

<https://youtu.be/naenNNMz1ss>

We are in a very confusing, scary place in time. This year, from all accounts and prophecies, was going to be our year as the body of Christ. The year of the Remnant, The Double Decade of Open Heavens, A new Era of Crazy Increase, Favour & Fulfillment. We started out with so much hope and excitement and looked forward to seeing the signs, miracles & wonders God was going to perform through our lives. Even though we know that God will fulfill the prophecies; we were still caught off guard by how it is unfolding.

So now we find ourselves with a pandemic threatening our lives, our homes, our relationships, jobs, education, our way of "worship" and basically our way of life. We're asking, "God, where are You and why is this happening?", "God, are You listening?", "God, I've been upholding Your word so why aren't You doing something? Why don't You answer?"

We find a similar scenario in Isaiah 58 where God's people; after receiving good news, have to go through a trying time. The Babylonian exile is presented in the Bible as punishment for idolatry & disobedience to God. So, after 70 years, they were allowed to return and rebuild their homeland. Finally they can go home! Much like us, they must have started out with so much hope and excitement. I can't imagine their excitement lasted too long, because of the state they found their homes and country in. The Babylonian invasion caused so much destruction & ruin! Even the temple was destroyed! But now they are back. They've served their sentence, right? God is on their side; God will restore! They are eager to get back to their old way of life. But in the midst of joyful return, through the prophet Isaiah,

1. God issues judgment!

Isaiah 58:1-5 (MSG)

Shout! A full-throated shout! Hold nothing back, a trumpet-blast shout! Tell My people what's wrong with their lives, face My family Jacob with their sins! They're busy, busy, busy at worship, and love studying all about Me. To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people, law-abiding, God-honoring. They ask Me, 'What's the right thing to do?' and love having Me on their side. But they also complain, 'Why do we fast and You don't look our way? Why do we humble ourselves and You don't even notice?' "Well, here's why: "The bottom line on your 'fast days' is profit. You drive your employees much too hard. You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight. You fast, but you swing a mean fist. The kind of fasting you do won't get your prayers off the ground. Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after: a day to show off humility? To put on a pious long face and parade around solemnly in black? Do you call that fasting, a fast day that I, God, would like?"

Imagine their shock 😞

That must have been quite a wake-up call to them. Having just served their sentence of exile; now being judged again! They are facing heavy taxes, droughts, natural disasters and need housing. Also, they had to endure constant attacks by those who opposed the rebuild of the city wall. Some had to borrow money and others were not allowed to work their fields. They must have asked: "Is there no reprieve? Surely we are doing the right thing; we are honouring God with our lives by fasting, prayer, to live right and to offer sacrifices? Lord I'm confused, are we not Your people? I mean we've just come back from exile, we need help! Why are You not helping us? What more do You want from us Lord?"

Like us, I imagine they also reminded Him of the word they got just before in:

Isaiah 57:16-18 (MSG)

For I'm not going to haul people into court endlessly, I'm not going to be angry forever. Otherwise, people would lose heart. These souls I created would tire out and give up. I was angry, good and angry, because of Israel's sins. I struck him hard and turned away in anger, while he kept at his stubborn, willful ways. When I looked again and saw what he was doing, I decided to heal him, lead him, and comfort him, creating a new language of praise for the mourners.

2. God's Instruction!

Isaiah 58:6-9 (MSG)

"This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I'm interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families.

Imagine their confusion 😞

Their conversations must have gone something like: "Is the prophet saying we don't need to fast?", "How can he say break the chains of injustice & exploitation? Does he not know that we are being oppressed and exploited by our rulers?", "We have debt and we cannot even work.", The other one says, "I am still building my house so how can I invite the homeless?", "I barely have money to feed my own family; how am I supposed to give food away to others?", "This seems so unfair to expect this of us. Haven't we suffered enough?", "Would it not make more sense for us to first sort out our own problems before going out to help others with their problems?"

But God being God was way ahead of them, because He already told them in:

Isaiah 56:11

"I don't think the way you think. The way you work isn't the way I work." "For as the sky soars high above earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think.

3. God's Partnership!

Isaiah 58:9-10, 13 (MSG)

"If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people's sins, If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,....." "If you watch your step on the Sabbath and don't use My holy day for personal advantage, If you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy, God's holy day as a celebration, If you honor it by refusing 'business as usual,' making money, running here and there

Imagine their dismay 😞

Realising that they are still falling short of the just requirement of God's glorious standard must have filled them with such grief. God is however looking to establish a partnership with His covenanted people. He wants their relationship with Him to involve more than mere religious rituals, but that their lives be totally surrendered to Him. These conditions set by God serves to include the people into God's plan to expand and establish His Kingdom. They are called to participate in His plan for salvation; to not just be in right relationship with Him, but also others. Just as good works alone cannot justify us, as we have been saved by grace, we also know that faith without works is dead. God is therefore calling them to look beyond their needs and to have compassion for others. The very same help and compassion which they are asking from Him.

4. God's Promise!

Isaiah 58:8-14 (MSG)

A Full Life in the Emptiest of Places

- Do this and the lights Will turn on, and your lives Will turn around at once.
- Your righteousness Will pave your way.
- The God of glory Will secure your passage.
- Then when you pray, God Will answer.
- You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'
- Your lives Will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives Will be bathed in sunlight.
- I Will always show you where to go.
- I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places — firm muscles, strong bones.
- You'll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry.
- You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past.

- You'll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, MAKE THE COMMUNITIES LIVABLE AGAIN.
- Then you'll be free to enjoy God! Oh, I'll make you ride high and soar above it all. I'll make you feast on the inheritance of your ancestor Jacob." YES GOD SAYS SO!

(16 times God says I WILL to prove His commitment to bless His people. The number 16 refers to a person who represents the character of God)

Imagine their joy 😊

Finally some good news. Some hope! The penny drops and they realise that God is still on their side. God wants to bless them and make them prosperous. He is simply asking them to work alongside Him. To ensure a better future and salvation for all. Then they can be free to enjoy living in true union with Him.

Their story does not end there, however. In *Isaiah 59*, God yet again reminds them of their sin, but reassures them that He still saves, He still hears. Once they repent, He comes in (**verse 19**) "*like a pent-up flood that the breath of the Lord drives along*" to redeem His people. The image I get here is: the people's repentance is the gate that releases the flood of God's redemption. Powerful! Guess what follows? *Isaiah 60*: "*Arise & shine.....*"

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS HISTORICAL EVENT?

1. God's judgment

God warns His people that He looks past rituals and religious acts. It is not a day, but a lifestyle of godly behaviour and a heart of worship that pleases Him.

Jeremiah 17:10

"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

2. God's instruction

God is not rejecting the practice of fasting and prayer. His instruction is to simply not just have a form of godliness, but to daily live for Christ despite our circumstances.

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

3. God's partnership

The Father is laying out His plan to bless us and inviting us to be role players in not just our future, but His Kingdom.

Luke 12:48

When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.

4. God's promise

He assures us that our lives will be a reflection of His glory, His light.

2 Corinthians 3:18

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image.

Conclusion

Throughout the bible we find this darkness vs light theme. In Genesis 1 we read that the earth was without form and an empty waste and darkness was there.

We are for the most part experiencing darkness looming in whatever shape or form this Corona virus has invaded our country and lives. Many of our people are worried about their livelihood. There are those of us who are feeling empty, without purpose, depressed, scared and lonely. Some might even be questioning God's love and faithfulness to them.

We can see that when the people obey God's instruction and truly partner with Him, then the promise can be fulfilled. Understandably the exiles in Judah must have been so busy rebuilding and repairing with the limited resources at their disposal. Despite the difficult conditions they lived in, God still warns them to not just be concerned about their own affairs. So amidst all that; they needed to find a way to do God's will. They had to be intentional about finding a way, a means and the time to hold to God's fast.

God says, "here I am" showing Himself to be among His people and like Isaiah we might even have said "Here am I Lord, send me." This is how we've partnered with Him. When we came to Christ, we became followers/disciples of Jesus Christ. God said in **Genesis 1**: '*Let there be light and there was light*'. If this is a time of darkness; we are called to be:

- The light of the world – **Matthew 5: 14-16**
- A light to the gentiles – **Acts 13:47**
- Walk as children of Light – **Ephesians 5:8**

God is saying in **Isaiah 58:9** - "*DO THIS and the lights will turn on, and YOUR LIVES WILL TURN AROUND AT ONCE. Your righteousness will pave your way. The GOD of GLORY will SECURE YOUR PASSAGE. Then when you pray, God WILL ANSWER.*"

YES GOD SAYS SO!