

Living now as we wait for Jesus Isaiah 56:1-8

While we were on holidays we went to Movie World. I went on the Superman Escape rollercoaster. It is a ride that I am still recovering from. I think I closed my eyes at one point. It only goes for about two minutes but I lined up for forty minutes to get on to it. I had to wait in line for forty minutes. Life is often about waiting and being prepared for when something comes.

I know I am not good at waiting. I am impatient and lose interest quickly. I lose sight of what is to come and so stop preparing.

In Isaiah 1-39 Israel finds herself in life threatening stage of their history. Things aren't the way God said they would be. However they have brought this on themselves by their rebellion. They had been surrounded and attacked by another nation – Assyria. If things weren't bad enough Isaiah predicted that in the future Israel would go out of their land and the people would be carried off into captivity in Babylon. Isaiah 39 ends on this depressing note. Things are going from bad to worse.

In Isaiah 40-55 we are reminded we are to trust in God alone. Isaiah the prophet is looking toward the exile that was predicted and beyond. He promises comfort. He says God has the power to give it and he wants to. God promises he will rescue his people. He will do it by sending a servant rescuer. We finished at Isaiah 55 where we saw God gave *an open invitation to the whole world to come to him and be satisfied and know where you are going.*

Chapters 56-66 of Isaiah are about how to live as we wait for Christ's return. God's people have the promises of God. They had the start of the promises but not the fulfilment. They are living with the 'now' but 'not yet' tension. So for us we have the start of the promises of Jesus and we live in the last days as wait for the fulfilment of those promises when Jesus returns. We learn in the chapters how we to live as God's people and more about our hope and the importance of our making Jesus known to those who don't know him.

*Now we learn how to live while we wait.
How do live while we wait for the Lord's return?*

1. Listen to what God says

Read: 56:1,4, 8

Isaiah ministered from 739 to 686 B.C. He was a prophet ie a man speaking on behalf of God. Isaiah receives a vision from God in 1:1 we are told. He gives us a different way of seeing life. He interrupts our lives. He interrupts our lives and says there is another way to look at your life. Without his word we are limited to our own thoughts. With his word new realities can be seen. Hope is given. I hope as we start this series in Isaiah 56-66 you are expecting your life to be interrupted again. Interrupted by the voice of God. Saying there is another way to look at your life.

This week I met up with a mate of mine and had a long coffee while we talked about life. He is studying at the moment and is writing a report from a survey he did on the difference between how men and women listen. Stereotypically women listen better than men. He found that women empathise when they listen while men schematise. I don't think it that women are better listeners than men it is just that the listening and respond differently.

*Listening is responding is some way to what you have heard.
Listen to God is responding to what he says.*

James 1 says that if we listen to the world and go away and not do what it says we are like a man who looks into the mirror and goes away and forgets what he looks like. We are hear the word and respond.

How are we to live while we wait for the Lord's return?

2. Live as God's people

Read: 1-2**Do you have to be good or righteous before you get God's salvation? NO.**

Notice Justice and righteousness are to be done because salvation is at hand.

Obedience is to be lived out as a response to salvation.

It might seem as though what Isaiah is saying is that there is a be good ladder with lots of be good rungs and the more do are good the closer you get to God. That is not the case.

God's salvation is free but those who receive it are to live like they know God.**Those who have set free from sin and judgment by God have an obligation to do God's will.**

Salvation is coming. For Israel that meant getting back to the land God promised them. In the long term it meant the coming of the Messiah. For us it means we know God has kept that promise and sent his Messiah in Jesus.

We now look forward to coming and bringing us to himself.

The future strengthens us to live well today. The promises for the future are meant to activate us today.

Certain behaviour is required. You've got to give up behaviour that doesn't fit in with the company you are in.

Do a U turn. Away from yourself. Change from being ME centred to God in Jesus centred.

Here Isaiah says it is being just and doing what is right. You might think it seems unrelated to be told to keep the Sabbath but it is not. Keeping the Sabbath involved making sure those who were masters gave their slaves rest.

This was a way of being just and doing the right thing.

So what did it mean for the Israelites to keep the Sabbath then?

It was a day of rest. Sabbath is the word for rest. A day to stop work. What was added was remembering God's rescue and promise of rest. It has two aspects to it: Physical and spiritual. It was made a law for the Israelites.

What does it mean for us to keep the Sabbath as God's people today?

We are no longer under the law of the Old Testament but we still live in God's creation where he worked 6 days and rested on one. It is a pattern for us. To have physical rest from our work. To give refreshment for our bodies just as we need sleep everyday. It shows we trust God to provide. We are not self sufficient but dependant on God so we can stop. It shows our whole life committed to God as it is a practical reorganising of your week around God and his people.

We have turned thou shalt not work on Saturday to thou shalt not have fun on Sunday.

The rest points to a greater promised rest which will be in heaven. So it is good for us to remember the rest we have that this say points to. Not a rung in the ladder to climb to God. Not to be strict about what day it should be. We must not define it for everybody else. We all know what work is for us and so whatever it is we should stop doing it for a day to give ourselves a break.

It makes sense that this is the day to meet with God's people to remember what God has done for us so we can enter God's rest in heaven. There is no law about this and nothing in the Bible that says that it has to be on Sunday.

One of visitors while we were on holidays is a friend who just got engaged. We talked alot about the changes that will mean for her life. Starting a new relationship and so it means real changes. Change where she lives, sleeps, eats, priorities in relationships. Marriage is a covenant relationship and means a life reflecting a new priority. So relationship with God in Jesus is a covenant relationship which means a life reflecting a new priority.

While we wait we are live lives marked by justice and righteousness.

God has a commitment to justice and he expects those who belong to him to share it and show it.

Their life together is to show that what living with God as King looks like and to show that his kingdom is just around the corner.

Jesus calls his disciples to the same in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Lives marked by righteousness. They will be part of the kingdom of heaven and they should show it now. They are the light of the world and city of a hill. They to make God known through how they live.

How are we to live while we wait for the Lord's return?

3. Be open and welcoming as God's salvation is for anyone**Read it: 3-5**

As with God's people if they hold fast to God they will know the blessing of His promises. They will not be cut off. Being an insider is no guarantee of being God's people just as being an outsider is no obstacle to being God's people.

God's people were to be an open community. They were to warmly welcome all who were committed to God. God doesn't intend to exclude those who were known to be outsiders nor should his people.

When Jesus came he lived this out. He constantly related to the outsiders and challenged the insiders. No clearer than he met the Samaritan women at a well in the middle of the day. He embodied openness to the outsider. Don't think God won't take you. You might not have ever been to church. You might not feel at home in church. What he desires is that you come to him through Jesus. He has the door wide open. He is ready to welcome you home.

When I first moved to the coast and started riding with a group of guys it was really hard to break into the group. It was only because of a couple of mates, and Tony that I felt welcomed. Settled groups are naturally not welcoming. It takes a lot of concentration and effort to be open and welcoming.

We are settled group and so are naturally not welcoming. It will take us a lot of concentration and effort to be open and welcoming.

Are we an open and welcoming group as a church? Is our meeting open and welcoming?

Are we concentrating and making a big effort? Does it go beyond our meeting on Sunday? Are we inviting people back to our places for a meal?

Isaiah's ministry was about gathering of people who will, trust and obey God's Word. People who lives were marked by a life of faith which waits for God and the fulfilment of His promises. The evidence of that faith is lives of justice and righteousness. Listening and responding in their belief and their behaviour.

Are you one of those people?

If not, come to God and here his promise of rescue in Jesus?

If you are, are you waiting for the Lord's return by listening, living and being open and welcoming?

What do you need to change? What is distracting you from living now while you wait?