

Isaiah 1.27  
7 March 2010

Dearly beloved, in the prophesy of Isaiah, we read of the Lord's anger upon Israel for her sins and rebellion and it seems that there is no Israel left and suddenly without warning, we find the prophet declaring the sweetest gospel of mercy and redemption. This is true when we read in Isaiah 1. The Lord had enough of them for being Sunday Christians – giving lip service to the worship of Jehovah. Their sacrifices, incense and the holy assemblies were filled with sin. The city of God has become a city of prostitutes and murderers. The leaders instead of leading the people God rebelled against God. They also had evil companions. They did not defend the fatherless and the widows. And therefore, the Lord declares that He will avenge them of their enemies. And then suddenly, without any warning: God declares that He will show favour upon his beloved. He will restore the judges and counsellors in order to restore order in the land and Jerusalem shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.

The question is, how can the Lord through Isaiah speak in one breath such terrible words of condemnation, and in the next breath speak of words of restoration and redemption? Understanding this text, which is the theme of the entire book of Isaiah, will help us understand the whole book of Isaiah. The text is the key that unlocks the door of understanding of God's timeless word to His church, whether to Judah or to us today. That key is the correct knowledge of the relationship between redemption and judgment for the text says, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment". The text is rich in meaning and we seek to understand by emphasizing its words in various ways: First, Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, which instructs us of the need of redemption. Secondly, Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, which emphasizes its certainty. And finally, Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, emphasizing the way of redemption. Therefore, the word of God to us today is Zion shall be redeemed with judgment: and her converts with righteousness.

The theme is: The Redemption of Zion. First, the necessity of redemption of Zion. How can we understand the word "Zion"? It can be understood in three senses. First, Zion is a hill. The city is one of the hills upon which the city of Jerusalem was built. The city was built on a mountain range, on the southernmost and highest of these mountain ranges. And on that hill that the temple was built and God's people came to worship. Secondly, Zion was often called the city of Jerusalem. This is because Zion was the chief hill of the city. And because Jerusalem and Zion are often used interchangeably, Zion can refer to the city of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the city of God. Thirdly, when Scripture speaks of Zion, it refers to the church of the old dispensation as it is represented by Israel and Judah. And because the church of all ages is essentially one, and since the church of the Old Testament is the type of the church of the new, the church of the new dispensation is called Zion. But not all who are called Zion are the true people of God, for within Israel there is always a two-fold seed: the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, or the elect and the reprobates. This text speaks of Zion as a spiritual Israel, the remnant for Isaiah says, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgement". But the prophet does not always have in mind all remnant who are of Zion. This is clear from verses 2 to 7, verses 21 to 25. Israel is ripe for judgment and faces the coming doom because of her many sins. But, yet Isaiah speaks of salvation in verses 8, 9, and 26, describing Zion as a very small

remnant which is restored and shall be called the city of righteousness. Zion is the converts or the returning ones. This is clear because there is the parallelism here: the second part of the verse (the returning ones) explains the first part of the text (Zion). Isaiah the prophet sees far beyond his own day, through the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity and all the way to the day of the return of Judah's remnant to the inheritance of Canaan. The returning ones shall be redeemed with righteousness and they are the same as that Zion who shall be redeemed with judgment.

This Zion must be redeemed because she is under the bondage of sin. Redemption is the beautiful word for it expresses what the Hebrew language means especially in view of the salvation of God's church. Zion may not be simply saved, nor must be merely delivered, which are terms that express only the negative aspect of salvation. Rather, Zion must be saved unto redemption. Her salvation must have the character of a ransom. The word, "redemption" implies that Zion is in the power of the foreign domination. All these means that a price must be paid in order to be freed from that power. All these elements apply historically to Zion of the Old Testament. Jerusalem is destroyed and her inhabitants are captives under the power of Babylon. Zion is in captivity because of her sins and rebellion against Jehovah. Isaiah sees that she must be delivered through redemption, the price of her sins must be paid so that she can go free. And therefore, the payment of ransom as announced is the word of glad hope to Zion – it is the gospel, that Jehovah will redeem her.

What is the relevance to the church? What is true of Zion historically is also true of Zion spiritually. As Zion is the picture of the church of all ages, the elect children of God, so Babylon is the type of the world, the bondage of sin, the power of evil and rebellion and all that is opposed to God and his cause. Just as Zion represents the cause of the seed of the woman so Babylon represents the cause of the seed of the serpent. Zion, the people of God lies in the midst of the world's evil and death. They are guilty before God; they are justly under the captivity of sin and they are the children of wrath, the rightful objects of God's holy anger against sin. This means that redemption is necessary. If Zion is to be delivered and saved from the power of Babylon, a ransom must be paid. This truth is essential because many deny it and many mock it. The modern Christian mocks at the necessity of a ransom because he thinks that he can save himself by an act of his will or by doing good works that will him salvation from God. He scorns the idea of blood theology and rejects the necessity of salvation by someone other than himself. But with all his theology of doing good and being merciful, he is no Christian. The true Christian understanding and confessing his own inability to save himself comes to the table of the Lord regularly. For he wants to put on the blood washed garments of redemption that are a sign to the right to life through Christ who loved him and saved him by paying the ransom of his own blood, the only price acceptable to God. Indeed, Zion must be redeemed. The church's ransom is a certainty for the text says, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment"

But, the facts seem to contradict this Word of God. From the viewpoint of Isaiah, it seems impossible that historic Zion would be redeemed for according to the Word of the prophet, God's wrath is upon Zion because of her sins. And as such the Lord will visit Zion in his anger and she will be given over into the power of mighty Babylon. There she will remain for seventy years, far from the holy city and the promised land. And even if there was a remnant, she would be swallowed up and mixed in with the

Babylonians without being redeemed and purified. And in the spiritual sense, redemption appear impossible for the power of sin is mighty. Looking at the guilt of the people: who shall pay the price that will redeems us from the punishment from God. Looking at the power of corruption, which holds an unbreakable grip over us: who shall deliver us from it? And looking at the power of the world in which we live in, which is very strong and is ready to swallow us: who shall redeem us from the world? Looking at the devil and his hosts who are always plotting and scheming against our complete redemption, seeking to prevent the counsel and purpose of God to redeem his people through Christ. Against such odds, how can Zion possibility be saved? Nevertheless, God says through Isaiah, that Zion shall be redeemed. And in the language of the text, there is utmost certainty. Appearance does not matter: sinfulness of man does not matter, guilt does not matter, power of corruption does not matter, nor the world or the devil matter. Notwithstanding, all the opposition and contradiction, the Word of God is that Zion shall be redeemed, God's word is sure. That every last one of his returning ones, the very small remnant shall be ransomed and no one shall be left behind or lost.

But, in where does the certainty of redemption? It does not lie in the will of man, as the Arminians would teach. They teach that God is willing to redeem not only Zion, but also all men. And God demonstrates his sincerity by sending his son to pay the ransom price. And therefore, on the basis of the atoning death of Christ, God sincerely offers salvation those would hear and believe the gospel. And by the exercise of man's free will, man must have the final say whether he wants to accept or to reject the offer. And so, according to their teaching, both Zion's membership and her redemption are dependant upon the will of man. If the Arminian teaching is correct, there is no certainty of the redemption of Zion. For not one person in the whole world can or will of his own accept the offered salvation. The reality is man will not accept salvation because man in his mind, will and heart is completely dead in sin and is utterly unable to save himself. The false doctrine of the free will of man takes away all certainty of Zion's redemption and is doomed to hell. Never can Isaiah promise ransom and restoration to Zion if the certainty of Zion's redemption lie in man's will.

Rather, the certainty lies in the will of Jehovah, who is the eternal, unchangeable and sovereign. He loves Zion from before the foundation of the world and chose her according to his electing love. In his incomprehensible love God willed that the remnant should be redeemed to the praise of his glory. To the end that he ordained his son to assume human nature, take upon himself our sin and guilt, and pay the ransom price of his own blood in order to realise Zion's redemption. This is the God who says, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment. He is the one who does his will and good pleasure. He is the ever living and ever loving God who loves Zion. He will redeem Zion and no else will. He will redeem Zion to the uttermost. This is why Zion's redemption is absolutely sure and certain.

What is the way in which Zion shall be redeemed? The way is of judgment and righteousness that comes from God. God is the righteous one absolutely: all that He is and does is righteous. He, as the sovereign God determines what is righteous and what is not. This means that all that he does must be just and right, in conformity to his own being and nature as the eternally perfect God. This implies that God judges according to the standard of his own righteousness. Judgment means that God always evaluates, measures and decides everything according to his righteousness. His righteousness is

the standard, the measuring rod against which He judges everything. This means that He does justice. His justice, then, is the result of his judgement: he judges according to his righteousness, and the end is justice. Hence, a just price must be paid for Zion. The ideas of God's righteousness and judgement determine to whom the price of Zion's redemption must be paid. It is not paid to the devil or to the world but must be paid to God, for He alone determines righteousness and justice. Therefore, he determines the price that must be paid when the righteousness is offended and violated. No one may be able to say that God sacrificed his righteousness in order to reveal his love and grace. God does not overlook or wink at sin, but determines that his divine righteousness be satisfied. The truths of God's judgment and righteousness imply the necessity of our redemption through Jesus Christ. Negatively, Zion can never pay the price of redemption. How can a sinner ever pay what he owes to God? How shall he ever do anything except increase the mountain of his sin and debt to God? If God sets the price, and the sinner must pay that price, the result can only be eternal death: he is certainly lost. Positively, God himself God accordingly to his eternal counsel, in harmony with his own righteousness, and in his love and grace, pays the price. In his counsel, God makes his son the head of the covenant and the mediator between himself and his people God sends his son in the likeness of sinful flesh through the wonder of the incarnation. God puts upon Jesus Christ all our sin and guilt. By crushing him through the death of the cross by the price of his righteous anger against sin, God redeems Zion by the price of justice, the justice of his highest love for his church. The concepts of God's redemption, judgment and righteousness have a two-fold implication. The idea of the text is the theme of the entire prophecy of Isaiah. This means that we must see the righteousness on the one hand, and of judgement on the other. The idea of the original is stronger and more precise – Zion shall be redeemed through, or by means of judgement. The positive aspect is that God through Christ Jesus redeems his church so that according to his perfect judgment, Zion is in perfect righteousness. The negative aspect is the condemnation of the world. The fact is that God judges according to his own righteousness. This means that through Christ he saves all those who are conformity with his righteousness, and that he condemns and destroys all those who are not in conformity with it. The redemption of Zion is the destruction of the world, and the condemnation of the world is the redemption of Zion. The one implies the other, for it is precisely in the way of judgment of the world that Zion is redeemed.

In where does Zion's redemption lie? Not in our ourselves, in our own will or words, for then we will surely go down to destruction. There is nothing in us that merit with Jehovah. Never can we possibly pay the ransom price of our redemption for in ourselves we are empty, undone and sinful. Instead, we rely upon Jehovah our God for our salvation, and upon Jesus Christ. We are sorry for our sins and repent. We are eager to be redeemed fully because of the grace of God we have learned to hate sin and to forsake the world and its evil power. We long to walk in love with God and with one another in the covenant fellowship of Zion. In this life we have only a small beginning of the new obedience. We seek the eternal Zion in principle, though imperfectly. But as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, we look forward to the day when Zion shall be perfectly redeemed with judgment, and her returning ones with righteousness. IN that day our redemption shall be perfectly accomplishes. In the hope of that day we love! Amen.