

COMMANDED TO LISTEN  
Isaiah 51:1-8

Intro: We must keep in mind that Isaiah was called to comfort the people of God. Israel had been taken into captivity, and Judah was threatened. In fact, parts of Judah had been under attack.

Those who were really concerned about what was happening were those who were the true people of God. It is impossible to get those who are not God's people exercised about the decline of the truth and of the blessing of God. In fact, the hypocrites will often play into the hands of the enemy.

So Isaiah does not concern himself with those who falsely claim to be the people of God. He is concerned about those who are God's elect people. They are the ones whom he desires to comfort. He speaks to them in the language given in our text: "Hearken to me"--in vv. 1, 4, and 7.

Although we will not take up the rest of the passage tonight, notice that the three hearkens and followed by three times that Isaiah wrote, "Awake, awake," in vv. 9, and 17, and then in 52:1.

The passage is concluded with one call to depart, in 52:11, 12: "Depart ye, depart ye, . . ."

We will take up the three hearkens tonight, and save the rest for another time.

How were the children of Israel to be comforted by those three passages?

- 1) Isa. 51:1-3.
- 2) Isa. 51:4-6.
- 3) Isa. 51:7, 8.

First of all, in looking at that expression, "Hearken to me," we need to realize that peace comes to us when we really listen to the Lord. It seems that we will look at our troubles, and listen to everyone else, but not to the Lord. Isaiah was speaking on behalf of the Lord, and the people were to listen.

In fact, they were commanded to listen. We do not realize how important it is to listen to the Lord unless we are told to do it as a command.

But this expression tells us another thing. We usually feel that a time of danger, or a time of discouragement, is a time to talk to the Lord. Isaiah would not discourage that. But he would say that we should not do all of the talking. We need to listen. The way we listen is by reading or by hearing the Word of God. In times of trouble we are more inclined to talk, but

what we need even more is to listen.

Let us remember this. In the first two sections Isaiah combines what we hear with what we are to look at. As the Israelites needed to learn to do that, so do we!

Let us then listen, and look, according to what we have in the first three verses.

### I. HEARKEN, AND LOOK (Isa. 51:1-3).

Vv. 1, 2 have to do with the past; v. 3 has to do with the future.

When the present and the future disturb us, it is often helpful to look back--to look back to our origins.

Vv. 1 and 2 have to do with Abraham and Sarah, the father of the people of God.

Abraham is likened to a rock; Sarah, to the hole of the pit. One speaks of hardness; the other of depravity. Both indicate how unlikely it was that God could even bring anything out of such circumstances.

Abraham was born in idolatry and heathenism; Sarah was barren. (Note the spiritual significance of these terms.) But look at what the Lord said: "I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him."

Here is divine election, the efficacious grace of God, and the perseverance of the saints--all of which were evident in the lives of Abraham and Sarah.

Now it is the past that will help to strengthen our faith. If God did what He did with and for Abraham and Sarah in spite of their failures, and in spite of the hopelessness of the situation in the beginning, then He can and will carry it all through to its fulfillment! And so we have v. 3.

Here is comfort!

That would be enough, but there is more.

### II. HEARKEN, AND LOOK (Isa. 51:4-6).

Each one of these verses contains special comfort for the people of God. Verse 4 has to do with the Word of God; v. 5 has to do with the extension of the work of salvation; v. 6 has to do with the eternal character of salvation.

A. Comfort by the Word (v. 4).

B. Comfort by the work of the Lord (v. 5).

"The isles" is a term which is used of the Gentiles, and this indicates that instead of being able to put an end to the work of the Lord, many of the Gentiles will be reached with the Gospel of righteousness, and are, in fact, waiting for it.

C. Comfort by looking at the world (v. 6).

That which seems so permanent is actually passing away; it is salvation and righteousness which are eternal!

Cf. 1 John 2:15-17. Men will set their hopes on that which they cannot keep, and no pay any attention to that which they cannot lose.

See also Matt. 24:35,  
Heaven and earth shall pass away,  
but my words shall not pass away.

Cf. 1 Cor. 7:31,  
And they that use this world,  
as not abusing it:  
for the fashion of this world passeth away.

"Fashion" has to do with the manner of life, the external appearance of things in this world.

So we must look at the certainty of the Word and the power of the Lord to accomplish what He purposes to accomplish, and also see the world as He sees it.

Here again is comfort!

III. A THIRD HEARKEN (Isa. 51:7, 8).

In verse 5 Isaiah called upon them to look at the people in the world who would be saved.

In verse 6 he called upon them to look at the world itself, its destiny.

Here he is more concerned about the reprobates, those who will not be saved, and who seem to have everything going for them in their opposition against God.

What are they like? They are described in v. 8 as a garment made of wool which can be destroyed by a moth or a worm.

Do you remember what Martin Luther had to say about even

"the prince of darkness" in his hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God? Listen to this verse:

And though this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure;  
One little word shall fell him.

Concl: What does all of this add up to?

It means that God will not forsake His people. He may have to judge us, but He will never forsake us. He even overrules so that through our sin it often turns out that others turn to Him. The enemies of the Gospel come and go, but they always go! The world may seem to flourish as believers suffer, but the world is doomed while believers look ahead to a more glorious day than anyone ever sees in this world. The possibility of our salvation was just as incredible as was that of Abraham and Sarah, but nevertheless the Lord has brought it about. And He is not about to give us up!

Are you listening? The Lord commands you to listen. Listen to the world, and you will always be distressed. Listen to the Lord and you will have peace even when everything else around seems to be going wrong.

What a wonderful Lord we have, and how wonderful it is to know His grace!