

## Covenant UMC Bible Study Notes-- November 27, 2017

During Advent we will consider apocalyptic themes of the end times. New birth comes, not without trials and tribulation. It is a warning against procrastination. We will reflect on the darkening days of tribulation. This is a metaphor: what does it say to our times?

### Isaiah 64:1-9

Note the tearing of the heavens in v. 1.

What kind of foreshadowing is in v. 8-9?

- Surrender.
- Supplication—"Be not angry."

In the black tradition, songs are either fast, or they are very slow, mindful.

Having been brought out of Africa on slave ships, there is a depth of soulfulness at having been enslaved. This has been passed on from one generation to the next.

This passage is from Second Isaiah. Computer analysis has been said to show that Isaiah could not have written the entire book. I believe Isaiah wrote everything, but in three parts. There may have been three different scribes.

Do you accept JEPD analysis of Genesis? In the tradition in which I grew up, this approach was considered horrible. You come to a point in time where you say, "I receive this."

Advent is a time of preparation, but also a time to reflect on what I have learned in this past year that has prepared me.

"We are the clay, you are the potter" (v. 8). Acknowledgment of who God created us to be.

We interrupt the truth because we too often don't allow God's molding to shape us.

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels..." (II Corinthians 4:7)

Verse 6 has been used in evangelism in the sense of "*your* sins..." Today we understand it as *our* sins.

The book *The Red Tent* describes the separation of women during their period, followed by ritual cleansing.

Science has shown that if women live in the same house they begin to have their periods at the same time.

The brains of men and women think differently. I see this as the warp and woof of fabric.

The Gospel comes more naturally to women because of their caring. The perspective of women is richer than that of men. Female pastors bring something to the table that no male pastor can.

### Psalm 80

"Let thy face shine, that we may be saved!" (v. 3, 7)

“Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears” (v. 5). The word “Eucharist” was translated into one African language as “feast of tears.”

## **I Corinthians 1:3-9**

The first two verses are like an address: who the letter is from, who the letter is to. The King James Version has become so familiar that it is like driving when you're sleepy.

“Sustain you to the end...” (v. 8). We have spent all year growing in knowledge. We are strengthened to know we don't travel alone.

In the Old Testament people plead for God to show himself. They have a feeling that God has abandoned them, that they have sinned and God has turned away. They need to see God in a miracle. In the New Testament, we wait it out together; it will be OK.

We experience this way more than we acknowledge.

What is here that is missing in the passage from Isaiah? The gift of the Holy Spirit, our advocate who will inform and strengthen us and walk with us.

Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

## **Mark 13:24-37**

This passage breaks into three parts.

He will... gather his elect... “from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (v. 27). You can't get beyond it.

These words must have made an impression.

To see this from a Twenty-First Century perspective, could the words “to the ends of heaven” include intelligent life on other planets? This encompasses the entire universe.

What is the lesson of the fig tree (v. 28)?

One possibility: the blossoming of the fig tree represents Israel.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (v. 31). We know the earth will be absorbed by an expanding sun in the far distant future. The words of Jesus will last even beyond that.

They are bigger than anything temporal.

Scripture shows forty year warnings, then twenty year warnings.

Are we supposed to get ready? Get busy? Or both?

The earth will not be here forever. God will.

John McCain lived through the worst of the Vietnam War and came back to a conflicted country. We are conflicted now. He was asked which was worse and he said the sixties. We have managed to evolve and grow. 1968 was a watershed year, like an earthquake. World War II also set us on a new course. World War II was followed by a great peace (by comparison). Is this great peace over?

The third part of the reading in Mark tells us to stay awake.

Recall the story about having oil in our lamps. The timetable will take care of itself. Revelation includes letters to seven churches; messages to five of these were pretty negative. I want to be an oil producer.

I have heard a New Year's Eve sermon on the seven churches of Revelation and the verses referring to "he that overcometh" (2:7b, 2:11b, 2:17b, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21). Pray to overcome this year. Each year is different.

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Looking at these four scriptures, what do we find?

- Tears
- We don't walk the journey alone
- Words of warning

It is time to "put our ducks in a row."

Is anybody nervous as we approach the first Sunday of Advent?

In Revelation, a woman (the church) births a baby, Jesus all over again. We've strayed. There will be the birth of a new church if we believe these are the last days. God will protect that baby.

There is a 500 year cycle to the church: the Reformation, the split of the Eastern and Western Churches. We're in another of these periods. This is an exciting time, but also one of fear and trembling. Be mindful. Be aware.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, it had been several years since he had planted it. What had happened since? He gave them encouragement; "you have what you need." They were not left orphaned.

They had been given spiritual gifts.

God claims us, and we claim God.

Straying is based on culture. Covenant UMC has lost a lot of kids growing up or moving away. It has been observed that we are losing the culture war. There are competing activities on Sunday mornings. Something is happening that the church is not tending to.