

Sermon Notes & References

When Will We Ever Learn?
Isaiah 42:18-25

January 19, 2011

A. Introduction

1. 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?'
2. God had a great and glorious purpose for Israel^A
3. God has a great and glorious purpose for His church^B

B. The Disability of God's People

1. to whom are these verses spoken?^C
2. from the Servant to the servant
3. their disability^D

C. The Damage to God's People

1. they knew the truth
2. warnings for not abiding in the truth^E

D. The Detection by God's People

1. the plea to discover why this damage has taken place
2. that we too should seek out the damage to the church^F

E. Conclusion^G

^A Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-8

^B Acts 1:8

^C Isaiah 29:10-12, 18

^D Psalm 106:21

^E 1 Peter 4:17-18

^F 2 Timothy 3:1-5

^G Revelation 3:15-16

A. Introduction

1. Where Have All the Flowers Gone—{2}.

- a. is the title of a folk song written a half-century ago
- b. with many versions, made popular by different groups

Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing
Picked by young girls every one
When will they ever learn ...

Where have all the young girls gone, long time ago
Gone to the young men every one
When will they ever learn ...

Where have all the young men gone, long time passing
Gone for soldiers every one
When will they ever learn ...

Where have all the soldiers gone, long time ago
Gone to graveyards every one
When will they ever learn ...

Where have all the graveyards gone, long time passing
Gone to flowers every one
When will we ever learn? when will we ever learn?

- c. and so the cycle of the song is ended
- d. the song reminds us of lessons in the book of Ecclesiastes
- e. and the theme of the song is simple
- f. despite mankind's recognizing the vanity of war
- g. with its pain and destruction, it seems to be inevitable

2. Isaiah has much the same to say about Israel

- a. repeatedly throughout their history
- b. they had had the same lesson made so plain to them
- c. in the book of Judges alone there are recorded seven cycles
 - (A) of Israel falling away from God,
 - (B) of God sending punishment in the form of foreign nations ruling over them,
 - (C) of God raising up a champion, a judge to free them
 - (D) of the people returning to God for a season
- d. and now, Isaiah, speaking to the exiles of Israel which will be living in the future in Babylon is really pointing out to them that the cycle has repeated itself once again – when will they ever learn? when will they ever learn?

3. God had a great and glorious purpose for Israel

- a. that was part of God's sovereign act in separating Israel and revealing to her His will; verse 21 expresses it in these terms: "The Lord was pleased for His righteousness' sake To make the law great and glorious."
- b. behind these words lay the words of God spoken through Moses in Deuteronomy 4:1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ... 5 See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6 So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? 8 Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"
- c. Yahweh, the God who chose Israel, intended that they should be His servant; but they failed because of sin
- d. Yahweh intended that they be a testimony of God to the surrounding nations, but they failed by worshipping idols
- e. Yahweh intended that by following His perfect law they should be His messenger of truth, but they disregarded it

- f. when will they ever learn? when will they ever learn?
 - g. but though Isaiah's words are addressed to the OT people of God, we must not leave them there
4. God has a great and glorious purpose for His church
- a. they are the NT people of God, the Israel of God
 - b. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
 - c. but oh! how often sin prevents us being the servants of God that He would have us to be!
 - d. how often the love of the world and the things of the world – which is idolatry – causes our testimony to fail!
 - e. how often our disregard for the commands of Christ and the royal law of Scripture – to love one another, to love our neighbour – estops our message of truth, for people can say of us, 'your actions speak so loudly, I cannot hear what your lips are saying'
 - f. this mere playing at doing church, at Christianity, takes place not only at the individual level but as the visible body of Christ in this world
 - g. when any branch of the church condones and even commissions by ordination those living in open sinfulness and flagrant immorality, then it is small wonder that all of the church of Jesus Christ is robbed of its power
 - h. these things should concern all of us, because the NT's analogy of the church is that of a body: and when one part suffers, then all suffer – the apostate church, the church that has fallen away from God and from the truth of His word affects us all and is a cause for deep prayer
 - i. so as we study these verses
 - (A) let us be attentive to what they have to say to us as members of the body of Jesus Christ
 - (B) asking ourselves that same question, when will we ever learn? when will we ever learn?
5. from this passage let us cover three points
- a. The Disability of God's People
 - b. The Damage to God's People
 - c. The Detection by God's People

B. The Disability of God's People

1. to whom are these verses addressed?

- a. verse 18 gives the first part of an answer: "Hear, you deaf! And look, you blind, that you may see."
- b. Isaiah has already pointed out that Israel as a nation is both deaf and blind to the truth; spiritually deaf; spiritually blind; as for example back in Isaiah 29: 10 "For the Lord has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, the seers. 11 The entire vision will be to you like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, 'Please read this,' he will say, 'I cannot, for it is sealed.' 12 Then the book will be given to the one who is illiterate, saying, 'Please read this.' And he will say, 'I cannot read.' ... (then comes a word of hope) ... 18 On that day the deaf will hear words of a book, And out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see."
- c. so, the words are to God's people; not to pagans
- d. but since in the previous verses Isaiah has been speaking about the ideal Servant of God, the Messiah, a person could be confused by the next verse, 19 "Who is blind but My servant, Or so deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is so blind as he that is at peace with Me, Or so blind as the servant of the Lord?"

2. the subject turns from the Servant, with a capital 'S' to the servant of Yahweh, with a small 's'.

- a. in my previous messages, I have tried to distinguish and to clarify to you the distinction between the various uses of the words 'my servant' in these chapters in Isaiah.
- b. giving to you the gist of what Franz Delitzsch^{3} has to say on this may be helpful. The servant of Jehovah is always Israel. But the term Israel may be applied variously
 - (A) to the overwhelming majority of its members who had forgotten their calling as God's treasured people, to whom Isaiah's message was one of judgement
 - (B) the living members who in faithfulness constituted the true kernel of the nation, to whom Isaiah's message was one of comfort
 - (C) and the ideal servant, the Messiah, the Centre of that inner circle or kernel of the nation
- c. at this point in chapter 42, the subject comes back from its highest point in Christ, to its lowest basis, the mass of the people, who lived in stark contrast to the ideal – from the perfect Head of the church

to the imperfect constituents

3. this is the disabled people being addressed in these verses
 - a. they were deaf; they were blind
 - b. these are disabilities that would impair the ability of any person to take the role of a servant: but these were not such physical disabilities as much as spiritual
 - c. verse 20 continues, "You have seen many things, but you do not observe them; Your ears are open, but none hears."
 - d. in both the books of Deuteronomy and in the Psalms there are a number of instances of a rehearsal of all the God had done for Israel; all the manifestations that they had seen of His power and of His goodness
 - e. then will come the message, as in Psalm 106:21, "They forgot God their Saviour, Who had done great things in Egypt"
 - f. and if we drop down to the last part of verse 24 in this chapter, we find the cause of their disability: "... the Lord, against whom we have sinned, And in whose ways they were not willing to walk, And whose law they did not obey?"
 - g. unconfessed and unrepented sin disables Christ's church
 - h. an unwillingness to abide by and shape one's life by the truth of God's word, disables the church of Jesus Christ
 - i. because of this, these verses have harsh things to say about

C. The Damage to God's People

1. this then is a people who knew the truth
 - a. who had been given evidence upon evident of the holiness and righteousness of God and refused to listen
 - b. so God dealt with them to bring them back to Himself
 - c. remember, Isaiah's words are directed to the Israel which will be in exile in Babylon in the future
 - d. verse 22: "But this is a people plundered and despoiled; All of them are trapped in caves, Or are hidden away in prisons; They have become a prey with none to deliver them, And a spoil, with none to say, 'Give them back!'"

e. verse 25: "So He poured out on him the heat of His anger And the fierceness of battle; And it set him aflame all around, Yet he did not recognize it; And it burned him, but he paid no attention." (Isaiah 42: 25)

f. this is what happened to Israel when they ignored God

2. the Bible has severe warnings for those who know the truth and do not abide in it, as in 1 Peter "4: 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 and if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?"

a. these things are written for us to learn

b. what God has done in His chastisement is there for ...

D. The Detection by God's People

1. Isaiah makes this plea of the people of Israel, asking in

a. verse "23 Who among you will give ear to this? Who will give heed and listen hereafter? 24 Who gave Jacob up for spoil, and Israel to plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, And in whose ways they were not willing to walk, And whose law they did not obey?"

b. look around you at the state of the Israel, says Isaiah, and enquire how and why this came into being.

c. who has truly an open heart and mind will see that the exile is not because of Babylon's superior numbers or armies – God had dealt with superior numbers and armies before; with Egypt, with Canaan, with Assyria – no, this exile was self-imposed by a people who ignored God

d. God asks his people, that those who are spiritually sensitive among them would seek to detect why things were the way they were, to look and to learn the lessons God had for them.

2. you who are the people of God today

a. you are asked to be detectives of God's hand and to look around you for the signs of the times

b. Paul lists some of these in 2 Timothy 3:1 "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to a

form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these."

- c. the anti-God bias of our educational system, the media, the judiciary, the government
- d. courts taking away the right of acting according to conscience of Saskatchewan marriage commissioners
- e. laws legalizing the immoral and the harmful, but curtailing the expression of truth of the word of God
- f. is this not the state of our land today?
- g. is this not evidence that the church is lacking in power, the power that in its first years turned the world upside-down, that in past centuries has transformed society?
- h. verse 23: "Who among you will give ear to this? Who will give heed and listen hereafter?"
- i. the state of the body claiming to be the church of Jesus Christ should wake us up to God's message to us today; that we should be spiritually sensitive to what is happening in our world and learn the lessons God has for us

E. Conclusion

1. I would like our messages always to be sunny and pleasant and encouraging, but here are some unpleasant, but needed, truths
 - a. to the church of Laodicea, we read in Revelation "3: 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth."
 - b. where have all the churches gone, long time passing?
 - c. where have all the churches gone, long time ago?
 - d. gone to lukewarmness, every one
 - e. when will we ever learn? when will we ever learn?
2. the church of Jesus Christ in this land is in need of revival
 - a. we can see with distress the state of the church in our land
 - b. there is no way to orchestrate a revival
 - c. it is the work of the Holy Spirit of God
 - d. yet in the OT God had this to say to the nation as a whole: 13 "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from

their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

(2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

- e. let us cleanse ourselves before God
- f. encourage one another in these matters
- g. and seek the face of God in prayer
- h. that by His grace we may see Him work mightily in us

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2. *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*, by Pete Seeger, 1955
3. K&D, *op cit in loc*, Isaiah 42:19