

Readings for Lent 4 – Isaiah chapter 51, verses 1 – 16:-

Remember that the chapter divisions in our Bibles do not necessarily follow the original “Sermon” divisions of this (or other) Books. The Reading this week is a word of encouragement to a battered and disillusioned people. Note that the word translated as ‘righteousness’ in verses 1, 5, 7 and 8. contains within its original meaning, the idea of ‘deliverance’. Because the Lord God of Israel is wholly righteous he must be faithful to his promises. Their ultimate vindication and salvation is assured because of who God is – the Holy one of Israel.

Verses 1 – 3:- Words of the prophet (Isaiah) to those who were looking for the Lord’s righteous deliverance. Remember what the Lord God has done down the ages for his people Israel. Right back to the promises made to Abraham and Sarah – Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 – 3; chapter 13, verses 14 – 16 and chapter 15, verses 1 – 6. God’s future purpose is to settle his people in a latter day Eden. The transformation of a dry and desert land is to be accompanied by a spiritual transformation when there will be joy and gladness expressed in the voice of song.

Verses 4 – 8:- In these verses it is the voice of the Lord God speaking to his people. He promises to judge the world and cleanse it of evil. In verse 4 “*a Law*” means “authoritative instruction”. God’s standard of righteousness will be set up as a standard for all the nations of the earth. Note the use of the word “*righteousness*” in verse 5. In this context “*righteous deliverance*” makes sense. The Lord’s salvation is eternal – the heavens and the earth are temporal because they are material. Redeemed souls will dwell forever in God’s presence. In verses 7 – 8 we see that those who have experienced the righteous deliverance of the Lord God need never fear what unregenerate people say or do. The wicked are already under judgement and the salvation of the people of God is sure.

Verses 9 – 11:- Again we hear the voice of the prophet / preacher on behalf of the believer. Praying for the Lord God to act. He is looking back on the great deliverance wrought by God for his people in the Exodus. This “*Rahab*” was a mythical deep sea monster and these verses bring a picture of the Egyptian chariots being overwhelmed in the Red Sea. As the Children of Israel rejoiced then with singing (see Exodus chapter 15, verses 1 – 21). So those ransomed from Babylon (both historic after the exile - Isaiah chapter 35, and future at the end of time - Revelation chapter 15, verse 3 and chapter 19, verses 6 - 8) will return to the New Jerusalem singing and rejoicing in what the Lord has done for them.

Verses 12 – 16:- The Lord God speaks again to reassure his trusting people. He points out the folly of trusting mortal man (who can kill only the body) more than the omnipotent creator who in the end frustrates the fury of even the fiercest opponents. Verse 14 refers to the state of a wretched slave, in shackles, bowed and broken. The Assyrians and Chaldeans would go down to destruction and only the once captive People of God would survive. In verse 15 “*the sea*” symbolises the restless unregenerate world – see Isaiah chapter 57, verse 20, James chapter 1, verse 6 and Jude verse 13. The Lord God has put his inspired Word into the mouth of his covenant people (Isaiah 51, verse 16). It is the possession of Scripture which gives the People of God their importance.

A note for the preachers of God’s Word today. In the pulpit in the parish church of Cullompton is a small plaque. It simply says “*Sir, we would see Jesus*” - “*John chapter 12, verse 21*”. These ‘Sermons’ in the book of Isaiah could be a pattern for your preaching and teaching. A “cry to the Lord” for his help. Some clear teaching from his Word. Some clear application for what that Word should mean in our lives. For all of us who listen to our preachers and teachers. Please give some helpful encouragement to those who preach and teach. Remember, you as a congregation will get the preacher you deserve. Let the words of Isaiah chapter 62, verses 6 - 7 be yours this Lent.