

**“It’s time to wake up and move”**

**Isaiah 1-39** deal mainly with Judah and Jerusalem at a time when the city was still standing and when the southern kingdom was threatened with invasion by the Assyrians. **Isaiah 40-55**, speak about the return and restoration of Israel, after the exile from Babylon and the promised Messiah. In **Isaiah 56-66**, Isaiah speaks about the great reward for all those who trust and obey God. He proclaims the hope for the afflicted and judgment for the evil.

We saw the last time I spoke from **Isaiah 51:1-3** that the Israelites were reminded that God can, and God will, establish His people as a nation again, after He delivers them from their Babylonian captivity. Today we’re going to deal with the end of this chapter, **Isaiah 51:17-23**. And we’re going to learn, that the wrath of God which was unleashed upon His own people, is going to be unleashed against God’s enemies.

A Sunday school teacher asked the children just before she dismissed them to go to worship, ‘**why is it so important to be quiet in worship?**’ And one little boy replied, ‘**because people are sleeping.**’

**Isaiah 51:17-20** “Awake, awake! Rise up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger. Among all the children she bore there was none to guide her; among all the children she reared there was none to take her by the hand. These double calamities have come upon you—who can comfort you? —ruin and destruction, famine and sword—who can console you? Your children have fainted; they lie at every street corner, like antelope caught in a net. They are filled with the wrath of the LORD, with the rebuke of your God.”

**Have you ever seen someone on the street whose just totally intoxicated from alcohol?** When we lived in Birmingham we used to see this all the time, men and women just throwing up on the street, staggering along the road trying to find their way home. And I used to think to myself, ‘**there go I, but for the grace of God?**’

Now I don’t know about you, but when I read these verses my heart gets saddened. Isaiah describes the old Jerusalem as a drunken woman staggering about with an almost empty cup. I say almost empty because there is something at the bottom of the cup, it’s the dregs. And the reason there’s only dregs left is because she’s drunk it all.

And notice that none of her sons can help her, **why?** Because all of them are drunk too and they’re lying around on every street. What a pitiful picture this is, **isn’t it?** Their poor mum is totally out of it, staggering around everywhere but her sons can’t help. And when we think about an ‘**antelope**’, we see an animal which can run very fast but it’s also so graceful in the way it moves around. And to see one caught in a net, you really can’t feel anything but sorrow for the poor animal, as it lays there helpless and in a hopeless situation.

**So, what is Isaiah trying to tell us here? What is he describing?** He’s saying that Israel had become a nation that was mindlessly drunk on the idolatry of the nations. In other words, the very reason they were in captivity in the first place was because of their idolatry. They had wandered so far away from God and got to the point where their kings and leaders couldn’t help them, no one could help them.

**And who brought them into such a sorrowful state?** Yes, they brought it on themselves but ultimately it was God’s doing. They’re in this sorrowful state as a result of drinking from the cup of God’s wrath. And let me tell you loved ones, no one wants to be on the receiving end of God’s wrath because it never ends well.

**Revelation 14:9+10** “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.”

None of Jerusalem’s inhabitants can or will help her, **why?** Because of famine and sword, the people were suffering, there was desolation and destruction. And so, God asks them, **who felt sorry for them? Who would feel sorry enough for them that they would be moved to actually help them? Who could God use to comfort them?** Well, obviously no human being, but only God Himself could comfort them and help them. ‘**Wake up**’ God says, ‘**Wake up and stand up**’ God says, it’s time to move, it’s time to prepare to leave your captivity.

**Are you awake church?**

I love that story about the preacher who was preaching on the subject of hell one night and in the audience, there was this guy who fell asleep half way through the sermon. The preacher got to the point where he banged on the pulpit to emphasise how bad hell was and shouted, 'If anyone here really wants to go hell, let them stand up now.' Well, that guy who fell asleep was woken up by the bang on the pulpit, but only heard the stand-up part and stood up. He said, 'preacher, I don't know what we just voted for but it looks like you and I are the only ones for it!'

You see loved ones, some people think that going to worship will just tire them out. Why do some people talk about Bible study and about worship as if it's exhausting? You hear people saying all the time, 'I'm too tired to go to church'. The implication seems to be, 'Well, church will just wear me out' or 'Bible study will just me more exhausted.'

You never hear people say, 'Well, you know, I'm tired, I'm worn out, I might just go to Bible study tonight to get fired up'. 'I'm going to go to worship today to charge up the batteries'. You see, that's what it is supposed to do, an opportunity to praise God ought to get us fired up.

There was a church in the highlands that used to have revival meetings every spring, and there was an old man who would come every spring, he would come back to God. He would be hot all through the summer, but he would cool off in the autumn and by wintertime, he would get cold and drop out, but every spring he would get fired up again. So, the first night of revival he was on the back seat, the next night he moved up two rows and the next night he moved up another two rows. And by the fourth or fifth night he's down the front shouting, 'fill me Lord, fill me' and a lady that knew him well said, 'careful Lord he leaks'.

And that's a problem we all face, we all tend to leak. God fills us up the Holy Spirit, He starts the fire in our hearts but after time that fire just doesn't burn as bright as it used to.

Ask yourself, who's going to help you when hard times come? I know when I was younger, and I was involved in alcohol and drugs, I thought I had loads of friends, but the truth was, whenever I was facing a difficult time, none of them were there to help me. My friends didn't want to know, my parents didn't want to help because I had hurt them so much with my lying and stealing, so many times before. And so, in my time of despair, I came to realise that the only person who could help was God.

And that's what Isaiah says next, when no one else is around to help you in any situation, God will intervene and help. Isaiah 51:21-23 "Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk, but not with wine. This is what your Sovereign LORD says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again. I will put it into the hands of your tormentors, who said to you, 'Fall prostrate that we may walk on you.' And you made your back like the ground, like a street to be walked on."

Now notice that Isaiah uses the word, 'therefore' which means there's a change coming. And because Israel was hopeless and helpless, God sees it and promises to intervene. There's a dramatic change about to happen. In other words, now it's Judah's brutal oppressors turn, to drink the wrath of God. Why? Because of what they were doing to God's people, they were trampling all over God's people.

God tells these people who are drunk from His wrath, that He will remove the cup of His wrath from His people and deliver them from captivity. God is going to transfer His wrath onto those who afflicted them. In other words, now it's Babylon's turn to be punished.

Now let me say a few words about this idea of God's wrath, because I believe this subject is sadly neglected these days. And that's because preachers feel uncomfortable speaking on the subject and people who hear anything about the subject find it offensive. Many people today, including many Christians, make two fatal errors when it comes to thinking about God and sin.

Many people today, make the first fatal mistake of thinking that God isn't all that Holy. And others make the second fatal mistake of thinking that sin isn't all that bad. You see, loved ones, God hates sin, and God cannot pretend He doesn't see sin, and so He must move against evil. And it's this Holy reaction against evil that God calls His wrath.

If we're going to stay true to God and His word, we cannot avoid or water down the subject of the wrath of God.

Romans 2:5 “But no, you won’t listen; and so, you are saving up terrible punishment for yourselves because of your stubbornness in refusing to turn from your sin; for there is going to come a day of wrath when God will be the just Judge of all the world.”

Ephesians 5:6 “Don’t be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the terrible wrath of God is upon all those who do them”. People will be offended if we preach on Scriptures like that, but the truth is, God will be even more offended if we don’t. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 “And they speak of how you are looking forward to the return of God’s Son from heaven--Jesus, whom God brought back to life--and he is our only Saviour from God’s terrible anger against sin.”

God’s wrath is coming and because God is Holy, He must give full vent to His anger against sin and against evil. Because if He didn’t, He wouldn’t be the one the Seraphs call “Holy, Holy, Holy” in Isaiah 6:3. And that’s why we have a cross, when God searched for a way to save sinners, He couldn’t pretend He couldn’t see sin. He can’t say, “It doesn’t matter, I’m just going to forget about it.” He’s got to react in His holiness against sin and that’s called wrath.

Though on a cross, God poured out His wrath, His just wrath against all of our sins, by placing them on His sinless Son, our substitute. And whether we accept that or not, loved ones, we need to understand and accept that God really is that Holy and sin really is that big of a problem.

Let’s get back to our text and ask ourselves, [what message does God want the faithful remnant here in Isaiah 51 to understand?](#) It’s simple, God put them into captivity, God will bring them out of captivity, God’s still in control. They need to understand that when they found themselves without mercy in captivity, God came for them. God’s people must be confident because God is their help.

[Have you ever cried out to God for help? Have you ever had those moments when you just don’t know how you’re going to get through a certain situation or circumstance?](#) Loved ones, I don’t know of a single Christians who hasn’t cried out for help at some point in their Christian lives. Yes, there are times we need help with the small areas of our lives but there are other times when we need a lot of help from God.

Psalm 121:2+3 “My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber.”

Now notice what the Psalmist says, he says, ‘[the One who can help is the One who created heaven and earth](#)’. Think about that for a moment and think about it practically. The One who created all that exists is more than able to handle the problem I’m facing. You see, we get stressed out in situations, all because we forget to ask God for help.

God says, it doesn’t matter if you think it’s a little help you need or a big help, it’s all small to Me. Nothing is too big or too small with God, He’s the Maker of heaven and earth. And if He created the universe just by His word, [how much more is He able to look after His children when they need help?](#)

And notice the Psalmist says that ‘[God won’t let your foot slip.](#)’ Now when I was younger living in Scotland, the winters seemed to last forever and whenever you went out, you had to be very careful not to slip on the icy paths. And very quickly you begin to learn that the key to walking on ice is to take your time and deliberately take one step at a time. And life in general is like that, it has many dangers and many pitfalls and, so we need to tread carefully through life one step at a time.

And notice also that the Psalmist says that ‘[God won’t rest from looking out for us](#)’. Now being tired and feeling sleepy is something I know all too well, but God doesn’t get tired, He never sleeps. He’s always ready to help us in our time of need. [Hebrews 4:16 “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”](#)

The Israelites didn’t find any mercy whilst they were in captivity, but God had mercy on them, when nobody else would, in their time of need. The question is, [do you believe that? Do you trust God enough to ask Him for help in any situation, big or small? Do you trust Him enough to know that He will give you what you need most of all in your time of need? Do you believe that God will give you the mercy and grace you need to help you through those difficult times?](#)

You know, it never ceases to amaze me when I hear Christians crying out for help from God, but they refuse to accept that help. Now you might be wondering what I mean by that, so let me put you out of your misery.

We know that God worked in miraculous ways in the past, He miraculously provided food and water and shelter etc. But He doesn't work that way today, you're not going to hear a loud booming voice from heaven in answer to your cries. You're not going to receive a vision or get a personal visit from Gabriel in answer to your cries.

So, **how does God answer our cries, how does He send help to us in our time of need?** You need to be spiritually awake to recognise how God helps us today. If someone is in need of some food, the church should help supply that person with some food. If someone is going through a loss of some kind, then the church should go to that person and comfort them. If someone needs someone to speak to about something that's troubling them, then the church should be there to listen to them.

You see, the church is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of the church, which means we're supposed to act as Jesus' arms and legs here on earth whilst He's in heaven. In other words, when someone is in need, the church is supposed to go and help meet that need. And loved ones, that's how God sends His help to people today, God sends His people on His behalf. That's what **1 Corinthians 12:26** means, when Paul says, **"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it."**

I remember when my mum passed away, there was a big part of me that just wanted to be on my own for a while, whilst I was mourning. But the Great Barr church, came to visit me over a period of a few days. One brother who came to visit me and asked, **'are you ok with church members coming to visit? 'How are you coping so well with the loss of your mother?'** To which I answered, **'I'm practicing what I preach, I'm allowing the body of Christ, do what God designed it to do, I asked God to help me cope and He sent me His people'**.

That's what **Romans 12:5** means, when Paul says, **"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."** Now church, when difficult times come, you need to allow God's people into your life to help, so they can do what God designed the church to do. But that also means that the church must willing to go and help others in their time of need.

**Are you awake church?** God says, **'Wake up', 'Wake up and stand up'**. Standing implies readiness, standing implies you're getting ready to go somewhere and do something. God says, **'it's time to move', but where God, where do you want us to go?**

**Matthew 28:19+20** **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."**

God says, **'it's time to take the Good News message out to everyone.'** Now you might be thinking, but I've only been a Christians for a few weeks! **'Go and make disciples'**. I'm not very good at speaking with people! **'Go and make disciples'**. I don't know my way around the Bible too well! **'Go and make disciples'**. I'm too old to be walking around the streets delivering leaflets! **'Go and make disciples'**.

**Romans 10:14+15** **"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"**

Loved ones, the time for excuses is over because there are people out there who are screaming out for help. It may be your neighbour, it may be a family member, it may be a close friend, it may be a work colleague. It may be a homeless person, it may be the guy who owns the local shop or the women who cuts your hair.

**Are you awake church?** I pray that we do what the church was designed to do and act as Jesus' beautiful feet and take that Good News message out to those people, who so desperately need to hear it.