

Choosing the Lord's Way

Isaiah 55

I. As the book of Deuteronomy comes to a close, we see Moses passing on solemn words from Jehovah to prepare Israel to go into the land: **Deut. 30:15-20**

A. God was setting before His people the promise of life: And in the midst of the contrast of the potential rewards or consequences of their choice is this one simple summary statement: *walk in His ways*

B. The Old Testament is one long narrative of God constantly calling His people to do this: to walk in His ways-- to be holy as HE is holy-- But that was something that Israel refused to do more often than not:

C. Following their own way would be the defining character trait of the Israelites right up to the point of their captivity: By the time of Isaiah, God's chosen people are described as having committed themselves mind, body, and spirit to the practice of wickedness:

1. **Isa. 1:21-23**: they are further described in chapter 6:9-10 as a people who refused to listen to God's call to come back:

D. Eventually their wickedness would demand God's punishment and judgment: But as is often the case, especially in the prophets, there will be promises of hope in the midst of judgment: like the sun shining through the clouds:

1. Isaiah 55 is one of those occasions: It is a passage that promises hope to those who would grow tired of their rebellion against the Lord, and would see an end to their suffering: **55:7**

2. The passage makes it clear that in order to find hope, and see an end to the suffering brought about by our previous choices, we cannot keep doing that same old thing: It requires something different: It requires what Moses spoke to Israel so many years before: choosing to *walk in His ways*

i. God's Way Offers Something Better (1-5)

a. For all of their time and effort, Israel never achieved different results with their methods: The numbers of tries, variations, and years passed made no difference: In every instance it only brought suffering:

i. Their ways never achieved satisfaction: They were always left wanting and empty: God describes this cycle as a people who are dying of hunger and thirst, and yet they choose to spend their money on things that cannot possibly satisfy them
(*Cotton Candy and pop*)

b. **Why did their** ways never end well? Why were they too blind to choose a better way?

The answer is the same to both questions: **Proverbs 19:3**

i. Man's way is foolish: Man's way can be described as any choice or decision made that wholly excludes the council of God: And unfortunately that is exactly the sort of thinking that prevails in much of the world today, and is what keeps people from turning from those ways:

ii. **Often times** it requires a "shock to the system" to bring people to their senses and realize this: They must be shaken up in order to see that man's way is foolish:

1. For the Israelites, it would be the destruction of their homeland, and being carried away to a foreign land, held captive for 70 long years:

2. Jesus would use the death of some Galileans in Luke 13 as a shocking occasion to call people to repent; in His parable of the prodigal son, it is not until the son sees how far his fortunes have fallen that he wakes up: (Luke 15:15-16)

a. As one author as put it: "*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*"

b. In other words: when we are living lives of fulfillment that comes from choosing His way, God is a pleasant voice; But when we forsake His will, the pain that follows is the shout of God urging us to return

c. God was offering to give Israel would could truly bring them out of despair, that could fill their hunger and thirst: And He offered it to them at no cost!

i. It is the same promise that Jesus would make when He called Israel to come back once again: **John 6:48-51, 7:37-38**

d. He offered to make them part of His everlasting covenant: (Isa. 55:3)

i. This is not a reference to the Old Law, but to the Covenant God made with His servant David: When God promised to him in Psalm 89:28-29 *My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever; And My covenant shall be confirmed to him. "So I will establish his descendants forever And his throne as the days of heaven.*

ii. It is a promise to be a part of what Isaiah foretold of earlier in the book in **Isa. 9:6-7**

1. **God was promising** His people the salvation of the Messiah:
2. God's way offers something better

2. Seeking Him Requires Forsaking Our Own Way (vs. 6-7)

a. **It would be** an empty promise if Israel was commanded to seek something that could not be found: That is never the case with God!

i. A recurring theme in the book of Luke is that those who seek will always find: Coins, sheep, or the Kingdom of God:-- *The beauty of the message is that God always allows Himself to be found by those who seek Him:* He is eager to forgive those who stop following their own ways: **Ezekiel 18:23**

b. **God is offering** them spiritual bread and water without payment: but there is still in a sense, a cost that must be met: It costs us forsaking our own way:

i. It doesn't matter how "good" or "evil" your way might be considered: (*what we've said in our studies on Discipleship*) The point is not to see if our way just needs some improvements, but must be given up completely: abandoned

ii. If a man abandon's his ways for God's, he will find compassion and forgiveness:

c. **There is** a vital point that we can't overlook in these verses: There will come a time when it is too late: The urge to seek God while He can be found implies that there will be a time that He cannot be found:

i. If that time comes for us, it will not be because God didn't give the opportunity or make Himself available: It will meant that we stubbornly chose to follow our own path:

3. Seeking Him Means Following His Ways: (v: 8-13)

a. Even though He isn't required to, God gives us a reason as to why we should seek His ways: *Because they are higher than ours:*

- i. This is not a passage that says that we just can't possibly understand God: It isn't the catch all passage for difficult to understand decisions that God makes (well, I don't understand why God chose to do that, but after all: *His thoughts are higher than mine*)
- ii. That is not the context of these verses at all: Isaiah is urging the Israelites to trade their path for God's: their ways for His: their thoughts for His thoughts:
 1. Trade in your thoughts which are foolish and lead to hunger, for the thoughts of God which are perfect and lead to everlasting life:
 2. As Jeremiah would say in 10:23 *I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.*
 3. We must follow the urgings of the Proverb writer: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. - Proverbs 3:5-6*

b. Isaiah further describes God's ways as those that always produce:

- i. God's word is compared to the rain: The difference between life and death: Rain at the right time meant crops for food, and seed for the next year: A lack of rain or at the wrong time meant no food and no seed, famine would come:
- ii. God's Word is the rain at the right time, the fruit that it bears is salvation:
 1. While they may have been oppressed, those who would turn to God's way would have triumph:

Conclusion:

- We are prone to seek our own way despite our intimate knowledge of the failures that it brings:
- God encourages us to set our ways aside and choose His: A better way with great reward: A way that we can trust:
- It was described as being given without cost, but that is only because someone else paid that price for us: **Isa. 53:6**
- Will you respond to that great sacrifice made for us? Will you obey the words of that Lamb who asks that we repent of our ways, confess His great name, and be baptized to wash away our sins?