

“SINGING ISAIAH”

Meditations on Texts from Isaiah and the New Testament

By Ken Onstot

“The Rose”

Scriptures: Isaiah 11:1-2, Luke 2:4-5

In Isaiah’s time the whole nation of Israel
Was a stump,
Cut down by Assyrian invaders,
Defoliated by Babylonian conquerors,
Hauled away, burned, thrown on the ash heap
Of history.

But out of that stump,
From an ancestor named Jesse,
Would come a new king.

God did this once before.
From Jesse’s family in Bethlehem God chose
The youngest, the runt, the least impressive son,
To become Israel’s greatest king.
His name was David.

Isaiah expects God to do it again.
Out of the stump of Israel,
From the descendants of Jesse and David,
In that same shepherding village of Bethlehem,
A new plant will grow,
A flower will bloom,
A new king will be born,
Who reigns with justice and truth.

Some say love, it is a razor,
That leaves the heart to bleed;
The Bible says love, it is a flower,
And Jesus, it’s endless seed.

“Star Attraction”

Scriptures: Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11

Isaiah wrote in a dark time
For God’s chosen people:
Defeated by Assyrians and Babylonians,
Forced from their homes,
Living as refugees,
Poor, outcast, mocked.
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion,”
Their captors laughed.
“You know, one of those psalms you people sing,
In your rubble strewn streets of Jerusalem.”

Five hundred years later it was still a dark time
For God’s chosen people:
Defeated by the Romans,
And forced out of their homes, this time
By taxes.

In the darkness a young couple from Nazareth
Seeks shelter anywhere they can find it
For the wife to deliver her child.

Then in the darkness a star shines,
A light arises, just as Isaiah predicted.
And kings come to its brightness,
Bringing gold and frankincense,
Just as Isaiah said they would.

The star attraction is the child,
So pathetic in worldly status,
And so valued by these foreign guests.

We, you and I,
Live in our own darkness,
Under our own oppressive powers,
Struggling with our own weakness,
Until we also follow the star.

“Highway Construction”

Scriptures: Isaiah 40:1-5, Luke 3:1-6

It would take a bulldozer
To bring Israel home from exile;
Something powerful to break down
The high and mighty oppressors,
Something wide to clear away the brush
Of captivity,
Something that digs deep and pushes people up
Out of depression,
Something that pushes forward those stuck
In hopelessness.

It will take a bulldozer
To bring us back to God.
The heights of pride and self-sufficiency
Must be cut down,
The low spots of hopelessness and unworthiness
Must be filled in,
The debris of false gods
Must be cleared away,
The crooked of heart
Must be straightened out,
And the rough edges of character
Must be made smooth.

Prepare yourselves for God’s north-south freeway
Through your soul.
For God is a bulldozer,
Bringing Israel home from exile
And you home from the far country,
By whatever means it takes.

“Miracles”

Scriptures: Isaiah 35:1-7; Luke 7:18-23

For God, the return of Israeli exiles
Is not enough;
The freedom of oppressed Jews
Is too easy.
God intends to transform
The whole creation.
The wilderness will be glad,
The desert will rejoice,
The crocus will sing,
And all the trees of the field
Will clap their hands.

If cacti can sing, and oak trees applaud, then why not
Blind people who can see,
Deaf people who can hear,
Lame people who walk,
The speechless who shout for joy.
Nothing is impossible for a God like that.

Perhaps our hopes for God
Are too small.
We ask for daily bread, but God intends
Fullness of life;
We ask for forgiveness of sins, but God intends
To overhaul of our character;
We ask for deliverance from evil, but God wants
To makes us a force for good.

If God can make trees clap,
And cacti sing,
And blind people see,
And deaf people hear,
And lame people walk,
Who knows
What God can do with you.

“The Rejected Who Saves”

Scriptures: Isaiah 53:1-6, Mark 15:25-32

In the Bible people are often saved
By the person they rejected.

Joseph’s brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt
Where he saved them from famine.
Moses’ people rejected his leadership
Before he freed them from Egypt,
And rejected it several more times,
Before he got them to the promised land.
David was considered too small
To defeat Goliath.
And Jeremiah too gloomy and depressing
To be a true messenger of God.

“He was despised and rejected by others.”
That happened to many of God’s people, including one
Who hung on a cross.
But he died without saving anyone,
Including himself.

Or did he save them
By not saving himself?
“He was wounded for our transgressions,
Crushed for our iniquities;
Upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
And by his bruises we are healed.”

Could the rejected one be the one who saves?
It has happened before.
Could the one who dies be the one who gives life?
Come and see.

“Good News”

Scriptures: Isaiah 52:7-10, Romans 10:14-18

Good news can not be silenced.
It bursts from heart to mouth,
And from person to person,
Carried on winged feet.
It is whispered to friends and shown playfully
On the finger of the newly engaged,
It is phoned and text-messaged to relatives
Awaiting word of a birth,
It trumpeted by lookouts seeing the cloud of dust
From approaching reinforcements,
It is shouted by the father who sees coming down the road
The prodigal son.

Freedom from captivity,
Return from exile,
This is good news,
That Isaiah could not keep silent.

Freedom from sin,
Coming home to God,
This too is good news
That we dare not keep to ourselves.

- Ken Onstot
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