

June 9th 2013: "Hope For Those Who Listen": Isaiah 30:15-26

As a person who has studied the Bible for many years I admit to growing up with this rather idealistic view of the people of Israel as they are presented to us in the Old Testament. I always knew about their failings as a Nation and the many times they chose to worship idols instead of the living God. Yet despite that I pictured them as a Nation in which the majority were totally committed to following God and serving Him, with only a minority taking the whole nation down the wrong path.

Yet this week as I have turned to a study of Isaiah 30 I was reminded again that in fact, from the time the children of Israel escaped from Egypt right through to the end of the Old Testament record, it was only ever a small minority that truly obeyed and followed God and were committed to serving Him because they loved Him. The majority were happy to tag along when it suited them to do so, and God always owned them as His children, but they were ready to grumble, to rebel, to follow other idols at the drop of a hat.

This is obviously the case in Isaiah chapter 30 which begins with these words in v1.

***"Woe to the obstinate children,"
declares the LORD,
"to those who carry out plans that are not mine,
forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit,
heaping sin upon sin;***

The time is about 705 BC and the Northern Kingdom of Israel has been destroyed by the mighty Assyrian Empire. The Nation of Judah remains but the threat of Assyria is ever present threat. So what the people of Judah decide to do is to go and seek help from the Nation of Egypt rather than turn back to God and depend upon Him.

So God calls them his obstinate children who belong to Him by name but not by nature. In fact we read this in verses 9-11

***For these are rebellious people, deceitful children,
children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction.
¹⁰ They say to the seers,
"See no more visions!"
and to the prophets,***

**"Give us no more visions of what is right!
Tell us pleasant things,
prophecy illusions.
¹¹ Leave this way,
get off this path,
and stop confronting us
with the Holy One of Israel!"**

They may be the children of God in name but they are far from Him in their behavior, commitment, trust or life style.

In a sense Judah then was just a little like Australia today. For most Australians still like to think that they have some connection with God, but if you dare to challenge them with God's programme for their personal salvation, they mainly react in a similar way to what we see here. Look at the CEV paraphrase:-

***Don't tell us what God has shown you and don't preach the truth.
Just say what we want to hear, even if it's false. ¹¹ Stop telling us
what God has said! We don't want to hear any more about the holy
God of Israel.***

Now God's response to such, whether they be the Old Testament Jewish rebel or the modern day non-church going Australian, is still the same, and is nicely summed up in v15

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:

***"In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it.***

In other words there is a way for even the most rebellious and obstinate sinner to be gathered into the safety of God's arms, and since Christ we now know how God has made it possible. But the majority then would have none of it and sadly, the same still holds today.

But despite this majority who didn't want to be bothered too much with God, there was in Isaiah's time and still exists today a minority who are tender hearted toward God because they see in Him their only hope of Salvation. Those who weep, not just because of the hopelessness of their situation but because they have become aware of their wrongdoing against God and how badly they have behaved towards Him.

In this chapter and in verse 19 they are called 'The people of Zion who will weep no more'. In this age of Grace God calls them His church. The bride of Christ. The redeemed. The chosen ones who through their faith and God's amazing grace are recipients of a love that is beyond description. And that group includes us gathered here in this place today.

And we see in this passage that God has a special word for them and for us. A word that begins in v19 :

People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. ²⁰ Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them.

That group of people who God calls the people of Zion, or the people of God's city, were those who knew how much they and their nation needed God. People who recognized the sinfulness in themselves and in Judah and were crying out to God for forgiveness and renewal. They were the people who were making a commitment to follow after God's way and yet were still suffering as much as the majority who disregarded God and looked to a land of idols for help.

Yet God's special word for them was that He hears and answers their cries, and although they would suffer the same afflictions that the disbelieving Jews would suffer, God would not hide from them those who as teachers of His words would give them comfort and encouragement and support through their trials.

Now our situation as believers in Christ Jesus living in this land of Australia is very different to theirs but has its similarities. We are aware that the majority of Australians may profess a belief in God but they happily disregard Him and His ways. And because of that we are seeing a deterioration in those values and morals that are God given.

But surely what is affecting us most is the impact of sin and evil in our world and the temptations and testing that such evil brings upon us and those close to us.

Look back upon this last week and think of the times you have cried out to God for His help or intervention simply because of the fact that we live in an imperfect world. There has been sickness, there has been relationship problems, there has been evil and injustice and it affects us all

And there may well have been times when God's response has been the same for you as it was for those people of Zion. Despite the fact that you are His child, He has left you with the bread of adversity and the water of affliction for a time. But He has given you something to sustain you. That's the Good news of this Scripture. He gives His voice.

He gives Hope For Those Who Listen. Look at v21

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Now originally I had intended at this stage to talk about God as the perfect GPS and refer to this navigation instrument that Tom leant to us for our trip.

But instead of doing that let me instead share with you the Biblical picture that this verse would have generated for its readers in Isaiah's times.

For the image is of a beast connected to a plough with the Master directing traffic from the rear. As the Oxen pulls the load so the voice of the Master constantly directs and encourages.

That's God's promise to us. Not only will He direct us but He will always be with us. He wants us to make a difference for Him in this world but He never leaves us to do so alone.

His voice is more than words in our ears.

It is the sense of His presence when we are at our lowest.

It's the sudden urge to be there for someone--→ to speak or to act because we know such is what God wants.

It's the word that leaps out at us from the Bible or motivates us through a sermon or study.

His voice comes in so many ways and at times we refuse to listen to it or to follow its leading. But God patiently gives us another chance to hear and to act because he loves us so much.

And there are times when His voice calls us to get rid of the idols in our lives and promises us the joy of His special blessings when we do so.

I wonder what God has been saying to you later, and whether you have been listening to Him. Because He speaks to all His children constantly and

in so many ways. He knows your name and He expects a response from you in an act of obedience, an act of service, an act of worship, an act of love.

What response are you giving Him?

But surely the greatest reason God has for being that Voice in your heart is that you will constantly be reminded of His love for you. That in the darkest places and the brightest places He is with you to keep you and to love you.

Back in the early 1900's there was a country evangelist called Charles Weigle who for a time battled to hear God's voice of love. You see he was a preacher who went from town to town sharing the Gospel and one day when he returned home after some time away he found his house empty and his wife gone. She left him a note saying that he could be a fool for God if he wanted but she was not prepared to be a fool for anyone.

Weigle became so despondent during the next several years that there even were times when he contemplated suicide. There was the terrible despair that no one really cared for him anymore. He didn't hear God's voice because He didn't really want to at that point of time. But one day the voice of God broke into the prison of his heart and he knew that God had never left him. Never stopped speaking to him. Never stopped loving him.

After that Charles felt compelled to write a song, the words of which go like this:

I would love to tell you what I think of Jesus, Since I found in Him a friend so strong and true; I would tell you how He changed my life completely, He did some-thing that no other friend could do.

No one ever cared for me like Jesus, There's no other friend so kind as He; No one else could take the sin and darkness from me, O how much He cared for me!

Is this the voice of God you need to hear today. Perhaps for the first time. Perhaps to hear it anew. The voice that says I love you.

And the response God wants back from you? To simply say, Lord I truly love you with all my heart, and my soul, and my strength.

