

# The Vision of Isaiah

Dr. John Kleinig, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 5/6/22

1. There are none so blind as those who do not want to see.
2. The Book of Isaiah challenges us to see with our ears by looking at what God is showing us in his word.
  - Its vivid imagery appeals to our spiritual imagination.
  - By its inspired poetic imagery the Holy Spirit wants to enlighten our hearts and minds to see the glory of God that is hidden for us in plain sight.
3. Isaiah is a visionary prophet who sees what God says and does.
  - Heading in 1:1: **The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz which he saw in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah concerning Judah and Jerusalem.**
    - Content of vision: God's purpose for Judah and Jerusalem with a focus on it as God's city and its King as God's deputy
    - Time: 55 years from death of Uzziah in 742 BC to death of Hezekiah in 687 BC
    - Focus on two phases in the history of Jerusalem
      - ❖ Assyrian siege in 701 BC as prelude to destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC
      - ❖ Return from exile and building of the city in 538-515 BC as a province in the Persian empire without their own king
  - Scope of Isaiah's vision
    - Space: role of Zion in God's plan for his people and the whole creation
    - Time: whole of human history from the first creation to the new creation
  - Single vision with a montage of many scenes rather than uninterrupted story
  - This vision corrects the deluded, vain-glorious vision of the people about God and their king, their city and the nations
    - God as the powerful King of Kings with the temple as his palace
    - Their enemies as God's enemies
    - Their kings as earthly emperors who would conquer the nations and rule over them together with God
    - Jerusalem as the future capital city of God's worldwide empire
  - So they say to Isaiah and his fellow prophets:  
**Do not see!**  
**Do not prophesy to us what is right;**  
**Speak to us smooth things;**  
**Prophecy illusions.**  
**Leave the way, turn aside from the path.**  
**Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel (30:10-11).**

- Because they refuse to listen to God's word they become deaf and blind
  - They keep on hearing but do not understand what God is saying; they keep on seeing but do not perceive what he is doing (6:9).
  - They become deaf to God's voice and blind to God's deeds: **they do not behold the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of his hands** (5:12).
  - They walk in darkness and remain shut in a prison that they have made for themselves, a prison that they share with all the nations that do not know God
- Through the message of Isaiah God does not just expose their spiritual blindness but also promises that he will open the eyes of people from Israel and all the nations on earth through the Messiah as Royal Servant in 42:6-7:
 

**I will give you as a covenant for the people,  
a light for the nations,  
to open the eyes of the blind,  
to bring out prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison those who sit in darkness.**
- Result for people liberated the prison of spiritual darkness
  - **In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see** (29:18).
  - **Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped; then shall the lame person leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute** (35:5)

#### 4. The book of Isaiah occupies a special place in the Hebrew Bible

- First of four scrolls which contain the words of the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets
- Key to understanding other prophets
  - Epitome of prophecy: the prophet of the prophets
  - Framework for understanding all prophecies
  - Parts of whole picture

#### 5. The call of Isaiah: 6:1-13

- Commission in a vision at the temple
- Vision of God as the most holy King with the angels as his courtiers
- Proclamation by the angels of God's holiness and his purpose to fill the whole earth with his glory
- Flipside of that: disclosure of Isaiah's impurity as a man of unclean lips like all God's people
- Cleansing from impurity with a coal from the altar for the proclamation of God's word of judgement and salvation to unclean people
- Commission as a prophet of judgment on God's people until their exile from the land

- Picture of God's people as a tall fruitless tree that would be chopped down to its stump to provide the holy shoot for a new fruit tree
- Basic message of judgment and salvation
  - God's judgement of the king, the city, and the nation by the Assyrians and Babylonians as a prelude to his judgement on all nations, the whole world and all evil powers in the whole cosmos
  - God's salvation of Jerusalem from the Assyrians and Israel from captivity in Babylon as a prelude to the salvation of his people together with people from all nations and the whole world from all evil

6. There are two sides to Isaiah's vision

- Dark vision of the present condition of God's people in first two chapters
  - He shows the pollution of the nation, its rulers and their city by their rebellion against God and desecration of his holiness by their impurity.
    - ❖ Murder and theft
    - ❖ Oppression, bribery and injustice
    - ❖ Idolatry and divination
  - Their doom from the self-inflicted spiritual, moral and mental confusion that threatens their lives:
 

**Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,  
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.**
  - Four graphic pictures for the people and their city
    - ❖ Rebellious children (1:2-3)
    - ❖ Body sick from head to foot (1:5-6)
    - ❖ City as prostitute (1:21-23) and God's enemy (1:24)
  - God's judgment on them to purge them, like a metalworker who extracts pure gold from its dross:
 

**I will thoroughly purge away your dross  
and remove your impurities (1:25)**
  - Call for repentance (1:18-200):
 

**Come let us reason together, says the Lord,  
Though your sins are like scarlet,  
They shall be as white as snow;  
Though they are red like crimson,  
They shall become like wool.  
If you are willing and obedient,  
You shall eat the good of the land,  
But if you resist and rebel,  
You shall be devoured by the sword.**
- Lovely vision of Zion's future mission in 2:2-4:
 

**It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of all mountains,  
and shall be lifted up above all hills;**

and all nations shall flow into it,  
and many peoples shall come, and say:  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may teach us his ways,  
and we may walk his paths.”  
For out of Zion shall go the law,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations  
and decide disputes for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their words into plough shares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

- Picture of God’s plan for Zion in the last days, the new age
- Mount Zion as the highest mountain
- Pilgrimage of many people from all nations to Jerusalem to meet with God in worship
- Proclamation of God’s word from Jerusalem to whole world with its instruction in God’s way of dealing with people in justice and salvation and how they can walk together with God
- Voluntary disarmament and international peace from God’s adjudication of conflicts
- Jerusalem as the place for international worship rather than capital of a world empire
- Further explication of this picture
  - The whole city will be God’s new temple in the new age with the coming of the Messiah (4:2-6)
  - The city will be the place where God would reveal his glory to all the nations (60:1-22)
  - Participation of Gentiles with the Israelites in the divine service in the new heavens and new earth (65:17-19)
  - Place of eternal worship and adoration:  
**For as the new heavens and new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord,  
so shall your offspring and name remain.  
From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath,  
all flesh shall come to worship before me (66:22-23).**
  - Fulfilment of these prophecies of Zion in the church as the new city of God (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:21; Rev 21-22)

## 7. God’s Promise of a New King

- Profile in seven visions of the coming Messiah who would bring peace to people on earth by God’s Spirit through his sacrificial death and his word rather than the exercise of political power through conquest and coercion

- First vision in 9:2-7 of the dawn of new age of peace with a righteous, eternal King on the throne of David: liberation from the yoke of oppression
- Second vision in 11:1-9 of descendant of David as a fruitful tree who would be anointed with God's Spirit to deal with evildoers by the sword of his word and reconcile people to each other and God
- Third vision in 42:1-4 of God's presentation of this King as his servant who would be empowered by God's Spirit to deal gently with bruised people and bring God's justice to the nations by his teaching.
- Fourth vision in 49:1-7 of the King's report of his mission to restore God's people and be a light to all the nations by bringing God's salvation to the ends of the earth.
- Fifth vision in 50:4-9 of the King's report of his condemnation by people and his dependence on God for his vindication.
- Sixth vision in 52:13-53:12 of the innocent suffering and death of the King as a sacrifice for sin so that he could sprinkle many nations with his cleansing blood and justify many sinners by bearing their iniquity.
- Seventh vision in 61:1-4 of the King tells us of his mission to proclaim the good news of God's pardon, his amnesty to rebels by the power of God's Spirit:

**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release from darkness for the blind,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn  
and provide for all who grieve in Zion-  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.**

#### 8. Well when was this vision fulfilled?

- The people of Israel expected that it would take place when they returned from exile
  - It is true that some of the things that were prophesied happened then.
    - ❖ The city of Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt.
    - ❖ They once again worshipped God at his temple.
  - But while some people returned from exile and settled in Judah, most of them never did but remained scattered among the nations.
  - Even those who did return from Babylon ceased to exist as a nation with their own king.
  - They never again took back the whole land of Israel and never again regained a king as a successor to David
    - ❖ They lost their independence as a nation.

- ❖ They only occupied in a small part the Promised Land.
- ❖ Even that remained a tiny province in an empire ruled by the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans.
- ❖ They even lost the city and the temple in 70 AD
- As we heard in the reading from Luke 4 the vision of Isaiah was fulfilled by Jesus in Nazareth and is fulfilled for us here and now.
  - It is fulfilled in your hearing.
  - The church is the new heavenly city of God.
  - Here the risen Jesus Christ is with us to preach the good news of salvation to us as our King, to heal our broken hearts and free us from all oppression, to comfort us in our grief and despair and put a song of praise into our hearts.
  - Here we have access to God's favour through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
  - Today God's new age dawns for us through Jesus here in this place.
  - Today the vision of Isaiah is fulfilled in your hearing as a prelude to its fulfilment with your physical eyes at the end of the world when the glory of God is revealed through Jesus.
  - To you who hear him preach the gospel he says: **Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it** (Luke 10:23-24).