

THE FRUIT AND EFFECT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

14 The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks, 15 till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. 16 Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. 17 The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. 18 My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.

Isaiah was sent to warn Jerusalem and Judah of what was coming. The physical threat was the Assyrian army. The spiritual threat was unbelief and being condemned for their sins. When the northern tribes had broken away from Judah and the fellowship of the true church, they had the advantage of numbers. There were many times more people in the new, more open, more friendly, more inviting, more liberal church than in the old one. They rejected the old requirements for making ministers, and they appointed whatever men and women they wanted without any mention of the Divine Order, the Divine Call, the Will of God, or the basic requirements of service to God's good people. Everyone began to do as they saw fit. It was an abomination. It was a sin.

They were warned by the God through his prophets, but they were conquered. Their land was deserted. The things Isaiah describes in our text had happened before: strongholds, castles, citadels, high walls, had all been pulled down and were a wasteland that wild animals loved.

This could happen again. In fact, because of Jerusalem's many sins, it was going to happen again. But the prophet has comfort: The destruction will be destroyed. The land will be restored. The promise of the Savior was still theirs.

There was a problem, though. Under King Hezekiah-- the king of Isaiah's time-- the people would flourish after the threat of Assyria had come and gone. But they would go back to their sins. Then another crisis would come: not the Assyrians again, but a new crisis, a new invader, this time it would be Babylon. And when Babylon came it wouldn't be the neighbors up north who would be carried away. It would be all of Jerusalem and Judah.

It would be these towers and walls and citadels that would be broken down and ruined. And then the wild animals would come here, in the empty streets, and crew on the grass and the dandelions that grow there between the cracks in the sidewalk. Flocks and herds of animals owned by

nobody would come and graze and chew up your mom's flowerbeds, because you and your mom and everybody you know would be walking into exile into Babylon, far away, for a lifetime.

God warns us, God tells us punishment is coming. God shows us this punishment by punishing others, like those northern tribes. But when we keep at our sins and forget about the warnings, pay no attention to them, it is the word of God we are avoiding. It is the law of God we are breaking. And therefore the punishment is not truly the ruin of our towns and cities or our gardens and bookshelves, but the punishment for sin is hell; it is torture and inconceivable agony, with pain in the mind, pain in the body, and pain in the spirit; pain that is made to remember with every passing eternal moment that this is the punishment for being God's enemy through sin, for becoming the devil's slave which leads to unbelief.

There is no rest or recovery from that punishment.

Therefore, O Isaiah, O prophet of the Living God, the God of Armies, the God of Wrath, the God who sees all—what hope is there for us?

Isaiah describes our only hope a few chapters later. **“He was cut off from the land of the living,”** he says, referring to the servant of God who would suffer in our place, who would take all of that dreadful agony into his own flesh, his own mind, and his own spirit. **“He took up our infirmities, that is, wherever we fall short of God's command and will, and carried our sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”**^a

Does your heart jump? Does your flesh relax? Is your spirit set at ease? These things show that you have faith in Christ, Christ who came and bore the punishment for our sins on the cross. Fully human, he was subject to God's will and could be punished as we would be. Fully God, his punishment has value enough, infinite value, to cover and to atone for the sins of all mankind.

The work of the Holy Spirit was to give you faith in this Savior, the only Savior, Jesus Christ. The Spirit has entered into each one of us at our baptism. The echo of the words may diminish. The wetness of the water dries quickly. But the presence of the Holy Spirit continues with many more blessings for our lifetime.

The blessings of the Spirit—faith, hope, love, true sonship, joy, and more—are given by the Spirit who dwells in us.

Isaiah's prophecy shows that although Jerusalem and Judah would be punished, chastised, for their sins and sent walking into exile, God would bring them back. They would repent, and God

^a Isaiah 53:4-5

would grant them forgiveness and peace and bring them back into their land. But after that, after their lifetime, the Savior would come to preach and teach and to extend the reach of God even to death, to death on a cross, to redeem his people back from death and the results of all sin, so that we who put our trust in Jesus will never endure the true pain of hell.

What we have are the fruits and effects of righteousness, which is faith in Christ.

The work or effect of righteousness is simply the quietness and confidence we have of our relationship with Christ.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit entered into the Apostles to give them courage and special abilities to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to people from many nations. We, too, have the Holy Spirit, not in such a spectacular way, but it is no less a miracle.

Isaiah wants us to remember especially that without faith, we have no gifts at all from God. Without faith, we would be enemies of God; hostile to God. But having faith and the new status of being righteous, we have the certainty of everlasting peace, and our eternal home with Christ, secure, undisturbed, forever. This is the Spirit's message: Your sins are forgiven. You are at peace with God.

This comes to us through faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a good day to explain something about our language about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is a Person, one of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, our Triune God. By "person" we don't mean flesh and blood. Jesus took on flesh blood for us, and he still has them, but before his birth he and the Father and the Spirit were all spirit, that is, unseen, but by "person" we mean what the ancient church always meant by "person" in connection with God: that is, **'not as part or property of another, but as that which exists by itself.'**^a My arm is part of me, but it is not distinct from me. It is not a person separate from me. But my brother is, and my sons are. So it is with God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct from one another, but there is only One God: and he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is the giver of life. He works faith in our hearts. He inspired the Scriptures to be written. He dwells in us and strengthens our faith and our resolve to live a more godly life today, tomorrow and always. The effect of this righteousness from God is peace, a peaceful dwelling with God forever, in his secure home, in our eternal and undisturbed place of rest where we will praise God together forever. Amen.

^a Augsburg Confession, Article I:3,4