

Session 2

December 8, 2024

LOOKING FORWARD TO PEACE

Isaiah 8:20 through 9:7

In 1650, poet and theologian Thomas Fuller coined the popular phrase, “It is always darkest just before the dawn.” I’m not sure whether that’s true meteorologically or not, but anyone who has ever shivered through a cold, dark night would certainly agree that nothing is more welcome than the dawn’s sun peeking over the eastern horizon.

Isaiah the prophet spoke of the darkness of Judah’s sin, and the subsequent darker darkness of the coming captivity that resulted. But even in the midst of God’s judgement, was the promise of a new day dawning. In this week’s lesson, three key words come to mind.

Darkness (8:20-21). If there was no darkness, we wouldn’t understand light. The darkness of Israel’s sin is highlighted in the previous verses of chapter 8. The “they” of verse 20 refers to the false prophets and soothsayers mentioned in verse 19. Rather than listening for the spirits of the dead, should they not listen to the word of God? The warning that follows is dire. Those who pursue darkness will certainly find it! Notice the starkness of the terms the prophet used: those who reject God would be dejected, hungry, famished, enraged. They would “curse their king and their God” (v. 21). Their lostness would be utter; characterized by distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction (v. 22). The result? They would run headlong from their present darkness into even thicker darkness. And for them, there would be no dawn (v. 20). For reflection: *Do you think this description applies only to the false prophets or does it extend to all who deny God. Why?*

Dawning (9:1-5). The promise of 9:1 is directly attached to the calamity of 8:22. The word “gloom” likely refers to both the physical hardships they and their land would endure as well as the cloud of despair that would engulf them. Yet even before it all began, there was a light at the end of their tunnel. The poetic description of the region is meant to encompass the entire area. Galilee, specifically, is significant in that that region received the first assaults of the coming captivity (and six centuries later, the first proclamation of the gospel!). In the Scriptures, light is used in a variety of ways. At times it refers to spiritual knowledge; at others, to joy; at others, to deliverance. But in every case, light is used in a positive, encouraging way. Again, it is virtually always set in a way that contrasts with “darkness” either directly (as in 1 John 1:8) or indirectly (as in Is. 2:5). There is a literary shift here as well. The language is both poetic and prophetic, and the verb tenses indicate a certainty in its fulfillment. The remaining verses in this section describe the blessings of light (as opposed to remaining in the darkness). Notice that this coming (and certain) light drives out darkness (v. 2); it is the harbinger of great joy (v. 3); it expresses deliverance over oppression and victory over the enemy (v. 4); and it signals the end of battle and the beginning of a reign of peace (v. 5). For reflection: *Besides the obvious replacement of darkness with light, why do you think the prophet used the metaphor of “dawning?” What other connotations of the word might be included here?*

Deliverance (9:6-7). Here, the prophet combines the promise of temporal, physical deliverance with eternal, spiritual deliverance. And that deliverance would come in the form of a person. No

other prophet so revealed the coming of, and characteristics of, the Messiah. Notice His *nativity* (v. 6): A child would be born (see also Is. 7:14ff); and the child (His Son) would be God's gift to humanity. Notice His *nobility* (v. 6): He would shoulder the rule of a nation. Simply put, He would uphold the rule of mankind. Notice His *names* (v. 6): they describe His deity. The characteristics wrapped up in those names could not be ascribed to mere men! Notice His *nation* (v. 7): it would be vast; it would prosper; it would be founded on God's promises and grounded on the throne (and lineage) of King David; it would be eternal in both its reign and its influence; and it would be ruled over with justice and righteousness. For reflection: *The end of verse 7 says, "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this." Why do you think this section ends with this statement? What is Isaiah saying here?*