

FRIDAY: Original Intent...

Read: Isaiah 49:5-6 ⁵ And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength— ⁶ he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

<p>Reflect: These verses have been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament. You know, the words Jesus spoke to His disciples at the end of Matthew’s Gospel (Mt28:18-20). “All nations” in Matthew is the same as “the nations” here in Isaiah. God has always been concerned about <u>everyone’s</u> salvation.</p> <p>To be honored (v5) is to be “heavy,” to be given weight – it indicates something is worthwhile. This servant of YHWH (the LORD) is held in high esteem. Conversely, a task that is “too light” (trivial) is to simply bring salvation to Israel.</p> <p>Again we clearly see God’s intent when He promised to bless Abram (Gen12:1-3). That blessing was never intended to stop with him. It was never bound to one ethnic group. Abram was blessed to be a blessing...</p>	<p>Respond: If Israel misunderstood God’s directive to convert “pagans” – are we in danger of that too; if not cognitively, then practically?</p> <p>If you are not using what God has blessed you with (e.g., talents, money, time, etc.) to bless others, is what God has given you really a blessing? Could it be a ‘curse’ if it is not shared with others?</p> <p>Are you aware of a task you are doing that might be “too light” in God’s eyes? E.g., if you’ve been praying for someone (which is wonderful) when will you talk to them about Jesus?</p>
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Pray: Ask for God’s continued blessing on the CEA (the church planting organization assisting NLCC with funds). Pray for a God-honoring and productive board meeting this Sunday. Pray for strength to stay faithful in hard times (Lk21:34-36) for those workers boldly speaking the truth due to doors being opened to share the rapidly spreading word of God.

SATURDAY: Efficaciously Empowered

Read: Ephesians 4

<p>Reflect: We’ve already talked about the body of Christ not being a “corporate organization” (April 6th). While the words “conglomerate organism” might not be the best choice to describe Her either, at least they point to a living body (organism) made up of distinct parts (conglomeration).</p> <p>Why did God institute “the church?” We’ve spent a week reflecting on the importance of the salvation of everyone. Could the church be God’s chosen instrument by which this comes to fruition?</p> <p>How does a church “work?” What makes it different from other gatherings of people with a common cause? What makes the body of Christ distinct from a group of Muslims, or Jehovah’s Witnesses, or whomever?</p>	<p>Respond: What can you do today to prepare yourself for worship at 1505 Road 175 tomorrow?</p> <p>How has the body of Christ been important in your journey of faith? Have you ever thanked people who’ve played a part in that journey? What about those assisting you now?</p> <p>Have you considered how you can support a part of our body, the Youth Group, with their fundraiser tomorrow?</p>
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Pray: Pray for a God-honoring and productive meeting between the preaching minister and elders prior to the board meeting tomorrow. Pray for God to be honored by your worship the rest of this day. Pray for God to be honored by our worship tomorrow as well.

Selective Soteriology?

April 27 – May3

The Yellow Pages I have lists 66 churches in the “Emporia Area” alone. If all of those congregations were located in Emporia (and they’re not) and each had 400 people attending weekly (and they don’t) that would basically equal the population of Emporia (26,400 people; Emporia’s estimated population in July of 2006 was 26,188).

If each of those congregations were in Emporia (again, they’re not) and each had 100 people attending each week (it’s doubtful they do – on average) that would be (drum roll please) about ¼ of Emporia’s population (6,600 people).

What’s my point? There are plenty of people in Emporia who need to know Jesus and submit their lives to Him. In Christian lingo, they need to be “saved.”

Yet as I’ve already mentioned, those 66 congregations are not all in Emporia. Lyon County’s population is around 36,000 people. So even if those 66 congregations (some of which were in Coffey County) all had 500 people coming weekly, that would still leave 3,000 people not “going to church” on Sunday...again, those 66 congregations come nowhere near averaging 500 people each week.

Now I certainly don’t want to create the illusion that going to a building to worship with other believers on Sunday is the most important component of Soteriology (the study of salvation). Yet it does play a part – it’s a place where saints (those “in Christ”) can be edified, and where pagans (those who are “unsaved”) can experience love from a community of people devoted to God.

Why are there so many “lost” people in the world today? Scratch that, why are there so many “lost” people in Emporia, in Lebo, in Americus, in Allen, Hartford, in Olpe, in...?

Are we genuinely concerned about the lost? Are we too content with our own salvation? Do we really think people need to know Jesus in order to spend eternity in God’s presence?

What do we do to show we’re concerned about the lost? Do we regulate our salvation to something we think about only on Sundays? If a person believes in ‘a god’ is that enough?

Monday: A Snapshot of “Heaven”

Read: Revelation 7:1-10¹ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth...³ saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel...⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Reflect:

While this isn’t going to turn into a week of devotions on the book of Revelation, it is a fitting place to start. What a sight! This is a picture of where history is headed. At long last salvation is fully realized – these people are fully in the presence of God.

The 144,000 Jewish people who are “sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel” (v4) is the same group that is later a “great multitude...” (v9). The numbers are symbolic. The number 12 and multiples of it are linked with God and the people of God. Multiplying it by 1,000 gives a large number. That’s the point, a large number of God’s people.

This is made clear with the innumerable multitude. Notice it is distinguished by four groups, “nation,” “tribes,” “peoples,” and “languages.” Four is a number of totality; this uncountable number is made up of all nations.

Pray: Thank God for His all-encompassing love. Pray for Bob Griffin, an elder of NLCC. Pray for God’s word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1) so that the numbers in Rev7 continue to grow.

Respond:

Read Rev6:12-17. In light of that picture, how much more beautiful is the imagery in Rev7? No one can stand up to God’s wrath – except His people – and that’s only because their robes have been washed in the blood of the lamb (Rev7:13-14).

Does the thought of a Middle Eastern follower of Jesus in “heaven” bother you?

Is there any room for prejudice in the life of a disciple of Jesus? How? or Why not?

Tuesday: A Snapshot of “Earth”

Read: Isaiah 1:2-4² Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.³ The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”⁴ Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.

Reflect:

To get to the scene of Revelation 7 God had to work through people. Since it was humans who “fell,” humans needed to be involved in the restoration process. You’ve heard before that God chose to work through Abram (cf. Gen12:1-3).

Unfortunately, by the time Isaiah writes (and even before him) the Jewish people (who descended from Abram) were not following God. There were some still loyal to God (e.g., Isaiah), but as a whole they were not...

This turn of events was simply unnatural. Beasts of burden (v3) know to whom it is they belong. Yet the people of Israel had forgotten Who chose them, Who made them a people, Who promised to bless them...and really even the purpose for which He did those things.

Respond:

Verse two is basically a summons to court, God’s court. If you had to stand trial before God, what would the verdict be?

Read Isaiah 1:12-17. God has always been concerned with what some label “social justice.” Do the things that concern God concern you?

If you are “in Christ,” why is it that you are saved? Is it for your own benefit?

Pray: Pray for the Bible studies taking place tonight. Pray for Larry Hayes, an elder of NLCC. Pray for God to raise up workers for His kingdom (Mt9:35-38) to help share the rapidly spreading word.

WEDNESDAY: Self-centered

Read: Isaiah 40:1-5¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.³ A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Reflect:

In chapter 40 the book of Isaiah develops a new focus. These words are directed toward the Jewish people who will be in exile in the future. They were intended to function as a source of hope. God is determined to redeem His people (He will).

Today’s verses form an amazing contrast with Isaiah 39:8. In chapter 39 Hezekiah greets servants from Babylon who congratulate him concerning his recovery from illness. Although having done great things in the past (e.g., Isa37:14f), Hezekiah still struggles with self-centeredness.

Basically, even though future generations will suffer, Hezekiah is OK with it because he won’t be affected by it. In light of leaders like that, no wonder God needs to comfort His people (Isa40:1).

Respond:

Do you ever have the attitude of Hezekiah towards, say, the environment (or something else)?

Read Daniel 5:1-4. That is one outcome of Hezekiah’s arrogance/carelessness (Isa39). Are you concerned with how your present actions will reflect on God in the future?

Travel in Palestine was difficult. In lieu of vs3-4, in what ways do you see God at work to make salvation “easier” (e.g., more accessible) for people today?

Pray: Lift up the other congregations of Emporia; ask God to bless their work for His kingdom. Pray for Roy Andrews, an elder of NLCC. Pray for boldness (Acts4:29) for the workers in God’s kingdom to share His rapidly spreading word.

THURSDAY: Readiness...

Read: Isaiah 49:1-3¹ Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.² He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.³ And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

Reflect:

In these verses the exile is depicted as over. However, Israel (once again as a whole...not everyone) is still sinful (e.g., Isa48:1-8) and even though many are back in Palestine – they need to come the rest of the way back...to the Lord that is (Isa48:22).

God was never concerned about a plot of land (i.e., the “Promised Land”). It was simply a strategic location for His influential people to live...in order to influence others. Therefore, God is not content with Israel to simply be ‘home’ from exile.

Who is the servant; Israel or Jesus? The pronouns are singular...which would indicate Jesus. Yet we must remember that there is precedence for a group of people to be talked about as a single entity (e.g., Hos1:1f). Apparently the people of Israel is one answer, but we can see Jesus here too.

Respond:

The “peoples from afar” (or distant nations) clearly indicates that God is concerned about them. Are you?

The sword (v2) would be for up close fighting; the arrow (v2) for battle from a distance. This servant of God is fully equipped. How can you do battle “up close” today (e.g., talking with someone)? Are you doing battle “from a distance” as well (e.g., praying for someone)?

God’s desire is to be glorified. Nothing brings Him glory like the salvation of people (e.g., Ezek36:16f; Phil2:11). Who do you know that can come to God and thereby glorify Him?

Pray: Thank God for the privilege to serve in His kingdom. Pray for Brent McCrory, the preaching minister of NLCC. Pray for open doors to share the gospel (Col4:2-4) for those workers who are emboldened to help God’s word spread rapidly.