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Day 200 - July 19

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## ***Judah after Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)***

### ***Isaiah's Prophecies about Restoration and the Messiah***

**Readings: *Isaiah 57:1-21; 58:1-14; 59:1-21***

#### ***Reflections:***

- Isaiah 57 begins with a reflection on the righteous dying. Often people live their lives without reflecting on the reality of death. At times the righteous die, Isaiah says, to spare them the suffering of greater evil. From God's perspective, death is not the end but merely a transition from the temporal to the eternal. As they rest in peace, the righteous that have died rest in peace in God's presence.
- Yet God's people have not lived righteously. They have chased after the sexual indulgence of the idols they continually worship. Again God compares their pursuit of idolatry and its sexual rituals as open, unashamed prostitution. He warns of judgment for those that do not repent and promises salvation for those that do: "But the person who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain."
- Isaiah calls out for the people to prepare the way for God's salvation. "Build a road! Remove every obstacle!" God is opening a way for restored relationship. God makes it clear that the only way a person is restored to God is through humility. Again we must note there is no mention of the sacrificial system, temple ritual or even the law. This mirrors Psalm 51 where David declares that all God really cares about is a humble heart that is contrite. "I live... with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, and to revive the heart of the contrite. ... I have seen his ways but I will heal him. I will guide him and restore comfort to him... Peace, peace to those far and near... 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.'"
- Isaiah 58 turns the listener's attention to the issue of fasting. Here we see the nation is into a form of super-spirituality that boasts outwardly of their religious asceticism. God challenges them because they are fasting but in their hearts they are abusing and mistreating their servants. Here again God lines up religion and blasts it to pieces. What kind of fasting (or religion) has God chosen? "To loose chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and to break every yoke....to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter...when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away your own flesh and blood." We can see

clearly in this passage how Jesus' teaching was just a very clear restatement of what God had been saying all along. God loves people and to worship him is simply to care for the people he loves. And the promises that come with this kind of merciful living are awesome: "Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I....then your light will rise in the darkness...the Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will raise up the ancient ruins..." The presence and power of God will work incredible miracles of grace through us and we will live in intimate relationship with him. What an awesome promise for all people who get God's heart and then just go for loving him and loving others as he commands. Our experience of life will take us back to the garden of Eden and our mission will help bring restoration to community as God's city is restored for his people to find a home in.

- Isaiah's vision of the Sabbath is ultimately relational. Taking time each week to just delight in God means that you are truly valuing relationship with him, rather than simply doing what you want with your free time. When we delight ourselves in God we discover that we find our "joy in the Lord."
- Isaiah 59 gives us another vision of the kind of life the wicked live and how they live in complete isolation from God and under his judgment. In many ways we see a parallel here with the way Satan approaches life: lies, injustice, a nest of snakes, poverty, nakedness, violence, rushing to do evil, no knowledge of peace and truth nowhere to be found. So what did God do? He decided to deal with all of humanity's sin and brokenness on his own. "Surely the arm (symbol of strength and power) of the Lord is not too short to save nor his ear too dull to hear." "He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene and so his own arm worked salvation for him..." We see that Jesus, who is called Emmanuel – "God with us", was actually God saving us himself! He became his own mediator between himself and humanity.
- Isaiah portrays God coming as a warrior to save. Paul (in Ephesians 6:10-19) uses this same image to describe Christ-followers as becoming soldiers in his army of salvation. The two images "righteousness as a breastplate" and "salvation as a helmet" (sign of victory) Paul directly takes from this passage. He also adds to this image the belt of truth, foot protection of the Great News of peace, the shield of faith, and sword of the Spirit. What a wonderful promise of God's ultimate rescue for a people in captivity: "The Redeemer will come to Zion to those in Jacob who repent of their sins!"