

Our Reluctant Repentance and God's Overflowing Grace – Isaiah 33

Introduction – Our repentance is often long overdue. We oftentimes come to God reluctantly and so it seems with Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. The setting is most likely when, having been threatened by the Assyrian Empire, Judah turned from God and sought help with Egypt which turned out to be no help. Hezekiah tried to buy the Assyrian's off with Yahweh's silver and gold (2 Kings 18:13-16) but was double-crossed. Assyria plans to attack Jerusalem anyway. Jerusalem has nowhere else to turn; is this why she turns to God? What does God say to people whose repentance is long overdue? Isaiah 33 is for people who have not been trusting God, but who now see that they cannot treat Him like a lucky charm and expect to live in His blessings. Isaiah 33 is for people who realize their lives have become a lost opportunity and their sin is finding them out.

The Destroyer Destroyed (vv1-6) – Verse 1 has the sixth “*woe*” of this section (ch's 28-35) but this is the only one that doesn't place a woe upon Jerusalem. Now it is upon the one who seeks to destroy Jerusalem. Assyria and Sennacherib are doomed. God had been waiting all along to deliver Judah; she just needed to turn to Him (30:18, v2). This is the dramatic turnabout describing Judah; her repentance. She finally realizes that all God has to do is rise up and the nations are scattered (vv3-4). Whether it is your initial salvation, or repentance at some point in your walk with God over a stubborn sin you won't let go, the experience of turning to God exalts Him and fills us “*with justice and righteousness. Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the LORD is His treasure.*” (vv5-6). These are His treasures for us; these are His gifts to those who turn and wait on Him. They are all hidden in and given from the Father and the Son (Col 2:2-3).

Repenting of Our Failure (vv7-9) – Looking back, the ambassadors of peace found Assyria to be treacherous; the negotiations have failed. What has the Lord taught them – and us? Every attempt at salvation, and so every attempt to find life and blessing, apart from obedient faith before God, results finally in disaster. When we turn to Him, even then, “*a broken and contrite heart...He will not despise*” (Psalm 51:17).

Repenting and God Rising Up (vv10-12) – If God is kind, then once we have exhausted our autonomous and unbelieving efforts, that is the time when He enters in. For Judah, this was a prophecy of the great desolation brought upon Sennacherib's army (Isaiah 37). For all believers, this is the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8).

Repenting and Its Renewing Power (vv13-16) – The love of Christ and our fear of the Lord do not cancel each other out. Rather they both draw us to the Father through Jesus Christ. This is the renewing power of repenting, hating our sins, fearing God's holiness, running to the Cross, confessing our sins, and being made clean – again and again. What Isaiah experienced in his vision before the throne of God (Isaiah 6) is an experience for a nation or any person or persons who see the consuming fire of God's holiness and love, His mercy and truth. Remember: Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt 9:12-13).

The King in His Beauty (vv17-19) – What happens when we repent? We see God. “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matt 5:8). And when you are in Zion, you look out and you cannot see the end of His land (v17); the King seems to reign everywhere. The enemies, once so overwhelming, become so detached and distant from you (v18, cf. Psalm 23:5). Those tongues of unbelief, accusation, and judgment cannot be heard (v19, cf. 1 Cor 1:20-21).

Look upon Zion where Yahweh Dwells (vv20-24) – This vision, of course, can be and should be extended to the eschaton. But it is here and now for Isaiah's people and it is here and now for the New Jerusalem in this age. It is in the midst of right worship that we find feasting, peace and stability (v20). It is in the midst of right worship that we are granted protection, even distance, from all enemies (v21). In vv21-22 Yahweh is named four times: He is for us, He is our Judge, His is our Lawgiver, He is our King. And the result? “*He will save us*” (v22). Finally, the chapter seems to end with an enigmatic picture: we are a drifting mess and yet this ship will be the one that takes the prey (v23 – and certainly this happened in time and space for Judah). No one who dwells there will remain “*sick*”, for God will take away our iniquity (v23).

God is fiercely loyal to His holiness. But this holiness includes a holy-mercy which He is just as fierce to let loose at the first sign of repentance – even if it is reluctant. God says if we trust Him to take our sin and guilt away through the blood of Jesus Christ, He will do so and it never will come back. You are utterly unable to do anything about your greatest adversary – your own heart and will. But He will save. His name is Jesus, “*for He will save His people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21).