

“Boats Against the Current” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | December 6, 2020

Isaiah 40:1-5

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare^[a] is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries:^[b]
 “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
 make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;
 the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.
⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
 and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

2 Peter 3:8-10

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you,^[a] not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies^[b] will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.^[c]

Intro Question

Have you ever found yourself stretching forward, trying to attain a change that you think you want and need, but never seem to have that change? What future are you reaching out for, preparing for?

Background

Tim relates the story of Jay Gatsby, the main character in The Great Gatsby, who, while fabulously wealthy, is very unhappy because he loves a married woman, Daisy. He thinks of a future when this will not be a problem because he can have Daisy as his. When circumstances are contrived for Gatsby to have an affair with Daisy, that begins a tragic chain of events that ends with Gatsby's murder. A look at the closing line of the novel refers to trying to move our boats forward only to be borne back to the past. This Great American Novel reflects much of how life has been lived and is lived now.

Discuss:

1.) “They had no child.” (v.7) The passage in Luke relates the story of the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. They are pillars of their religious society in all the “approved” ways, but are very unhappy because they are childless and, being elderly, have been unhappy for a long while. Even though they have prayed for children in the past, nothing came of the prayers and they just carried on, dwelling on this part of their past. They did not allow their lack to defeat them but it did not leave them either. All those “approved” check marks did not help with their pain, but they simply carried on each day in much the same way as we all go on when hurt, pain and disappointment inevitably enter our lives. Zechariah and Elizabeth are truly Advent people, waiting. At some point, we are learning, we will all know the need for what Advent promises, a radically different future. The questions then are “what future are we really waiting for?” and “what are we preparing for?”
Advent is really preparation for that second coming, the arrival of the glorious, radiant overwhelming Christ who will come before us in the full Glory of God. See description in Revelation 1.

¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

Luke 1:5-22

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah,^[a] of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the

2.) "Prove it." While Zechariah is burning incense in the holy of holies, the angel Gabriel appears and tells Zechariah that he and Elizabeth will have a son, a special man who will play a critical role in the coming of God's promise. Zechariah relies not on a promise from God's messenger, but on the things of this world and his own experiences and wisdom, in effect saying "prove it." "We are too old, this can't happen, we're past that." He is cynical. He is borne back to the past. There is no gratitude. He seems to have given up. One wonders how long it has been since the couple prayed for a child. Have we also given up on our prayers? This passage shows that God is more faithful to our prayers than we are. If a promise of God is Biblical, if it is in scripture, then in his time he will be faithful to that promise.

He has not promised continued, uninterrupted good health, comfort or affluence. We need to be sure that the things we are expecting out of God are indeed the promises of God. He has promised us all a glorified, resurrected new body with him in glory. There are no promises of success, but that the meek shall inherit the earth; no promise of a marriage and family for everyone, but that he will be to his people as a husband is to a bride. Liars will be quieted. He will do away with sorrow, mourning and death in his New Heaven. So, don't allow current pain to diminish hope in God's promises.

3.) The "out front" hope. There is a forward thrust to this season. Coming to us is a fiery king who will make all things new. The price for this has already been paid. The job will be finished. The outcome is known from God's promises. He's coming back to finish them out. Those who still are of an age for youthful dreams, maybe well into middle age, don't rely only on them. There will come a time, according to author Fleming Rutledge, when all will come to believe that life is a disappointment or to adopt a stance of denial, of bluster and false optimism. The older among us have seen this transition and can speak into it if the young and middle-aged will only listen.

Conclusion/Application

He is coming. That is Advent.

There is a third option for a Christian aside from either disappointment or denial: See the coming Glory of the Lord. Look forward to His coming. To do this, repent. Take two steps: A) Acknowledge our very real hurt in our past and turn to face forward. B) Trust that God's promises are true. Be active in that trust. Accept and things can turn: hurts forgiven, addictions faced and defeated, hospitality that can bring others

wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute.

not just into homes but into lives and courage to challenge those parts of culture that are not of Christ.

Even one small change like this during this season is a sign that all is true. Look to God, who has been ahead of us always. Look forward, not back, and anticipate the coming.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Please, grant me the strength of belief to know and understand those true promises that are forever, that I may cling to them going forward. Lead me fully to comprehend that full astonishment of where those promises will take me and all of your people – a timeless life in your presence where all things are made new. Amen.