

Isaiah 30:1-5, 8-21**Luke 17:11-19****Introduction**

Last year on my best friend's birthday I gave him a set of solar powered garden lights. They were the sort that you stuck in the ground and they took power from the sunlight all day so that at night they came on automatically when it got dark. He was delighted and put them around the borders of the flower beds. Several weeks later I asked him how they were doing. He said they were great but unfortunately one of them didn't work. I suggested I took them back to the shop but before we did that we decided to move it out of the shade, where it had been, into a part of the garden where it would get sunlight during the day. Sure enough the next night the light was shining as brightly as the others. It had to be in the sun to receive the power it needed to shine at night. If we are to glow with Christian life, we need to be placed in the presence of the Son of God to let him abide in us and for us to know we abide in him.

This abiding has to be continuous. As soon as the lamp was moved into the shadow it stopped working. It's the same for us when we don't remain in God's presence we lose our power and our life.

Today's reading from Isaiah has this message at its centre. It contains three very familiar verses that are often used by Christians to give encouragement and help to each other yet they are interwoven with some very powerful criticism of the people of Israel and a promise of judgement and punishment. God reminds his people that they will not succeed in their own strength and need to return to him and remain in him for their life and strength. Even at a time in Israel's history where they are continuously turning away from God, disobeying him and seeking help from other sources and other gods he continues to call them back and offers love and forgiveness to them.

This prophecy occurs at a time in the history of God's people when the people of Israel had been defeated and carried off into exile by the Assyrians. The Assyrian King was threatening Judah and this was all in fulfilment of prophecies to the people that unless they returned to worshipping God and seeking him alone they would be defeated and their nation destroyed. Instead of repenting of their disobedience and turning to God for help and rescue they turned to the King of Egypt for support in fighting off the Assyrians - not learning from their previous experiences in Egypt they turned away from God and tried to defend themselves by political and military means.

1. The command to write

The chapter starts with God lamenting their stupidity and obstinacy (*read verses 1-3*) So once again God tries to speak to his people and instructs Isaiah to give them his message, in verse 8, he tells him to write it on a

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tablet for them and to inscribe it on a scroll. This was so that there was a public and a private record of what God had said to them. The message wouldn't simply be given verbally, it was to be written on a tablet for them to read so that there could be no doubt about it having been delivered and also inscribed on a scroll - a duplicate copy if you like so that for the days to come there would be an everlasting witness that even now at this late and painful stage in their history God was offering them a way out.

His words are harsh because their behaviour has deserved harsh judgement. Isaiah goes on to give two explanations for the judgement that God is calling on his people:

A. THE FIRST EXPLANATION

God says they are a rebellious people, deceitful children. This is because they have refused to hear or respond to revealed truth. They have refused to listen to God's word (*read vv 10-11*) They do not want to hear from God at all, what they prefer to hear is a humanly contrived and more acceptable message. What they do not want is to be continually confronted by God and his word to them. They are actively and effectively rejecting him as the Holy One and replacing him with their own more acceptable gods - man made idols, and replacing his living effective, active word with man made messages that are easier to hear, that flatter their egos and allow them to live the way that they prefer.

This is something that we can all be guilty of to a lesser or greater degree. It can be hard to hear God speaking directly to us because he may be shining his clear and holy light into parts of our lives that we do not want challenged and do not want to change. There is a danger that we can simply obey and stick to the parts of God's word that we find pleasant and affirming and spend less time reading or hurry over the more uncomfortable parts. The Christian Church as a whole is very guilty of this. There seems to be great emphasis from some parts of the church on personal sexual purity, In the debate at the last Lambeth Conference the Bishops united to call homosexual relationships sinful yet ignored the sins of adultery, divorce and promiscuity. We shout about personal holiness carefully forgetting that in the same passages of scripture God condemns greed, dishonesty, injustice, lying, gossiping, drunkenness and many other things that we may consider lesser sins.

The people of Israel certainly wanted to be selective in what they listened to and God tells them that that is sin. (*read vv12-13*) Refusing to take God's word seriously is a sin because it is rejection of him and his plans and purposes for us. The result in this instance was destruction. Isaiah

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describes it as the collapse of a supporting wall that will crush instead of protecting.

B. THE SECOND EXPLANATION

Their sin is not only that they have not wanted to listen to God but that they have rejected a specific message. The message is very well known by many Christians and these verses are often used to give comfort and reassurance, which of course they should. This message was the life line that God was throwing to his people he told them: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength." Which of course is the consistent message that God gives to those he loves and is the essence of the Gospel. If we turn away from our disobedience and simply rest in God, If we stop rushing around trying to organise our lives and simply rest in him. If we stop our clamouring after other sources of help and trust him then he will rescue us from whatever predicament we are in and put our feet back on solid ground. First of all to return us to fellowship with him and give us eternal life, but day by day in the little things if we are able to come to him for guidance and direction, to trust him to save us then he will rescue us and give us a fresh start.

But there is the rub. It can be hard to trust God for his solutions to our difficulties and the dilemmas of daily living because if we ask him to rescue us he may ask things of us that we don't want to give and he may lead us into places that we do not want to go. For the people of Israel it was easier to rely on their own feeble military strength and turn to a corrupt and cruel power for help than to turn back to God, admit they were wrong and ask him to give them help and rescue.

So God says to them (*read vv 16-17*) They have chosen their way forward and God warns them that it will lead to complete destruction, they will be left destroyed and isolated - just a flag staff on a hill with no army. The Israelites preferred to trust in military power and their own activities to rescue them from their predicament than to allow God to help them. So he tells them that they will reap the consequences of their actions and it will lead to destruction.

I think that being human ourselves our reaction to difficulty is often very similar. Instead of turning to God for help and trusting him to meet our needs and deal with our failure we try to sort it out for ourselves, either by running away or by rushing around trying to resolve the problem. We may turn to other things for help. The people of Judah turned to Egypt. We might try to rely on an individual for our security, a special relationship, or our own intelligence and talents, we might look to money, success and fame, our families, alcohol, sex or some other source, but we

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might find it hard to trust God to rescue us and in his place put other supports.

C. THE WAITING GOD - HIS FAITHFULNESS AND COMPASSION

look what God promises to those who return to him.

1. Blessedness when the waiting is over

Hear the sadness as God longs to help his silly, rebellious people. (*read v 18*) He longs to be gracious. He is waiting eagerly for the opportunity to show his love towards his people. He rises up to show compassion. He sees the problems and suffering of the people he loves and his heart aches for them. Our God is a God of justice, we will be punished for our disobedience and rebellion against his choices for us - but if we wait for him, if we look to him for guidance and help he will heap his blessings upon us.

2. Comfort and care after tears

He promises them that when they call to him he will answer them straight away. There will be an end to their weeping. As soon as he hears their call he will answer them and release them from their sorrow and suffering. This is a promise for the future for salvation to come - in the first place when God would bring his people home from exile after many painful years and later in full restoration through Jesus Christ.

3. Spiritual blessing: revelation and receptivity

Although they are suffering at present, suffering terribly, God promises that if they turn to him in repentance for their rebellion he will start to lead them again. Their teachers and prophets will again lead and direct them and more than that God himself will guide them individually and personally. He promises that if they again turn from the right path they will hear God's voice directing them, telling them which way to turn, which path to take. Of course it is ultimately their decision whether they listen to God's voice and whether they obey it. It is a choice that each of us have. The more we look to God to guide us the more easily we will recognise his voice speaking words of guidance, comfort and help. The more we are able to trust him with our lives in the small things and the big the more we will see his purposes, his holiness in our lives, his plans for our talents and gifts. It can be hard to trust him - but he promises to prove totally able to deal with all our difficulty and pain. He asks us to obey him and to live Holy lives and he promises to provide all the resources that we need.