

Scripture Text

Isaiah 48

Context

Isaiah was enabled by God to address the Jewish captives far away in Babylon in sixth century B.C. He announces a promise that God is coming with a world-changing display of his glory (40:5). To prepare for his coming, the exiles must return to the Promised Land (48:20). They must not be demoralised by the impressive but empty culture of idolatry in which they live (41:21–24), nor should they resent God's use of a pagan conqueror, Cyrus the Great, as their liberator from Babylon (44:24–28). They must look by faith for a greater liberator still to come, the messianic "Servant of the Lord" (see note on 42:1–9). He will bring justice to the nations (42:1–4) and save his people from their ultimate captivity, the guilt of sin (52:13–53:12).

Observation and Meaning

- V1-8: In what ways is the 'house of Jacob' just like Babylon? List of all of them.
- V9-11: Why will Israel's fate be different to Babylons? How is God's glory seen in his perseverance with and deliverance of Israel?
- V9-11: How does God's commitment to his glory then become the ground of our assurance of his goodness to us?
- V14-19: In these verses God shows how he works in the world: through Cyrus, or history (v14-15), through his Servant, or Christ (v16), and through his commands, or Word (v17-19). Why is Isaiah mentioning these three ways that God works? What is promised to those who listen?
- What is the final instruction in v20-22?

Big Idea

We should flee from those things that hold us captive, and pay attention to the God who perseveres with us for the sake of his own glory.

Connecting to Bible Storyline

Throughout the bible we see the tension between God's promises towards his people, and yet their unfaithfulness to him. We see in this passage that God's loving graciousness is the revelation of who he is, and therefore his mercy towards us and his glory go hand in hand.

Sermon Outline

1. Understanding God's perseverance with us (v1-11)
 - a. Who we are: the problem of our hypocrisy (v1-2)
 - b. God consistently speaks to us (v3-8)
 - c. Why God acts - for his glory (v9-11)
2. Understanding how God works with us (v12-22)
 - a. Cyrus - God over history (v14-15)
 - b. Christ - God enters history (v16)
 - c. Commandments - God guides us through history (v17-22)

Applications

- In what way in history is God's gracious glory most clearly seen? How is God's commitment to his glory the ultimate hope for our salvation?
- What is the response that God asks from us in v17-22?
- How does Isaiah 48 increase your faith in God so that you can walk in his way? In what areas of your life currently is God asking you to trust him and walk in obedience?

Guide for Study Leaders

Use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text.

Context

Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.

Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation & Meaning

Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. "for", "if", "therefore"), repetition, dialogue, narrative, OT quotations, etc.

To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author's purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?

Helpful questions to ask include:

Who is writing and to whom?

What is the situation of the author and of the readers?

Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?

Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application

Apply God's word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviour by asking good "heart" questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?

Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?

Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.