

Sermon Topic: "God is the Stability of Our Times", by Preacher Wendy Chiang

Sermon Text: Isaiah 33:5-6, 14-18

Intro

- Often, faith arises from crises. We often only see our need for God only when we taste our inadequacy and despair, when life seems meaningless.
- We must first admit to the bad news (that we have limited resources to save ourselves) before we can receive God's good news.
- The good news is that God offers His stability to us at all times. This is shown in today's passage though the foretelling of the coming of the Messiah that was spoken to people facing a threat from an enemy.

God's promise if we trust in Him

- The passage is set in 700BC, when Judah was facing threat from Assyria (Israel had already been taken captive). As Assyria drew near to Jerusalem, the people of Judah were unsure of what to do. Some believed they should surrender to Assyria, while others considered forming an alliance with Egypt.
- The prophet Isaiah was sent by God to warn the people to do neither. Earlier in Isaiah 30:2 & 5, the people had been warned that those who go down to Egypt to seek protection from the Pharaoh would be put to shame and disgraced.
- The key to salvation was to trust in the exalted Lord, and not to run towards man. God would provide the stability when all was bleak.
- Isaiah proclaimed that 2 things would happen if they trust God (Isa 30:6):
 1. God will be their stability
 2. God will be their resource
- In fact, God had already said to them in Isa 30:15 that 'in repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength'. Self-reliance will not ensure victory.
- These words continue to ring through today. God doesn't change through time. He was the stability of His people as they faced aggressive Assyria. He is our stability as we confront a pandemic silently attacking us.

God's provision of stability

- If we trust God, the promises of Isa 33:6 are ours – 'The Lord will be the stability of your times; abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge: the fear of the Lord is your treasure'.
- God's stability is the best defence in troubled times. He keeps us on a firm foundation. This hour of trial may be intense. But God keeps a firm grip on us through the resurrected Christ living in us.
- He also dispenses His resources to us so that we can rise above our trials -
 - Abundance of salvation: God will provide an abundant supply of salvation. This divine provision does not just occur at the point of conversion, but over and over again through our lives, for every emerging need.
 - Wisdom: God's gift of practical understanding & life management during a crisis
 - Knowledge: God's gift of truth, a light that comforts and guides in the dark.

- Fear of the Lord: – This is not a product of our emotional effort, but a divine gift, to help us stick to what is holy.

Obstacles to experiencing God's stability and resources

- If God provides stability and resources, why don't we experience it all the time? Isa 33:14 states that 'sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: "Who among us can live with the devouring (holy) fire? Who among us can live with everlasting flames?" They could not access His benefits because they refused to forsake their ways.
- The "godless" in this verse was not said in reference to unbelievers. The prophet Isaiah was raised by God to speak to a people who know Him, but who had forsaken Him (they were believers of God).
- While we have trusted in Jesus as our Saviour and have received salvation, we still give in to the capacity to sin. Christians can be godless too. Godless is to be god-less, dismissing Him as negligible (like an insurance plan that is only activated in an emergency).
- Verse 7 warns us that a sinful, godless life will lead to ruin. Any human effort to resolve problems without God will leave us buffeted and exhausted.
- "True Christians don't succeed completely in destroying the sinful nature on earth. They have to fix it to the cross and be determined to keep it there till it expires – John Brown
- The apostle Paul also exhorts us to crucify our old nature. Resisting God is the reason why we cannot experience His stability and resources.

Enjoying God's presence and experiencing His safety

- Today's text speaks of a posture that God demands of His people (Isa 33:15-18a). If we want to enjoy God's presence and experience His safety (v15), we must:
 - Walk rightly in our behaviour and lifestyle
 - Speak honestly and sincerely
 - Be fair & just in our dealings
 - Take care of our thought life
- It is difficult to walk in God's requirements on our own. This is why Jesus gives us the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers us to live the obedient life God requires of us.
- Let us choose to use this pandemic pause to attend to the essential business of repenting from self-centredness, re-prioritise our worship of God, re-focus our growth on Christ, and rendering acts of mercy to the helpless and the weak.
- As the presence of God is enjoyed, the fear of trouble will decrease. God's refuge is top security. We will have no lack of provision and protection.
- "God has not promised skies always blue, flower strewn pathways all our lives through. He has not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain. But God has promised strength for the day, rest for the labour, light for the way. Yes, He has promised grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love" - Annie Johnson Flint
- God invites us again today: Will you let ME be the stability of your time? God can be trusted. Let us hope in Him.

Small Group Discussion:

1. Share a time when you were in trouble. How did you get out of it?
2. What suffering is described in vv 7-9? (Think: Try to determine to whom this refers.)
3. What would happen when God decided to act (vv 10-12)?
4. How would sinners and hypocrites react to God's punishments (vv 13,14)?
5. Who can dwell "on high"? What blessings will he receive (vv 15.16)?
6. What will these righteous people see (v17)? (Think: What might v18 mean?)
7. What does this text mean for you? How does it encourage or instruct you in the way you should live and act as a disciple of Jesus?