

SURPRISED BY GOD

Isaiah 53:10-12

INTRODUCTION

- A. In 1334, the army of the Duchess of Tyrol encircled the castle of Hochosterwitz in the province of Carinthia. The fortress, situated on an steep rock rising high above the valley floor. Only a prolonged siege could force the defenders to surrender the castle. In due course, the situation inside the fortress became critical: the defenders were down to their last ox and had only two bags of barley corn left. On the other hand, the attackers were facing problems of their own: the troops were growing mutinous, there seemed to be no end to the siege in sight, and the army was needed elsewhere for other urgent military business.

The Commandant of the castle faced a difficult dilemma. Time was running out. Every possible solution had been tried and had failed. Surrender was only days away. So the Commandant decided on a desperate course of action: He had the last ox slaughtered, its abdominal cavity filled with the remaining barley, and ordered that the carcass be catapulted into the middle of the enemy camp.

The attacking army, thinking the castle had so many supplies it could afford to throw food away, packed up their tents and left.

- B. In our culture, we usually assume there is a direct and obvious connection between a problem and its solution, between a question and its answer. In neat, logical, linear fashion, we like to trace straight lines between issues and the means of their resolution.

The straighter the line the better. No tricks, no surprises. Just give us straight-shooting, clear-cut, precise answers to the problems we face. It appears to be part of our psyche to believe that for every problem there is a simple solution, and for every question an obvious answer.

Very often, however, solutions to human difficulties are far from obvious. You can't always travel in a straight line to get from the troublesome present to a better tomorrow. The answers to some of our dilemmas are not neat, logical or obvious. Frequently, we have to do something contrary to logic, something surprising, to accomplish resolutions to the problems we face. Sometimes, you have to slaughter your last ox, stuff it with grain, and catapult it into the ranks of your enemies before they will go away and leave you alone.

- C. God knows that. And in the book of Isaiah – for the first time in the O.T. – God makes evident His strange, wonderful, nonsensical solution to the problem He has with sin-sick, pride-filled, rebellious, and dying humanity.

I. THE PROBLEM.

- A. The Tumultuous Times of Isaiah.
1. Brief overview of Isaiah, the prophet.
 - a. A prophet for the Southern Kingdom – lived in Jerusalem.
 - b. Received his calling the year King Uzziah died, 740 B.C.
 - c. Prophesied until at least the year Sennacherib is killed, 681 B.C.
 2. The external situation – Judah is being threatened from all sides. How will God handle things so as to save His people and protect His honor?
 - a. Trouble with Israel and Aram.
 - b. The threat of Assyria.
 - c. The fall of Samaria (721 B.C.) – Shalmaneser V.
 - d. Sennacherib and Jerusalem (701 B.C.), 2 Chron. 32.
 - e. Babylon on the horizon.
 3. The internal situation – The problem grows worse once you look inside the Southern Kingdom. God may win the day politically/militarily, but how is He to

win over His own people? They have forsaken Him and forgotten Him. What can He do to make them His in more than name only?

- a. Manasseh – King of Judah during the days of Isaiah.
 - i. Built altars to other gods and set up an Asherah pole in the temple.
 - ii. Sacrificed his own son in the fire.
 - iii. Filled Jerusalem with innocent blood.
 - b. Religious situation.
 - i. Isaiah frequently and bitterly condemned idolatry.
 - ii. Religion had degenerated into ceremony and rites.
 - c. The moral situation: Materialism and Injustice.
- B. The Significance of these Problems in a Wider Context.
- 1. The present was only the latest example of past patterns.
 - 2. The Israelites were only one instance of the human plight.

II. GOD'S SOLUTION.

- A. The Logical Answers:
- 1. The **Flood Solution**: wipe out and start over.
 - 2. The **Wilderness Solution**: dismiss an old generation and raise up a new.
 - 3. The **Judges Solution**: punishment and restoration.
 - 4. The **David Solution**: focus on the seed.
 - 5. The **Exile Solution**: focus on the remnant.
- B. The Illogical Answer:
- 1. The **Anointed One** – God's surprising, nonsensical, illogical and effective solution to the problems faced by Israel and the world.
 - 2. The **Servant Songs** – four of them in Isaiah.

III. THE SERVANT SONGS OF ISAIAH.

- A. The Quiet Revolutionary (Isa. 42:1-7).
- 1. Thesis: God's chosen one will revolutionize lives, nations, a world.
 - a. Vs. 1a – He is God's "chosen one in whom I delight."
 - b. Vs. 1b – God's spirit will be upon him.
 - c. Vs. 1c – He will bring justice to the nations.
 - d. Vs. 3b – He will bring forth justice.
 - e. Vs. 4b – He will establish justice on the earth.
 - f. Vs. 4c – He will establish His law.
 - g. Vs. 6b – He will be a covenant for the people.
 - h. Vs. 7a – He will give sight to the blind.
 - i. Vs. 7b – He will free the captives.
 - j. Vs. 7c – He will release those in dungeons.
 - 2. Antithesis: God's revolutionary will accomplish these marvelous things through very peculiar means.
 - a. Vs. 1 – He is, after all, a servant.
 - b. Vs. 2 – He will be so quiet, he will not shout, cry out, or raise his voice.
 - c. Vs. 3a – He will be so sensitive that the bruised reed he will not break, the smoldering wick he will not extinguish.
- B. The Failing Victor (Isa. 49:1-7).
- 1. Thesis: This one, called by God, will save the entire world.
 - a. He is commissioned to bring the Israelites back to God.
 - i. vs. 5b – formed to bring Jacob and Israel back (south and north).
 - ii. Vs. 6a – called to restore Jacob and bring back Israel.
 - b. But such a task is "too small a thing" for the Messiah, Isa. 49:6-7b.

2. Antithesis: Though he will accomplish so much, it will only be through self-doubt and the doubts of others.
 - a. Vs. 4a – “I have labored to no purpose; I have spent My strength in vain and for nothing.”
 - b. Vs. 4b – paraphrase: Only God knows what I have tried to do.
 - c. Vs. 7b – He was despised and abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers.
- C. The weak strong one (Isa. 50:4-9).
 1. Thesis: God has given truth and strength to His chosen one.
 - a. Vs. 4a – He knows the wisdom of God.
 - b. Vs. 4b – He can speak words which sustain the weak and weary.
 - c. Vs. 4c – God gives him strength to face each day.
 - d. Vs. 7a, 9a – The sovereign Lord helps him.
 2. Antithesis: Though he is strong enough to persevere, he is weak enough to be hurt by men.
 - a. Vs. 6 – He is beaten, his beard is pulled, he is mocked and spit upon.
 - b. Vs. 8 – He is accused.
 - c. Vs. 9 – He is condemned.
 3. Through it all, he is strong only because God is strong, he endures only because he leans on His God, he has confidence only because he trusts in God.
- D. The Suffering Savior (Isa. 52:13-53:12).
 1. No wonder Isaiah exclaims, “Who can believe what God is about to do?” “Who would ever think God would reveal His strength in this way?” (53:1)
 2. Thesis: This is a Savior like no other. That God would use this one to save His people is beyond understanding.
 - a. Vs. 2 – He was nothing special physically No commanding presence.
 - b. Vs. 3 – He was despised, rejected, and underestimated.
 - c. Vs. 4 – We thought he was afflicted by God.
 - d. Vs. 5 – He was pierced and crushed and punished and wounded.
 - e. Vs. 8 – He was killed.
 - f. Vs. 9 – Though innocent, he was considered guilty and buried with the wicked.
 3. Verse 10 forms the hinge of this passage – “Yet...”
 - a. All of this was God’s plan.
 - b. It was God’s will that these things should happen.
 4. Antithesis: Isaiah 53:11-12

CLOSING

- A. Sometimes, you have to slaughter your last ox, stuff it with grain, and catapult it into the ranks of your enemies before they will go away and leave you alone. The Messiah – this Messiah – was God’s ox thrown into the middle of Satan’s camp in order to save His people.
- B. The Jews were looking for straight-shooting, clear-cut, precise answers to the problems they faced. They wanted a military leader who would overthrow the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Greeks, then the Romans. They wanted a political leader who would unify the country and lead with wisdom and strength – another Solomon.
- C. And God gave them Jesus!
- D. We also are looking for obvious answers. Like Naaman, we are willing to fight dragons, slay giants, battle the Gargon. But God tells us to dip seven times in the Jordan ... He tells us to trust in this Messiah described by Isaiah.