

Sermon

“Building the Kingdom — Despite the Moochers & Busybodies”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, November 17, 2019

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

- Is. 65:17 For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.*
- 18 But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.*
- 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.*
- 20 No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered
accursed.*
- 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*
- 22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*
- 23 They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well.*
- 24 Before they call I will answer,*

while they are yet speaking I will hear.
25 *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.*

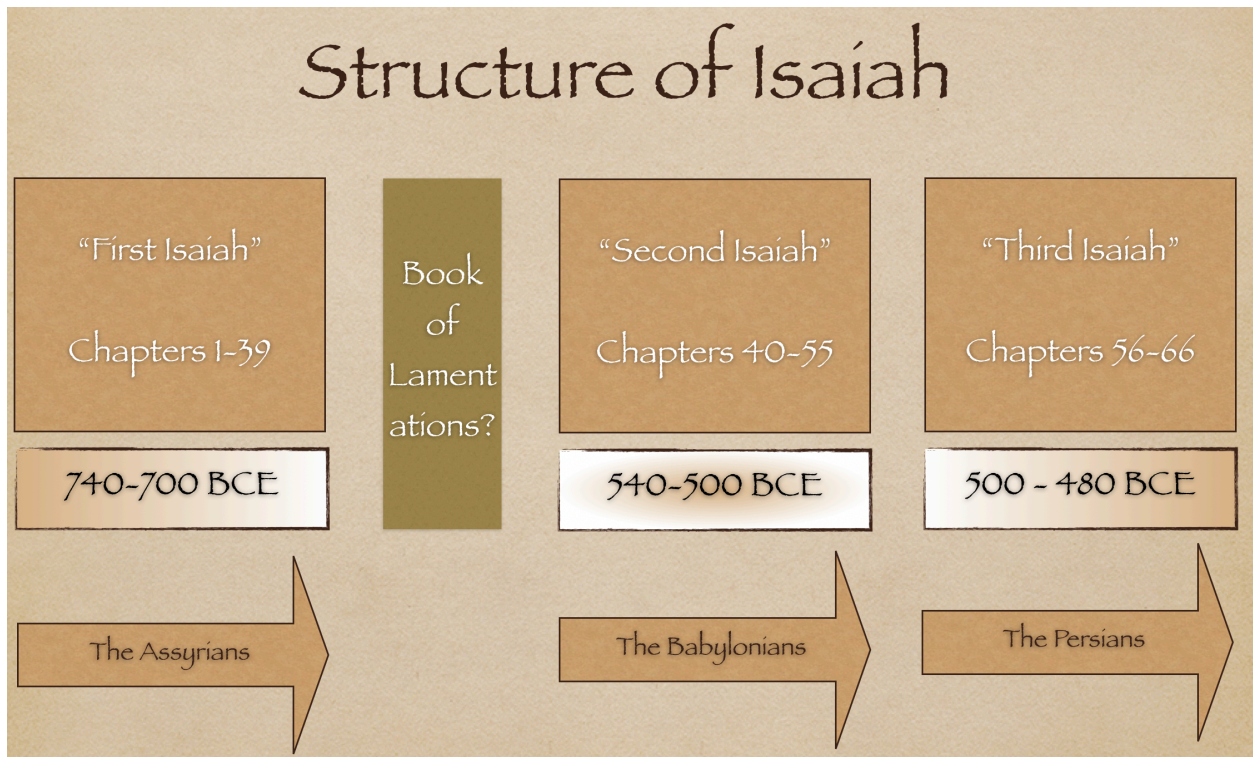
2Th. 3:6 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, 8 and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. 9 This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13 Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

- I. By the time the inhabitants of Jerusalem heard the poem we think of as the start of Third Isaiah . . . they had been through a lot!**
 - A. The oracle announces a new beginning which is not limited by what has come before.**

*I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.*
 - B. But you and I here today may not hear this poem as the astonishing good news that it is.**

C. To do that we would have to recall those “former things” which no longer impinge on the new Jerusalem being promised.

II. So without taking too much time let us remember the history which gave rise to the poetry of the three Isaiahs.



A. I only take time to describe all that so we can appreciate *how long* we had waited for good news about a new Jerusalem to come to us.

B. In Isaiah 65 we get the news we had been longing for for many generations.

*be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.*

- 19 *I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
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an infant that lives but a few days,
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and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*
- 23 *They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well.*

C. The new Jerusalem which God designs is:

- 1. Joyful**
- 2. Delightful**
- 3. No longer a place of distress and weeping**
- 4. Infant mortality will dramatically improve**
- 5. Living to old-age will be the norm**
- 6. Justice will prevail:**
 - † **If you build a house you get to live in it**
 - † **If you plant a garden you eat the produce**
 - † **Whatever work is done will be enjoyed
because we will not be laboring in vain
bearing children for calamity**

- D. What a change this oracle must have been to their lived experience of nearly 300 years of:**
- 1. War**
 - 2. Occupation**
 - 3. Deportation**
 - 4. Living as resident aliens in another's country**

be glad and rejoice forever

Indeed!

III. By the time Second Thessalonians is written we are again several hundred years further in the timeline of the community of faith. (51-52 CE OR 80-115 CE)

A. The author writes about the need to organize the community of faith around certain standards.

B. They sound somewhat familiar:

we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you.

Could be seen as another form of
they shall not plant and another eat;

Especially when 2 Thessalonians adds:

we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

C. Now it is at this point in the message that a preacher like myself needs to be careful!

And disambiguate:

- 1. While I generally like the NRSV translation**
- 2. This is a tricky spot in the Greek:**

Author is working a pun in Greek which doesn't easily get past the chasm of translation into English.

D. The pun goes something like this.

1. The Author worked among them even though he *could* have asked to be fed given that he was “working” in bringing the gospel . . . - nevertheless the author modeled for them a way of being with them that honored the needs of the whole community.

2. The problem with those who are not working (Literally “walking / living in a disorderly way”) is that their behavior is at odds with the purpose of building a just and equitable community.

3. So those who are “unwilling to work” might be better and more thoroughly rendered, “those who are working around/against the goal of building a workable community.

† Not those who *cannot* cooperate/work

† But *will not* cooperate/work

IV. And they are not the *only* ones who get called out:

For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

A. The armchair-quarterbacks - the gossips - those who spend time complaining that it wasn't done to suit them but who fail to pitch in and work to provide a better solution...

B. They too come under fire!

- V. I would wager that all of us know these two types of people:**
- A. The moochers — Those who would rather “work the system” than work.**
 - B. The Busybodies — who are a constant source of trouble in any community of faith - who are too often putting their noses and two-cents worth in too many places where they are unwilling to be part of the solution.**
 - C. If Second Thessalonians can be trusted . . . this has been going on since the first century of the church!**

VI. So what are we to do? How will we participate with God in creating a “New Jerusalem” in the downtown Fargo area?

- A. I suspect the key found in the last sentence of today’s passage...**

Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

- B. We know that there are very many people falling through the cracks of the current economy . . .**
- C. We know that the elderly, in particular, are becoming homeless in ND at a dramatically increasing rate . . .**
- D. We know that the brutalities of Winter weather are knocking on our door at this time of year...**
- E. We know that if we try to respond to those needs:**
 - † A few will try to “game the system” - a few have been doing that in every community since the time of Second Thessalonians at least...**
 - * But *we must not grow weary* in doing what**

we know is right! (Brueggemann's story)

† **A few (and these few are more likely to come from within the congregation itself) will be inclined to the malady of busy-body if we begin to dream big dreams about addressing the very real needs of our community...**

* **But *we must not grow weary* in doing what we know is right!**

VII. My friend and mentor Ben Johnson

“Paul, do not grow weary in doing what is right...”

A. I have tried to imitate Ben by occasionally writing to people I know are in difficult situations to give them encouragement to not grow weary.

B. Just a few pages earlier in Isaiah than today's passage the prophet announces on God's behalf:

*10 if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*11 The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.*

*12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in. [NRSV Isaiah 58:10-12]*

(It's the election for the fifth Sunday in Epiphany 2020 and also every year on Ash Wednesday)

C. So let us not grow weary - let us press ahead in helping God to build a workable urban community so that we might deserve the title, "Restorers of the streets to live in!"