

Covenant UMC Bible Study Notes-- December 4, 2017

for the Scripture readings for December 10, 2017

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

How do these readings enrich your journey through Advent? How are you challenged?
How are you encouraged?

Isaiah 40:1-11

Chapters 40-66 of Isaiah reflect a different age from Chapters 10-39, which was a dismal time. Isaiah had a prophetic pen: he looked not only to his own time, but to years to come: Cyrus, the Messianic age, the New Testament Church Age.

Jerusalem has received from the Lord's hand "double for all her sins" (v. 2). Double punishment? Or (1) punishment and (2) restoration?

See Isaiah 61:7: "Instead of your shame you shall have a double portion..." After judgment comes light and darkness.

A double blessing can be physical and spiritual.

Job was restored double.

There is a spiritual mathematics at work here.

When a tree is cut down, new shoots come up from the root.

Judgment is followed by an opportunity for restoration.

Jeremiah 16:18: "And I will doubly recompense their iniquity and their sin..." God will restore them, but first, God will doubly repay iniquity.

Zechariah 9:12: "Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double."

Are these references to "double" to be taken literally? Or do they mean "more than you can imagine"?

Revelation 18:6: "Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed." What we put out there gets magnified.

To whom much is given, much is required.

It's how you know you're loved.

You have a responsibility for what God has deposited in you.

When I get to feeling that I know it all, God pokes my balloon.

Jesus said he who does not leave his father and mother is not worthy of him. The disciples said "we've done it. What's in it for us? What's the payoff?" You will receive 1000 more in this life, and eternal life in the world to come. [See Mark 10:28-30.]

Don't be discouraged no matter how hard it gets. When the blessing comes, it will feel like double.

“Good tidings...” (Isaiah 40:9). Compare “good tidings” in Luke, Chapter 2. The Greek word is the one from which we get our English word “evangelize”.

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Looking ahead to Isaiah 40:12, there seems to be a connection with the verses immediately preceding our reading from 2 Peter. Isaiah’s verse speaks of the greatness of God as creator. In 2 Peter we read of people who scoff at the idea of the Second Coming (3:3-4), but Peter points to God as creator (3:5). God, as creator, can do anything.

God can do surprising things.

Peter encourages us to be zealous (3:14), not to sit and do nothing because the world will end.

Psalm 85

Captives have been brought back. Salvation is near.

The justice and grace of God meet (v. 10b). There is harmony.

These people lived with a terrible amount of insecurity, Syria on one side, Egypt on the other. These were hard times. It is nice to have some promises. The times were scary. They had gone into captivity. They had a portable God, not rooted in a temple. Our faith is not rooted in this building.

God heard the Hebrews when they were in bondage in Egypt; also, Daniel and his friends in captivity in Babylon.

Mark 1:1-8

This passage connects to the one in Isaiah 40.

God wants to plow the mountains and push the dirt into the valleys. God wants everything level and plain.

A bulldozer comes into our life.

God’s leveler.

Is there significance to the people having built “the high places” of Baal? [Jeremiah 32:35]

There is a natural and spiritual meaning to mountains. Ascend and look down.

Mount Sinai.

Psalm 121: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.”

In Mark, John says that he has baptized with water, but the one to come will baptize you “with the Holy Spirit” (v. 8). In Matthew and Luke, the words are “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16). The Holy Spirit *or* fire. Judgment *or* blessing.

It’s not easy to go to Hell. You have to walk around God standing in your life. But there is a time of judgment. The sovereign will of God intrudes into our well-made plans.

Great men of God do what they do because of the Holy Spirit. We want to copy the formula.

We copy their methods thinking we will get the same result.

A warning from God comes forty and twenty years ahead of an outpouring. This country has had a revival movement every generation or so: after the Civil War, and in the 60s—the charismatic movement among Roman Catholics.

One pastor spoke of a Christian Church in his community where everyone went; then they went to the Baptist church, then others. God says, whoever will be open.

God shows no partiality.

There may be a great influx, then a great falling away.

There are times when the Spirit of God broods over the water, and there is great revival. God is in charge of the times and seasons. It is a wonderful thing to see. We could be on the verge of that here.

If we have a warm heart, God will send people our way.

Charles Finney was famous here in Rochester. There was a beginning, a middle, and an end of his revival. What could the church have done to extend it? Or was it just God's timing?

Churches have a life cycle. Some things have to die.

As to a son continuing his father's ministry, it is hard for a son to plow his father's field. Instead, we should ask, "What field, Father?"

We have everything we need to be blessed by God.

People have burdens.

Humble ourselves before the Lord. It is wonderful to be in a revival. The wind blows where it will.

God doesn't reveal it to just one person, but to many.

God gave us a witness.