

Scripture Text

Isaiah 51:9 – 52:12

Context

From Isaiah 40-55, the prophet is addressing the Jewish captives far away in Babylon in the 6th century. Though God would seem far from his people during a time of difficulties, he promises a righteous and eternal salvation to them (Isaiah 51:5-8). This redemption plan will unfold according to God's specific purposes and timing.

Observation and Meaning

- Read verses 51:9-11. What is going through the mind of God's people as they recall their history? How does looking at God's past faithfulness lead to faith and hope, while still under captivity in Babylon?
- Read verses 51:12-16. Instead of responding to faith by granting an immediate deliverance, what is God saying instead? How is verse 13 explained by verse 12? Why should the faithful remnants have confidence in God's promises?
- Read 51:17-23. What has God done, and why? When the cup of wrath has been drunk, what will the future hold? Why is this a call for God's people to awake?
- Read 52:1-6. How does God view his people? What invitation is he making to them? Why do they need to awake, in light of this?
- Read 52:7-10. What is happening? Why is it such a great cause for joy? What does this tell us about God's greatest purposes?
- Read 52:11-12. The call to leave Babylon is a call to be set apart for purity and holiness. What will give power for the people to accomplish that?

Big Idea

God's triumphant grace in our lives awakes us to be set apart for holiness and live for his higher purposes in this world.

Connecting to Bible Storyline

In the Exodus, God parted the Red Sea to save his people so that they are set apart to testify his name to the nations. In the Gospel, Jesus took upon God's wrath and cleansed us from sin so that we may proclaim the good news of his victory to all.

Sermon Outline

1. Are we spiritually drowsy? (51:9-16)
2. Awake to the end of God's wrath and condemnation (51:17-23)
3. Awake to the reality of our holiness and beauty before God (52:1-10)
4. Go in freedom! (52:11-12)

Applications

- How does remembering God's unchanging faithfulness throughout history to his people serve to build our faith today?
- As we look at ourselves and our circumstances, what promises from God are we struggling to believe? How can we help one another to exercise faith and hope in God's word?
- Read Isaiah 52:7 again, and reflect on how Paul uses this great statement in Romans 10:14-15. As believers of the gospel, how does this shape and change our purposes in our daily lives and vocations?
- How can we, individually and corporately, be set apart to share the greatest news ever? This Christmas season, what are some ways we can evangelise together as a CG?

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.