

TWO REASONS TO PRAISE THE LORD

25 O Jehovah, you are my God. I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago. ²You have made the city a heap of rubble, [you have turned the] fortified city into ruins. [You have caused the] foreigners' stronghold to no longer be a city—it will never be rebuilt. ³Therefore, strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. ⁴You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress—a shelter from the storm, a shade from the heat, when the blast of the ruthless is like a windstorm driving against a wall, ⁵or like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shade of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

⁶On this mountain Jehovah of hosts will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet with aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples and the burial sheet that is spread over all nations; ⁸he will swallow up death forever. The Lord Jehovah will wipe away the tears from every face; he will remove from all the earth the disgrace [suffered] by his people. [Of this you can be sure,] for Jehovah has spoken it.

⁹On that day it shall be said, Surely this is our God; we have trusted in him, and he has saved us. This is Jehovah; we have trusted in him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. ¹⁰The hand of Jehovah will rest on this mountain; but Moab will be trampled in his own place, like straw is trampled down in the manure. ¹¹[Moab] will stretch out his arms in it, like a swimmer stretches out his arms to swim; but [Jehovah] will bring down his pride, despite the skill of his hands. ¹²He will tear down your high fortified walls and lay them low; he will tear them down to the ground, to the very dust.

26 On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city! He erects walls and ramparts for security! ²Open the gates so that the righteous nation—the nation] that is faithful—may enter. ³You will keep him in perfect peace, he whose mind is set on you; because he trusts in you. ⁴Trust in Jehovah forever; for Jehovah, Jehovah [himself], is an everlasting rock. ⁵He has humbled those who dwell on high, [he has brought down] the lofty city—he levels it to the ground, he casts it down to the dust. ⁶It shall be trampled underfoot by the feet of the oppressed and by the footsteps of the poor. ⁷The path of the righteous is level; you who are upright will direct the way of the righteous. (Isa. 25:1-26:7)

Introduction

John is a hardworking guy. He puts in a full day's work on the shipping docks. He stays out of trouble. But still he suffers a lot of harassment. His fellow workers constantly harass him and try to make people think he is a fool. Why? Because John prays before eating his lunch and spends a part of his lunch time reading the Bible.

Carol is a sweet and attractive young lady. She's polite and considerate. But she still suffers a lot of harassment. Why? Because in her criminal justice class at the university, Carol ventured to explain that the real solution to the problem of

delinquency is conversion to Jesus Christ. Her statement met with sharp censure from her fellow classmates who would ordinarily identify themselves as tolerant and open-minded.

Can you identify with John or with Carol? Do you ever experience harassment or censure or even hatred on account of your Christian life and testimony? In a sinful world that seeks to suppress the truth of God and is at heart at enmity against God, we may expect to encounter varying degrees of persecution for the sake of Christ. But the present passage of Isaiah (chapters 25-26) supplies us with two good reasons to praise the LORD, especially when we encounter persecution for His Name's sake.

I. Praise the LORD, for His Sure Promise of Present Care (Isa. 25:4-5; 25:12-26:7)

In 25:4 Isaiah testifies that the LORD has been a stronghold for the poor: *"You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress—a shelter from the storm, a shade from the heat, when the blast of the ruthless is like a windstorm driving against a wall."* In contrast to the people of the world who are described as *"the ruthless"* (i.e.; a people portrayed as being strong and terrorizing and without any capacity for mercy or compassion), the people of God are depicted as being *"the poor"* and *"the needy."* Furthermore, the world is depicted as hurling itself like a great storm against the people of God.

Do we expect that we can live a life that is faithful to Christ and not encounter the hostility of the ungodly and of the devil himself? Proverbs 29:27b declares, *"He who is upright ... is an abomination to the wicked."* What did the Lord Jesus encounter as a result of living a life in this world that was devoted to God His Father? The answer is summarized in Hebrews 12:3, *"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* As, by the grace of God, we live lives that are faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, we may expect to receive the same response as the Lord Jesus:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember what I told you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. (Jn. 15:18-20)

But note, too, that the LORD is described as being *"a refuge," "a shelter,"* and *"a shade"* for His people. We may expect hostility and conflict from the world, but we may also expect the LORD to sustain, strengthen, comfort, preserve, and deliver us. Consider the testimony of the Psalmist: *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble ... ⁷Jehovah of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress"* (Psl. 46:1,7.) Note, too, the testimony of the Apostle Paul, *"the Lord stood*

at my side and gave me strength ... And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me out of every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom; to him be glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Tim. 4:17-18.)

In verse 5 Isaiah looks forward to the day when the LORD will *"silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shade of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled."* Just as a cloud overshadows the sun on a hot summer day, bringing refreshment and relief from the intense heat, so shall the LORD at last bring eternal relief from all who would oppress us. Such is also the assurance given by the Apostle Paul, *"God is just. He will pay back affliction to those who afflict you, ⁷and give relief to you who are afflicted, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels" (2 Thess. 1:6-7.)*

In 26:3-4 there is given to us the assurance of *"perfect peace"* as we place our confidence in the LORD: *"You will keep him in perfect peace, he whose mind is set on you, because he trusts in you. ⁴Trust in Jehovah forever; for Jehovah, Jehovah [himself], is an everlasting rock."* This peace is the result of having our mind (or, imagination) focused on the LORD, as opposed to worrying about what men may do to us or what might happen to us. So much of our present consternation results from projecting into the future and imagining the worst-case scenario. This passage instructs us rather to focus on the LORD, taking confidence in the fact that He is the Almighty and that He is our God. By way of illustration, the tightrope performer makes it safely across his tightrope to the far side by focusing on the distant end and by refusing to look down or around him; in the same way, this passage calls us to keep focused on the LORD. Let us follow the example of the Psalmist, when he wrote: *"I have set Jehovah always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Psl. 16:8.)*

Do we ever fall prey to our own imagination? Do we ever allow our imagination to run wild and project the worst possible scenario? And consequently scare ourselves to death, or at least immobilize ourselves, as was the case with Gideon? Because Gideon feared his father's household and the men of his city, he was literally unable to undertake by day the act of breaking down the altar to Baal:

Jehovah said to him, "Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole that is beside it ... ²⁶Then build an altar to Jehovah your God on the top of this bluff, using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down ..." ²⁷Then Gideon took ten of his servants and did what Jehovah told him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, he could not do it in the daytime, so he did it at night. (Judg. 6:25-27)

This is exactly what the devil desires to have happen; so that we might become ineffective for Christ, so that we might become frantic, so that we might even question why God would permit us to be put into such a position. By way of example: The boss has suggested that you lie to a client; your response is to panic,

rather than trust in the LORD. You allow your imagination to run wild: “If I tell the boss that I cannot lie to our clients he will become furious, and the other employees will laugh me to scorn. I’ll miss out on a promotion, I may even get myself fired! I’ll have no recommendation for another job! I will not be able to support my family! How could God let all this happen to me?” The solution is to look to Christ! From the Scriptures learn what the LORD has done for His people in their times of trial and testing. Claim for yourself the promises He makes, and heed the counsel of Isaiah 26:4, *“Trust in Jehovah forever; for Jehovah, Jehovah [himself], is an everlasting rock.”*

In 26:7 we are given the further assurance that the LORD will direct the path of the righteous: *“The path of the righteous is level; you who are upright will direct the way of the righteous.”* As we seek to follow Christ He will show us the way, He will show us the right thing to do in a given situation. The Book of Proverbs exhorts us, *“Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and do not depend upon your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths”* (Prov. 3:5-6.) The LORD Himself assures us, *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you”* (Psl. 32:8.) When we walk with the LORD we can do so with confidence, knowing that the Holy Spirit watches over us and will re-direct our steps when we are in danger of departing from the way that is pleasing to the LORD: *“with your ears you will hear a voice behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it”* (Isa. 30:21.)

As Christians, let us praise the LORD for His sure promise that He will take care of us: His presence will be a refuge for us, His grace will sustain us, and His counsel will guide us.

II. Praise the LORD, for His Sure Promise of Future Vindication (Isa. 25:2-3,6-11)

In 25:2-3 Isaiah looks into the future and praises the LORD for His righteous act of justice: *“You have made the city a heap of rubble; [you have turned the] fortified city into ruins. [You have caused the] foreigners’ stronghold to no longer be a city—it will never be rebuilt. ³Therefore, strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you.”* Once again, the LORD’s act of judgment is viewed as the conquest of a strongly fortified secular city. Rebellious mankind will at last be compelled to bow before God and acknowledge Him as LORD (vs. 3.) The Psalmist declares, *“All nations you have made will come and worship before you, O LORD. They will bring glory to your name; ¹⁰for you are great and do wonderful things; you alone are God”* (Psl. 86:9-10.)

Isaiah sees a day when the redeemed of the LORD—identified as the poor and needy—join with Christ in the eternal feast He has prepared for us to enjoy with Him: *“On this mountain Jehovah of hosts will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet with aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines”* (vs. 6.) *“On this mountain”* is a reference to Mt. Zion (Jerusalem), which was the Old

Testament site of God's presence in the midst of His people, a type (i.e.; a living model) of heaven. Thus, Isaiah speaks of future and eternal realities by employing contemporary Old Testament terms and places. *"Jehovah of hosts will prepare a feast ... for all peoples."* It is not just Old Testament Israel, but all the redeemed who shall partake of the LORD's salvation and blessing, note Matthew 8:11, where the Lord Jesus declares, *"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."*

Verse 7-8a tell us that on that day the LORD will destroy the shroud and the burial sheet that is spread over all the nations—in other words, the LORD will swallow up death. Consider the Apostle Paul's teaching contained in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57,

Listen, I will tell you a mystery. Not all of us will fall asleep [in death], but all of us will be transformed—⁵²in a moment [of time], in the blinking of an eye, at [the sounding of] the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised to an imperishable [existence], and we will be transformed. ⁵³This body that decays must clothe itself with what is imperishable; indeed, this mortal body must clothe itself with what is immortal. ⁵⁴When this that decays has clothed itself with what is imperishable and this that is mortal has clothed itself with what is immortal, then the word that has been written will be fulfilled, "Death has been devoured by victory." ⁵⁵Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:51-57)

Verse 8b assures us that on that great day the LORD will wipe away His peoples' tears and reproach. All the reproach (scorn, ridicule, contempt) suffered for Christ shall be replaced with joy and honor, bestowed by the LORD Himself. As verse 9 indicates, on that great day our Christian hope will be fulfilled and our Christian faith will be vindicated: *"On that day it shall be said, 'Surely this is our God; we have trusted in him, and he has saved us. This is Jehovah; we have trusted in him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'"*

In contrast to all that awaits the Christian, verses 10-12 describe the utter humiliation and defeat that await those who have defied their God:

The hand of Jehovah will rest on this mountain; but Moab will be trampled in his own place, like straw is trampled down in the manure. ¹¹[Moab] will stretch out his arms in it, like a swimmer stretches out his arms to swim; but [Jehovah] will bring down his pride despite the skill of his hands. ¹²He will tear down your high fortified walls and lay them low; he will tear them down to the ground, to the very dust. (Isa. 25:10-11)

Note: The Old Testament pagan nation of Moab, an archenemy of Israel, is used here to represent all the enemies of the LORD and His people. Verse 10 presents a picture of the ignominious subjugation and humiliation of those who have lived their lives on the earth in defiance and opposition to their Maker. Moab shall be trampled down like straw is trampled down in the manure. Note, too, the separation from God. Referring to Mt. Zion, Scripture declares, *“the hand of Jehovah will rest on this mountain.”* In contrast, Moab shall be trampled down *“in his own place,”* the place of judgment, separate from the place where the LORD’s blessing rests.

Even in the midst of judgment there is continued defiance in the incorrigible heart of the unconverted. Verse 11 portrays Moab as stretching out his arms in an effort to swim for survival, but all to no avail, *for “[Jehovah] will bring down his pride, despite the skill of his hands.”* Indeed, as verse 12 goes on to indicate, there shall be no defense, no refuge, for the unrepentant sinner on the day of God’s judgment. Here the imagery changes, with the LORD’s final judgment of the world portrayed as His conquest of a well-fortified city, but one that is utterly unable to withstand His divine assault. The poor and the needy (the faithful people of God who have borne reproach and persecution at the hands of the world) will walk upon the ruins of that once great city: *“He has humbled those who dwell on high, [he has brought down] the lofty city—he levels it to the ground, he casts it down to the dust. ⁶It shall be trampled underfoot by the feet of the oppressed and by the footsteps of the poor”* (vs. 5-6.) God’s righteousness and faithfulness are evidenced in the fact that those who have been oppressed for His name’s sake shall finally be exalted, while their oppressors are reduced to humiliation and defeat.

As Christians, let us praise the LORD for His sure promise of future vindication. He shall vindicate His Name and He shall vindicate His people:

Then those who feared Jehovah talked with each other, and Jehovah listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared Jehovah and honored his name. ¹⁷“They will be mine,” declares Jehovah of hosts, “in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. (Mal. 3:16-18)

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul declares, *“all those who would live godly lives in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Tim. 3:12.) Indeed, if we would live a consistent Christian life—and that is what is required of us by Christ—we may expect to encounter opposition, harassment, and even persecution for His Name’s sake. But despite what we may encounter in this present world, let us praise the LORD for His sure

promises: 1) His sure promise of present care; and, 2) His sure promise of future vindication.