

Isaiah: Offering Hope for the Future

Akira sat stonefaced. She tried to get out of coming to church this morning, but her parents insisted.

Chloe, one of Akira's newfound friends, had died in a car accident seven months ago. Akira's mother said she needed to go through the grieving process. Akira did not think she would ever move from the second stage—anger! Still, Akira felt as though she could not escape the eye and the love of the Lord.

Today, a visiting youth minister was speaking to the young adults. He gave his testimony about a time of rebellion after he had come to Christ. The Lord had not provided opportunities that he wanted. The youth minister found that the path he eventually followed had been the best all along.

His words began to chip away at Akira's heart. She had wanted to be part of Chloe's pretty, popular, and plush world. Akira started running after materialism and began to despise the things of God. She had been wrong.

"Can we visit and pray together?" a girl said, intruding on Akira's thoughts. "The minister asked us to pair off, share some struggles, and pray together."

After the service, Akira met her parents in the church lobby. "How was youth fellowship?" asked her mother.

"All right," she said, to which her parents exchanged hopeful looks.

1. *How do you react when things don't go your way? Explain why.*

2. *What things do we often pursue that offer only false hope? Why do we do that?*

3. *As Christians, why do we need to live with expectancy and not expectations?*

False Profession of Faith

Isaiah 29:13-16, KJV

13 Wherefore the Lord said,
Forasmuch as this people draw
near me with their mouth, and
with their lips do honour me,
but have removed their heart
far from me, and their fear
toward me is taught by the
precept of men:

14 Therefore, behold, I will
proceed to do a marvellous
work among this people, even
a marvellous work and a wonder:
for the wisdom of their
wise men shall perish, and the
understanding of their prudent
men shall be hid.

15 Woe unto them that seek
deep to hide their counsel
from the LORD, and their works
are in the dark, and they
say, Who seeth us? and who
knoweth us?

16 Surely your turning of
things upside down shall be
esteemed as the potter's clay:
for shall the work say of him
that made it, He made me not?
or shall the thing framed say
of him that framed it, He had
no understanding?

Isaiah 29:13-16, NIV

¹³The Lord says:

"These people come near to me
with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
Their worship of me
is based on merely human rules
they have been taught.

¹⁴Therefore once more I will
astound these people
with wonder upon wonder;
the wisdom of the wise will
perish,
the intelligence of the
intelligent will vanish."

¹⁵Woe to those who go to great
depths
to hide their plans from the
LORD,
who do their work in darkness
and think,
"Who sees us? Who will know?"

¹⁶You turn things upside down,
as if the potter were thought to
be like the clay!
Shall what is formed say to the
one who formed it,
"You did not make me"?
Can the pot say to the potter,
"You know nothing"?

Unlike people, the Lord is not impressed with outward appearances or actions that are meant to please others instead of Him. Isaiah saw that God looked into the heart of the Israelites' worship and found their hearts were far from Him.

Instead of worshiping the Lord out of love for Him, they just went through the ritual motions of worship.

The Israelites also sinned and thought no one could see them, not even God. Therefore, the Lord promised that what was coming upon them would be a (terrible) wonder to behold. Those whom they considered wise would perish, and the understanding of the prudent would cease to exist. By thinking they were hiding their evil ways from God, these sinners had turned everything upside down in their folly.

Just as a clay object can't deny that the potter made it, so too would it be foolish for people to deny their Creator. Yet, when people act as if what they do is hidden from God and will not be held accountable to Him, they truly are denying the existence of the Lord to whom we all will one day answer.

4. *How did the people approach God in worship?*

5. *What attitude did the people have as they lived and behaved as they saw fit?*

6. *What did God promise would happen as a result of their hypocrisy?*

Future Prospect for Justice

Isaiah 29:17-21, KJV

17 Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?

18 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.

19 The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 29:17-21, NIV

¹⁷In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field

and the fertile field seem like a forest?

¹⁸In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness

the eyes of the blind will see.

¹⁹Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

KJV

20 For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off:

21 That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.

NIV

²⁰The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down—

²¹those who with a word make someone out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice.

In the future, when God intervenes to bless Jerusalem, the moral change in the Jewish nation will be as great as if the usually forested Lebanon were turned into a field and vice versa. Ears will be unstopped, and eyes opened—both physically and spiritually—to discern the Lord’s truth.

When this happens, two kinds of people will rejoice: the humble and the poor. Jesus said the “poor in spirit” would be blessed (Matt. 5:3)—those who recognize their spiritual neediness apart from God and therefore turn to Him in faith.

The Lord also pronounced a blessing on the humble, who would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). Isaiah proclaimed that the humble and poor would rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

The poor and the humble will also rejoice because God will, in due time, judge the perpetrators of injustice. These wrongdoers are in three categories: the ruthless, the scorner, and the one with an eye for evil. The ruthless have no mercy for the less fortunate. The scorners mock God. Isaiah said that they would be consumed and disappear from the face of the earth. Finally, those with an eye for evil—such as false accusers in court—will one day face their day of reckoning.

7. *Who would one day rejoice in the Lord?*

8. *How does Isaiah describe the people who practiced injustice?*

9. *What would happen to those who dealt with the poor unjustly?*

Faithful Promise of Hope

Isaiah 29:22-24, KJV

22 Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale.

23 But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

24 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

Isaiah 29:22-24, NIV

²²Therefore this is what the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the descendants of Jacob:

“No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale.

²³When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

²⁴Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.”

Because true justice will prevail, Jacob’s descendants would no longer be ashamed. Furthermore, their faces would not turn ashen in fear or dread anymore. When people practice justice and walk in integrity, they will see their children sanctify the Holy One of Jacob by giving due reverence and honor to the God of Israel.

Our passage closes with two amazing truths. First, those who were wayward in spirit will come to understand the error of their ways. Second, those who murmured and complained against the Lord will be willing to receive instruction.

10. *Why will Jacob no longer be ashamed?*

11. *Who will gain understanding and accept the teachings of the Lord?*

12. *How does this give God’s people hope for the future?*

Surprised by God!

In *Surprised by Joy* by C. S. Lewis, the author recounts his conversion to Christianity. His parents regularly took him to church in his hometown of Belfast, Northern Ireland, while he was growing up. But Lewis became bitter toward God when his mother became ill with cancer and died when he was only 10. “With my mother’s death,” he said, “all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life.” Lewis became an atheist.

However, atheism did not bring him the “joy” he so much wanted. He called joy “an unsatisfied desire which in itself is more desirable than any other satisfaction.” He looked for it in the many books he read, especially medieval literature and tales of myths and fantasies. But he would later write in *Surprised by Joy* that “a young man who wants to be a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere.”

Instead of Lewis’s readings leading him further from the “myth” of God, they began to lead him to the Lord. He discovered that what he originally called “the Christian mythology” was not a mythology like the others, but a true description of how the world has worked since the beginning. “All pleasures,” he found, are “substitutes” for the true joy he eventually found in Christ. Lewis realized he had not been searching for God. God had searched for him—and found him through the unexpected means of literature.

Each one of us lives a unique life and has a unique relationship with our heavenly Father. Therefore, the Lord upends our expectations for lives unique to us in order to bring us to where and what He wants us to be.

13. *When have you looked for joy in places you did not find it?*

14. *Why do we expect God to work in the ways we want Him to work?*

15. *How has God upended your personal expectations in a way that has caused you to seek Him?*

The Pursuit of God

Much like the Israelites, we often stray from the Lord, placing our trust and expectations on false hopes rather than placing our hopes for today and the future on Christ. Nevertheless, the Lord is faithful and will not abandon those who truly seek Him.

► *Take a few minutes to write a letter to God. Begin by thanking Him for giving you the wisdom to comprehend how fleeting are the hopes of the world and how everlasting and priceless are the hopes you have in Christ. Also, thank Him for being actively involved in your life—even, at times, upsetting your personal expectations. Promise the Lord that you will continue to seek Him, and relate how you will pursue His presence, His guidance, and His love.*

KEY VERSE

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. —Isaiah 29:24, KJV

Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction. —Isaiah 29:24, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 10 through May 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Acts 4:13-22—Apostles Speak Truth to Council.
- Tues.** Jeremiah 37:11-16—Prophet Jeremiah Is Arrested and Imprisoned.
- Wed.** Jeremiah 38:7-13; 39:15-18—Ebed-Melech's Trust in Jeremiah Honored.
- Thurs.** Jeremiah 37:17-21—Jeremiah Reaffirms Prophecy of Zedekiah.
- Fri.** Jeremiah 38:24-28—Jeremiah's Last Days in Jerusalem.
- Sat.** 2 Kings 25:1-12—Jerusalem Destroyed; People Exiled.
- Sun.** Jeremiah 38:14-23—Zedekiah Must Submit to Babylonian Conquest.