Walking In The Fear Of The Lord

Isaiah 5.24-30

Having set out the sins of the nation, Isaiah now prophesies about the nation’s doom. Through judgment, God will deal justly with the corrupt nation. What Israel has come to lack as a people is fear. They are no longer moved by prospect of wrath. Like the wicked of Romans 3, “there is no fear of God before their eyes.” But in keeping with Romans, the prophet does not deviate from the Law of the Lord since “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3.18, 20). Isaiah will do this as he systematically lays out the reality of the judgment of God. Here Isaiah will lay out the cause, severity, instruments and for our instruction, the wisdom of God’s wrath.

*The Cause Of Judgment*

**Isaiah 5:24–30** 24 Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble And dry grass collapses into the flame, So their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

When we consider the root cause of God’s judgment, the prophet boils it down to Israel’s rejection of God’s revelation, “they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (v.24). All judgment arises from this fundamental problem. What we do with God’s revelation in this life will determine what God will do to us in the life to come. The reason for this of course is due to the moral and ethical implications that are bound up with God’s revelation. The further a person strays from God’s word, God’s truth, God’s law and revelation, the further they stray in their deeds. We saw that already with Israel as the nation became more and more twisted in their ways, even calling “evil good and good evil” (5.20). This has always been the case and this will be the case again when God comes to judge the world in righteousness at the end of the age:

**2 Thessalonians 1:8** 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

**2 Thessalonians 1:10–12** 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. 11 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We could also say that the cause of God’s judgment was rooted in the failure to reciprocate the love of God. The people did not love God’s light so they did to come to the light:

**John 3:16–19** 16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

Although God had delighted in them (5.7), proven by what He had done for them throughout redemptive history, they turned away from Him, and rejected Him and rejected His covenant (cf. Jer. 31.31-32). As Raymond Ortlund has said, “when delight dies, despising takes over, and judgment descends” (Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. *Isaiah, God Saves Sinners*, 73). And when people are in a covenantal relationship with God, God will fulfill the sanctions of the covenant perfectly and faithfully whether to bless or the curse (cf. Lev. 26; Dt. 28). When can see the promise of the judgment descending in the days of Isaiah as it was originally promised under Mosaic covenant. As will become evident in this text, part of that judgment will come at the hands of God’s enemies like Assyria and Babylon:

**Deuteronomy 28:25–26** 25 “The Lord shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26 “Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

To boiled it down even further, and to broaden the application of this passage to all of humanity; judgment descends because of sin. Afterall, all failure to love God, to delight in God, to seek God, to glorify God in all things is sin:

**Ephesians 5:1–6** 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

*The Severity Of Judgment*

**Isaiah 5:25** 25 On this account the anger of the Lord has burned against His people, And He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down. And the mountains quaked, and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. For all this His anger is not spent, But His hand is still stretched out.

When we pause to consider the severity of God’s wrath we need to realize that we live in a day and age where the doctrine of the wrath of God is one of those doctrines that has been all but forgotten and at the very least consistently neglected in the church. Of course, this is understandable; no one wants to be known as the apologist for the doctrine of hell, no one wants to be known as the theologian of wrath. I don’t think, Isaiah wanted to be either but it was not up to him and it is not up to us! That’s because the wrath of God is the consequence of the holiness of God and the righteousness of God against sin and sinners. From this text we also learn that God’s wrath is unrelenting in its severity.

The prophet here is warning the nation of the coming judgment by apparently reminding them of God’s previous acts of judgment, ironically, the very “deeds” that they now refuse to remember, the prophet reminds them of. The reference to God’s anger and hand against the people is here tied to the shaking of the mountains which most commentators see as a reference to a severe earthquake that took place during the reign of Uzziah (cf. Amos 1.1; Zech. 14.5). At that point Israel was still experience peace and prosperity, safety and security, and while religion was still active in Israel, economic blessing was not resulting in spiritual blessing but spiritual lethargy instead. The earth shook as a warning and corpses lines the street then as a warning. However that early warning was not the end, “For all this His anger is not spent, But His hand is still stretched out” (v.25). There was more wrath to come because there was more sin to punish!

If this is the case, then, what we call “natural disasters” can be warnings analogous to the wrath of God. Unless a person has been caught in a mighty earthquake, lived through the eye of a great storm, or had their roof ripped from their home by a fierce tornado; we may not understand the dread of that. But the dread of natural disasters is but weak reflection of full display of God’s wrath that is coming on the wicked at the end of time. We should repeat the fact also that such natural disasters are living parables, given to us to be warned and in order for us to warn the wicked of the judgment to come. Of course, a natural disaster is only natural to the extent that there are geological or scientific explanations for such phenomenon but God is still sovereign over all calamities (cf. Is. 45.7). In revelation, God will use earthquakes to usher in His divine wrath; so that it will not just be the tension of tectonic plates but the decree of an angry God:

**Revelation 16:17–21** 17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.” 18 And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

*The Instruments Of Judgment*

In this instance, the instrument of choice for God’s wrath will be the stealth and swift supper power of Assyria whose hordes will be ready, trained, skilled, fierce, unstoppable and full of terror. As a “distant nation” Assyria will illicit the dread of the unknown, a sense that something is coming and yet unpredictable and uncontrollable. God will “whistle for it from the ends of the earth” so that it will be foreign, unfamiliar and unreasonable (v.26). The rod of God’s anger will be like the ready warrior who never slumbers but is always ready for war (v.27). It is war-machine, bread for one purpose; to kill and execute destruction like a “whirlwind” (v.28). Once Israel is in the Jaws of its enemies it will be easier to take a dying animal out of the mouth of a roaring lion; an impossible proposition that no on would dare to undertake (v.29). In verse 30, the metaphor mutates from beast to sea in apocalyptic fashion conveying both the mystery and hopelessness of the threat. The sea in the Ancient Near Eastern world was always dreadful, ominous, unknown and its immensity was unfathomable so that in biblical parlance, the sea was the place one went to die (cf. Ezek. 27.26-27; Ps. 69.1-2):

**Jonah 2:1–5** 1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, 2 and he said, “I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. 3 “For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. 4 “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ 5 “Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me…

As a consequence of their sin, Israel was meant to feel a sense of hopelessness in the midst of their dread. As Edward Young put it, this is “the judgment of abandonment.” Hopelessness was not something they had come to grips with yet. Their spirit of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and their sense of independence had seared their conscience so that they could not confess their own crisis and calamity.

*The Wisdom Of Judgment*

In the gospel, we go from the wrath of Isaiah, and the pronouncement, ‘no one to deliver,” to the grace of Jesus Christ, where we encounter the Deliverer Himself who can snatch us out of the mouth of the roaring lion. From the covenantal angel, Israel’s judgment increasingly demonstrates that so long as man in under a works principle deliverance for their sins remains out of reach. However, the failure of Israel, the sin and apostasy of the nation becomes the backdrop of another principle; the principle of grace. Like Adam, the first son of God, the federal head of humanity, the ‘public’ person of his posterity who fell into sin and was banished (Gen. 3.24), Israel, the cooperate son of God, also falls and is banished from the land (Is. 5.13). Although the works principle in operation was much different between these two initial sons, the outcome was similar; exile from the land- the realm of blessing and *shalom*. Both covenantal situations make it clear that so long as the people of God are bound to a principle of works, God’s intended blessing for them would remain out of reach. Of course, the grace principle, rightly understood, does not enter into the equation arbitrarily. Why? Because of righteous. His righteousness must be fulfilled, His law obeyed, and His justice upheld (cf. Ps. 51.4).

The bible can rightly be said to be presenting a long line of sons of God who rise up and fall, rise up and fall. But at the proper time, God sent forth His Son (Gal. 4.4)! His obedience is thus essential in the story of God. If He does not obey, then, unlike Adam, unlike Abraham, unlike Noah, Moses, Israel, David; then truly all hope would be lost. But praise be to God that through the perfect, personal, exact and entire obedience of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 5.12ff.), God can be both just and the justifier of the person who has faith in Jesus Christ and inherit the blessings that previous generations, through their sin, had forfeited. God’s judgment of Israel paves the way for the propitiation provided in Jesus Christ. Both the historical necessity and the covenantal foundations of Jesus’ obedience as well as the application of redemption to His people are seen most clear against the backdrop of Israel’s sin and judgment. This is what all of the Law and the Prophets have been leading up to; propitiation in a redemptive historical context:

**Romans 3:21–26** 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The OT often asks what only the NT can answer; ‘how can God’s anger be spent?’, ‘how can His hand of judgment be stayed?’ Of course, Jesus is the only way. The righteousness that Israel so desperately needed, the “righteousness of God,” is the very righteousness we could not attain, we could not achieve and we could not apply to our own account; that very indispensable righteousness has been provided for us on the basis of faith in Jesus. One day God will whistle again and hordes of judgment will come for the last time and when He does, there will be none to deliver— unless! Unless of course deliverance has been secured by the Deliverer, the righteous Son, the Messianic Son, the true Israel of God, Jesus Christ the righteous. All of redemptive history calls for this Righteous One. As Stephen is concluding his exposition of redemptive history, he emphasizes that what the patriarchs and prophets were announcing was the coming of the Righteous One (Acts 7.52).

Israel’s lack of faith should provoke our own, Israel’s indifference should produce our zeal, Israel’s rejection and despising of God’s revelation should cause in us total trust in God’s Law until at last we can say with the psalmist, “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!” (Ps. 139.17).