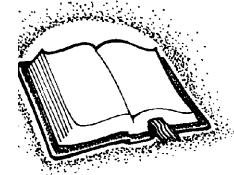


Unlocking the Bible (30)



Comfort ye My People

Lessons from the Book of Isaiah

In our series on the books of the Bible we now come to the Prophets. Historically, they belong to the 'second half' of the OT- a period of decline after David's reign. They represent a plea to repent and to return to God for salvation.

That is the message of Isaiah. It starts with an impassioned plea: *"Come now; let us reason together," says the LORD. "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."* The nation has fallen into such a state that something needs to be done, and quickly.

The first twelve chapters are like a pair of scales. On the one hand is the negative situation with Israel being unfruitful, false and pretentious; - a vineyard which, despite careful attention, is useless. Isaiah's vision of a Holy God gives him a message that can transform that state. That is the pivot. On the positive side the result is a redemptive hope and a glorious prospect – *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; a Branch [that] will bear fruit.* Because of it they will be able to *"draw water from the wells of salvation"*.

That is the potential, but, the reality is different. The next section, (13 to 39) is a catalogue of their successes and failures. There are encouragements reflecting honest endeavours on their part; a recognition that they have tried. Well-known verses echo that thought: For example, *"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength"*, or *"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."* On the other hand, where the nation departs from the way of God, there are warnings, such as: *"Woe to those who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD"*. That paradox is illustrated vividly in Hezekiah's choices. Punishment is inevitable, but potentially redemptive.

The remainder of the book (40 – 66) is concerned with the redemptive process achieved through that punishment. It covers three aspects.

In the first place there is an assurance about God and His love. This is expressed in verses like: *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you."*

That is followed by a graphic description of the process. Salvation will only come through suffering and cleansing from sin. The true Saviour will pay for those sins as he pours out His life, yet will triumph. Isaiah 53 is a classic description of the Suffering Servant.

Finally, there is a choice – that of whether to accept that means of salvation and submit to God's redemptive process, or not. For example, *"Why spend money on that which is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen to me. Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live."*

What can we glean from this? It is clear that transformation will not come by human endeavour. Our present sinful state calls for punishment. But God promises redemption through the Cross.

It is useful to think of Isaiah as recommending that we submit ourselves into the hands of a Surgeon and the unknown (to us) operation, but in full confidence that He is able and that the outcome will be successful. There has been abundant assurance about His ability and care, so the outcome will be good. For, His *"word will not return to Him void, but will accomplish what He sent it to do"*. True redemption is venturing confidently into that unknown knowing that that painful way is the only, but sure, means for redemptive healing. In New Testament terms it is submitting to the Cross of Christ and the salvation that it brings.

Love so amazing, so Divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.