

Isaiah 1:18-31
November 26, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you hear the word “revival,” what does that conjure up in your mind? [Let people engage]

Q: Have any of you ever attended a revival meeting? And if yes, what was that like? Positive? Negative? [Let people engage]

It seems like revival meetings are becoming less and less in Christian churches. When I was on staff at Grace Southern Baptist in KS, we had a revival that was a week long. We came after work Sunday through Friday evenings. We had a guest preacher who had a sermon series ready to go to inspire us to look at our own lives. For those who weren't Christian, there were evangelistic messages with opportunities to commit their lives to Christ. For those of us who were already Christian, we had opportunities to evaluate our daily lives to see if it was aligned with God's Great Commission one evening, then we'd look at how we were edifying the church with our spiritual gifts another night, etc. The overarching goal was to allow the Holy Spirit to move in such a way that we would humble ourselves before the Lord, seek His forgiveness, and then be intentional in serving Him as He called us.

Transition: In today's study, Isaiah is like the “guest preacher.” He is the Lord's messenger, who is going to help us understand the roadmap back to God for any of us who are missing the mark. He will be clear about that. So as we study today's passage, consider that all of us CAN experience revival BY understanding the Lord's **CHOICES** and their respective **CONSEQUENCES**. Let's see if find some **CHOICES** in our text today.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.18:

- “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

V.19:

- If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land;

V.20:

- but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

V.21:

- See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her— but now murderers (may refer to those who took advantage of the needy – 1:23)!

V.22:

- Your silver has become dross (residue left in a smelting process after pure silver is removed), your choice wine is diluted with water.

V.23:

- Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.

V.24:

- Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies."

V.25:

- I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.

V.26:

- I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City."

V.27:

- Zion will be redeemed with justice, her **penitent** ones with righteousness.

V.28:

- But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish.

V.29:

- "You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen."

V.30:

- You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water.

V.31:

- The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire."

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.18: How would you describe the Lord's tone in the opening of this verse? [Open, Inviting, "let's talk"]

Observation: He could have said, "Darn it. I'm sick and tired of your bad behavior! How many times do I have to tell you to STOP your evil doings?!!! But he doesn't. It reminds me of Mark's comment two weeks ago when he said, "The Lord only SPEAKS LOVE." This verse is a great example of that.

Q: What is the "carrot" He puts out there for His chosen people to encourage them to "reason together?" [Though your sins are as red as crimson, I will make you "white as snow."]

Q: I couldn't help but think about those of you who are parenting. What's the principle that might be helpful in dealing with children who have disobeyed? [Have a tone that invites a conversation and helps your child see a happy ending.]

Observation: So in order for us to experience revival, the first CHOICE is **to be willing to meet with the Lord and "reason together."** We need to be open to hearing what He has to say.

Q V.19-20: The Lord gives His people a roadmap for revival, but it looks like a fork in the road. How can His people experience revival? [Be willing to be obedient. In return, the Lord will

provide divine forgiveness to wipe their sins away such that their heart will be white as snow. Moreover, they will experience the blessing of eating the best from the land.]

Q: What's the other fork in the road, or the "or else," if they aren't willing to be obedient? [If they resist and rebel, they will be devoured by the sword]

Q: When we live in obedience to our heavenly Father, He promises blessings to us. This seems like a no-brainer, so why do we find ourselves on the wrong path that leads us to move away from Him instead of toward Him? [pride, selfishness, power struggles – I need it to be my way]

Observation: So in order to experience revival, we have a CHOICE to obey if we're interested in experiencing His blessings, or rebel.

Transition: Isaiah will now list the CAUSES of God's discipline in the next three verses by turning His attention to the condition of Jerusalem.

Q V.21: How does He describe His city? [The city has become a harlot.]

Q: Being described as a harlot is pretty harsh. What is He really saying about Jerusalem? [God and Israel have a covenant relationship, except they became like prostitutes. They were unfaithful to Him by seeking idols instead.]

Q: Based on this verse, what does a "faithful city" look like? [They are full of justice; the city was characterized by righteousness.]

Q: But the city is no longer "faithful." Instead, the Lord describes her as a "murderer." What do you think He meant? ["Murderers" may refer to those who took advantage of the needy (cf. Isa. 1:23 and comments on v. 15).]

Q V.22-23: Isaiah helps us understand what the Lord meant by "murderer." He gives us a word picture around silver and wine. What do you think Isaiah means by silver becoming dross, or that choice wine is diluted by water? [Silver and choice wine is considered valuable, but now they have become worthless. Like worthless dross, the nation would be "thrown away."]

Q: What happened to the leaders? [They became rebels, hung out with thieves, loved bribes. They were leading the people into ruin by theft, bribery, and injustice. It is a picture of sinful leaders producing a sinful people. (Henry Blackaby)]

Q: How did these sinful leaders impact the fatherless and the widows? [They could not even get hearings because they had no money for bribing the rulers. This grieved God because His covenant people had no concern for the needs of the fatherless and widows.]

Q: Let's hit the "pause" button. How can we improve, either individually or as a church, to take care of those who are truly in the one-down position? Ex: widows, the fatherless (think single parent), anyone who is needs help. [Be intentional to help someone who God reveals to you this week – and how appropriate given that this week is Thanksgiving.]

Q V.24: The Lord makes a declaration against his foes or enemies. Who are His enemies? [His chosen people! It's anyone who tramples on those who are already down-trodden.]

Q V.25-27: It's important to look at these next three verses together. In V.25, what does the Lord intend to do? [turn His hand against them; thoroughly purge away their dross and remove all their impurities.]

Q V.26-27: Do you think that God's vengeance upon His unfaithful people was about "getting even?" If no, then what was His purpose in judging His people? [Restoration! It's about turning His covenant community back to a proper relationship with Him!]

Q V.27: Let's look closely at this verse. Who are the ones whose righteousness is restored? [The penitent ones. The ones who humbled themselves before the Lord and confessed their sin.]

Q V.28-31: So what happens to those who continue to make the choice to rebel?

- Rebels and sinners will both be broken
- Those who forsake the Lord will perish
- You'll be ashamed and disgraced (because they were involved in idol worship near sacred oaks and in gardens)
- You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water.
- The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire. (Similar to the idea found in the NT that our works will be judged. If they didn't have eternal value, it will be like hay, wood, or stubble that will be easily quenched by the fire. Other theologians think the "unquenchable burning" probably refers to the destruction by the Babylonian army *as well as* eternal judgment.)

LOOK:

Revival is much deeper than confessing our sins and apologizing for them. It is deeper than just feeling bad for committing sin. Revival starts with an open heart. We have to be willing to "come and reason together" with our Lord to hear what He has to say. Then we have to make the choice to repent from our sins with changed behavior and align ourselves with His will to look after the disenfranchised, the oppressed, the fatherless, the widow, and anyone who needs a helping hand.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Is). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 1034–1036). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

God then invited the sinful people to come to their senses (Isa. 1:18) and admit they had been wrong in their attitudes and practices. The invitation **Come now, let us reason together** was more than a call for negotiations between the people and God. The word “reason” (*yāqāḥ*) is a law term used of arguing, convincing, or deciding a case in court. The people were to be convinced by their argumentation with God that He was right and they were wrong about their condition. (Other court terms in this chapter are **justice ... defend**, and **plead**, v. 17.) If they acknowledged the depth of their sins—that their iniquities were like blood-colored stains on their souls (**scarlet**, a red dye made from a worm, and **crimson**, red-colored cloth)—then God in His grace would cleanse them, making them spiritually **white** like **snow** or **wool**. Acknowledgment of sin was to precede God's cleansing. And the same is true today.

The **obedient** (v. 19) would **eat the best from the land**, that is, they would have bountiful crops as promised in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:3–6, 11). By contrast, those who refused to turn to God (rebels; cf. Isa. 1:23, 28) would be defeated by enemies (**devoured by the sword**, v. 20; Deut. 28:45–57). This was certain **for the ... LORD has spoken** (cf. Isa. 40:5; 58:14).

c. The Lord's lament over Jerusalem (1:21–23)

1:21. The contrast between the original condition of Jerusalem under David and the early years of Solomon's reign with the condition of the people in Isaiah's day is detailed. At one time Jerusalem was considered **faithful** like a devoted wife. Now, however, the **city was a harlot**. The imagery of prostitution is common in the prophetic books (esp. Jer. and Hosea). This figure is based on the fact that in marriage, as in the relationship between God and Israel, a covenant was made. When a person becomes a prostitute he or she mars the marriage covenant. In the same way when a person left the true God for idols he marred his covenant with the Lord.

Jerusalem had been known for executive **justice** and upholding **righteousness**. “Justice” refers to proper judicial procedures, and “righteousness” is the behavior of those who sought this standard. (Cf. these two in Prov. 8:20; Isa. 5:7; 28:17; Amos 5:7.) **But now** instead of righteousness “living,” **murderers** were present. “Murderers” may refer to those who took advantage of the needy (cf. Isa. 1:23 and comments on v. 15).

1:22–23. Their **silver** and **wine**, which used to be valuable, had become worthless: **dross** metal and watered-down wine. Dross is the residue left in the smelting process after pure silver is removed. Like worthless dross, the nation would be “thrown away.” The people would be exiled if they would not repent and turn to the Lord.

The rebellious **rulers** in the city were leading the people into ruin by theft, bribery, and injustice to the helpless (cf. comments on v. 17). **The fatherless** and **widows** could not even get hearings because they had no money for bribing the rulers. This situation was especially

abhorrent to God because His covenant people were bound to Him and therefore to each other. But now they had no concern for each other's property and needs.

d. The Lord's declaration of the sentence (1:24–31)

God's lawsuit ended with His pronouncing judgment on the guilty nation. In this chapter God is pictured not only as one of the parties in the litigation but also as the Judge who will decide what will happen to the guilty party. Those who were obstinate, refusing to repent, would be judged, but the repentant would be redeemed.

1:24–26. God's judging will bring Him **relief from** the displeasure caused by His **foes** (**enemies** within the covenant community). It will be like a purging agent, getting rid of the **dross** (v. 25; cf. v. 22), leaving only the pure silver. Vengeance was not for the purpose of "getting even" with unfaithful people. Its purpose was to turn the nation back to a proper relationship to God. **The LORD will** see that the right kind of **judges** are in office **as in** former times (David's and Solomon's empires), and Jerusalem **will** once again **be called the City of Righteousness and the Faithful City** (v. 26). References to "the faithful city" (vv. 21, 26) serve as a literary device called an *inclusio* to tie these two verses together.

1:27–31. The contrast between the fate of the remnant and the wicked is detailed in these verses. The remnant will dwell in the new **redeemed** city of Jerusalem (**Zion**; cf. v. 8) where God's **justice** will be present (cf. v. 26). **Rebels** (cf. vv. 20, 23) **will perish**, after being embarrassed that they were ever involved in idol worship near **sacred** oak trees (cf. 57:5) and in **gardens** (cf. 65:3; 66:17). Whereas they once enjoyed worshiping idols (probably including Baal), in those pleasant surroundings they would become like fading **oak trees** and a dry **garden**. Though once strong (like a **mighty man**) in defying God the unrighteous **and his work ... will burn**. This unquenchable burning probably refers to the destruction by the Babylonian army *as well as* eternal judgment.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 994). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

1:16–20 Isaiah provided God's list of correctives for the social evil and inequality that rendered Israel's worship repugnant to him. These admonitions about just relationships do not imply that following them, alone, would bring God's blessing. The scarlet stain of sin can only be made "white as snow" (v. 18) through divine forgiveness. This happens when people have "willing and obedient" hearts and do not "refuse and rebel" against God (vv. 19–20).