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"From the Pastor's Desk..."

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WHEN IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Jeff Meyers and David Noebel, authors of "*Understanding the Times*" said in one of the books they have written, "Ideas have consequences. They form our beliefs, shape our convictions, and solidify our habits."

This month much of my devotion time has been in the Book of Isaiah. I read that he wrote other books but for some reason or another they have not been preserved for us. But I am thankful that this one book has survived the ages. It has been said that Isaiah has been quoted in the New Testament more than any other prophet. I can see why.

Isaiah has been referred to as the messianic prophet mainly because he spoke more about Christ than any other prophet and because he was so thoroughly imbued with the idea that his nation was to be the nation from whom one day the Christ would come to not only save His people from their sins, but that He would be the Savior for the whole world. He was continually focused on the day when that great and wonderful work would be done.

Bible scholars have placed his active ministry at about 740-700 B.C. The things which he prophesied concerning his nation being exiled from the land of Israel, as well as speaking of their return after 70 years of bondage in Babylon, he prophesied 150 years prior to the event. Like Samuel, none of his words fell to the ground. He was completely accurate in his forecast.

I believe that one of the main objectives in God appointing Isaiah was to prepare the righteous for what they were facing as a nation, as well as to warn the wicked of the consequences of their ways. What I like about the book of Isaiah is that he not only spoke of the Jewish nation, but of the Gentile and the Christian age (See Isaiah, chapter two and three).

What is interesting to me is that Isaiah spoke of Zion, (which I believe is a reference to the Church, which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles), would be the means by which this world would discover how to be civilized and teach mankind a better way to live. Isaiah spoke of this in a true spirit of optimism when Jerusalem was in Alex Halley's words, a "*veritable cesspool of filth.*"

Of course, when Isaiah prophesied these words the question for the religious mind would be; "*How will God be able to accomplish this?*" However, the answer was not long in coming. Isaiah basically said, "God will accomplish this through His judgments upon His own people." Therefore, the desire of God would be that through His judgments His people would give us their passion for idolatry when they suffered for their sins in exile and after they suffered awhile would return back to the God that they had forsaken. He would therefore heal them and make them a great nation and from that nation the light of the Gospel would be shown to the nations of the world.

Who can deny that the civilized world owes much to the Jewish community? They have contributed much to the nations of the world in medicine, technology, respect for human life, and in law and ethics. Their ideas have played a major part in the advancement of civilization. But what was the source of those ideas? They came from God. It started with a man named Abraham who heard from God. It continued through a man named Moses who heard from God. And it came from Jesus Christ who was sent by God to teach mankind a better way to live. All this after a man named Adam messed up everything by listening to an idea that came from the devil himself. Ideas do have consequences.

America is at the crossroads today as to whose ideas they are going to follow. The fear is that the average citizen is listening to the wrong people with bad ideas that come with bad consequences. The Scripture is still true, *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”* Gal. 6:7

However, Isaiah was not afraid to point out to his people their true character. Today, if a minister would describe the Jewish people in the way that he did the general public would denounce him as being anti-Semitic. But if you will look into your Bible you will see Isaiah, the prophet of God, bringing an indictment upon his own people. Especially look at Isaiah, chapter 48. Below is a portion of this charge.

“Yes, you have never heard, yes, you have never known; yes, from of old your ear has not been opened. For I, the Lord, knew that you, O house of Israel, dealt very treacherously; you were called a transgressor and a rebel [in revolt] from your birth. For My name's sake I defer My anger, and for the sake of My praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried and chosen you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I do it [I refrain and do not utterly destroy you]; for why should I permit My name to be polluted and profaned [which it would be if the Lord completely destroyed His chosen people]? And I will not give My glory to another [by permitting the worshipers of idols to triumph over you]. Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called [ones]: I am He; I am the First, I also am the Last.” Isaiah 48:8

What I think the Lord is saying is much like what one parent said when he found his child breaking the family rules, *“If you were anyone else's child I would throw you out of this car and leave you on the side of the road.”* Of course a true parent would not do that because he is a true parent. But that did not mean he would not correct the child to cause them to learn from the error of his ways. This is why God explained to Israel the purpose He allowed them to be sent into exile for seventy years would be to teach them the error of their ways in the hope that they would change. You see, even when Israel sinned God was still giving Israel a chance to redeem themselves by changing their ways.

Of course, the question is. “How long can one be that optimistic? I remember a few years ago when I was giving leadership to a church in Canada. Ginny and I were invited by one of the church attenders over for dinner. While we were eating I observed the household cat sitting near the feet of our host...all through the meal that cat kept looking up at its master with that look like he was expecting some morsel of food. So I asked my host how long he had the cat. He said, *“About ten years.”* I then asked, *“Do you ever feed him while you are eating at the table?”* He said, *“No.”* It was then I said, *“That is the most optimistic animal I have ever seen...ten years and never been fed at the table...but here he is still waiting, looking up, expecting food.”*

Naturally, I sure would not want to portray that a cat has the patience of God. But I do believe that the reason for God's patience has been not about hunger, but about love. God's love is far more Divine and above any love known. But we ought to realize something...that while God's love can outlast a generation, a generation in its failure to respond to that love can be the biggest loser because they go into eternity having never changed and there are consequences to that aspect. God concludes the matter in the final verse of Isaiah 48:22 *“There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.”*

Just because God's love is eternal, and His patience is eternal, does not mean that a people who resist that love and reject His longsuffering and patience will not reap the judgment for their sins. The whole purpose in God allowing Israel to endure the furnace of affliction was to purify them. What happens when a person goes through the fire of affliction but fails to come out purified? Think about it: when the door was open for the Jewish people to return to their homeland many of them chose not to return. They had grown so accustomed to the pagan lifestyle of Babylon they refused to go.

“Ideas have consequences. They form our beliefs, shape our convictions, and solidify our habits” the writer said. The only antidote to bad ideas is for the people to hear the truth. For someone to come along and expose the lies they are hearing tends to deceive them. This is why, as a church, we seek to teach the Gospel in order that we might prepare our people with thinking skills necessary to resist falsehoods and lies from the pit of hell. The average Christian's are like sitting ducks in a pond. We need to be a people who are in pursuit of the truth who endure when the pressure is on. Amen.