

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Isaiah 48:17-22 "Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. ¹⁸ Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; ¹⁹ your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me." ²⁰ Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!" ²¹ They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and the water gushed out. ²² "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."

✠ Get Out! ✠

There are two urgent words which might be spoken in any of the following situations. A house is burning down with a family stuck inside, a firefighter breaking down the front door in search of its occupants. Or a mother is frazzled by her children tugging at her leg while she's trying to cook dinner. Or a talented young individual is stuck in a dead-end job. There are two words which might be urgently spoken in any of these cases. What are they? "Get out!"

In August of 587 BC, Israel's entire world caved in around them. The temple had collapsed, their monarchy which they had once been so proud to establish was now defunct, their homeland, once flowing with milk and honey, was now a wasteland, and all their hope was destroyed along with it all. And now, seven hundred miles from their home, Israel's exiles were trapped in a basement called Babylon. It was tragic, as you can hear in our text before us this evening. ***"Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments!"*** God says. It didn't have to be this way! If they'd listened, if they'd only listened, ***"Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the see."*** Oh, what could have been!

Nevertheless, God still does not desert them. He sends the word of the Prophet Isaiah to his people, with a singular summons, "Get out!" Easier said than done, the people might have thought. With every passing year, the Babylonian god Marduk must have seemed more and more powerful, more and more in control, and Israel's God must have started to appear to be more and more just a fairytale told to children. Slowly but surely, the exiles began to grow acquainted with their strange surroundings. There are economic documents which were unearthed in Tel el Murassu on the Tigris River that shows that the conquered peoples who were able to adjust to life in Babylon and start to blend in—their lives became very financially successful. And so, for the Israelites, living in this land of destruction and death and idolatry started to comfortably become a new way of life.

It was the whole boiling frog syndrome. You might have heard that before. It's said that if a frog is placed in hot water, it will jump right out from the pain. But if it is placed in lukewarm water that is gradually heated, it will never get out, but instead slowly die. Well, the same thing was going on with the Israelites that now called their Babylonian basement the new normal. They started to grow comfortable, but they were in hot water. And if they did not get out soon, they would die.

And so, God sent Isaiah to do everything possible to awaken Israel from their spiritual slumber, warn them of the perils that awaited, and get the people out of Babylon. He does so throughout chapters 40-55 of his book. In chapter 52, he announces to them that the Jehovah God would ***“lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations.”*** (10) In chapter 40, Isaiah says God’s ***“glory will be revealed and all flesh will see it together.”*** (5) Rest assured, says Isaiah later on in that chapter, ***“Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength!”*** (31) And though they were slowly but surely flickering out, yet God promised in chapter 42, ***“A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out.”*** (3) In chapters 51 and 52, he repeats the message, ***“Wake, awake!”***

The climax of all of this urgent preaching comes in our text, in verse 20: ***“Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, “The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!”*** And what was Israel’s response to these impassioned pleas? Nothing! Nothing at all. They refused to leave. The bright lights and the sounds of Babylon convinced them it was the place to be. The religion of Babylon had become near and dear to their hearts, Marduk was enough cause to stay.

And that’s why throughout chapter 48 Isaiah calls the people stubborn, unyielding, headstrong, prone to idolatry, deaf, deceptive, stubborn rebels from birth. All this was because Israel refused to listen to the good news of their salvation. And to “listen” is just what God wanted them to do. Eleven times in this chapter of Isaiah, the prophet exhorts the people to “listen.”

As they receive these notices from Isaiah, could you imagine what the people’s responses might have been? How reasonable they must have sounded to the human nature. “Isaiah, haven’t you heard? Babylon is the greatest country on earth! This is the land of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Why would we want to go back to our little backwater town in Judah? You want us to sell our houses, our possessions, pack our bags, and go back to live in a land that’s been wiped out by famine and warfare? Go back to what?! We’d have to rebuild entirely! Get out of Babylon? Isaiah, have you lost your mind?” And so, the exiles are unmoved by any of Isaiah’s words; undeterred by His warnings, simply not caring about offers of hope being extended to them.

Well, what about our bondage? How about this Babylonian cellar that we live in? Our bondage began a bit differently: just one more drink, just one more lie, just one more look. Sadly it’s never “just one more,” and soon the desire for “just one more” after “just one more,” becomes unshakeable. Soon, we find ourselves enjoying life here in Babylon. And just like frogs in the pot, we might not even hardly notice what’s going on. Sure, the society that we belong to might have been a bit shocking to us at one time—with its obsession with pornography, money, gossip, vain-glory—but we hardly even notice many of those characteristics of our world anymore. It’s become comfortable, we’re accustomed to living in this world of destruction and death. With each passing day, it becomes easier to deny that my life resembles the world much more than it resembles the Christ. Clearly, we are in hot water! That’s why God says to us too, ***“Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy.”***

It’s on God’s heart to call His people out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. That’s why He called Abraham and Sarah to get out of Haran. It was the center of moon worship, and they were to be *His* special, chosen people. He urged Lot and his family to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah because it was the epicenter of sexual perversion. Again and again throughout Israel’s history the Lord is calling His people to get out of the decay, away from the worldly decadence with all of its deceit, to

leave these lands where the only result would be death. He cries out to us to recognize the very real spiritual dangers in our time, and to get out! To get away from it all! And our response? All too often, it's nothing. We're along for the ride.

We often ignore God crying out to us through His Word. In Isaiah chapter 30, we see one response of the people that isn't too far off from what our human nature wants to declare. They said to Isaiah, ***"Speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions; stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"*** (10-11) God's warnings against sin, against worldly living, that's too much to bear. We don't like being confronted with that. Maybe on Sundays we can tolerate it, but it's much too much for an everyday battle.

But deep down, we've all found that the joys and successes that our Babylon offers, it's just not enough. Instead of quenching our thirst, it dries us out, always yearning for more. We know we're thirsty, not for more of the same. No, we're thirsty for a clean conscience, for a fresh start; we're yearning for a tender-loving hand to reach into this basement dungeon and get us out.

And that's exactly what God offers still. Isaiah chapters 40-55 is chock full of the good news of God's deliverance. Consider the comfort of these words from chapter 43, ***"I, even I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins."*** (25) God declares to you in chapter 44, ***"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist."*** (22) If you're exhausted from the rat-race of this life and are looking for a fresh start: you have it. These promises have been fulfilled and come to fruition in our dear Lord Jesus Christ, the one who went down into the grave, so that He could drag you out.

He is the one crying to you, "Get out!" You, when a fireman climbs into a burning house and saves a family, and they're lauded as heroes, you'll often hear the response, "I was just doing my job." But when it came to Jesus saving you from sin's basement, it was not just a job. It was entirely personal. It was intensely personal. It was personal when Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. It was personal when in His hour of need all of His disciples scattered. It was personal when His own people clamored for His death. It was personal when His own Father forsook Him. But it was also personal on another level. Jesus suffered and died for you. He bled for you and sweated for you and cried out for you. He felt the nails and the thorns for you.

And because of all that, Jesus comes personally for you in your personal darkness as you struggle with your own personal sins. And he comes to rescue you, to release you, to personally set you free from guilt and shame and blame.

What's our response to that? Joy! For we're finally out of Babylon. We're able to flee from Chaldea. We can do so with a shout of joy, praising our Savior, our rescuer, Christ Jesus. Amen.