

group Bible Study – January 31, 2007

Read Isaiah chapters 24-30

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A personal testimony...

There are many different 'spiritual disciplines' that a Christian person can practice in order to bring their life into closer alignment with the kingdom of God. We know about prayer, study of scripture, confession, silence and solitude, and so many others. A couple years ago, I decided to engage in a discipline of another kind. I decided to memorize poetry.

For about a year, I memorized a new poem every week. I would read through volumes of poetry from my favorite authors, and choose a new poem each week that spoke to me deeply about some kind of eternal truth. Then, throughout the week I would recite this poem over and over out loud and in my head, until it was stuck in my mind and in my heart. Now, years later, I have as my constant companions in life some of the greatest thinkers I know of: John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Frost, and especially Emily Dickinson.

Why was this a spiritual discipline for me? Simply put, I understand the Bible better now. I can understand the visions of the book of Revelation on a deeper level – I *feel* more of what the author is communicating through his art. The theology of Genesis makes more sense. The Psalms come alive with human and divine passion. And of course, the book of Isaiah becomes a central vision for understanding God and the world.

Remember this: like so many other parts of the Bible, the book of Isaiah is a poem. It is like one massive abstract painting, with dramatic images of horrifying devastation side-by-side with visions of a perfect future for the whole earth. As you read chapters 24 through 30 this week, try to *feel* what Isaiah the poet is communicating through this literary masterpiece. This is what it all boils down to for Isaiah: we need a true vision of the awesome power and love of God, and we need to respond appropriately. Failing this, our lives are doomed.

What do we learn about God from chapters 24-30 this week? First of all, if we let our hearts experience this text, we are overwhelmed by the power of God. The earth is his. All creation is within his grasp, and there is no escape. "Now the LORD is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate; he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants" (Is. 24:1).

The proper response to this overwhelming sovereignty of God is to worship him, for he has cared for his creation like a loving parent since the beginning of time. "O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure" (Is. 25:1).

But this worship response has been neglected. The people have failed to grasp the true vision of who God is, and so they have forgotten what it means to be his people. We read that "the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (Is. 24:5).

Because the people's vision has failed, they must be shaken, woken up, shocked into remembering who they are and what God has done. This is why Isaiah writes the way he does – he is on a mission from God himself to remind the world about what is true. Is our mission any different today?

Study Questions (for individuals or groups):

- In Isaiah 24-30, what do we learn about who God is? What do we learn about being the people of God? What kind of future does God promise?