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A Song of Salvation for the Peace of the Oppressed

Isaiah 26:1-27:1

Context: Isaiah 24-27 – a grand, glorious “Big Picture” view of God’s triumph over the wicked powers of the earth for the benefit of His people... like the Book of Revelation, it faces the oppressive power of the tyrant nations who love to crush and dominate God’s people – it faces it square on and both speaks of a future world in which God will rule in peace forever and ever AND of a present reality both of great suffering and of loving protection by a sovereign God. So, for the suffering people of God, who are going through the fires of oppression at the hands of vicious tyrants, they are given two great encouragements: 1) God is sovereign RIGHT NOW, measuring out the victories of the wicked and limiting the damage they can do to His beloved people; 2) God will someday crush all the oppressors and set up an eternal kingdom in which He will reign gloriously over all His beloved people. Isaiah 24 surveyed this “BIG PICTURE” marvelously... it spoke of the destruction of ALL THE EARTH and of God’s final GLORIOUS REIGN in Mount Zion:

Isaiah 24:19-23 The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. ²⁰ The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls-- never to rise again. ²¹ In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. ²² They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. ²³ The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.

Isaiah 25 zeroed in on the future celebration that God’s people will have when all the tyrants are destroyed and death itself is swallowed up in victory; it pictures the city of

the oppressors pounded to rubble, and the rich banquet feast the Lord will spread for His people in their resurrection:

Isaiah 25:6-8 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

So, Isaiah 24-25 are triumphant prophecies of final victory by the Lord over all the tyrants that oppress God's people in this world

But Isaiah 26 teaches God's oppressed people how to celebrate RIGHT NOW, before the final victory has come

It is like a Psalm that we are taught to sing by faith while we are still going through the struggle, while we are still in the battle with the tyrants and oppressors

Isaiah is dealing REALISTICALLY with the RIGHT NOW for the Jewish people of the 8th century B.C. and beyond... they are dominated by earthly oppressors, carried off into exile either by Assyria or Babylon... these massive cities seem unconquerable... the future for the Jews looks very bleak indeed. How then can God's people sing a song of celebration, a song of deliverance, when it seems like the tyrants are winning all the battles? When it seems like God has given up on His people and can no longer save them? Isaiah 26 is a song of REALISTIC PRAISE for God's present protection and future deliverance for His suffering people

A TALE OF TWO CITIES:

I. A Song of Trust in God (26:1-6)

Isaiah 26:1-6 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. ² Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. ³ You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. ⁴ Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal. ⁵ He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust. ⁶ Feet trample it down-- the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor.

A. A Song to Be Sung By the Suffering

Isaiah 26:1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah

1. “In that day...” = in the day when the Lord will bring about His deliverance; in the day of testing and triumph
2. “This song will be sung”... Isaiah 26 is a song of celebration, a song of trust in the Lord
3. “in the land of Judah” = the setting is 100% Jewish... the Jews, the people of God, afflicted and oppressed by Gentile nations... invaded again and again, ruled over by Gentiles...
 - a. The church of Jesus Christ derives joy from Isaiah 26 by extension... we do not face the same circumstances... certainly not oppression and persecution in America
 - b. BUT around the world, the church of Jesus Christ is suffering great affliction and persecution
 - c. The immediate setting of Isaiah 26 is the land of Judah... the Jews in the time of the Old Covenant
 - d. BUT the protection God extends to Christians and the delight we have in seeing God’s full salvation in our lives... salvation from our enemies, from Satan, sin, death, and wicked people who oppose Jesus

B. A Tale of Two Cities... Again!

Once again, we must notice that Isaiah 26 is, to quote Dickens, “A Tale of Two Cities.” In Dickens’ classic, the two cities were London and Paris, during the time of the French Revolution; however, a truer expose of the two cities of Isaiah 26 is Augustine’s classic, *The City of God*... written in the year 410 A.D. at the time of the fall of Rome to barbarian Visigoths... Augustine said that all of human history can be understood as an unequal battle between two cities – the City of God and the City of Man; the City of Man (Rome in Augustine’s time) represents the world – the human world, built by human lust and greed and ambition and talent and power and artistry... THE WORLD in all its splendor and wickedness... the City of Man rises and falls and rises and falls by the same principles – driven by Satanic lust for power and pleasure... it has many forms and many overlords, but one unchanging nature.

By contrast, the City of God is eternal – the New Jerusalem, built out of LIVING STONES, human beings, saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ and built together into a living city, a city with God at its center. The City of God is ETERNAL and GLORIOUS, the city of Man is temporary and dark

So, how do we see these TWO CITIES in Isaiah 24-26?

City of Man:

Isaiah 24:10-12 The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred. ¹¹ In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom, all gaiety is banished from the earth. ¹² The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces.

Isaiah 25:2 You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.

Isaiah 26:5-6 He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust. ⁶ Feet trample it down-- the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor.

C. The City of God in Isaiah 26...

Isaiah 26:1 We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts.

1. Isaiah calls the city STRONG... it has powerful WALLS and RAMPARTS
2. Any ancient city was only as strong as its walls... the thicker and higher and better built they were, the more secure the city from attack
3. Ramparts were high towers from which archers could pick off attackers with ease
4. Isaiah says this strong city is protected by SALVATION... as though the word "salvation" were engraved on every stone in the wall
5. Salvation means the commitment of God to protect the city... the city's strength comes from the sovereign power and will of God

Isaiah 37:33-35 Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. ³⁴ By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city," declares the LORD. ³⁵ "I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!"

6. This is also a perfect picture of the security of the believer in Jesus Christ

John 10:28-29 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

7. Hymnwriter John Newton must have been thinking of Isaiah 26 in part when he wrote the words to his hymn, "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken"

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God
He whose word cannot be broken, formed thee for His own abode

On the rock of ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose
With salvation's walls surrounded, thou mayest smile at all thy foes!!

D. Open the Gates for the Righteous Nation

Isaiah 26:2 Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith.

1. The open gates represent a city at peace, a city at ease... no threats, no danger

Revelation 21:25-27 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

2. The war has been won, salvation's victory is complete
3. And the city will be inhabited only with RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE... the RIGHTEOUS NATION... the NATION THAT KEEPS FAITH
4. Old Covenant: keeping faith meant keeping the stipulations of the covenant, not breaking it
5. New Covenant: keeping faith means trusting in Christ alone for salvation... having your name written in the Lamb's book of life, and walking in the newness of life that the Spirit directs

E. God Keeps Us in Perfect Peace BY FAITH IN HIM ALONE

Isaiah 26:3-4 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. ⁴ Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

1. In the midst of all the turmoil of this chapter... of tyrants that seek to dominate the people of God, it is easy to be filled with FEAR and ANXIETY
2. Isaiah 26:3 speaks of a perfect peace that can flow over the hearts and minds of the people of God
 - a. "Perfect peace" = "SHALOM SHALOM"
 - b. Shalom is a holistic well-being—every aspect of your being is lavishly provided for... no threats, no hunger, no thirst, no fear, no worry... joy, fullness

Ephesians 3:19 that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

c. SHALOM SHALOM is well translated “perfect peace”... peace upon peace upon peace

3. The key to this perfect peace: GOD!!

a. God is the TOPIC of this person’s thoughts... His mind is FOCUSED on God, on pleasing God and serving Him

i) The Hebrew word can be translated “to lean upon” or “to rest upon” or “to rely upon”...

ii) This person is thinking about God consistently, trusting in Him, relying on Him... God’s power and name and promises are the topic of His thought-life. His mind is STAYED UPON JEHOVAH

iii) He is the opposite of a DOUBLE-MINDED MAN (James 1)

b. AND secondly, God actively keeps his mind in perfect peace... God actively exerts protective power to keep such a person in perfect peace

4. Key parallel in NT: Philippians 4:6-7

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

5. Then comes the exhortation: TRUST IN THE LORD!!

Isaiah 26:4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

a. In the midst of the trying circumstances of the fact that the Lord has NOT YET destroyed the wicked city and the oppressors are still having their way, TRUST IN THE LORD any way... wait upon Him

F. By Contrast: The City of Man (the Wicked City) Will Come Crashing Down

Isaiah 26:5-6 He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low; he levels it to the ground and casts it down to the dust. ⁶ Feet trample it down-- the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor.

1. These are the poor and oppressed people of God who have been trampled by the tyrants

2. The city of man—the conquering empires, like Assyria and Babylon, Persia and Greece, Rome and the others—they have been built by bloodshed and oppression

3. The arrogance of these conquerors is repugnant to God... He is determined to cast down their lofty attitudes
4. So, the City of God is surrounded by the walls of salvation and cannot be destroyed
5. The City of Man is surrounded by human arrogance, and God will cast it down
6. Furthermore, the very people who were oppressed will delight in trampling down the smoldering ruins of the wicked city

G. Summary: A Song of Triumph... to Sing While Waiting on God

II. A Lament While Waiting for Salvation (26:7-18)

A. Walking in Righteousness, Waiting for the Lord (vs. 7-9)

Isaiah 26:7-9 The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth. ⁸ Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. ⁹ My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.

1. These verses describe the spiritually healthy life of the person who is suffering and waiting for God to fulfill His promises for deliverance
2. Isaiah speaks of the path of the upright... despite the suffering, despite the opposition, it is a LEVEL path... it is made SMOOTH by the commands of God
3. It does not imply that the suffering of the people is as nothing... but it is far better to suffer for doing right than to succeed while doing wrong
4. God's commands in particular smooth the way:

“walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you...”

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Isaiah 35:8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.

5. As the people of God do God's will, they have to WAIT for God... the final defeat of the enemy may not be for a long time
6. In the middle of this obedient lifestyle is a yearning to be with God

Isaiah 26:9 *My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.*

- a. Waiting for God is never easy

Psalm 13:1-4 *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? ³ Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; ⁴ my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

- b. This righteous heart finds rest in God alone

Psalm 63:1 *O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

- 7. Especially, the righteous yearn for God's name and renown to be EXALTED

Vs. 8 *Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts*

- a. God's name is His reputation... His renown
- b. The righteous want God to be vindicated as a righteous judge

B. The Purpose of God's Judgments: An Education in Righteousness (vs. 9)

Isaiah 26:9 *When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.*

1. Isaiah makes it plain why God brings His judgments... they are a clear display of His righteousness... His zeal to uphold His laws
2. God has laid open many judgments in history to teach this wicked world His righteousness
 - a. The Flood of Noah
 - b. Sodom and Gomorrah
 - c. The Ten Plagues on Egypt
3. These are all for educational purposes... and the primary audience is the people of God... we alone are able to see these judgments and tremble at the dreadfulness of the wrath of God
4. But...

C. The Hardness of the Wicked (vs. 10-11)

Isaiah 26:10-11 *Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the LORD. ¹¹ O LORD, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it.*

1. Wicked people NEVER LEARN no matter what God does
2. If God delays His wrath and brings no response, waiting for them to repent, they tend to think there is NO GOD, at least not one who cares about their wickedness

Psalm 94:3-7 *How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant? ⁴ They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers are full of boasting. ⁵ They crush your people, O LORD; they oppress your inheritance. ⁶ They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless. ⁷ They say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed."*

Psalm 50:21 *These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you.*

Isaiah 57:11 *Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear me?*

D. God's Zeal for His People (vs. 11)

Isaiah 26:11 *O LORD, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people and be put to shame; let the fire reserved for your enemies consume them.*

1. God's hand lifted high means He is ready to act on behalf of His people
2. BUT the hard of heart CANNOT SEE God's activity on behalf of His people
3. They misread the signs of the times
 - a. The Assyrians come in arrogantly and think the God of Israel is no different than any other god
 - b. The Babylonians conquer Jerusalem and sacrifice to their gods
 - c. The Persians rule and do not acknowledge God at all
 - d. The Greeks come in and Alexander the Great sets up temples to himself; Anitochus defiles the temple of the living God with pig's blood
 - e. The Romans are the worst of all... filled with arrogance and dominating the people of God
4. The People cry out to God: LET THEM SEE YOUR ZEAL FOR YOUR PEOPLE

- a. They yearn for deliverance and for rescue
- b. They yearn for God to keep His promise to David and to all the sons and daughters of Abraham
- c. They want the FIRE RESERVED FOR GOD'S ENEMIES to consume them

E. God Glorified in Crushing Tyrants and Enlarging the Nation (vs. 12-15)

Isaiah 26:12-15 LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us. ¹³ O LORD, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honor. ¹⁴ They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them. ¹⁵ You have enlarged the nation, O LORD; you have enlarged the nation. You have gained glory for yourself; you have extended all the borders of the land.

- 1. As the people of God wait, they look again and again to God and His power
- 2. They acknowledge that God alone can establish and ordain PEACE for the people of God
- 3. God works His will sovereignly in His people

Isaiah 26:12 all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

The truly godly Jews of the Old Covenant understood that their own righteousness was completely a work of God in them... anything worthy of praise came from God's WORK IN THEM

Hebrews 13:21 may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ

John 3:20-21 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Philippians 2:13 it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

- 4. BUT: The only way the people of God can have peace is if God would destroy their tyrannical oppressors

Isaiah 26:13-14 O LORD, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honor. ¹⁴ They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them.

- a. For a time, a tyrant may rise up and oppress God's people...
 - b. Pharaoh may plot to wipe out the Jewish nation by killing all the boy babies... but God crushed him in the end
 - c. Various Gentile powers ruled over the Jews from time to time, like Midian... but God crushed them too
 - d. Each empire that has flexed its muscles against the Jews has in the end been humbled... Haman is dead, Sennacherib is dead, Antiochus Epiphanes is dead
5. In the end, God vindicates His promises to His people and enlarges the reduced population again:

Isaiah 26:15 You have enlarged the nation, O LORD; you have enlarged the nation. You have gained glory for yourself; you have extended all the borders of the land.

Zechariah 2:4-5 Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. ⁵ And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the LORD, 'and I will be its glory within.'

The ultimate fulfillment of this promise is in the addition of the godly Gentiles through the gospel of Jesus Christ:

Galatians 3:29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

F. Lamenting the Weakness of the People (vs. 16-18)

Isaiah 26:16-18 LORD, they came to you in their distress; when you disciplined them, they could barely whisper a prayer. ¹⁷ As a woman with child and about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, O LORD. ¹⁸ We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world.

1. The people under these oppressors feel their weakness
2. They were in great agony, like a woman in labor
3. But unlike her who gives birth to a healthy baby, their labor pains produced nothing but more suffering
4. They yearned for God to step in and end their sufferi

III. The Joyful End: Resurrection and Deliverance (26:19-27:1)

Isaiah 26:19 - 27:1 *But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. ²⁰ Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. ²¹ See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer. ^{NIV} Isaiah 27:1 ¶ In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea.*

A. Magnificent Promise of the Resurrection

1. Ultimate victory for God and His people is guaranteed
2. BUT what about those righteous people who suffered and died along the way?
3. What about the martyrs whose blood was shed by these wicked tyrants while God was still waiting to fulfill His plan?

Revelation 6:9-11 *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.*

4. Verse 19 is one of the clearest promises of individual resurrection in the Old Testament
 - a. God says the DEAD WILL LIVE... their BODIES WILL RISE
 - b. Those who were dwelling in the dust of the earth will wake up and shout for joy
 - c. This is only through faith in Jesus Christ
 - d. By this passage, Jews of Jesus' day knew there would be a resurrection at the end of the world... Jesus made it clear that HE IS the resurrection

John 11:23-26 *Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*

e. Similar prediction in Daniel as well:

Daniel 12:2-3 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

B. In the Meantime... RIDE IT OUT!!

Isaiah 26:20-21 Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. ²¹ See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.

1. For a little while, the people of God have to take cover, find shelter
2. For a little while, the people of God have to go through suffering and wait on the Lord for His plan to be fulfilled
3. BUT the Lord will punish the wicked for the persecution of the righteous
- 4.

C. The Earth Will Disclose the Blood Shed Upon Her

Isaiah 26:21 The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer

Genesis 4:10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

Revelation 16:5-7 "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; ⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." ⁷ And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

D. Final Judgment on the Serpent and His Henchmen

Isaiah 27:1 In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea.

The true enemy behind all this persecution of the people of God is Satan, that ancient serpent, who has hated God's people from the beginning

Here is yet another prophecy of the destruction of the true enemy

This language seems almost mythological

But it was Satan who chose to disguise himself as a serpent in the Garden of Eden... here God promises to crush him forever:

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Revelation 20:10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

IV. Application: What Does This Say to Us Today?

- A. Come to Christ
- B. Pray for the Persecuted Church
- C. Take to Heart the Elements That Speak To You Directly
 - 1. Verse 1: understand the security of the believer
 - 2. Verse 3-4: Learn how to rest by faith in God alone and learn what “perfect peace” is... obey Philippians 4:6-7; don’t be double-minded
- D. Understand the Future of the City of Man