

Reflections on September 2013 Readings

Psalm 99:8 says *O, Lord our God.. thou wast a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings*. The Book of Isaiah also reminds us that God is forgiving but also hard on sin. The first part of Isaiah's Book is filled with messages of God's judgment. Chapter 5, for example, is filled with doom:

Doom to you who use lies to sell evil, who haul in sin by the truckload.

Doom to you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness in place of light and light in place of darkness.

Doom to you who think you're so smart, who hold a high opinion of yourselves!

Isaiah not only warns about the downfall of Judah, but also gives explicit details about the decimation of Israel's enemies: Moab, Tyre, Babylon, etc. Thankfully, words of comfort gradually dominate:

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusts in you. (26:3)

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. (30:15)

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. (40:31)

The final section of Isaiah stresses hope, and prepares the way for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Guess who I think of when reading verses like these:

My servant will make nations worthy to worship me; kings will be silent as they bow in wonder.

They will see and think about things they have never seen or thought about before. (52:15)

He was wounded and crushed for our sins; by taking our punishment he made us completely well.

All of us were like sheep that had wandered off. We had each gone our own way, but the Lord gave Him the punishment we deserved. (53:5-6)

The Lord decided his servant would suffer as a sacrifice to take away the sin and guilt of others. (53:10a) ...he suffered for our sins and asked God to forgive us. (53:12b)

How wonderful to know that the crooked places shall be made straight (40:1-5), that He will lead His sheep like a shepherd and carry little ones in His arms (40:11), that His words will not return to Him void but will do all He sent them to do (55:11)...and He will create a new heaven and earth where wolves and lambs will graze together and there'll be no more crying and sorrow. (65:17-19, 25)

Paul's letters to Timothy are filled with early Christian sayings on which full reliance could be placed. Some of my favorites are:

We bring nothing into the world and take nothing out (1:6:7)

The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. (1:6:10)

God didn't give us the spirit of timidity, but one of power, love and self-discipline. (1:2:6a)

Enduring, we with Him shall reign.

Who Him denies, he will disclaim.

Our faith may fail, His never wanes

For thus He is, He cannot change! 2:12-13

The Lord knows those who belong to Him, and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord must turn away from evil. (2:2:19b)

Ecclesiastes was a very enjoyable, read-in-one-sitting Book. It's a search for the meaningful life. It starts with a gloomy outlook (life is boring, a senseless chasing of the wind, all is vanity, etc.). It's a hard lesson to learn that we can't live life on our terms; earthly goals are seductive and life is unfair. But we're told to enjoy God's gifts, and obey Him (for He will judge all we do, even in secret..." 12:13-14) Some my favorites in Ecclesiastes are: *In everything there is a season... (3:1-8)--of course!*

Two or three are better than one... a friend can help you up and warm you up, and a three-corded rope is hard to break. (4:9-12)

Don't bad-mouth your leaders, even under your breath...a little bird may hear and tell. (10:20)