

God's Anger Unsatisfied

Isaiah 9:8 – 10:4

Halifax: 21 June 2009

Introduction

Today we return to our regular sermon series in Isaiah.

- You will remember that Isaiah's prophecies fall into different units,
 - and at this time, we are looking at a portion that began in chapter 7 where King Ahaz refused to look to the Lord and was told that Assyria would come to wreak havoc upon the nation.
 - In chapter 8 this destruction is further spoken of as coming upon the covenant people who had rejected the Lord.
 - Yet in the first seven verses of chapter 9, we are given the very encouraging assurance that despite the coming devastation,
 - God will still bring the Messiah who will establish God's elect under the blessing and favour of God forever and ever!
 - He will be the governor they need who will establish His kingdom and who will reign forever and ever with perfect wisdom and justice.

But this glorious promise is something yet future to Isaiah—over seven centuries future!

- In our passage today, Isaiah rather abruptly returns to the present reality—
 - the judgement that has already begun to fall on the covenant people and that will bring them down very low before the coming of the Messiah.
 - It was indeed for the faithful remnant to rest in the promise of future deliverance and to find assurance in God's promises,
 - and for that reason, we will find that Isaiah will keep going back to the promise of Christ,
 - but before those promises were fulfilled, there would be seven hundred years of humbling for the covenant people who were mostly apostate...
- The next phase in that humbling would be the decimation of the Northern Kingdom... of Israel or Jacob...
 - You will recall that the ten tribes of Israel had separated from Judah in the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam,
 - and were called Israel or Ephraim, or the Northern Kingdom.
 - Israel was to go into captivity first under the hand of Assyria (in 722 BC),
 - and then Judah later under the hand of Babylon (in 586 BC)...

- And it is here in Isaiah 9:8 – 10:4 that Isaiah makes it very clear that the destruction that Israel was soon to experience would be very great indeed...
 - He describes rather fully...
 - Yet, He also makes it very clear that even all the troubles they will experience will complete the punishment that is due to them for their apostasy!
 - No no my brothers and sisters!
 - We must never suppose that God’s punishment of our sins is complete until we have come to find our rest in Jesus Christ crucified!
 - As long as there is no repentance on our part,
 - whatever judgements and punishments and afflictions we experience in this life are not worthy to be compared with the judgement that is our due!
 - It is only the beginning of sorrows!
 - Divine justice can only be satisfied by the shedding of Christ’s blood.
 - Apart from Christ,
 - we are shut up to most grievous torments in body and soul without intermission in hell fire forever and ever.
- There is a great and blasphemous tendency in the church today to grossly underestimate the demerit of our sin and the penalty that it incurs...
 - This passage is a corrective to such error...
 - There are many false teachers in the church today who absolutely hate the very idea of the crucifixion viewed as the wrath of God poured out on His Son for the sins of His people.
 - These false teachers speak with great arrogance against the doctrine of a substitutionary atonement...
 - They claim that if the cross were such, God would be petty and unjust and not god-like at all...
 - They even say that if the cross is God punishing His Son for our sins, then the cross is cosmic child abuse...
 - I do not even want to repeat all their blasphemies!
 - Their condemnation will not slumber!
 - This sort of offence with the cross has been going on in every age of church history—
 - and though they present it as something new and recently discovered, it is an old heresy that goes back to the first century.
 - Until the Holy Spirit humbles a sinner’s proud heart,

- he will never admit that he has been punished far less than his sins deserve...
- and that nothing but the blood of the very Son of God can atone for his transgressions.
- that whatever judgements are experienced in this life do not begin to exhaust the vindictive wrath of our holy God against our sin.

And so as we come to look at our text today,

- I want to begin by showing you just how angry the living God is against His people for their sins when His people are not resting in Christ...
 - I do not mean to say that there were not those among the covenant people in Israel and Judah who were indeed resting in Christ as He was then promised...
 - Their sins were pardoned and they were accepted by the blood of the covenant that was to be at last shed by Christ for them...
 - But most of the covenant people had not repented of the sins and were not resting in promise of God's forgiveness.
 - And the same can be said in our day...
 - Most of those who are baptised and so formally in covenant with God have never truly repented of their sins and turned to Christ alone for salvation—
 - They suppose that they are saved by their words or their rituals or perhaps even more often that God is not even angry with them in the first place...
- In looking at the wrath of God and the reason for His wrath,
 - I hope that all of you who believe will gain a fresh appreciation for Jesus Christ who has borne God's punishment in your place...
 - And that any of you who do not believe will see your great need of Christ and will flee to Him with urgency for salvation lest you be consigned to God's wrath forever and ever.

I. First of all, see how God's wrath is not satisfied by the punishments of this world!

- Look at how Isaiah 9:8 – 10:4 is structured...
 - It is made up of four stanzas telling of God's punishments.
 - Each stanza is concluded with the same refrain—
 - a refrain that is repeated four times over.
 - It is found at the end of verse 12, verse 17 and verse 21 of chapter 9 and at the end of verse 4 of chapter 10...

- It says:
 - “For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand *is* stretched out still.”
 - This means that even though God brings all the punishment that is described in each of the four stanzas,
 - the conclusion is the same in every case...
 - His anger is still not turned away and His hand is still stretched out to bring yet more punishment.
 - Justice has not yet been meted out...
 - God’s vindictive justice has not yet been satisfied.
 - More punishment is due to them.
 - Let us now look at the great judgement described in each stanza—judgement that is then described as being wholly inadequate.
- A. In verses 8-12, the Lord shows us that Israel will be invaded by the Assyrians.
1. This is brought out in verses 11 and 12.
 - Let me just read these two verses and then I will explain them.
 - Isa 9:11-12: Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, And spur his enemies on, the Syrians before and the Philistines behind; And they shall devour Israel with an open mouth.
 - First of all, notice that it says the Lord will set up the adversaries of Rezin.
 - Do you remember who Rezin is?
 - He is the King of Syria (not to be confused with Assyria).
 - Perhaps you will remember from chapter 7 that Syria and Israel had entered into a confederation to protect themselves against Assyria.
 - Syria lay just the North of Israel.
 - That meant that Syrian was hit first when the Assyrians came down from the Northeast.
 - At the time of Isaiah’s prophecy in chapter 9,
 - Assyria had already invaded Syria, and Israel was next in line!
 - After they were through with Israel, they would sweep into Philistia.
 - By calling the Assyrians the adversaries of Rezin, Isaiah makes it clear that Israel is next.

- And look who is giving these adversaries of Rezin their strength against Israel!
 - Isaiah says that the LORD Himself is setting them up against Israel and is spurring them on!
 - We will see this even more clearly spelled out next week as we move further into chapter 10...
 - But please understand,
 - it is never a matter of a nation just gaining strength and doing these things—
 - you must never think of it like that...
 - When a nation comes to destroy another nation, God is behind it...
 - it is His judgement—
 - He is the one who raises up one nation to destroy another as an act of His judgement.
 - Assyria was coming against Israel because the LORD was sending them against His people to punish them for their apostasy.

2. What will be the result for Israel?

- The language is vivid!
 - vs 12: “They shall devour Israel with an open mouth!”
- Their enemies will swallow them up—consume them—devour them!
 - They came with repeated blows, swallowing up one city after another...
 - And then they came back through again and again after that.
 - This is what is coming but even after this is done,
 - God’s anger will still not be satisfied...
 - His hand will still be stretched out against His people to punish them yet more.

B. In the second stanza (verses 13-17) we are told how universal God’s judgement will be...

1. universal in the sense that it will reach to all the people—everyone will be cut off.
 - no one will be exempted!
 - In verse 14, Isaiah says that the LORD will cut off both the head and the tail...

- The idea is, the whole animal—everything from the head to the tail...
 - The head and the tail and everything in between...
 - He goes on:
 - “from the palm branch to the bulrush”—
 - in other words, from the overgrowth to the undergrowth—
 - all without exception will be cut off...
 - Interestingly, Isaiah explains that the head refers to the leaders and the tail refers to the prophets—
 - who were false prophets.
 - Like many so called Christian leaders in our day, these prophets would not stand up against corruption in high places...
 - They were like the tail of a dog—following along after the corrupt leaders of their day when they should have denounced them...
 - fawning after them and pandering to them.
 - Isaiah insults them by calling them the tail...
2. And notice in verse 16 that the leaders themselves who were to protect God’s people by leading them in God’s ways are instead leading them astray...
- v. 16: For the leaders of this people cause them to err, And those who are led by them are destroyed.
 - Our Lord Jesus uses these words against the leaders of His day and they are perfectly suited to be used against the leaders of our day.
 - He speaks of them as the blind leading the blind.
 - How quickly the masses will follow a bad example!
 - How easy it is for them to pretend that whatever their leaders approve is approved by the LORD.
 - If my parents do it, it must be okay...
 - If there is no law against it, it must be okay...
 - But the LORD says here that if you follow false leaders, it will bring about your destruction!
 - You are responsible to find out what the will of the LORD is and follow Him even if your leaders do not follow Him.
3. Verse 17 really drives home how far reaching and universal God’s judgement is...
- As you know, the Lord is (as a general rule) committed to the protection of the orphan and the widow—

- He looks after them Himself if His servants won't do it...
 - But there comes a time when a people are so wicked that even their orphans and widows fall under God's punishments...
 - Such is the case here!
 - Here we are told that the LORD will not only have no pleasure in the young men of Israel (which speaks of those who were chosen for battle),
 - but also that He will have no mercy on the fatherless and the widow!
 - Sometimes the poor and the widow assume that the God will bless them simply because they are destitute...
 - but when they join in the wickedness of the community and do not turn to Jesus Christ,
 - They will be judged right along with the rest of the community.
 - They are not exempted just because they are orphans and widows!
- Once again, you see the refrain...
 - Even though God's judgement will reach from the greatest to the least so that all are cut off,
 - His anger will not be turned away and His hand will still be stretched out against them.

C. In the third stanza, we are told that God's judgement will bring about domestic strife among the people so that they will destroy one another!

1. The society pictured here is one that burns itself up by its own wickedness.
 - They are so selfish that they take advantage of their own flesh and blood...
 - Families quarrel and are divided...
 - There is cheating and stealing and lying and fighting not to mention laziness—no one wants to help his neighbour but everyone is out only for himself.
 - Such a society is said to go up in smoke,
 - like briars and thrones crackling in the fire...
 - like a forest where one tree sets off another.
 - A society like this can stoop so low that even the women become so selfish that they will murder their own children in the womb--
 - Western nations are actually annihilating themselves by destroying their own children before they are even born!
 - and a man rather than protecting and caring for his wife and children will freely abandon them.

2. But I want you to notice what verse 19 says about a society like this...
 - We often think that such a society is ripe for God's judgement—
 - and of course that is true—God will judge them for their wickedness...
 - But verse 19 shows us that a society becomes like this *as* a judgement of God.
 - In verse 19, Isaiah says that it is through the wrath of the Lord that the land is burned up in this way—
 - with brother destroying brother and parent destroying child...
 - They are all grasping for themselves and so destroying one another...
 - and this is the wrath of God burning them up in this way.
 - In other words, when we bite and devour each other,
 - we are already under the judgement of God.
 - We have turned away from Him, so He has taken away our domestic peace and replaced it with civil strife.
 - When people in our society first began to turn from the worship of God, they supposed that they could still be civil toward each other.
 - Such was the attitude of the 50's—
 - But now God has taken from us the ability to get along with each other—
 - Strife and envy have entered into our communities, our schools, our very households.

3. This is the terrible judgement that God brings upon a wicked society...

- What sorrows there are because of domestic strife...
 - it is much more difficult for your enemies to be those in your own household than those of another nation...
 - Yet, even this does not exhaust the wrath of God!—
 - “For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is still stretched out.”

D. And in the fourth stanza which is found in chapter 10, verse 1-4, we see the fourth way that God's anger is expressed against His apostate people...

1. Here the LORD tells His people that there is a day of punishment and desolation that will come from afar (see verse 3).
 - Once again, this refers to the coming invasion of Assyria.

- Israel is told that they will have to leave their glory behind...
 - They are told that they will have no place to turn for help...
 - They are told that those who are not taken as prisoners will be slain...
- This is just what happened to Israel...
 - Assyria conquered them and then came back again and took those who survived after the battle into captivity as prisoners...
 - The northern kingdom was wiped out—everything was lost.
 - The Assyrians were cruel and ruthless, and there were no allies to help Israel.
 - Israel had forsaken the rock of their strength and now they had to live the consequences!
2. Surely this would be the end of God’s judgements upon them...
- surely death would be the end...
 - but no—
 - The refrain is repeated again in verse 4!
 - “For all this His anger is not turned away and His hand is stretched out still!”
 - No my brothers and sisters, God’s wrath is not exhausted even by death!
 - Even death is not the end!
 - So many think that it is, but here we are shown that it is not...
 - There is still more wrath to come even after death...
 - Sin is such a wretched thing—much more must be done for justice to prevail... much much more!
 - Only the Messiah, given and crucified, can take away God’s wrath.
 - Nothing else will do...
 - Until you repent—own your sin and turn from it to Jesus Christ,
 - you are subject to more and more wrath from the hand of God
 - and such wrath as will continue for all eternity.
 - It will never be satisfied.

TRANS> But now,

II. Let me show you why the LORD was so very angry with His people!

- What have they done to provoke Him to such wrath?
 - Once again, we will look at each of the four stanzas to see what they say about this.

A. In the first stanza, the Lord accuses His people of arrogance...

1. It is the worst kind of arrogance there is—the kind of arrogance that is the very root of sin—the arrogance that brought about the fall of mankind...
 - It is the arrogance that supposes you can get along without God...
 - that you can live and prosper and make life good without Him!
 - that it does not matter if you have His help are not—
 - that all that is really irrelevant and makes very little difference!
2. Look at how their arrogance is demonstrated by what they said when God's judgements began to fall on them!
 - Your words often expose your pride...
 - verse 9 says this is what they say in pride and arrogance of heart:
 - verse 10: "The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with hewn stones; The sycamores are cut down, But we will replace them with cedars."
 - The bricks in their day were not very strong, so the idea here is that even though God's judgement has fallen on them and their brick structures have been destroyed,
 - they will simply use the destruction as an opportunity to build things back better than they were before!
 - They will replace bricks with hewn stones!
 - They will replace the fallen sycamore trees with stately cedars!
 - They are undaunted!
3. Now my friends, if you want to provoke God to wrath, this is the way to do it!
 - a. Do as America did when the LORD knocked down the world trade towers...
 - I still remember how Colin Powell go on the television and began to boast about how great America is,
 - and how this will not stop them and how they will rebuild and be even greater than before...
 - It was a very inspiring speech—
 - very inspiring and very ungodly!
 - It is the arrogant attitude that is spoken of here by Isaiah!

- b. This is no way to respond to God's judgements!
 - The proper way to respond would be to let it stop you—right then and there—
 - Let the calamity that God sent break you...
 - Let it cause you to fall down on your knees and humbly confess your sin to God and plead for His mercy...
 - Let it cause you to realise that you are but a frail creature and that you cannot go on with out Him!
 - When God's judgement falls, it is no time to beat your chest and flex your muscles and tell everyone what a survivor you are!
 - It is time to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God so that He might lift you up!
 - Some people may cry to God for help at such times, but few there are who repent of their sins and return to Him.
 - c. This is our whole problem as fallen creatures...
 - We think we can get along without God—without repentance—without Christ—even when His wrath is revealed around us—
 - There is death, sickness, poverty, war, storms, and all sorts of calamities that God has sent to remind us that we are sinners who need to repent.
 - These are, as we have seen, only preludes to His coming judgement...
 - They are sent to wake us up!
 - But instead of humbling ourselves before Him, we go on avoiding Him and acting as if we can bless ourselves...
 - as if, to use the language of Babel, we can make a great name for ourselves.
4. And these were God's own covenant people who were talking like this...
- The ones who were delivered from Babel with the promise that **God** would bless them and make their name great—not they themselves!
 - The ones who were delivered from Egypt when they were under complete bondage—are they able to bless themselves?
 - How much more ought God's covenant people today to be far from such arrogant attitudes—
 - we who have been shown what God had to do to take away our sins!

- Are we going to suppose that we can bless ourselves independently of our LORD who was crucified for us?
- Are we going to suppose that we can go on for a moment without His grace?
- No wonder God was angry with His people!
 - Such arrogance is a high sin!
 - It is a sin that many do not even recognise!

B. Look at how the next stanza goes on with the same theme (verse 13)

- v. 13 For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts.
1. We saw before in this section that the leaders and the prophets caused the people to err—led them to destruction...
 - and here we see what that destruction was!
 - The leaders did not do what leaders ought to do.
 - They did not teach the people to turn to God when He struck them.
 - They did not teach the people to seek Him who is the LORD of hosts—the God of armies who raises them up and destroys them.
 - And the people followed their leaders wicked counsel...
 - They did not seek the LORD or turn to Him.
 2. You can tell a lot about a person by what they seek...
 - A covetous man seeks riches...
 - A proud man seeks honour...
 - An adulterous man seeks his neighbour's wife...
 - But a true Christian seeks the LORD Jesus Christ.
 - His life is about knowing Him and finding new life in Him—the life and salvation that He alone provides.
 - He will seek His blessing, he will seek His counsel, he will seek his help, he will seek His forgiveness and mercy, he will seek His grace and His righteousness and His way.
 3. God has sent His Son that we might obtain this life through Him...
 - He has spared nothing for our salvation!
 - But what kind of affront is it to Him to be brought into His covenant and refuse to seek what He has provided at such great cost?
 - It is not only the height of folly—it is the height of wickedness!

- It is such wickedness that causes God's unrelenting, unquenchable wrath to come upon us!
- It is such wickedness as causes Him to declare that we are hypocrites and evildoers, and that we speak folly (v. 17)
- It is such wickedness as causes Him to cut us off from the least of us to the greatest of us—even to our widows and orphans!
- It is such wickedness as causes His anger to remain and his hand to still be stretched out against us even after we have been stricken many times.

TRANS> Already, there is enough here to explain why God was so angry with His people—

- They were His people for whom He had promised salvation and they were not seeking His salvation...
 - but Isaiah goes on to show more justification for God's wrath...

C. In the third stanza, he speaks of their wickedness that burns like fire...

1. We have already seen this—they were devouring each other—their own brothers.
 - And now I would point out also how Isaiah shows the eagerness with which they devour one another!
 - At in the end of verse 19 and in verse 20 he says:
 - No man shall spare his brother. 20 And he shall snatch on the right hand And be hungry; He shall devour on the left hand And not be satisfied; Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm.
 - You see that they are shown to be greedy for each others destruction!
2. Look, these are those who are made in God's image!
 - As His image, it is there's to reflect the glory of God as a mirror—
 - They are to love each other as the members of the Trinity love each other...
 - A Father is to love His Son just as God the Father loves God the Son...
 - and a son is to love and obey his father even as God the Son loves and obeys His Father...
 - And the husband is to love his wife in the same way that the Father loves the Holy Spirit,
 - And the wife is to love and serve her husband in the same way that the Holy Spirit loves and serves God the Father...

- But here are God's covenant people devouring each other!
 - And not just devouring each other, but *eager* to devour each other...
 - Instead of living *for* each other, each is trying to take from the other.
- Now look, we were all created in God's image and we are all fallen—
 - and this is a terrible thing because we are still God's image,
 - but instead of showing what He is like—loving each other—we bite and devour and destroy each other!
 - We are so far from the love that Christ demonstrated when He came among us...
 - We are fit only for destruction and judgement...

TRANS> But there is something even worse here

3. God has promised to renew His image in His covenant people...in us!
 - He has given His commandments,
 - and if we will look to Him, He promises to write His law on our hearts so that we will delight in His ways and be empowered to live in them...
 - He has poured out His Spirit on us to transform us...
 - He has done this, but we bring forth stink-fruit such as described here—
 - we devour each other instead of being renewed in the fruits of the Spirit!
 - We, of all people, should be different because of our privileges... as God's people...
 - We are to be growing more and more into the likeness of Christ by His gracious working in us.
 - But when we are not truly in Christ, we are as described here...
 - like a raging fire of wickedness that destroys our own flesh and blood.
 - God's unquenchable anger is again fully justified!
 - It is for us to repent and receive the new life that He has promised.

D. In the fourth stanza (chapter 10, verse 1-4), we have a fourth reason given for God's sustained anger...

1. That we are a people who not only do the wickedness that has just been described, but who also justify it...

- We call good evil and evil good.
 - As Romans 1 puts it, we not only do wickedness, but we also approve of those who practice it!
 - It is one thing when a people become wicked, but still admit that they are doing wrong...
 - It is quite another when they no longer even acknowledge their sin as sin.
 - when they cast away God's standard altogether!
 - And this is all the worse when the people doing this are God's Covenant people!
2. You can see in the text that this is what Isaiah is speaking about...
- a. It is a situation in which the officials of the land devise a legal system that deviates from God's moral standard...
 - They write laws that are unjust and oppressive—burdensome to those whom the law is supposed to protect.
 - In such a society, things become acceptable that are not acceptable to God.
 - b. For Israel,
 - the casting off of God's law meant that oppression was tolerated...
 - the weak and helpless were defrauded and the law looked the other way.
 - c. We live in a society where there are virtually no laws against adultery and many other forms of immorality...
 - We even see churches that ordain persons living outside chastity as defined by scripture...
 - We see persons admitted to membership in the church who are cohabitating outside the bonds of biblical marriage...
 - We see Sabbath breaking and oppressive requirements to work on the Sabbath more and more accepted in our society.
 - We see dishonour of parents hardly looked on as a sin...
 - We see bankruptcy no longer as a thing to be ashamed about.
 - That is what happens in a society that does not uphold God's standard.
 - Sin becomes fully accepted!
 - It is one thing to do wrong—it is a much worse thing to say that it is okay to do wrong—or that what is sinful is not sinful.

- d. What hope is there for a people who have so corrupted themselves that they are no longer able to even see their sin?
 - How can such a people ever turn to God?
 - How can they ever see their need to repent and believe on Jesus Christ?
 - This is the dreadful state that has come upon our society...
 - Many in the church when they hear of salvation do not even know what they need to be saved from...
 - They know their sorrows and their loneliness and their need to gain as sense of belonging,
 - but they have no true sense that they are sinners who need to be pardoned and transformed by Christ.
 - They are products of a society that has so hardened itself, that they cannot see their sin.

Conclusion:

Is it any wonder that the LORD should be filled with anger against such a people and that His hand should be stretched out against them?

- Once again, the refrain is sounded—
 - “For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand *is* stretched out still.”
- Once again we see the fearful thought that all these accumulated judgements are insufficient to appease the wrath of God.
 - As Calvin says, all the instances of punishment that now produce fear and terror are nothing more than preparations for that final vengeance with which He will thunder against the reprobate, and many things he appears to pass by, he purposely reserves and delays till that last day.

What can possibly be done for such a people?

- Isaiah asks them in verse 3 what they will do in the day of punishment—literally, in the day of God’s visitation...
 - The answer is that they will have nothing that they can do...
 - They will have no place to hide and no place to run for help because they have forsaken the only one who could have helped them...
 - the one who judges them even for refusing His help and salvation...
- There is only one thing that can turn away the wrath of God?
 - And that is the LORD Jesus Christ crucified and trusted in.

- God has delivered Him to be crucified and He has accepted His sacrifice for sinners...
 - But unless you repent and trust in what Christ has done,
 - you remain forever and ever under the wrath of God...
 - He will not be through with punishing you forever until and unless you repent.

- Edward Young has this to say:
 - How majestic this picture is! Before a whole nation stands the lone Isaiah. "What will you do?" he asks. You who are confident that you can meet every situation, who think that all wisdom resides in man alone! Judgement is coming, mighty and gathering force. What will you do? Oh! that Isaiah's words could be heard today! What will you do, you who trust in man? The day of judgement is coming. Flee unto Him who alone can save from the wrath to come!

- My brothers and sisters, it is only then that you can say what Isaiah says in chapter 12:
 - "O LORD, I will praise You; Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.'"
 - Can you say that?
 - Can all of you who hear this sermon say that?
 - Nothing is more important than this.