



Bible Study

March 11, 2015

Gen 7:6-9

Isaiah 10:12-20

Proverbs 9:12-18

Genesis 7:6-9 (NKJV) -

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood waters were on the earth. So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. Of clean animals, of animals that are unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah.

Proverbs 9:12-18 (NKJV) - If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you will bear it alone. A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple, and knows nothing. For she sits at the door of her house, on a seat by the highest places of the city, to call to those who pass by, who go straight on their way: "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here"; and as for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell.

Isaiah 10:12-20 (NKJV) - Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks." For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries; so I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people, and as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth; and there was no one who moved his wing, nor opened his mouth with even a peep." Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood! Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will send leanness among his fat ones; and under his glory he will kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. So the Light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day. And it will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they will be as when a sick man wastes away. Then the rest of the trees of his forest will be so few in number that a child may write them. And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

Commentary -

As St. Paul summarized to us, 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom. 6:23). When someone has worked for a period of time, they expect to receive their agreed upon wages automatically. In the same way, sin and wickedness bring death, chaos, and destruction automatically, as surely as day follows night. This was true of the entire inhabited world in the days of Noah, when mankind had reached the point where every man's thoughts were always evil, all the time. God, in His patient love for mankind, withheld the full consequences of humanity's actions until the cup of their iniquity was full, and then He unleashed His wrath, allowing destruction to come upon the entire world. Still, within the ark, He preserved a remnant of humanity, and of the rest of His Creation.

In today's reading from the prophecy of Isaiah, we see a similar dynamic. It has been roughly 500 years since the Lord brought the people of Israel into the land that He promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He gave them the land and poured out His blessings upon them. Despite all of those blessings, despite His Love for His people, they have, from the beginning, rejected Him, turned away, and run after the things worshipped by this world. Rather than giving thanks to Him, they have taken credit for their prosperity themselves, or worse, given it to some other god unworthy of the title. In His forbearance, He has again and again delivered them from the consequences of their sins, turning back the Amalekites, the Midianites, the Jebusites, the Philistines, the Hittites, the Arameans, the Syrians and many others. In response to His protection, He has received nothing but ingratitude and spite.

Through Isaiah, God has announced to the nation of Israel that their judgment is coming, and that the same lies in store for Judah unless they likewise repent. For Israel, judgment is taking the form not of flood waters, but of the armies of the Assyrian Empire, one of the most brutal and violent in history, descending upon them from the north. In the end, Israel, and the nine tribes of the Israelite people whom it represented, will be wiped from the face of the Earth, never to be seen again. The Lord is no longer going to hold back the consequences of the great evil the people have committed. They are going to experience them in full, because they will not repent.

Today's reading from Isaiah, however, is addressed not to the Israelites, but to the Assyrians. Even as God uses them as a tool to bring about His judgment on His people, He knows how they will interpret the events that are about to unfold. They will interpret the horrible violence against Israel as a good thing, as an icon for other nations to see of their brutality and power. They will interpret Israel's utter defeat as being a result of their own superior strength to the Israelites, and even Israel's God. They will, in their pride and arrogance, wear death and destruction as a badge of honor. And so, the Lord warns them that they are next. Just as Israel's wickedness remained unpunished for a long time due to the Lord's mercy, so also has the Assyrian's sinfulness gone unpunished. But that will not last forever. And when the time of Assyria's doom comes (in that case, at the hands of the Babylonians), unlike Israel or the family of Noah, God will preserve no remnant. The judgment will be complete.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day and seven times in a day returns to you saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:1-4). Many times in the Old Testament, we see men and women, and sometimes whole nations used by God to bring about judgment, to bring upon people and other nations the consequences of their sin and wickedness, be it the Prophet Elias slaying the prophets of Baal, or the Israelites destroying the Canaanite kingdoms, or the Judges of Israel violently overthrowing Israel's oppressors. In every case, however, even when God has ordered the violence and the judgment to take place, those responsible must themselves repent and humble themselves before the Lord, be it the

warriors of Israel during the conquest of Canaan being considered unclean and remaining outside the camp to purify themselves, King David being unable to build the Temple because of his lifetime of warfare, or when he did not so repent, Samson being consumed and destroyed by the same violent judgment that he delivered to the Philistines.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been called upon to be the tools in the hands of the Lord of His mercy and His forgiveness, not of His judgment. Destruction and misery follow our sin as day follows night, and it will come upon us when we least suspect. Christ came into this world not to condemn us, but that we might be saved through Him. We have been given the authority as the Church to set people free of the cycle of sin and death through forgiveness and healing. This is not to say that we ignore, or turn a blind eye to sin. Quite the opposite: a correct diagnosis is necessary for real healing and recovery to take place. But it is healing that the Lord seeks, not justice. Not the destruction of His enemies, but that His enemies might become His friends. Not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn and live.

Questions to Ponder -

- 1) Noah was commanded to take both clean and unclean animals onto the Ark, as all of God's Creation is precious to Him. How should this affect who we are willing to invite into our lives, our homes, and our churches?
- 2) Today's reading from Proverbs describes the call that we hear toward sloth, toward taking the shortcut, and the easy way through life; to slide through life along the path of least resistance. We also read where that road ends. Where are some places in your life in which you experience this temptation, either internally or as pressure from others, to do what is easy and seems good at the moment, rather than what is truly good and right?
- 3) Through Isaiah, the Lord asks the rhetorical question as to whether an axe can take credit for having split logs over against the one who was wielding it, or a saw can claim to have cut wood without the one who sawed with it. Often, we take credit for things that God has done in our lives, or blessings He has given us, or things He has accomplished through us. This is pride. What are some things which you have claimed credit for or been proud of when the thanks and praise should instead have gone to God?
- 4) Because the Lord is long-suffering, merciful, and gracious, He has held back from us the full consequences of our sins, just as He held back the waters at the time of Noah, the foreign armies from Israel, and now holds back the time of His Second Coming in order to allow for repentance. Think of some times in your life when your wrong choices should have led to disaster, but the Lord spared you.

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