

Sermon Notes & References

Righteousness for Israel

Isaiah 45:8-17

April 10, 2011

A. Introduction

1. What is God like?

2. Isaiah's exclamation, Isaiah 45:15

3. Outline of Epistle to the Romans

- a. 1:1-17 Introduction
- b. 1:18-3:20 Righteousness Needed
- c. 3:21-5:21 Righteousness Provided
- d. chs 6-8 Righteousness Applied
- e. chs 9-11 Righteousness Refused
- f. 12:1-15:13 Righteousness Realized
- g. 15:14-16:27 Conclusion

4. Paul's exclamation, Romans 11:33

B. The Promise of Righteousness 45:8

1. the picture drawn

2. the purpose stated

C. How God Will Bring Righteousness for Israel 45:9-13

1. They question what God is doing (vv 9-10)

2. Does God know what He is doing (vv 11-12)?

3. What is God doing (v 13)?

D. The Effect of God's Righteousness for Israel 45:14-17

1. Bringing a blessing to the nations (v 14)

2. Isaiah's exclamation (v 15)

3. God's righteousness upheld (v 16)

4. Of eternal duration (v 17)

E. Conclusion

1. What is God like?

2. For Your righteousness, O God, *reaches* to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? (Psalm 71:19)

3. the story of God's righteousness

—{1}. **Isaiah 45:8-17** **Righteousness for Israel**

A. Introduction

1. What is God Like?

- a. Paula Rinehart tells of a seminary professor who 'used to begin his fall semester freshman class with this question: "Students, I have one question for you. What is God like?" His students would get out their pencils, hem and haw, and wait for the professor to dispense the prescribed answer. But he outwaited them. In desperation, one student after another would attempt to fill the awkward pause. "God is love, God is just, God is like this, God is like that." The professor would just sit there, unimpressed.—{2}.
- b. think how you would answer that question
- c. its not easy, is it?

2. in the middle of our text is this verse, Isaiah 45: 15,

- a. as Isaiah, under prophetic inspiration, writes by God's revelation of the righteousness that God is going to bring to His people, Israel, he is awestruck, realizing how feebly he grasps the purposes of the great God he serves
- b. in the AV: "Verily thou *art* a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."
- c. in the NAS: "Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Saviour!"
- d. and Franz Delitzsch's translation as rendered into English: "Verily Thou art a mysterious God, Thou God of Israel, Thou Saviour."
- e. Paul had the same problem as Isaiah as he wrote about God's righteousness in his letter to the church at Rome – the heart of that book between its introduction and its conclusion has this very simple outline, —{3}.

(A) 1:18-3:20 Righteousness Needed

(1) the story of sin

(B) 3:21-5:21 Righteousness Provided

(1) the story of the cross

(C) chs 6-8 Righteousness Applied

(1) the story of salvation by grace through faith

(D) chs 9-11 Righteousness Refused

(1) the story of the Jews rejection of the gospel

(E) 12: 1-15 Righteousness Realized

(1) the story of the new life of a saved believer

- f. when Paul comes to the end of the section on how the Jews as a nation had rejected God's righteousness in Christ, his exclamation is much like Isaiah's
- g. Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

3. and this may well be our exclamation as examine

- a. The Promise of Righteousness, v 8
- b. How God Will Bring Righteousness for Israel, vv 9-13
- c. The Effect of God's Righteousness for Israel, vv 14-17

B. The Promise of Righteousness

45:8

- 1. verse 8: "Drip down, O heavens, from above, And let the clouds pour down righteousness; Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit, And righteousness spring up with it. I, the LORD, have created it."
 - a. note the lack of geographical limitation in the natural act of God's providing rain to the earth
 - b. in like manner there is no stated limitation to His pouring down His righteousness upon mankind
- 2. These are the LORD'S words,
 - a. and He uses the picture of nature
 - b. the description of how His creation works
 - c. to illustrate how His righteousness will come, what it is like
 - d. we like to have a beautiful, sunny day like the one we enjoyed yesterday; to get out of the house and enjoy it
 - e. but if we were not to receive the God-given rain – and especially if we were living in the land of Judah – we very soon would be pleading for rain, as we and all the plant life were burned up by heat and drought
 - f. the rain falling, and the earth receiving it and providing it to the roots of the plants is a blessing providing the means of physical life

3. In similar fashion, God promises in these words to pour out the blessing of righteousness
 - a. the word righteousness in this verse is used in both its masculine and feminine form – *tsedeq* and *tsedeqah*
 - b. that is often a Hebrew way of indicating completeness – righteousness is going to come in a fully complete form
 - c. that completeness is shown by the results
 - (A) closely coupled with this righteousness is salvation
 - (B) a salvation that will bear fruit, beautiful results
 - d. this is so because it is a work of God, He created it
 - e. but there seem to have been some doubters listening to what God had to say, for he continues to tell

C. How God Will Bring Righteousness for Israel

45:9-13

1. They question what God is doing
 - a. but they should not be questioning God's means & methods
 - b. to do so is utterly absurd as we read in verses 9 *“Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker — An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’”*
 - c. to quarrel with the way God is working is unreasonable
 - d. He is the Maker of Israel as well as the Maker of mankind
 - e. in this verse, the word ‘Maker’ and the word ‘potter’ are the same word in Hebrew
 - f. to question God's *modus operandi*, his way of working,
 - (A) is as absurd as a lump of clay that is being worked by the potter's hands on the wheel, questioning the potter
 - (B) like something which is being made saying about the one making it, he has no hands, that is, he cannot make anything – obviously absurd
 - g. verse 10 gives another example: *“Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ Or to a woman, ‘To what are you giving birth?’”*
 - h. here a child, and the implication is an unborn child, is questioning his parents' right to bring him into the world

- i. and does so in a most disrespectful way, considering them as 'a father, a woman' rather than 'my father, my mother'
- j. that, too, is patently absurd and irreverent as well

2. Does God know what He is doing?

- a. verses 11 and 12 answer yes: ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons, And you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. ¹² It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands And I ordained all their host."
- b. 'Yes', says the LORD
- c. 'ask me what will happen to my sons, the work of my hands – my handiwork – Israel – the people that I have been forming upon the potter's wheel, and I will tell you because I know what I am doing.'
- d. how can you have assurance of this?
- e. commit – ordain (they are the same word in Hebrew) – the work to me; leave it to me
- f. 'to show you that I am competent,' says God, 'consider what those hands of mine have done – take a look around you: at the earth; at the men with which I peopled it; at the heavens surrounding it; at the starry host in the heavens.'
- g. that shows God knows what He is doing

3. What is God doing?

- a. verse 13: "I have aroused him in righteousness And I will make all his ways smooth; He will build My city and will let My exiles go free, Without any payment or reward," says the LORD of hosts.
- b. 'I have aroused him' – who is the 'him'? this is given by the context: it is talking about Cyrus. Throughout these chapters 44 to 48 of Isaiah, the work of Cyrus as God's messiah servant to deliver Israel out of Babylon's bondage is never far from the surface – as God's agent Cyrus is acting in order to bring salvation to the people of God
- c. but, we should hasten to add, that just a shade further behind Cyrus, is the message of the Messiah Servant, Jesus Christ, bringing salvation to the world, as we shall see more particularly in a moment
- d. so Cyrus is the instrument in God's hands
 - (A) and this pagan ruler is nevertheless raised up 'in righteousness' – what He is bringing to Israel is

in accord with God's righteous nature

- (B) he will send the Jewish exiles back to the land which is rightfully theirs; bring them justice
 - (C) he will take them out of bondage to be free
 - (D) he will see that their city is rebuilt; in fact, will see that the rebuilding is funded
 - (E) and he will do this as would a righteous judge, without the thought of any bribe or reward
- e. for this reason – that Cyrus will execute righteousness on God's behalf – God will make His way straight or smooth
- f. God does know what He is doing! What will result?

D. The Effect of God's Righteousness for Israel

45:14-17

1. It will bring a blessing to the nations

- a. verse 14: *Thus says the LORD, "The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush And the Sabeans, men of stature, Will come over to you and will be yours; They will walk behind you, they will come over in chains And will bow down to you; They will make supplication to you: 'Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, No other God.'"*
- b. there is a historical sense in which this was true, that as the nations heard Cyrus command
 - (A) they, too, were freed from a measure of bondage
 - (B) and they recognized, even as it was stated in Cyrus' decree, that the God of Israel was the true God
 - (C) these people would come over to Israel, and like the eunuch of the court of Candace of Ethiopia, make their way to Jerusalem to worship the true God
 - (D) the fetters or chains they wear are not those of being subjugated by Israel, but of willing submission
 - (E) for, through Israel, they recognize the true God
- c. but there is also a spiritual fulfilment to be found in Christ
 - (A) of the Gospel being proclaimed into all the world
 - (B) of countless men, women, and children
 - (C) seeing that God indwells the Christian
 - (D) asking for their prayers

2. Therefore Isaiah exclaims in verse 15
 - a. "Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Saviour!"
 - b. which we have already discussed
 - c. but to which we will but add the comment of a hymn-writer which begins the first verse with
Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
 - d. and then concludes the final stanza with
All praise we would render — O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee!^{—{4}}.

3. By this God's righteousness will be upheld
 - a. verse 16: "They will be put to shame and even humiliated, all of them; The manufacturers of idols will go away together in humiliation."
 - b. the delivery of Israel from out of Babylon
 - (A) similarly to the delivery of Israel from out of Egypt
 - (B) will bear a tremendous testimony
 - (C) that He alone is God and there is no other
 - c. an evidence of God's righteousness
 - (A) that He will effect justice on behalf of His people
 - (B) and He will also effect justice against that which is evil – idols, their makers and their followers

4. Its effect will last for eternity
 - a. verse 17: 'Israel has been saved by the LORD With an everlasting salvation; You will not be put to shame or humiliated To all eternity.'
 - b. the phrase 'by the LORD' does not do this verse full justice. The Lord is more than the agent through whom salvation is obtained: He is Himself that salvation and in Him Israel finds deliverances.^{—{5}}.
 - c. the salvation that is coming to Israel will be constant and continuous
 - d. in the AV, 'world without end'
 - e. words that take these promises beyond the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of a mere earthly conquerors

- f. to a deliverance from the far greater bondage from sin through the work of Jesus God, the Chosen One, the true Israel of God; even as Jesus said, 'salvation is of the Jews'
- g. to the eternal salvation of all those who are in Christ
- h. and it is on this theme that, Lord willing, we shall continue next week as we look at the following verses under the title, 'Righteousness for the World'.

E. Conclusion

1. back to that seminary professor's class

a. 'Finally, after they had exhausted everything they knew or had ever heard about what God was like, the professor would lean over and say, "Men and women, let me tell you something. God is not like anything. He is His own standard. And the tragedy is that you are going to build your little theological boxes around what you think God is like."⁽²⁾'

b. God's righteousness

(A) is not a concept we store in a little corner of our mind

(B) something we polish off and trot out on Sundays

(C) in some pious words or some good deeds

(D) Psalm 71:19 says, "For Your righteousness, O God, *reaches* to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?"

2. the story of God's righteousness

a. in practical terms that we can take for ourselves

b. is found in our closing hymn, "Revive Us Again"

c. the righteousness that is found in Jesus Christ

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. *Passages of Faith*, by Paula Rinehart, Discipleship Journal #75, May 1993 – Kerux illustrations #3311
3. *Thinking Through the Bible*, by Dr John McNicol, Principle Emeritus of Toronto Bible College, The Upper Canada Tract and Book Society, Toronto, 1944
4. Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)
5. *The Book of Isaiah*, by Edward J. Young, *in loc*