

Coming off of Easter I was reminded in my own heart of the draw toward experience. The big Sunday, the whizbang sermon, the emphasis we put on special events. But more so I reflected on the reality that faith is lived out in community, in the day-to-day, nitty-gritty, happiness and sorrows of life. And the gospel, the good news of Jesus speaks to and holds us up in all of it.

What relief!

Toward that end we plod along, studying the word and seeking Jesus.

Jesus brings his people to the place of utter reliance on Him and because he is good we can hold on as we get there.

Isaiah 29:1-24

Did you know that your body was designed to be formed to function well under the weight of gravity? When babies are born their femurs, (the big bone at the top of the leg) are straight. But they are soft bones as toddlers begin to rise and put weight on the bones they settle, they shape into the hip sockets for mobility and stability. Eventually to harden and help us thrive.

It is a beautiful piece of intelligent design - beyond random chance.

But if you lie in a crib as a toddler, never putting weight on the bones, they don't form into the hips. This was my daughter's situation. Adia's femurs hardened unshaped, still straight because she was never given the chance to bear weight on them, to walk.

The miracle of modern medical treatment, thankfully, can fix such a problem but it requires the breaking of the bones and forcefully reshaping them and applying the strength of titanium to hold them in place. And without getting too gruesome, you have to have access to the femurs and the hip sockets to form them correctly. Hours of surgery, and months of recovery and years of therapy because femurs were kept from forming.

Something broken to bring health, to eventually bring thriving. We are watching the healing happen and it gives us hope.

Maybe you have had a similar experience as you think of your own path to health. Cutting through healthy tissue to repair what is broken; chemotherapy to kill what is worse; struggle and strain to reverse atrophy or injury of muscles... Experiencing pain with perseverance because healing is on the other end.

This imagery all matches the spiritual story of Israel - God's people. And here in Isaiah 29, we catch a view of the arc of pain and the sustaining promise of healing. For us, it is another reminder of the provision and hope we have in Jesus.

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The prophet speaks the words of the Lord - Ariel "Jerusalem," under siege, in trouble, experiencing pain. The people are in the ashes, brought low for what seems to be a purging of meaningless religion to replace it with hope.

There are three movements in the chapter that we want to follow and find the good news for those trusting God today. Humbling, Hypocrisy, and Healing.

1) Humbling

God in his sovereignty may humble us, it may hurt, but where we are headed is worth it.

We often talk about what we bring into the salvation Jesus provides, our need, but how we get to a place of recognizing or owning that need varies.

God in his loving kindness, which can be a mystery to us, may bring us low like he did Jerusalem.

V. 2 "Yet I will distress Ariel..."

V. 4 "You will be brought low, from the earth you shall speak, and from the dust your speech will be bowed down; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and from the dust your speech shall whisper."

God acting, bringing low. To the dirt. To a place of humility, can't go any lower. That even our prayers are seemingly a whisper. For Jerusalem, it is the siege of their city. Foreign invaders, Assyria closing in. Real suffering.

For us the same life as a siege. The diagnosis, loss, anxiety, relational brokenness, separation, even actual attack on us... unanswered questions that leave us low.

We don't like this - it doesn't seem sensible. We are much more comfortable with other sources of our hurt. Yes, it may be our own sin that brings on the pain... It may be our cosmic enemy's efforts, Satan's work to rob God of glory... all of it though within the decree of God. All purposed by him to refine his people.

However dim or unclear it is to us, whether we ever see it or not.

We can find ourselves in the ashes, our prayers barely a whisper. Deliverance feeling so far off. Experiencing severe mercy of God.

Brought to a place of reliance. Of nowhere else to go but into the trust of God.

“When God surprises you so that you can't see through what God is doing in your life into the reason behind it, when he becomes opaque and mysterious, you are seeing something. You are seeing that God is God and you are not God.” Ortlund

It may not make any sense to us, but it is the mystery of God we accept and even embrace because we are not willing to give up what we know of him, of his love, of his grace.

For Israel and every one of us that stand in need of Jesus, life brings us to a place of surrender to Christ or violence against him. Isaiah 29 is an invitation to “yield to the victory of God. [To] Let him win.” Ortlund

Clear evidence that we are not sovereign, that we don't run the universe and don't speak with creative authority in the way He does. Humbled in our need.

But it is always with a promise... “But the multitude against you will be like dust.” Your foes one day will be like a dream. Destroyed by the Lord of hosts.

For Adia, the pain of surgery and recovery a mist of memory.

For us spiritually, on the other side, transformed, refined, embracing our reliance on Jesus. “How happy are tried Christians, afterwards.” - Charles Spurgeon

Humbled out of hypocrisy.

2) Hypocrisy

This is Jerusalem’s issue, this is what the Lord is bringing them low to deliver them from. The pointless ritual, lifeless religion dutifully experienced, bringing distance from the Creator.

Israel is blind in their routine, assuming their identity.

V. 9 “Astonish yourselves and be astonished... be drunk but not with wine.” Drunk with the hysteria of putting on a show devoid of spiritual connection and empowerment from God.

Belong to God in declaration but not in reality. Both brought on by self, by the sin of the people, and by God to rid his people of performance and replace it with passion.

“The worship of these people is impervious both to the heat of his anger and to the warmth of his love. They neither tremble nor rejoice in God’s presence. They just go through the motions.” Ortlund

Jesus quotes Isaiah in condemning the false worship of the Pharisees. **Mark 7:6–8** “And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; [7] in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ [8] You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” (ESV)

Refusal to see who God is and what he desires to do for those he loves... My kids refusing to take the medicine that will cure them because they don’t like the flavor...

Even as those awakened by the grace of Jesus we are prone to the same type of hypocrisy of missing the point and missing the grace we have in Christ. Living just phoning it in... slipping further apart.

Hebrews 2:1 “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” (ESV)

There is hope. “Human defiance is the madness out of which his grace is creating something new.” Ortlund

"as God works in our lives, he will seek to achieve the same purpose as in theirs: healing our hearts—from coldness, complacency, dry religion, formalism, spiritual dullness, and worldly wisdom—resulting in a people wholeheartedly passionate for his glory.” Davis

Hypocrisy is brought to an end by the promise, pain resolved by the miraculous work of God in Christ.

Isaiah 29:14a “behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder;” (ESV)

His promise is healing.

3) Healing

Isaiah 29:17–18 “Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? [18] In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. (ESV)

Healing is coming for Jerusalem, deliverance is coming, ultimately in Christ.

Those brought low, shaken out of hypocrisy, those made meek by the work of God, made whole.

In Isaiah God is saying, "You may not understand me or my ways, but you can always trust me. If I surprise you with humility, lowness, I will also surprise you with the joy I'll bring out of that pain.' For Israel and for us, it can be a struggle to see this, to hear this, but this is God's specialty. This is how he works and brings us to where he longs for us to be - as passionate followers of him.

Isaiah 29:19 "The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel." (ESV)

Meek - those surrendered to God. Those relying only on him, that have been brought low to lean into the provision, the grace of Christ. The promise is for joy. Triumph, peace, elation that it is finished, we can stand righteous before God, refined by his work, for his glory and our good.

It's this fresh joy I long for, I imagine you do too. What Isaiah says is that fresh Joy in Christ is going to come like a flood over the earth. Because we have witnessed his work we can trust his word - however perplexing his ways may be...

Our part is meekness, surrender to his grace, to his power, to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for us.

"The result of this faith will be genuine spiritual joy; having been humbled by the judgments of God, they will drink at a fountain of "joy after joy" (v. 19)."

This joy then is strength all the more to endure, a grip to hold on with.

And we lean into that healing, as we whisper, as we stand above our conquered foes, as we rely on the gospel of Jesus, his gift of healing. This is the well we keep coming back to, to drink the refreshing goodness of Jesus for all of life. It is the power of refined godliness in our lives.

"Older people need the power of godliness in their hearts because they have little time left to get ready for Heaven. Middle-aged people need the power of the godliness in their hearts because they are strongly tempted to coast, to rest on their laurels, to become dull and mediocre. Young families need the power of godliness in their hearts because they are forging the convictions that will shape their home for a lifetime.

Singles need the power of godliness in their hearts because they can gain or they can forfeit single-minded devotion to Jesus. Students and teenagers need the power of godliness in their hearts because they are being targeted by the world with brilliant and attractive seductions. Children need the power of godliness in their hearts while they are young and open, to be set apart to God forever..." Ortlund

"In the end, the transformation of former rebels into humble disciples is the centerpiece of God's healing work."

The power of the gospel is our experience as we surrender, humbly to God's care and mysterious ways, and embrace the renewal he promises. Jesus knows you, he sees you, he feels what you do, and he is bringing you through.

Hebrews 4:14–16 "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (ESV)

"Will we trust him and follow him in meekness, wherever he leads?"

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Hold On - Just a while longer friend. In Christ you have been guaranteed eternity, let that drive your humble faith, surrender and cling to his promise, of grace to cover your sin and give you new life. Seek his purpose in your experience.

Practically you keep going forward trusting. Be willing to be helped, to be prayed for, to be honest in community that others may hear your whisper.

Pursue Passion - Ask the Spirit for eyes to see, ears to hear, and the ongoing experience of fresh joy in the Lord - that we, the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. Pray, open the word asking to see Jesus and find hope. Study with others. Share your joy.

With each new step that my daughter takes the process is worth it. The pain is far gone and there is only joy, and more to come.

When our enemies are like a dream when those who have gone astray come to understanding, when shame and pain are no more when ultimate healing comes - it will all be worth it. A life surrendered to Jesus - Hold on!