people the devil will never get! ... The Holy Spirit is working in our times showing men and women, boys and girls, - in increasing numbers, - of their need for the Saviour because we are still in the day of grace. The devil likes to tell us how poor a state we are in ... but when we look towards God, we know, - like Isaiah was being told, - ... we know that God is at work and He is the Victor. ... That is how Isaiah was being assured.

Yes, the Babylonian armies came, and they left great destruction, - they made Jerusalem into a pile of rubble. They heaped horror after horror upon the people. They desecrated the temple. They carried the Jews off into captivity. They

caused untold misery ... But where are the Babylonians today? They have been assigned to history, - you can read about the prophecies concerning their fall in Is. 46-47, and that once great city is in pieces today because of how God dealt with them ... Where though is God's ancient people? ... Jerusalem is one of the greatest cities in the world ... How has that happened? It has happened because God has kept His promises, and He will keep on keeping them until they are all fulfilled.

We are also His people ... those out of the Gentile nations whom He has redeemed through grace ... And we read in His Word how the story will end ... and Isaiah knew it too. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, God will bring all His great promises to pass ... and that is the great and blessed hope of *all* who belong to Him ... even His Church today ...

Kingdom of Christ, for Thy coming we pray,
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song Thy creation shall sing,
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.