

Lesson 9

God Doesn't Do Things Our Way

Introduction

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.” This is the LORD’s declaration. “For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

– Isaiah 55.8-9

These statements of God by the hand of Isaiah come just after an incredible invitation is extended. *Pay attention and come to me; listen, so that you will live, 55.3.* A few verses later we read:

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call to him while he is near. Let the wicked one abandon his way and the sinful one his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, so he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will freely forgive.

– Isaiah 55.6-7

Here we see the gracious, compassionate ways of God to love, help, uphold, and forgive rebellious human beings. It defies human logic. Think of it in this way:

- God graciously offers pardon to the offender. Do sinful humans do so?
- God graciously offers pardon to offenders much beneath Him. Do sinful humans do so?
- God graciously offers pardon to offenders who have repeatedly rejected His overtures. Do sinful humans do so?
- God graciously offers pardon through a wonderful sacrifice – His Son. Would sinful humans do so?¹⁶

The answer is obvious. Sinful humans tend to focus on themselves and would never go to such lengths. The plan for our salvation *had to originate outside of ourselves*. This is why Isaiah explains in vs. 8-9 that God does not think and do things the way humans do. For that we should be eternally grateful.

A General Principle

There is, in Isaiah 55.8, a broad principle that applies to all areas of life and thinking.¹⁷ It is: *God does not think or do things like the way you do.* As we study the doctrine of providence and learn to look for how God is moving and acting in our life, we will discover He is working in ways we would have never conceived. In fact, His thoughts and ways are so different from ours that He tells us the gap is as wide as the distance between the heavens and the earth, v. 9.

¹⁶ Exell, Joseph S. *Isaiah*. Vol. I–III. The Biblical Illustrator. New York; Chicago; Toronto; London; Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 232.

¹⁷ Smith’s writing here is worth noting. See Smith, Gary. *Isaiah 40-66*. Vol. 15B. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009, p. 510.

A few chapters before, in Isaiah 45.9-12, we learn that God is in control. He knows the future. He moves with absolute power:

I made the earth, and created humans on it. It was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded everything in them.

– Isaiah 45.12

Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are considered as a speck of dust on the scales; he lifts up the islands like fine dust. All the nations are as nothing before him; they are considered by him as empty nothingness. With whom will you compare God? What likeness will you set up for comparison with him?

– Isaiah 40.15, 17-18

God operates from a perspective that is beyond the realm of our comprehension. Therefore, there are times and situations where He acts in ways we never would have. There are also other times where He chooses to wait, thereby helping us grow in patience as well as dependence on Him.

The Problem of Impatience

Impatience is nothing more than a refusal to wait for people or developments. It frequently is an indicator of a lack of faith.¹⁸

Abraham & Sarah

Abraham was 75 years old at the time of Genesis 12 when he was told that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, 12.3. Genesis 21.5 says he was 100 years old. Sarah was 90. During that period of 25 years, the couple thought of ways to facilitate God's promise on their own. One idea was that Abraham's steward, Eliezer, could become the heir of his household, Genesis 15.2-3. Another idea was for Abraham to father an heir through Hagar, Genesis 16.1-2. In both cases, God said "no." In fact, their decision for Abraham to have a child through Hagar resulted in great trouble and consternation, Genesis 21.8-11. Life would have been much simpler had they simply waited and trusted in the Lord.

Esau & Jacob

Genesis 25 records the story of how Jacob obtained Esau's birthright. In a story of outright cunning and deception, Jacob got the birthright through a pot of stew. This was incredibly shortsighted and impulsive on Esau's part and later led to great strife between him and his brother. Their relationship was never the same. Esau's impatience led to disastrous consequences for the rest of his life, Genesis 25.34-46.

Saul and his Offering

1 Samuel 13 records how Saul made an offering without waiting for Samuel. The Philistines were highly motivated to fight Israel. The entire nation had become "repulsive" to them, 13.4. The text is very descriptive in relating the size of the army assembled for battle:

¹⁸ Manser, Martin H. *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser, 2009.

The Philistines also gathered to fight against Israel: three thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and troops as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Michmash, east of Beth-aven.

– 1 Samuel 13.5

When Israel realized the great numbers against them, the people hid wherever they could. Saul remained, and those who were with him followed him, but were very scared. Saul and the people waited in Gilgal seven days for Samuel to come and give burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. Each day that went by must have been torture for Saul and the people. By the seventh day the pressure mounted upon Saul as the people began to scatter and go home. Rather than wait, Saul took it upon himself to offer the burnt offering before the Lord. As soon as he did this, Samuel came, 13:10.

Upon his arrival, Samuel questioned Saul, who tried to explain:

I thought, 'The Philistines will now descend on me at Gilgal, and I haven't sought the LORD's favor.' So I forced myself to offer the burnt offering."

– 1 Samuel 13.12

Desperate circumstances are no excuse for circumventing God's will. The Scripture is silent on this, but we do not read of Saul entreating the Lord during the 7 days he waited. No prayers are offered. There was no admonishing the people to entreat the Lord and seek His deliverance. Saul's rashness brought significant consequences upon him. Things would not nearly have been as desperate for Saul if he were a man of faith.¹⁹

We need to heed the Biblical warnings about impatience

Here are 4 scriptures that need no explanation:

Even zeal is not good without knowledge, and the one who acts hastily sins.

– Proverbs 19.2

Patience is better than power, and controlling one's emotions, than capturing a city.

– Proverbs 16.32

Be silent before the LORD and wait expectantly for him; do not be agitated by one who prospers in his way, by the person who carries out evil plans.

– Psalm 37.7

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

– James 1.19-20

We Must Allow God to Work in His Time and in His Way

Isaiah 40 looks forward to a time of deliverance. As with many Old Testament prophecies it has a dual application. Looking at it messianically, the prophecy looks forward to the work of John the Baptist foretelling the coming ministry of Jesus, 40.2-10; Matthew 3.3. But closer to Isaiah's day was a nation

¹⁹ Allen, Matthew. *1 Samuel*. Waynesville, OH: Spiritbuilding Publishers, 2016, p. 51-52.

that would soon go into exile, being captives to a world power much stronger than them. There would come a time where the people could not imagine any possible way to deliverance. All appeared hopeless. We know the outcome. God delivered His people in a way that defied human logic. This was true for the way He delivered them out of the exile, and it is certainly true for the way He delivered us from sin.

But just as God's people had to wade through 70 years of Babylonian rule, there will be times where we too must wait on God. While we're waiting, we need to be looking for and praying for God's help. We need to resist our human impulses to take matters into our hands and act before God does. The three examples we discussed in the previous section should drive this point home. It is always better to be longsuffering. Patience takes the long-term view.

Conclusion

While we wait, we have the assurance that God is with us:

He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Youths may become faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint.

– Isaiah 40.29-31

We also have the assurance that God will never fail. No human entity can thwart His plans. He never grows tired. *There is no limit to his understanding*, 40.28. Going back to Isaiah 55 we see that those who trust in the Lord will never fail. If we will wait, His will always wins out:

You will indeed go out with joy and be peacefully guided; the mountains and the hills will break into singing before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush, a cypress will come up, and instead of the brier, a myrtle will come up; this will stand as a monument for the LORD, an everlasting sign that will not be destroyed.

– Isaiah 55.12-13

For Thought and Reflection

1. What is the context leading up to Isaiah 55.8-9?
2. What is the general principle in Isaiah 55.8?
3. How far is the gap between our way of thinking and God's? See Isaiah 55.9.

4. How does Isaiah describe God's knowledge & power in Isaiah 40 and 45?

5. Of what is impatience an indicator?

6. How did Abraham & Sarah demonstrate impatience? How would their life been simpler had they just waited / trusted in God?

7. How did Esau's impatience impact the rest of his life?

8. What clues regarding Saul's spiritual life do we get from 1 Samuel 13? What are the implications for us?

9. Besides those listed, what are some other Biblical passages that warn against impatience?

10. How good are you at waiting on God? What can you do to improve?

11. What 2 things do Isaiah 40.29-31 and 55.12-13 assure us?