

July 16 — The Naked Truth

READ

Isaiah 18:1-23:18

Isaiah 20:2-3, *“The Lord told Isaiah son of Amoz, ‘Take off the burlap you have been wearing, and remove your sandals. Isaiah did as he was told and walked around naked and barefoot.’ Then the Lord said, ‘My servant Isaiah has been walking around naked and barefoot for the last three years. This is a sign — a symbol of the terrible troubles I will bring upon Egypt and Ethiopia.’”*

THINK

Imagine seeing someone walking down the street in their “birthday suit.” It would grab your attention for sure! Now, imagine that they said, “I’m simply obeying God’s command!” That is what we see happening in today’s reading when God ordered the prophet, Isaiah, to remove his garments for three years (Disclaimer: he likely wore a loincloth at least!) Did God want to shame him? No! God did it to grab people’s attention, to spread an important message in an eye-catching way. The Israelites’ hearts were hardened and spiritually insensitive, so God wanted to shock His people into hearing the “naked truth” about their disobedience.

If you’re wondering how that could possibly relate to your life today, put yourself in Isaiah’s sandals — or lack thereof! Not only must we see the naked truth about our own sin, but we must also speak God’s truth into the lives of others. We must be willing to stand firm against our culture’s current and share the hope that’s only found in Christ, who was stripped and exposed as He shed His blood for us on the cross.

Who do you know that needs exposure to God’s truth? Be willing to share what God has done in your life because eternities are hanging in the balance. Do so because, when you were naked in your sin, God clothed you with His forgiveness and grace!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, You alone are worthy of my praise! Help me to share Your truth with others unabashedly. Use me to reach those who so desperately need to turn towards You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

July 17 — You are Clay!

READ

Isaiah 24:1-27:13, 29:1-24

Isaiah 29:16, “You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘You did not make me? ’Can the pot say to the potter, ‘You know nothing?’”

THINK

Control is defined as “the power to influence or direct people’s behavior or course of events.” What a tempting role to claim! It seems ideal to be the one who calls the shots and gets the glory. However, such desire for control is what produces so much conflict in families, relationships, the workplace, government, and so many other places in life. There seems to be this underlying belief that we could do the job better if we were in charge.

This desire is nothing new. From the beginning, people have attempted to usurp God’s authority. We convince ourselves that this time is different; things will go much better if we take the wheel. Even as we read how this plan repeatedly failed for the Israelites, we continue on this path that only leads to disillusionment and destruction. It’s then, as we see in the verse above that we must humble ourselves and admit: We are clay! Without the ultimate Potter — God — our lives are shapeless with unformed potential and devoid of purpose.

When we allow our Creator to have His hand on the potter’s wheel of our lives, we’ll experience far less conflict and frustration. Does it make for a perfect life? No! But when we let God take control and follow His direction, we handle life’s hardships better. Therefore, we must trust that God always has a plan and purpose in place, even when things seem out of our control. The result — we gain peace of mind and ease of frustration; we can relax in His love as He molds us into great works of art!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, I give it all to You. My attempt to control my life has not worked well. Who am I to tell You, my Creator, that I know better? I surrender all that I am to You, knowing that Your ways are higher than mine. Amen.

July 18 — Walk This Way!

READ

Isaiah 30:1-33:24

Isaiah 30:20-21, *“Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, He will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear Him. Right behind you, a voice will say, ‘This is the way you should go, whether to the right or to the left.’”*

THINK

Loving parents discipline their children when they disobey. They don't enjoy handing down a punishment or seeing their kids mess up. They want the best for them and understand that consequences must be given. Even when disappointed, they willingly give direction and guidance in a heartbeat because, ultimately, they want their offspring to travel along the right path in life.

God is the ultimate parent. He loves us more than we could ever know. Even when He's disappointed with our actions, when we succumb to that same old temptation yet again, His love remains the same.

In today's reading, the Israelites had continuously looked to the Egyptians for security and strength when facing a serious threat of attack. The same God who'd delivered their ancestors from Egyptian slavery had made it abundantly clear that they should trust in Him, that He would fight for them and strengthen them. Yet, they still refused to heed numerous warnings, and, as a result, they had to endure major hardships. But God's discipline always comes with a promise — one of the best being His promise of guidance. He alone should direct our paths and guide us in the way of righteousness.

Where would we be without His wisdom? How would we truly know what path to take to live out His best for our lives? No matter what you've done or ever will do, don't forget that God wants to help you navigate through all seasons — the good, bad, and in-between. Don't be prideful or look elsewhere. Look to His Word, listen for His voice, and listen for the wisdom of others who faithfully follow Christ. Do this, and live a life of victory and purpose. The right direction may not appear in bold signage with flashing lights before you, but you will feel either a gentle nudge in your spirit or later recognize how God orchestrated certain events to lead you where you needed to go. How great is our God!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving me and so willingly providing the guidance I need no matter what I've done in disobedience to Your commands. You are the ultimate Parent with whom I place my trust. Amen

July 19 — Future in Hand

READ

Isaiah 34:17-35:10

Micah 2:13-5:15

Micah 4:1, *“In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s house will be highest of all—the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.”*

THINK

When we think of the end times, the end of the world as we know it, fear, uncertainty, and confusion often come to mind. It’s not really the kind of topic we want to talk about over dinner or when we’re out with friends!

Question: Does thinking about the end of the world scare you? It doesn’t have to be an anxiety-inducing, hair-raising, goosebump-causing subject. God has given us the 4-1-1 on what we need to know most — with Him, in the end, we win!

We can have confidence knowing that God is in control and He’s already secured ultimate victory for us. Instead of fear, we will experience freedom — from ignorance, war, want, and fear. But, according to His Word, this isn’t just our future — it starts here and now.

Question: How can we experience this freedom? It begins by BELIEVING that Jesus died a sacrificial death for our sin and rose again to defeat the grave once and for all. Then we CHOOSE to accept Him as our personal Savior and trust Him with our present and our future. As we surrender all that we are to Jesus and live in a way that’s pleasing to Him, our fears will dissipate because we trust that He is in control and our future is in His loving hands!

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for giving me the confidence of knowing You are in control no matter what life throws my way. I know that in the end, we win because of what Your Son did for me on the cross. Amen!

July 20 — What Does God Require?

READ

Micah 6:1-7:20
2 Chronicles 32:1-8
2 Kings 18:13-37
Isaiah 36:1-22

Micah 6:6-8, “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

THINK

In every significant relationship, there are moments of tension — especially with those closest to us. When tempers run high, it’s not uncommon to hear a child or a spouse shout out in frustration, “What do you want from me?!” There’s an underlying feeling that they have gone above and beyond to do what is needed, but it’s just never enough to satisfy.

Many of us have also approached God with similar cries:

“God, I have been obedient!”

“Why have you allowed this to happen?”

“Why haven’t you given me the ONE THING I desire?”

It’s not wrong to cry out to God; He loves and cares about us deeply. But accusing God of withholding good or trying to bargain with Him is pridefully putting ourselves on His level. It’s assuming we see and understand what God does. It’s forgetting the high price He paid to rescue us from sin and death.

So, what does God require? It’s not a thousand rams or ten thousand rivers of oil. God asks us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him. When we do what He requires, our lives will be blessed and packed with purpose!

PRAY

Oh Lord, You are mightier, wiser, and stronger than me! Forgive me for thinking that I know what’s best. Humble me, Lord, and remind me that I am a sinner saved by grace. Help me to walk humbly with You, day by day. Amen.

July 21 — What's Your Response?

READ

2 Kings 19:1-37

Isaiah 37:1-38

2 Chronicles 32:9-23

Isaiah 37:14-17, *"Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord."*

THINK

How well do you respond to criticism or hostile confrontation? It's easy to get defensive and fire back with contempt. But such knee-jerk reactions only add fuel to the fire and blind us to the best course of action. Why? Because they're rooted in pride and a desire to "win."

Hezekiah received a letter with hair-raising news and criticism from a chief commander of an adversarial nation. Did Hezekiah fire back in all caps? No, he went to the temple and laid it all out before God. He humbled himself and acknowledged God's sovereignty as he asked God to see the words of this frightening message. He asked God to save His people so that all the kingdoms of the world would know that He is Lord. In turn, God answered, saying, "Because you have prayed to Me...." That begs the question: What if he hadn't prayed? Perhaps Jerusalem would have been conquered. We can only surmise what might've happened had he not, but one thing is for sure — prayer has power, and God responds! He wants us to seek His help and trust in Him with the outcome.

Follow Hezekiah's example and come before God with whatever struggles you face today, laying it all out before Him in prayer. You can be certain that "because you prayed," He will respond and speak into your troubled heart. When we seek first His will and purpose, we can trust that He will faithfully guide our path. It's a much better alternative than slinging mud and trading insults with others — it leads to victory no matter the outcome!

PRAY

Lord, I come before You on bended knee. Please open my eyes to see what You see in my current circumstances. Help me trust that You are working through this for a purpose. Amen.

July 22 — Pray First

READ

2 Kings 20:1-19
Isaiah 38:1-39:8
2 Chronicles 32:24-31

Isaiah 38:1-5, *“About that time Hezekiah became deathly ill, and the prophet Isaiah ... gave the king this message: ‘This is what the Lord says: Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die. You will not recover from this illness. When Hezekiah heard this, he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ‘Remember, O Lord, how I have always been faithful to You and have served You...’ Then he broke down and wept bitterly. Then this message came to Isaiah from the Lord: ‘Go back to Hezekiah and tell him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will add fifteen years to your life...’”*

THINK

What is your first response to hearing horrific news? Do you deny it, do you scour for worldly solutions, do you try to handle it on your own? Or, do you turn to God?

Once again, Hezekiah received bad news — this time about his own demise! And, once again, we see that his first response was to cry out to God. He didn’t demand a second opinion; he didn’t insist on verifying with a battalion of physicians in an attempt to figure out how to weasel his way out of death. He knew nothing or no one else could spare him apart from the Lord Himself. So, He turned to the One who could meet his need.

Today’s reading shows the importance of communicating with God. He may not always answer our prayers the way we want, but He won’t answer them at all if we never make them in the first place.

Who are you turning to FIRST as you face the challenges in front of you? Have you brought them before the Lord? Do so, and know that He will answer. And whatever His response, His way is always best!

PRAY

Dear God, I lay everything at Your feet. I know only You can do the impossible. Thank You for hearing my prayers and responding to them. Help me trust in You more, and make prayer my first response in all things. Amen.