

“The Big Picture”

Are you frustrated? Depressed? Does it seem like “the world is going to hell in a handbasket?” The pandemic throws everything out of whack – the political swamp remains swampy – technology is speeding up so fast that we’re feeling uneasy and insecure – and the identity wars are raging.

Of course, you have your own personal chaos to deal with (that’s not reported in the news). Family battles – financial issues – loved ones wrestling with all kinds of trials (from the all too frequent cancers, to suicidal tendencies).

We are like the generations that have come before us – who said that “things can’t possibly get any worse” and thought “the end is near.” In situations like this, it is so easy to slide into that dark cloud of despair – as if all is hopeless.

Folks, in the midst of this storm, this chaos, this fog of war – I want you to stop, and step back for a moment. God, in His Word to you today – pans back so that you can see the big picture – so that you can see the Light of Christ, that shines into this world, and shines on us who sit in darkness.

The Israelites in the days of Isaiah sound just like us today. And yet, God’s overarching message here in our text is that He is not only in control of the big picture – but, that He also has His eyes on you. He is the Lord who shepherds His flock, and He comes to you today, to provide you with the highest of pastoral care.

God’s people, Israel, are living in exile. They are like sheep who have been run off from the Promised Land – rustled by thieves and taken away. Cut off from their land (and all the Lord’s promises that go with it), they can’t help but wonder if they are also cut off from the Lord’s deliverance and salvation.

For 70 years they’ve lived in the foreign land of Babylon. Are the Babylonians greater than the Lord? Given their extreme situation, should they listen to the Babylonian prophets and worship their gods? Is that their only hope, the only way to live?

Israel’s questions really boil down to this. Will the Lord save us? CAN the Lord save us?

Through the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord answers their questions. He gives them hope in the midst of their despair. He comforts them in their chaos. He gives them the big picture. He is the Lord of all nations. Babylon, and all the nations are “like a drop in the bucket” – they count for as much as the “dust on the scales” – they are “less than nothing and emptiness.”

And the false gods and idols – what are they in comparison to the Lord – nothing but something crafted by the hands of man, dressed up with gold and silver – or if he is poor, made of wood. Regardless, these false gods, these idols – “they will not move.” A god, set in its place by man.

The Lord, however, is the Creator of all. Isaiah says: “Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power not one of them is missing.”

This same God, who is Lord over all – almighty and in control of all things – Isaiah says that He is “God for you.”

“The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has not might, He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Does that sound too good to be true? Do you want evidence? Take a step back and look at the Creation itself – and see how the Lord continues to preserve His Creation, making it fruitful to this very day.

And He who is Lord and Sustainer of ALL Creation – has regard for, and pays attention to, YOU. He does not overlook His children. You want evidence?

Consider Abraham and Sarah who questioned the Lord’s promise. What looks like an empty promise, a hopeless situation, is true. To “as good as dead Abraham and Sarah” – the Lord gave a son, just as He promised. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

Consider young David who goes out to do battle with Goliath. Is that what your battles look like? And yet, “the battle is the Lord’s” – He is the One who gives victory to David over the giant.

Look at poor Elijah who stands alone against the 450 prophets of Baal. The odds are overwhelmingly stacked against him – but its not even a contest – for Baal is a false god – for there is no God, but the Lord alone (evidenced by His consuming fire that falls from heaven, consuming the sacrifice and destroying the false prophets as well).

And where does that get Elijah? On Queen Jezebel’s bad side – pursued relentlessly – until he thinks that he must be the only child of God left in the whole world (sound familiar?). But He is not alone. His way is not hidden from the Lord. The Lord who controls the cosmos sees Elijah, hears his prayer, and provides for all his needs. [P]

It is one thing to pan back and see the big picture of how the Lord is at work in the world – but in His Son, Jesus Christ – we get a laser-like-focus of how He is God FOR YOU. It’s Jesus who comes to Simon’s mother-in-law and releases her from her fever and resurrects her to new life. It’s Jesus who heals the sick who were brought to Him, and who casts out the demons.

“Let us go on to the next towns,” He says, “that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” That’s why Jesus has come here – to you gathered here, with your own afflictions and chaos. The Lord-of-all-Jesus comes to your town – to you who want evidence that He is FOR YOU – and He gives you His Word, and the Holy Spirit, so that you may believe and trust His Word.

You want your diseases to be cured, your family healed, and peace in the world in which you live. Like Israel of old, you want to be delivered from your exile! And like them, your exile may continue – but the Lord assures you – that He is WITH you and FOR you.

He comes to YOU personally – and gives His very own Body and Blood – for the benefit of your body and blood. He comes to YOU, and gives His life for your death. He comes to YOU, and releases you from that which enslaves you, binds you – forgiving all your sin, recreating what was broken, and reconciling you to the Father, and to one another.

Take and eat, take and drink – this is FOR YOU – to deliver you from your exile. You want something tangible? Here is a tangible forgiveness, that is as certain and sure as Christ Himself – crucified on Calvary, and raised to life again on the third day. That Jesus comes and takes your hand, heals you, delivers you, and resurrects you. You may not see it or experience it now – but it is certain and sure – and you will see and experience it in HIS due time.

Dearly beloved, the Lord God rules and reigns over all things FOR YOU – and He is WITH YOU, shepherding you in this life – until He gives you a blessed end, delivering you from evil once and for all, taking you to be with Him in the Promised Land of heaven for all eternity. All of this is YOURS – even now – in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.