

Sermon - 08-07-22
Ps 50; Is 1:1, 10-20; He 11:1-3, 8-16;
Lu 12:32-40
Moving into Our Heavenly Home

By the time the Prophet Isaiah preached (7th c BC), the people of God were all settled down. They no longer lived in tents, as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had done. Ranching and farming were outside the city gates, in the countryside. In Jerusalem were markets for buying food, clothing, kitchen ware and household items. Imported goods were available because of a strong trade economy. Isaiah is preaching against the hypocrisy and idolatry of a complacent, comfortable society – too complacent and too comfortable.

Isaiah prophesies doom and he tells the people plainly why doom is approaching: going through the motions of worshipping the invisible Creator God of Israel; meanwhile lying, cheating and robbing the poor. They play church and then fail in matters of goodness and justice for the oppressed, the widow and the orphan. They go to temple and then climb the hills to worship Baal and Asherah. How is Isaiah's time of history so different from ours? Isaiah tells the people to wash themselves. Rich folks in Jerusalem can fill a tub with scented water to bathe – and they can clean their clothes in laundry tubs with soap. They are not dusty, smelly sheep herders living on the back side of the desert like their ancestors – or like the poor of the day.

But Isaiah is not talking about the washing with water commanded by the Law of Moses. No, Isaiah is after peoples' souls to quit moral filth and seek God while there is still time. It will be a hundred years before enemy armies break down the gates of Jerusalem. Yet, our loving God sends word that He is not pleased with His people. They need to change their ways. Maybe they're not even thinking of their spiritual home – the city not made with hands – the realm of God's unveiled presence. It's easy to worship a carved image covered with gold and silver – right there in a shrine, so visible and real: like diamonds in a glass case, or a Jaguar on the showroom floor. Isaiah's admonitions are for us just as much as for people in the 7th c BC.

Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and so many more, lived out honor and worship of the invisible God. Their witness completely changes our idea of what treasure is.

I was invited to visit pagan temples a few years ago in the Dayton area. My school mate, Pramod Aghamkar, ministers among Indian and Pakistani ex-patriots. They are Hindu, Jain and Sikh, mostly professionals. He took me on a tour of temples in the area. The Jain temple was remarkable. The idols are shockingly life-like. They wear colorful silk clothing and have very natural looking eyes and hands and feet. They wear masses of gold jewelry. The people bow down before these figures and sing praise songs to them – and read from a book of scriptures. The congregation spends a lot of money to make their idols rich and beautiful. Pramod and his wife, Ranjana, host discussions in their home over delicious Indian meals to introduce people to Jesus.

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Lk 12:32-34)

Many people think that paradise is for later – and only for a select few. **But** the joy of being alive in God's presence – being at home with Jesus begins when we believe in Him. We are welcomed as citizens of the New Jerusalem right now by faith!

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews addresses Jewish believers. This author sets forth Hebrew beliefs and shows that Christ is Messiah – the fulfilment of God's promises to His people.

People in the 1st c AD struggled with devotion to an unseen God as much as people do today. The norm was to stop by a convenient shrine to drop in a few coins, some fruit or a loaf of bread as an offering to the god of good crops or the

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goddess of prosperity. They went their way and gave the matter no further thought. Their duty was done. It's the lottery ticket mind-set, a transaction.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men (and *women*) of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible." (vv 1-3 NASB) These are words of awakening. This is a world view radically different from material and utilitarian thinking. The godly world view breaks in on us like the light of dawn.

This preacher calls the roll of the saints who made their way by faith. These people were given strength and conviction that God is real through every kind of adversity. They were granted this faith even before the great fulfillment of God's promises in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. They watched for Him. They expected Him to show up.

Eugene Peterson puts it like this: "Each one of these people of faith died not yet having in hand what was promised, but still believing. How did they do it? They saw it way off in the distance, waved their greeting, and accepted the fact that they were transients in this world. People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted. But they were after a far better country than that—*heavencountry*. God is so pleased with them because they understand and believe that God has a City waiting for them." (vv 13-18 MSG)

The Apostle Peter reminds us: "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (I Peter 3:15 ESV).

As we live by faith, we're already moving into our heavenly home. Amen.