

Isaiah 9-12: God's Salvation

Today we wrap up our seven week series on Isaiah. I get the unenviable job of preaching on four chapters of Isaiah - 9, 10, 11 and 12 - to bring us to a close of the first section of this large and important Old Testament book. These first 12 chapters of Isaiah focus on the sins of God's people, at that time being Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, and the punishment they are facing for turning their backs on God as his people. The northern kingdom, called Israel, has already been swept away by the armies of Assyria in God's judgment for their rebellion against God. Judah, the southern kingdom, think they will be safe, because they have treaties with Assyria. Plus, they are Jerusalem, the city of God, which contains the temple of God, and God wouldn't let a foreign army take his own city. Isaiah's message is that they are wrong. They don't need protection from Assyria or Samaria or Damascus. What they need is protection from God's judgment on their sin. That is their impending doom. Their enemy is their own wickedness, their own rebellion against God!

Salvation has always been

God's plan for his people is not just to save them from the expansive armies of foreign empires. His plan has always been bigger than that - he is going to save his people from all injustice, oppression, evil, war, wickedness, foolishness, and destruction. And that, honestly, is why we still care about what Isaiah has to say. He's talking about God as a saving God, saving his people from all bad things, and giving them all good things. God doesn't just say to his people, "I'll save you from the your enemies and their armies if you turn back to me from your sinful, idolatrous ways." Instead, he reminds them, "I will save you from all your real enemies – injustice, foolishness and wickedness – even your own!" That's been God's promise all along. Isaiah is just one scene in the long story of God's promise. It's not a new story for us, it wasn't a new story back then, even when Isaiah gave it the first time. God saved his people from slavery in Egypt 800 years before. He would send his perfect saviour, Jesus, 700 years later. It's one big story that stretches back to the beginning of time, and will stretch forward, through today, into eternity. We are part of this story. This is important to us.

What will this grand salvation plan of God be like? Look at the way Isaiah paints his picture of God's salvation for his readers and listeners. Just from the readings we had today, we can see a few things to look out for. There will be joy. There will be freedom from oppression. There will be peace, no need to fight any more. Linked to peace is that lovely passage in chapter 11 describing wolves and lambs lying together, calves and lions and cows and bears and snakes and children all living together in harmony – there will be no death, or even danger.

In amongst all this, there is a person who will take charge of the world. This powerful figure is called God, and has the Spirit of God, the wisdom of God, the power of God, and his reign lasts forever. And this powerful figure brings judgment.

Importantly for us, this salvation comes not only to Judah and the Jews, but it comes to all nations – it is a worldwide thing.

So these are the things that make up salvation – salvation is a worldwide event where the people of God find joy, peace, freedom from oppression, freedom from their enemies, freedom from all death and danger. A powerful, righteous figure from God, who is God, is in charge, and brings justice for the poor, and judges and slays the wicked. And it lasts forever. That's salvation. Doesn't it sound wonderful? Don't you want that?

And if you weren't wondering where it is before, surely you are now! You might think, "Okay, that's great, but it sounds like this salvation isn't coming till the very end of time." Or perhaps

you're sitting here saying, "I'm a Christian, Jesus died for my sins, so I am saved. Hasn't salvation already come?" If God was talking about saving Israel back when they were slaves in Egypt, if he's talking about saving his people here in Isaiah hundreds of years after that, if Jesus comes and is still talking about salvation hundreds of years after that, and we're here still talking about salvation thousands of years after all that... well, the question is, when does God's salvation kick in? How long do we have to wait? Is it already here?

Salvation is coming

For anyone who lives in the world, though perhaps some more than others, it is clear that it hasn't come yet. There are still wars – Wikipedia says fighting continues in Syria, in Afghanistan, in Burma, Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, India, Mexico, Sudan, Iraq and Mali – and that is only a list of conflicts where 1,000 or more people are dying every year. It doesn't even include attacks like the Boston marathon bombing. God's people still have enemies too: churches are still getting bombed, pastoral workers are being beaten, arrested, and buried alive, believers being persecuted, discriminated against, harassed, attacked. The enemies of God have not been judged. The wicked can still oppress the poor. People still die. There are still dangers. Go and stick your finger in a funnel-web spider's hole, and it might bite you, and you might die. Finally, we can still sin, and be wicked and foolish, and rebel against God, and so attract his punishment.

Salvation is obviously still coming. Things are not much different today as they were in Isaiah's time, in that respect. They looked forward to salvation, and so do we.

Salvation has come

But there is a difference. As Christians, we read these chapters and we can point to a few key verses and say, "Look, that's Jesus in those verses. So salvation has already come!" After all, the people in darkness have seen a great light – Jesus is the light of the world. A child is born, a son is given, he is called Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Jesus was born as a human child into the world, we know him to be God incarnate. We understand him to be born in the line of David, a branch from the root of Jesse (King David's father). The Spirit of God was certainly upon him, in wisdom and understanding and counsel and might and knowledge and fear of God – all this we can see reflected in Jesus when we read about him in the gospels.

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the promised one of God, who has been talked about ever since Genesis, when the descendant of Adam would strike down the serpent; ever since Moses and Egypt, when he spoke of a leader even greater than Moses; ever since King David, when he was told that one of his descendants would sit upon the throne forever. Ever since Isaiah spoke these words promising a saviour whom we could call God With Us. When Jesus was born 2000 years ago, he changed the way the clock runs on salvation. Salvation begins with Jesus. Jesus is that promised one. Jesus is our salvation, and so our salvation has come.

Salvation is here

But here's the thing. Back in Isaiah's time, God is calling on his people to respond to this news of salvation straightaway. He doesn't say, "Wait for Jesus to be born, then you can spring into action." He wants action from his people because it's going to happen. Because when God makes a promise, it's as good as true. It's like when you take a cheque from the Reserve Bank to a normal bank, they don't have a waiting period, they just cash it, because it's guaranteed the Reserve Bank will have the money. God's promises are guaranteed to come true because it's God who makes the promise. God's people didn't need to wait for Jesus, they could act on God's salvation right then. We have Jesus, but we don't have the final promises of salvation – those come at the end. But God has

promised them, so we can be sure they will come, which means we can act on them now.

Salvation is right now when you are with God. Look with me here at chapter 12. Chapter 12 is two songs that God's people should sing to God because of his salvation. The first one is a song of praise, starting at vs 1, *"In that day you will say: 'I will praise you, Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. 2 Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.'"* And then it says in verse 3 *"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."*

We are saved by God from his own wrath, his punishment on us for our sin – and in that we can find comfort, right now. We might not have global peace, we might not have freedom from all oppression. Those are coming. But right now we can find a personal peace, we can be free from the fear of death, of the unknown future and what it might hold. We drink from the water of salvation with joy, a joy that can't be taken away from us by what happens in the world, because God's salvation is guaranteed. No wonder these words are in a song of praise – those truths are phenomenal. That's what salvation looks like right now.

The second song goes like this, starting at vs 4, *"In that day you will say: 'Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. 5 Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.'"*

Whereas the first song we sing to God, thanking him for his salvation promise, this second song we sing to each other. We are saying to each other, "God is so great, you should go and tell everyone about him!" This song obviously needs to be sung before salvation is finished, because it is about proclaiming God's glory to the nations, all the great things he has done.

Often we focus on what we are doing to bring that message about God's glory to people. But in the light of the salvation God has promised us, and the joy we can find in its certainty now, think for a moment about what we do in life to encourage each other to glorify God and proclaim his name. Maybe we support people financially to go and proclaim God's greatness, like missionaries. Maybe we equip people with the training they need to share their testimony. Maybe we share with others stories of our own experiences in the faith, and what God has done in other people's lives through us. Maybe we organise a situation that allows others to meet with people who need to hear, befriend them and be a part of their lives. Maybe we see someone doing one of these things, and we offer to help, or even just take an interest, ask them how it's going, and pray for them.

There are lots of things we can do, but the foundation of them all will be the same: we expect salvation, both now and in the future, because it's guaranteed by God; we value salvation, because really, what is more valuable than an enduring peace and joy, an eternity without war, death and danger, and freedom from oppression; and because we let it seep into our lives now – we let it bring us comfort, let it bring us joy, let it bring us peace, let it free us from fear right now. Salvation isn't just something that happened back when Jesus died on a cross. Salvation isn't just something to look forward to at the end of time, whenever that will be. Salvation is here right now, it pays dividends in your life right now, the joy, the freedom from fear, and the peace and comfort of God. You should drink from God's salvation with joy; you should not be afraid of anything, because you trust God; you should treat God's future promises as guaranteed. If you expect it, and you value it, then you'll live it and proclaim it, and encourage others to do the same.