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“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.*

*5 ‘EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED,
AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT
LOW;
THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT,
AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;*

6 AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.’”

7 So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 “Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 9 “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

What a remarkable passage of the scriptures we have before us this morning.

In my thoughts, as I ponder and have pondered, or I suppose the better more current term might be meditated on the singular overall theme and focus of the whole of scripture, I am somewhat seperated from what evangelical christendom would say is the over-arching theme of the book.

That should throw up a red flag. We put a lot of stock in historic interpretation of our tribe. What have the saint's said over the centuries?

And who are you to say something . . . else?

That always weighs heavy on my thinking. And the church, and especially the last century of evangelical protestant christianity has zeroed in on the cross of Jesus and the salvation offer to sinners.

That's the most important thing. And it is. That's the message our Lord commissioned us to take to the world. That's our purpose while we have breath during this part of our eternal life. Nothing we're to be doing trumps the great commission.

Go out into the highways and tackle the strangers and tell them, forgiveness is available . . . and free. The cross. The death of of the sinless servant, God incarnated, atoned for my sins. Purchased me out of the slavery of sin. Fit me to dwell with the Father in glory. Gave me a righteousness, not my own, I am hidden in the resurrected Christ.

But in my meditations on all of the book, all of the scriptures I see a greater theme that the whole of the book is about. The complete story.

And that theme revolves around a day, let's call it the "day of the Lord" since scripture calls it that, a day when Jesus returns in blazing glory and takes back this earth from Satan who usurped the rule way back in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned.

Satan usurped the rule. His is a reign of terror and sin. And so many questions are answered when we understand that.

Why is the world so chaotic. Why do humans do unspeakably evil things to other humans. Why is ISIS on the rise, continually. It's like a fire, and you beat it back over here, but over there, it's growing out of control again. Pure evil that spreads like a forest fire. Where does that come from?

Why is there suffering and sickness and disease and famine and war. Non stop war. And every where you look, there is continual evil. Non stop evil. Chaos and evil. You read the description of the situation before God brought the flood, and tell me what's different today?

Genesis 6; 5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

That's just 6 chapters into the story. Right before Noah and the first destruction of evil. Look around you. Turn on the 24/7 news. Tell me what is different today, except that there are a lot more people and a lot more wickedness.

The theme of the combined story of the 66 books that make up this overall inspired word of God is the final solution of the problem encountered in Genesis 3.

God gave the authority to reign to Adam. Adam chose to sin. That authority to reign defaulted to the serpent, and evil rebellion against God has reigned on this planet since that day.

The book is about the day when that wrong is righted. When the authority to reign is reclaimed by it's rightful owner and Satan is deposed and locked up in a prison for a thousand years.

That day, and the events surrounding it is called, "the Day of the Lord" all over the old testament, and the new. It's the theme of this book.

Now, if you're thinking to yourself, that sounds like a reign of terror to me, that's exactly what it is. To the rebellious of this world, to the lovers of evil and the haters of God, the Day of the Lord will most certainly be a time of unparalleled terror.

We spoke of that somewhat just last week. When Jesus returns to this earth to depose Satan and take back this world, it is a cataclysmic event. The events that surround the return of Jesus to this world . . . make Noah's flood sound pretty tame.

You say, what does that have to do with our passage this morning? Let me try to explain;

Luke is quoting Isaiah 40 to introduce us to John the baptizer. But Isaiah 40 is one of those passages that has a telescoping fulfillment. A dual fulfillment. A lesser and then a greater fulfillment.

Only the mind of God could have devised such a thing as what we'll see in Isaiah 40. I think this is fascinating.

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John, son of Zacharias is the prophet who cries out in the wilderness to make ready the way of the Lord.

He was aware that he was that prophet. Sent by God to announce the arrival of God's Christ, God's Messiah. But that is the only part of Isaiah 40 that applies to John. Nobody listened. So none of the other parts

happened.

At this point we need to look a little deeper at Isaiah 40, because it's fascinating to compare Isaiah's message with John's message.

Isaiah begins in vs. 1 of chapter 40:

1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem;

Clearly, John did not get the memo. Speak kindly to Jerusalem?? Really? Comfort my people? Here's John's message to God's people and to Jerusalem;

7 So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Speak kindly to Jerusalem. Comfort, Oh comfort my people. You brood of snakes. Bunch of vipers.

What's going on here? You thought my preaching was harsh? John is lashing out at these folks.

It's because John is announcing the Messiah to a people who are deaf and dumb and blind. John is speaking to leaders of a false religion. A religion that leads you away from God, not to Him.

If you went to the Jews of Jesus' day in order to find God, it was like you just dropped into that scene in temple of doom where Indy is dropped into the snake pit. That's who these religious leaders are. Vipers. You go to them to find God, and you may as well have been dropped into your doom.

Fast forward to the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 40. Let me set the scene for you. 60 centuries since Adam. 20 centuries since the cross of Jesus purchased our atonement.

Western civilization is dieing. The influence of the church, the salt in a perishing world has become tasteless. The salt has lost it's saltiness. The church is luke warm. It has married the world. No one can tell the difference any more. God is coming to take the remnant, out of this world.

Then the world can get on about the business of a world with no restraints against evil, at all. The world's conscience, the church, became seared, and then it was gone. So the world embarks on wickedness with no restraint . . . at all.

7 years of history left on Israels Daniel 9:27 clock. The remnant of the church exit, that clock begins.

Israel is pressed on every side, and I believe, most likely scenario, so this is just Jim's best guess, America collapses and Israel has lost it's strong sustaining arm of help in the world.

That part could happen before the rapture. We may be here to witness the collapse of our nation. Highly possible. But that isn't really important to God's plan. When America collapses, who will guard Israel from the nations around it that would like to choke it do death?

The Bible tells us Israel is going to enter into a treaty with a man who emerges, seemingly out of nowhere. This man emerges from the chaos of world-wide collapse and somehow he puts humpty dumpty back together. He restores order out of chaos.

The whole earth looks to him as a messiah . . of sorts. And he offers Israel the protection they so desperately need. A treaty.

Then, 3 1/2 years into that treaty, he turns against Israel, and quite literally, all hell breaks loose. You can read the book of Revelation for a play by play if terror piques your interest.

What you end up with is 3 1/2 years of incomprehensible punishment. In that time period with wars and murders and plagues and other phenomenons like meteorites hitting the earth and bizarre things going on, 1/2 of the worlds population perishes.

And that's like a picnic compared to what's happening to the jews in Israel. Ultimately, 2/3 of them will die. But right at the end, the one third that's left, they will recognize that Jesus is their Messiah and will turn to Him as He returns to them.

Now, with all of that in mind, Isaiah 40 begins to make perfect sense. Actually quite literal sense.

1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

*2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem;
And call out to her, that her warfare has ended,
That her iniquity has been removed,
That she has received of the LORD'S hand
Double for all her sins."*

*3 A voice is calling,
"Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.*

*4 "Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley;*

*5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*

*6 A voice says, “Call out.”
Then he answered, “What shall I call out?”
All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the
field.*

*7 The grass withers, the flower fades,
When the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
Surely the people are grass.*

*8 The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.*

John was that voice, the first time. No one listened. Messiah was murdered. It was necessary for the sinless messiah to become the atonement for our sins. He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

The second time He comes, this voice will cry out in the wilderness, and all Israel will be saved. All of them. The survivors after this time of punishment. Every one of them will look on Him who they pierced as Zechariah chapter 12 states and mourn for Him. They're all going to believe.

This dual fulfillment of this and other prophecies about the so-called fore-runner of the Messiah comes up over and over and it's confusing to some people.

Let's spend a few moments seeing where those ideas are based. We've already looked at Isaiah 40 a little bit this morning, now let's review

Malachi 4:5,6 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD.*

And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Hebrews 9:27 says; *And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,*

How interesting that Elijah didn't die. God sent a fiery chariot and took Elijah up to heaven. Malachi clearly says, Elijah is going to come before what? *before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD.*

We know now, with our 20-20 hindsight, that the shoot of Jesse, the servant was humbled and murdered for us. For our sins. The great and dreadful day of the Lord does not define the life of Jesus that we will study in Luke's book.

Later, the pharisee's will ask John point blank. Are you THE prophet? Are you Elijah who was to come? And he will say no.

How then does he fulfil Isaiah 40? Let's take a closer look at what Gabriel told Zacharias about his soon to be son, John. There are clues for us direct from the angelic message sent by God.

Lk. 1:16 *"And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

The angel is specific. He will go before Him. There's the fore-runner thing of Isaiah 40. That's our link to this prophecy of one who cries in

the wilderness to prepare the way. Messiah is coming.

Note also that the angel doesn't exactly quote Malachi. Gabriel says John will come in the spirit and power of Elijah, not that he IS Elijah.

Then note the exact wording that follows because it is different from Malachi's prophecy in an important way *TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN*, (There's our direct Malachi quote.) *and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

What did Malchi say that isn't quoted here? *Lest I come and smite the land with a curse.*

John came as herald of the Messiah. But comfort and talking gently wasn't appropriate for the crowd of false religious jews that came out to see the "prophet" show. John was a spectacle to go out and see. A one man show. A dinosaur. A real prophet in a land that hadn't had one for 400 years.

Did John turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children. In other words, did the false religious leaders repent and return to a child-like faith in God as healer and forgiver of sin?

These leaders of Israel were dis-obedient. They thought they were righteous. But their works based religion had left them bankrupt. Their righteousness was filthy rags, garments soiled in sewage to God. The Messiah was coming to wash those garments clean in His blood, to give them His perfect life to offer to God instead of the sewage.

They wouldn't have it. John was calling for a complete turn around from their invented religion of shallow, showy traditions of men. Something totally different than what they were consumed with. They would go into the water, but there was no real repentance from their false religion.

Now, God has given me a wonderful gift in my wife. She tells me when she thinks I'm too abrasive in the pulpit. Too harsh. You didn't need to say that. You didn't need to bring that up. You make people upset when it isn't necessary.

And I know from long experience that her point of view is to be respected. I'm not dismissive. I do listen to her. I'm thankful for her.

But I want to introduce you to John's first sermon. At least the first one recorded for us. Jesus said he was the mightiest of the prophets. Maybe I can learn some better manners from John.

7 So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Oops. Did John mis-read Isaiah's prophecy? Speak softly to Israel. Encourage Jerusalem with gentleness. Gentle words of hope. Loving words gently spoken to encourage poor trodden down Jerusalem?

No, No. John knew exactly what was going on. John is responding to the words that Gabriel left out. "*Lest I come and smite the land with a curse.*"

I have been called a hater. That's the popular vernacular thrown around these days against any one who dis-agrees with our current popular culture. Get on the right side of history, or be a hater.

Did John hate these folks. These fathers of Israel. These religious fathers who were guiding Israel into a curse? What do you think? He speaks pretty harshly to them. Is that hate speech?

You pit of poisonous lethal snakes. You leaders who are handing out

the cups of Kool-aid. That's what they were.

Jesus said; Now careful here, trigger warning, this is also slightly harsh. This man may be a hater according to our culture. Jesus said to these same people that John spoke to; *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."*

They are sons of hell. And their affect is the affect of poisonous snakes. They make people twice as dead as they are.

It isn't the time to speak softly, tenderly, it's the time to get their attention with a 2X4. I'll confess that I worry more about not speaking harshly than I do about the few times anyone thought I was abrasive.

What was the effect? Did John's preaching move these false religious teachers out of error, into safety? His next words give us a clue. Turns out John was probably a mind reader. OK, not a mind reader, but what he did have was the prompting of the Holy Spirit within him.

8 *"Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance,*

Going into the water doesn't accomplish anything except you get wet. Maybe the universal solvent will remove a bit of physical dirt. It carries the dust away. A momentary physical cleansing. But John says, that's not enough.

Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance A real repentance is deep inside. It isn't momentary dirt removal outside. It's a new man inside.

This is a huge issue in the church today. Every kind of decisions and asking Jesus into your heart, and weepy responses, and walking down

the aisles and raising your hand while eyes are shut and a whole bunch of other stuff . . . and then what? Poof. Poofers. Like 13 year old mormon girls in Colorado City. Poof, they're gone.

None of that stuff matters any more than the pharisees going out to John and getting dunked in the Jordan. Meaningless.

John says, good for you. You got wet. Big deal. Show me fruit. Show me change. Oh, we hate that word. Change. John says it's worthless, unless a real change in keeping with repentance comes. Real fruit. Not show.

James says, faith without resulting works, fruit if that makes you more comfortable, real change, is dead. Dead faith. Raising your hand and all that other stuff is like pharisees getting in the Jordan river with John the baptizer and inside their hearts, it's all just for show. They have no desire to be any different.

Why would they. After-all, they are direct descendents of Abraham. Who needs repenting and changing. We're jews.

John, in his soft and tender way, will address that. Mind reading again. The Holy Spirit reads minds and tells John what to say;

and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

This isn't the only time these same guys played the Abraham card. In John chapter 8 while they're looking around for stones, large stones in order to murder Jesus, they play this same card.

Abraham is our father. Who's yours, Jesus? They were calling Him a bastard. Who's your father Jesus, Abraham is ours.

Abraham was like kings X I guess. Your heart is full of murder, and they would have done it that day if the opportunity had been there, but it's OK because we've got kings X. Abraham.

Is there any value in having Abraham as your father? Yes, yes there is, if like Abraham, you believe God and He accounts it to your account as righteousness.

But, if you don't make that same transaction with God that Abraham did, you can play kings X abraham all day long and it's meaningless.

John says, God can raise up children of Abraham, real ones, not phonies, out of stones if He desires. Their claim is hollow. Worthless.

Then gentle John finishes his sermon;

9 “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

This is the same scenario as we saw last week in Isaiah 11. God has an axe. An iron axe. In Isaiah 11 it was Assyria that would come in like a lawnmower that levels forests and clear cut Israel. Mow them like grass.

John says; You know that axe that Isaiah spoke of. God still has it. This time it'll be Rome, not Assyria. Same axe, different woodsman.

Again, fruit is the problem. God isn't interested in outward show. He's interested in hearts that will come out of this world and belong to Him. When that happens, fruitfulness is always the product.

Pew research says that out of 7.3 billion people, 2.3 billion are christians. 1/3rd. Fair enough. Where are they? There are 2500 people in Tonopah. That means we need a building that will hold 850 people.

Right?

I'm thinking we need to save up to buy the boarded up school in Sierra Vista so we can even begin to house 850 christians that are here, somewhere.

Maybe it's the harsh preaching?

You can get in the Jordan with John the baptizer all day long and it doesn't make any difference unless your life is changed. You can tell Pew research you're a christian all day long and it doesn't make any difference if there's no lasting fruit.

Where are all these people. And some day at the judgement you can tell Jesus all day long, "I checked the christian box on the pew research questionnaire" and if there's no fruit, no changed life that lasts a lifetime, He's going to say, *I never knew you. Depart from me ye workers of iniquity.*

As we close, look again at the words from Isaiah that Luke gives us in vss 4-6 4 *as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,*
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A king is coming to town and every citizen is called upon to prepare

themselves for His visit. But this isn't any King.

When an ordinary king might come to town, say a president that people actually like is coming to Reno. Massive preparations take place.

The town is systematically cleaned up. The homeless are moved to some shelter so they won't be sleeping on the side walk. Security teams are called in to work overtime.

The highway department blocks off the road that the president will enter on so that no other traffic will be using it as his motorcade approaches. The cameras are pointed at his arrival. The motorcade pulls up to the front door of the arena where he will visit and the red carpet is rolled out so he doesn't soil his feet on the ordinary path that others use.

People who have worked hard stand along the road and line the pathway where he will walk. Large crowds wait for a glimpse of the great man as he descends from the presidential Cadillac and walks along the red carpet into the building which is jammed with people who have come to hear him speak.

That's an ordinary president. What do we do when God is coming to visit among men?

John came to announce His arrival. Nobody much cared. Until they did care and when that occurred 3 years later, they murdered God who had come.

