

Isaiah 3:16-4:6
January 21, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you hear the word “vanity,” what comes to mind? What do you picture? [let people engage]

Q: Can you tell by the way a person dresses if they are being vain? If yes, what gives it away?! [Let people engage]

We certainly want to affirm that it is not a sin to look nice! But it is also helpful to know when we’ve crossed the line from dressing nicely to becoming vain by how we dress. Last week we learned of God’s judgment that is forthcoming to the elders and leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. God was angered with them because they plundered the poor, led God’s people away from God and did not give justice to those who needed it. Today He turns attention to the *women associated with these elders and leaders*. We’re getting ready to find out why they are being severely judged as well.

Transition: The goal of this lesson hasn’t changed since we have been studying the consequences that are headed their way. It is my prayer that **all of us CAN enjoy our relationship to God BY honoring Him through a spirit of humility**. Someone read Isa 3:16-4:1.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.16:

- The Lord says, “The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles.

V.17:

- Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald.”

V.18:

- In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces,

V.19:

- the earrings and bracelets and veils,

V.20:

- the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms,

V.21:

- the signet rings and nose rings,

V.22:

- the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses

V.23:

- and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls.

V.24:

- Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding.

V.25:

- Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle.

V.26:

- The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground.

CHP 4 V.1:

- In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, “We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.16: How were the women conducting themselves? [In today’s culture, some would label their conduct as “sluts.” They looked almost like prostitutes. They were drawing attention to their external trappings.]

Q: When you read a verse like this, is it fair to say that you can judge someone’s spiritual condition when they are dressed so vainly? Why or why not? [Yes? They were more interested in feeding their love for admiration than dressing themselves in a way that honored God through modesty.]

Q: So what’s the problem with that?! Why would that upset the Lord? [The women exhibited spiritual bankruptcy. They had a continued disregard for the ways of the Lord. Consequently, Jerusalem’s women would not be excused from punishment, for they participated with their husbands in the corruption of the culture (cp. the women of Samaria, Am 4:1). Depending on personal beauty rather than spiritual beauty is a sin.]

Q: What’s the problem of “flirting with your eyes?” [These women were married!!]

Q: So how does spiritual beauty look for women? [X-REF: I Peter 3:3-5; or we could say the opposite characteristics of what we read, i.e. instead of haughty spirit, a spiritually beautiful woman has a humble spirit]

Q V.17: How will the Lord physically afflict these women? [He will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald.]

Q V.18-23: How will the Lord deal with all of the accessories? [He is *snatching away* everything they thought was important: their fancy clothes, special perfumes, special jewelry and head wear.]

Q V.24: Once the Lord disciplines these women, what is the outcome? [These women will experience what it’s like to be without their wealth and fancy clothes and accessories.]

Q: Did anyone catch that “instead of beauty, branding?” What does Isaiah mean by that? [He is forecasting what to expect during the “day of the Lord.” Some commentators explain that branding is like the humiliation of having clothes cut-off at the middle of their buttocks.]

However, some commentators believe that branding is the literal idea of being physically branded by their captor, which would be a very painful thing.]

Q: Why do you think the Lord had to go to this extreme? [The women forgot who they were to worship, and that was God alone. These women placed so much value on their external trappings and perfumes that He had to show them who was always in control. By humbling them, He would help lead these women to repentance of their pride and the oppression of the poor.]

Q V.25: What will happen to the men of Judah and Jerusalem? [They will fall by the sword. They were lauded as warriors in battle, but they will die.]

Q V.26: What will be the condition of Jerusalem? [It will become destitute. It will sit on the ground in rubbles.]

Q: Just imagine if you were one of the women. Your husband is most likely killed in battle. Your wealth has been removed. You're physically not well with the sores on your head – and you give off a displeasing odor probably because of it. You have become a prisoner of war, led by a rope, like cattle going to the slaughter. How do you think you are going to survive? [Let people imagine]

Transition: Let's take a look at what the women's response will be after Zion becomes rubble and the men are killed.

Q Chp 4:1: What do you see? [During the Babylonian exile, we see desperation to avoid the disgrace of not having husbands, they will stoop to the shameful state of sharing a man with other wives.]

Q: Was Isaiah promoting polygamy? [No. He was warning these people of the dire consequences of maintaining their evil ways. His word picture was intended to motivate the people to repentance before this sad condition befell them.]

Transition: The prophet looks beyond the "Day of the Lord" to that time when the kingdom will be established on earth. You'll read a phrase, "Branch of the Lord," which is a messianic title for Jesus Christ who came as a "shoot" from the seemingly dead stump of David's dynasty. Now we will enjoy reading that God's people will share in the glories of His kingdom.

[Read Isa 4:2-6]

V.2:

- In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.

V.3:

- Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem.

V.4:

- The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a (the) spirit of judgment and a (the) spirit of fire.

V.5:

- Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy.

V.6:

- It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.2-3: Isaiah is helping the reader visualize what it will be like during the Millennium. What do you see? [The land will be fertile and fruitful; those who are found in Zion will be called holy people. ***The mark of distinction for surviving Israel will be holiness***, not wealth or prestige.]

Observation: From an eschatological vantage point, the “survivors” of Israel are the people who will survive the difficulties in the Great Tribulation just before the Lord Jesus Christ returns to set up His kingdom.

Q V.4: What does v.4 depict? [The Lord is cleansing the women and Jerusalem of sin. It is a picture of forgiveness. The nation, **will be cleansed by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire**, as the judging will be like fire that will burn **away** the nation’s undesirable **filth** (sin). Only the sovereign work of **the Lord**, not human effort, will be able to **cleanse** (cf. 1:25) the nation (cf. Zech. 13:1).]

Q V.5-6: Isaiah gives us a word picture that should sound familiar to most of us. What do you think of when you read “a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night?” [God leading the Israelites through the desert.]

Observation: As God’s glory was visible to Israel in the Exodus from Egypt in a **cloud ... by day and fire by night** (Ex. 13:21–22; 40:34–38; cf. 16:10), so also will His glory be visible when the redeemed nation will be in her land of promise. God’s glory, like a tent, will provide safety and peace.

LOOK:

The real reason for God’s judgment is not punishment, but salvation. The prophet has hope, a hope grounded in faith in God. The people can be cleansed of the sin and filth of their lives and given a place of standing with God. Thus, it’s never too late for anyone to repent of their sins and give their life to Christ. It’s a privileged position to be in God’s family, which should motivate us to righteous living for His name’s sake.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Comforted* (p. 25). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

After denouncing the men in leadership, the prophet zeroed in on the proud women who profited from their husbands' crimes (3:16–4:1). The Prophet Amos had a similar message for the women in the Northern Kingdom (Amos 4:1–3). Everything would be different for these women when the judgment of God came to the land! In that day, nobody would notice their expensive clothes, their jewelry and perfumes, and their elaborate coiffures. They would be prisoners of war, led by a rope, like cattle going to the slaughter. So many men will be killed there won't be enough husbands to go around! (4:1)

God is long-suffering as He watches people viciously exploit one another and selfishly ravage His creation. But there is coming a day when unbelieving sinners will be punished and God's people will share in the glories of His kingdom. Are you ready?

The Branch of the Lord (Isa. 4:2–6). The prophet looks beyond the "Day of the Lord" to that time when the kingdom will be established on earth. "Branch of the Lord" is a messianic title for Jesus Christ who came as a "shoot" from the seeming dead stump of David's dynasty (11:1; 53:2; see Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). God will cleanse His people (Isa. 4:4; see Zech. 12:10–13:1), restore the fruitfulness of the land, and dwell with them as He did when He led them through the wilderness (Isa. 4:5–6; Ex. 13:21–22). Not just the temple, but *every* dwelling will be blessed by the presence of the Lord! Unlike Isaiah's day, "in that day" the people will be holy (set apart), and the land will be beautiful and glorious.

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. 1040–1041). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

d. Judah's fall after her pride (3:16–4:1)

Judah's proud condition was illustrated by Jerusalem's society women. Isaiah contrasted what they looked like then with what they will look like after God's judgment comes on them.

3:16. The **haughty** wealthy **women of Zion** (Jerusalem) were trying to attract attention by the way they walked (proudly, with **outstretched necks**), flirted, minced along, and dressed. Isaiah may have implied that the entire nation was proud.

3:17–4:1. In contrast with their pride, wealth, and beauty, the **women of Zion** (cf. 3:16) would be in deep distress. They would have **sores on their heads** and would be **bald**. This baldness may refer to their shaving their heads, either in mourning or for medical reasons, because of their head sores. Being in deep distress they would not care how they looked. In fact **the LORD** would cause the Babylonian soldiers to take **away** all the women's fine jewelry and wardrobes (vv. 19–23). **Instead of fragrance** they would have an awful odor (v. 24) perhaps from their head sores (v. 17). Taken captive by the Babylonians, the women would be pulled by **a rope** and would wear **sackcloth**, black coarse cloth made from goats' hair and symbolizing mourning (cf. Gen. 37:34; 1 Kings 21:27; Neh. 9:1; Es 4:1; Isa. 15:3; 22:12; 32:11; 37:1–2; Lam. 2:10; Ezek. 27:31; Dan. 9:3). Their **beauty** would be replaced by painful **branding** by their captors. The women would mourn because their **men** (husbands, brothers, and male friends) would be dying **in battle** (Isa. 3:25). The city would be so **destitute** of men and the women would be so disgraced that they would compete to gain a husband (4:1). Isaiah's picture of the

Jerusalem socialites and their plight might be humorous if it were not so pathetic and realistic. Years later Jeremiah wrote that the women resorted to eating their own children during the siege (Lam. 2:20; 4:10; cf. Lev. 26:27–29; Deut. 28:53–57; Jer. 19:9).

5. THE HOLY SURVIVORS (4:2–6)

After God's original indictment or "lawsuit" (1:2–31) He gave a promise of restoration (2:1–5). Now at the close of the stinging reiteration of judgment (2:6–4:1) is another section on comfort (4:2–6). In spite of the terrible blow facing the nation because of its sin, some people would survive. Isaiah's initial audience might have thought he was speaking of those who would survive the Exile. However, in the light of Matthew 24:4–30 he was referring to the people who will survive the difficulties in the Great Tribulation just before the Lord Jesus Christ returns to set up His kingdom.

4:2. In spite of the coming severe judgment, divine blessing would eventually come. Sometimes the phrase **in that day** refers to the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem (e.g., 3:7, 18; 4:1), but here (see the statements in vv. 2, 5) as in 2:11–12, 17 it means the millennial reign of Christ.

Some interpreters say **the Branch of the LORD**, who is **beautiful and glorious**, refers to the believing remnant. It seems better, however, to take the "Branch" as a reference to the Messiah since this is its meaning in Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8. The term "Branch" is a fitting figure for the Messiah because He "sprouted" from David's line (Jer. 33:15) and will bear fruit. Just as people delight in fruit from their land so **the survivors** will delight in the Messiah, **the Fruit of the land**. The Branch is suggestive of Jesus' words that He is the Vine (John 15:1).

4:3–4. The mark of distinction for surviving Israel will be holiness, not wealth or prestige. Their sins will be forgiven. Speaking again of **the women of Zion** (cf. 3:16–4:1) Isaiah noted that they, representing the nation, **will be cleansed by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire**, as the judging will be like fire that will burn **away** the nation's undesirable **filth** (sin). Only the sovereign work of **the Lord**, not human effort, will be able to **cleanse** (cf. 1:25) the nation (cf. Zech. 13:1). John the Baptist said that Jesus would "baptize ... with fire" (Matt. 3:11), that is, purify the nation by an act of judging (cf. Mal. 3:2–5).

4:5–6. In this yet-future time of blessing for redeemed Israel **the glory** of God will be evident in Jerusalem (**Mount Zion**). As God's glory was visible to Israel in the Exodus from Egypt in a **cloud ... by day and fire by night** (Ex. 13:21–22; 40:34–38; cf. 16:10), so also will His glory be visible when the redeemed nation will be in her land of promise. God's glory, like a tent, will provide safety and peace.

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 (pp. 998-999). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

3:16–24 Isaiah portrayed the judgment of the proud women of Jerusalem in graphic and gruesome word pictures. His description was a realistic portrayal of what would happen should the army of another ancient Near Eastern nation conquer Jerusalem. The enemy would respect neither men, women, nor children, but would savagely abuse and slaughter them. Such would be the Lord's judgment if the wealthy women of Jerusalem, with the leaders of Judah, failed to repent of their pride and oppression of the poor (cp. vv. 13–15). In seeking to move them to

repentance, the prophet did not gloss over the possible consequence of continuing disregard for the ways of the Lord. Jerusalem's women would not be excused from punishment, for they participated with their husbands in the corruption of the culture (cp. the women of Samaria, Am 4:1). God will humble the proud and He alone will be exalted (Is 2:12, 17).

4:1 So many men in Jerusalem would be killed in battle (3:25) that there will be no husbands left for these rich women. In their desperation to avoid the disgrace of not having husbands, they will stoop to the shameful state of sharing a man with other wives. Isaiah's words were no endorsement of polygamy or multiple sexual partners; he was warning these people of the dire consequences of maintaining their evil ways. His word picture was intended to motivate the people to repentance before this sad condition befell them.

4:2 Some interpreters view the phrase "branch [*tsemach*] of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious" as a sign of the land's fertility. They view it as a parallel to the next phrase, "the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of Israel's survivors." Others take the "branch of the LORD" as a messianic title based on other occurrences of the word, used in the sense of the springing forth of salvation (2 Sm 23:5) or "a horn" (Ps 132:17) for David. These passages, because they speak of the continuing line of David, carry a messianic implication. Isaiah, a prophet of Jerusalem close to the royal court, likely knew these songs. Later he called the Messiah "a shoot" (*choter*) that will come up from the stump of Jesse, even a "branch" (*netser*) that will bear fruit (Is 11:1). Jeremiah referred to the "righteous Branch" or "Branch of righteousness" from David (Jr 23:5; 33:15) and Zechariah (Zec 3:8; 6:12) used the term "Branch" with a messianic meaning.