

## TCC Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2014 – 11<sup>th</sup> hour thinking – Isaiah 33

### **Title: “11<sup>th</sup> hour thinking”**

**Purpose:** To see how God deals with his people – even at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour.

### **INTRODUCTION**

I wonder if you can identify with the scenario I am going to paint – there is some need in your life and in fact it is really becoming very pressing and you pray and pray and it seems that God waits to the very last minute to the 11<sup>th</sup> hour in order for His answer to finally come and deliver you.

And you say to yourself Q. Why does God always seem to do that?

Well perhaps we need to turn around that question and see things from God’s side and to allow Him to ask us the same thing when it comes to us getting around to repentance.

#### An 11<sup>th</sup> hour setting

What greets us, as we turn the page over to Isaiah chapter 33 this morning, is what would be called an 11<sup>th</sup> hour situation:

- a place where the enemy (in this case the armies of Assyria) is right at the door
- a place where time has pretty well run out and where your options are few

#### Historically

Historically this would be the year 701BC (or thereabouts) and King Sennacherib of Assyria is making his final approaches to the city of Jerusalem and are starting to fill the horizon as seen by those standing on the walls of Jerusalem which itself would be now be tightly shut up.

#### Last resort

Looking from the point of view of God’s people – they had tried a variety of options and all of these had failed them:

- (\*NOT\* Syria+Israel \*BUT\* Assyria) - for a time they had resisted an early alliance with Syria and Israel thinking it better to try and appease the Assyrians by making an alliance directly with them (and for a while this looked as though it might work)
- (\*NOW\* EGYPT) - then when Syria and Israel both fell to the Assyrians – and when the Philistines also fell – it seemed good to them to look further afield across to another notional super-power – and hence their desire to go back to EGYPT
- (\*NOW\* Assyria again) - when help from there did not materialise, just as Isaiah had told them

they then turn back to appeasing the Assyrians but this has not worked

And so finally they start to see that everything that they had looked to (outside of God, their God) had failed them spectacularly and at great pains and expense to themselves!

Their last resort now is to turn back to God in a **LONG-OVERDUE REPENTANCE** and this is what we see here in this chapter.

#### This morning

- Perhaps this morning, before we delve into the actual text itself, you can identify with that feeling of being in a place of **LONG-OVERDUE REPENTANCE**.
- Maybe you've tried using God as a sort of **spiritual rabbit's foot**. Using God rather like some **St Christopher's** charm that hopefully will bring you good luck and the prosperity that you desperately want.
- It might be that you felt that there were still some other avenues that were available and you have gone down them only to discover that they have brought you back to the same spot.
- Just possibly you are none the better off and considerably the worse off – you feel quite frankly racked with guilt, desperate, trapped and against the wall.

Well if any of that is you then you already have quite some alignment with the people and situation prevailing with the people that Isaiah is writing and preaching to.

#### Never too late

There is a sense in which we can say that it is never too late to come to God.

If you ask the question:

Q. When is it too late?

The answer is, I think, "**When you are dead!!**"

You might well think that the people of God were beyond redemption – that they had already burned their boats by going after every available option and spurning God at every turn – however this is one amazing passage which shows us something of what might be suitably called DIVINE HUMILITY.

#### Dividing up the chapter

Now one of the challenges that we always face whenever the chapter is longer than just a few verses - is figuring out how the passage breaks down:

- We look for things like introductions and/or conclusions
- We look for to see if there are any obvious sections and whether or not these have some sort of logical progression

- We look to see if there is some sort of theme which unifies or glues together everything

### My assessment

As I looked at this it seemed as though Verses 1-6 and then Verses 7-24 were the two sections that made up the chapter or unit.

Not only that it seemed that the second part (Verses 7-24) was essentially an enlargement or a development of the first part (Verses 1-6).

It seemed that Verses 1&2 got expanded and developed in Verses 7-9

That Verses 3&4 got expanded and developed in Verses 10-16 and then finally

Verses 5&6 had a fitting counterpart in Verses 17-24

### Our structure

So what that gives us structure this morning are the three headings:

1. A TURNING POINT
2. GOD'S NOW MOMENT
3. THE BLESSINGS THAT WILL FLOW

And for each of these 3 sections we will start off with a pair of verses in the first part of the chapter - and then we'll bounce across to the second part of the chapter to develop it.

So then #1:

#### 1] A TURNING POINT (Verses 1&2 also Verses 7-9)

As you can see it starts with that word "WOE" and by now we are getting a little familiar with the word because this is WOE #6 out of 6 that shape the 8 chapter section from Isaiah 28 thru to Isaiah 35 - and we are just about completed on that section which will take us through to the 4 chapters of story which will complete the first half of Isaiah.

And this word has thus far been addressed time and again to God's people clearly marking up and sign-posting the tragedy of potential bad decisions that the people have God have been in the process of making.

Q. I wonder – has God been marking up your life script recently with a series of "WOE's", with a series of "WATCH OUT's"?

And just to be clear – when God puts a WOE here it is to try and bring about a change of heart.

They are **\*NOT\*** to be seen as God saying DOOM!! You're all DOOMED I tell you!!

Let us be clear God is marked very fundamentally by the fact that He loves mercy. (Micah 6v8)

"He has showed you, O man, 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. "

Q. Do you tend to imagine that God's "default mode" is **REBUKE**?

Well if you do - then let me suggest that you **RE-MODEL** your thinking and come to see that God's default mode is more accurately understood as **REPAIR** - He always works to put us back into working order.

If you don't like the word **REPAIR** - then you might use the word **REDEEM** instead. He works constantly to take that which is entangled in sin and to **DELIVER** back in the wonderful freedom of the Kingdom of God.

A turning point

Now I called this first part a TURNING POINT.

Q. Why that?

Well very simply because when we hit this 6th WOE we discover that something has dramatically changed.

Q. How come?

**Well because this WOE is the first one of the 6 that is no longer directed at God's people.**

This chapter brings us to an: "**11th hour crying out to God for help**".

Historically this is the year **701BC** and the King of Assyria - **King Sennacherib** - has his war machine now laying siege, finally, to Jerusalem itself.

By this point much of the rest of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) has been successfully defeated and overrun by the Assyrian domination.

But now it is Jerusalem's turn.

This is now **CRUNCH TIME** for God's people.

See what **Verse 2** says: "O LORD, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress."

This was the most wonderful sound in God's ears.

Remember the longing that was in God's heart expressed there in **Isaiah 30 verse 18**:

"Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"

It had been a real long time in the coming!!

## Tender steak – Brighton Marina

In the week whilst on holiday in the Gatwick area - we took a trip down to the South Coast and in the evening we discovered a place in Brighton called **The Brighton Marina** (perhaps some of you have been there).

And there were lots of shops and eating places and I had a **lovely tender steak**. As you may know, one of the ways that they say to make nice tender steak is to **use a hammer on them before you cook them**.

It seems that due to the very stubborn and stiff-necked nature of most of us - God resorts to using something like a steak hammer **to SUFFICIENTLY TENDERIZE us** so that we will be turned around.

### Verses 7-9

Verses 7-9 give us expanded details on the situation as they were experiencing it:

Verse 7 - both the brave men, the warriors of the people - they were publicly crying aloud - and no it was no war cry they were shouting. Also we have the political leaders, those who had brokered the 11th hour peace treaty with the Assyrians - they are weeping.

As Verse 8 indicates this treaty, which was intended to pacify the destructive appetite of the Assyrians has been broken.

They have been double-crossed - their words, and signed documents, duly witnessed by both sides and sealed - have now been seen to have actually been completely worthless. Completely outrageous.

Why are the highways deserted (Verse 8) - well simply because the Assyrians are in the vicinity - they have not withdrawn to return to their country as would have been the agreement.

And as Verse 9 very poetically puts it - the land is in mourning - the named places which should have been fertile and rich places are described as like the desert, or looking like trees in winter time.

They had played every hand that they had and everything had turned to dust!

Brokenness is a tool in God's toolbox that He will use if He has to simply because it brings us back to a place of fruitfulness in repentance.

As **David** has learned - arising from his own very bitter experiences of sin in his life - Psalm 51 verse 17:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise.

### The WOE in Verse 1 explained

And hence it is that the WOE we find here in Verse 1 is directed at the Jew's enemies, the Assyrians.

**\*READ\*** Verse 1 - we can see that God is now turning the tables - and all this has happened because God's people have finally exhausted their own self-dependence.

Oh for the day when we will run out of our own resources!!

So then #1: A TURNING POINT

And now #2:

## 2] GOD'S NOW MOMENT(Verses 3&4 also Verses 10-16)

Verse 3 and Verse 10 are somewhat parallel to each other - they express the same thought - let me read Verse 10 first and then Verse 3:

**\*READ\*** Verse 10

**\*READ\*** Verse 3

### Tremendously encouraging

I do find these verses tremendously encouraging. When times seem dark and dismal, as soon as God beholds that our knees hit the floor and our hearts are properly bared before Him.

THEN God arises.

Imagine, if you will, that God has his own divine airforce and his own airbase equipped with his own fighter jets just sitting on the tarmac, cockpits open and ready to deploy - and he has his elite angels as pilots just awaiting the siren to sound and everything to immediately swing into action.

That is true right now.

Q. Why not determine right now - jot it in your notes:-

**"Note to self - PRAY TO GOD - CRY OUT - ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR OWN DESPERATION!!!"**

and then await God to respond - await God to scramble his crack team in response?

God does have a "**NOW MOMENT**" - and this is what this passage teaches us.

**701BC** was a very "**NOW YEAR**" everything was brought to a head - the stakes were very dramatically raised - it was a time of all or nothing.

Now I'm not saying that the people simply were saying to themselves - "Well I suppose we have nothing to lose!!!" - I am not too sure that that is the sort of response of faith and that God responds to and it doesn't really reflect the refocussing of hope and longing that is pictured in Verse 2.

### 2 things unfold

Now I think it is worth noticing that there are **a couple of things that happen when God arises** -> one is obvious - the other less so:

a) Victory

**The first thing that happens** is that God brings about a reversal of fortunes and God grants the victory to his people.

This was what God promised to them, back there in [Chapter 31](#), where we had God urging His people to RETURN.

[Isaiah 31 Verse 6](#) "Return to him you have so greatly revolted against, O Israelites"

And perhaps you remember that God helped them to have **a real sense of God on their hearts** by giving them **2 pictures and 2 promises** - we saw God picture Himself to them as a **MIGHTY LION** and also as a **PROTECTIVE BIRD** hovering above them.

And one of the promises came by way of a clear prediction - [Isaiah 31 Verse 8](#) reads:

"Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them..."

And this victory is spelled out in [Verses 3&4](#) - **\*READ\***

And when we get to [Isaiah 37](#) we will see the details of what actually transpired.

#### b) The Fear of God

**The second thing that happens is** - at least at first sight - a bit surprising, we see that **the operation of God in His mighty power induces in His people - THE FEAR OF GOD.**

Perhaps you remember the story of the large catch of fish in [Luke 5](#):

- Jesus tells them to go out into deep water (even though they had worked all through the night as professional fishermen and caught nothing)
- then catch such a massive amount of fish that the nets start to break and the boats are about to sink from the sheer weight of the catch
- then we see Peter's reaction to Jesus as the direct AFTERMATH of this POWER DISPLAY:

[Luke 5 verse 8](#) "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, **"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"**"

You see God's might and raw power is **a powerful summons for us to feel our own sinfulness much more keenly. It makes us ask that really crucial question:**

Q. If God is as holy and as all powerful and as utterly awesome as this - what hope is there for a wretched, wicked and disgusting sinner as me?

Q. Surely there is no hope for me, surely no way that i can be in the same place as this God of burning fire?

In fact you don't even need to go as far as the NT in order to see this sort of reaction taking place in someone.

Just think of Isaiah himself in that majestic chapter in [Isaiah 6](#) and when he sees the undimmed glory of God and cries out:

[\(Isaiah 6 verse 5\)](#) "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

#### Q & A - Verses 14-16

In [Verses 14 thru 16](#) - you can see that there is a QUESTION and ANSWER section:

- The Question is:  
"Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"
- The Answer that follows goes like this:  
"He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil— this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.

If this question and answer seems to have a familiar ring to them - that is because we have come across very similar QUESTIONS and ANSWERS before in both [Psalm 15](#) and in [Psalm 24](#).

#### A godly profile – walking the walk

It gives you something of the profile of the sort of person that pays attention to the ways of God and actively pursues God's righteousness - he is the sort of person who is not perfect but who does take positive steps to keep his walk in alignment with the declared ways of God.

This is the man (or woman) who does not simply talk the talk but also actively walks the walk.

#1 A TURNING POINT

#2 GOD'S NOW MOMENT

finally #3:

### 3] THE BLESSINGS THAT WILL FLOW (Verses 5&6 ALSO Verses 17-24)

Arising from the ashes of mankind's best efforts - we see the alternative that God produces.

God's trees truly produce wonderful fruit.

[Verses 5&6](#) gives us a summary:

- "The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high;  
he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness.  
6 He will be the sure foundation for your times,  
a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge;  
the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure."



Let me unpack that a little as a lot is compressed in a short space:

- if there is anything that is **glaringly absent in our day it is STABILITY** - where the NIV talks about a "**SURE FOUNDATION FOR YOUR TIMES**" - other translations have "he will be the stability of your times" - unless a nation or a people have a proper basis to work from there can be no consensus and no foundation that can bear any weight.  
As Jesus expressed it in the Sermon on the Mount - any house built on the sand will soon fall with a mighty crash when the storms come.  
Do we not live in perilous times because we have been for centuries digging away at our Christian foundation.

- "A rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge" - with God there has always been and always will be an ABUNDANCE - and especially in those things that really matter: salvation, wisdom and knowledge.

The apostle Paul speaks in his final letter before his death to his son in the faith Timothy and joins together these aspects of WISDOM and SALVATION - 2 Timothy 3v15ff:

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. "

And as the climax to this list of tremendous abundant blessings we have "the fear of the Lord".

The NIV expresses this as the KEY TO THIS TREASURE and this very much figures - remember how the FEAR OF THE LORD is talked about at the outset of that most PREMIUM of books on WISDOM - the Proverbs - Proverbs 1 verse 7 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. "

It is that great differentiator of peoples - if you have ever truly known and experienced the Lord, the true God, the One that the highest of angels cry out Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty - about - then you will be a changed person as a result.

Let me ask you:

Q. Have you got the key to this treasure?

Now Verse 5 speaks of the fact that God, the LORD, is **going to fill Zion** – (that is the Jerusalem of the future - that Spiritual city of God) - **with both JUSTICE and RIGHTEOUSNESS** - and maybe you might wonder what exactly that might look like - well Verses 17 thru to the end of the chapter expand out the details.

Verses 17-24

**Verse 17** hints as the beauty of all that is to follow:

"Your eyes will see **the king in his beauty**  
and view a land that stretches afar."

Which King is this - if it is not King Jesus - the Messiah who will one day come and wipe away every tear from our eyes.

And Isaiah whets their appetites and tells them that in time to come they will behold **THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY**.

**Vernon Higham** writes in his **hymn** (and we've sung this one here):

"I saw a new vision of Jesus,  
A view I'd not seen here before,  
Beholding in glory so wondrous  
With beauty I had to adore.  
I stood on the shores of my weakness,  
And gazed at the brink of such fear;  
'Twas then that I saw Him in newness,  
Regarding Him fair and so dear. "

A great antidote

What a great antidote this is to the dismay that our society and world brings.

**This is the REAL REALITY** - think about that word reality - it is REAL -ITY!!

In time to come there will be nothing except for this and it is BEAUTIFUL.

Notice **THE SIGNATURE** that comes in **Verse 22**:

"For the LORD is our judge,  
the LORD is our lawgiver,  
the LORD is our king;  
it is he who will save us."

In the OT we had those who were Kings, those who were priests who taught the law, and those who were prophets who acted as the conscience of the nation and who gave judgments on their behaviour and their decisions.

And these role were always separate we don't ever have kings who functioned in the other roles.

When we get to the NT we have King Jesus, who is also declared to be a priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek and we have Jesus who tells us that he has come not to abolish the law but to be the fulfillment, the completion of it. In fact Jesus is given the title The Word of God.

Jesus signature is clearly given here and the fruit of His reign is truly wonderful:

- there is PEACE **Verse 20** - after all He is the King of Peace - we read of a tent that will never be moved - Q. Why not? Because we will be at journey end of course.

And once again we will be able to look back with great joy and total relief at those things that formerly terrified us (see **Verse 18 & 19**). I am reminded of that section in **Isaiah 25 verse 9**:

“In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

- **Verse 21** \***READ**\* shows us that there will be "ALL THE GLORY AND NONE OF THE VULNERABILITY"
- **Verse 23** \***READ**\* this reminds us that all of this will come down to God's grace and not any doing or righteousness of our own.

The **concluding Verse** finishes off the picture - this new and wonderful and beautiful vision with the **DUAL TRUTH** that BOTH **SIN & SICKNESS** will be dealt with:

(Verse 24) “No one living in Zion will say, “I am ill”; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.”

## CONCLUSION

We should always be ready to respond to God’s amazing divine humility – that even when we dilly dally as regards our returning to him away from all the sinful and godless ways that we often choose – that He is ready to receive us still and bless us also both now and in the future.

This is our God – amazing grace – that saved a wretch like me!!

AMEN