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October 21st: Isaiah 3 & Mark 4:35—5:20

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The humbling of Judah, her sons and her daughters. Calming the storm and delivering the demoniac.

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Transcript

Isaiah chapter 3 1 For every one his fellow, and every one his neighbor. 2 The youth will be insolent to the elder, and the despised to the honorable. 3 For a man will take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, 4 You have a cloak.

You shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule. 5 In that day he will speak out, saying, I will not be a healer. In my house there is neither bread nor cloak.

You shall not make me leader of the people. 6 For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying His glorious presence. 7 For the look on their faces bears witness against them.

They proclaim their sin like Sodom. They do not hide it. 8 Woe to them, for they have brought evil on themselves.

9 Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds. 10 Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out

shall be done to him. 11 My people, infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them.

12 O my people, your guides mislead you, and they have swallowed up the course of your paths. 13 The Lord has taken His place to contend. He stands to judge peoples.

14 The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of His people. 15 It is you who have devoured the vineyard. The spoil of the poor is in your houses.

16 What do you mean by crushing My people, by grinding the face of the poor? declares the Lord God of hosts. The Lord said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet. Therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts.

In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents, the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves, the headdresses, the armllets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets, the signet rings and nose rings, the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags, the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. Instead of perfume there will be rotteness, and instead of a belt a rope, and instead of well-set hair baldness, and instead of a rich robe a skirt of sackcloth, and branding instead of beauty. Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty men in battle, and her gates shall lament and mourn, empty she shall sit on the ground.

In Isaiah chapter 2 the prophet described the haughty pride of the people of Jerusalem and Judah that would be humbled by the Lord on the coming day of his judgment. The Lord would bring all of man's lofty might down low, but he would raise up the mountain of Zion and of his house over all of the other mountains. Rather than Zion going out to the nations and taking on their ways, the nations would flow up to Jerusalem, and the word and law of the Lord would flow out to the whole world.

Chapter 3 continues the theme of the crushing of Jerusalem's pride. It takes the more general statements of the preceding chapter and expresses their import in more particular terms. The conclusion of chapter 2, with its caution against depending upon the frailty of man, sounds a note that is fundamental for much of what follows.

Verses 1-7 fill out the picture of the cutting down of the lofty in verses 12-17 of the preceding chapter. Support and supply would be removed from Jerusalem and Judah. The expression support and supply is one with two very similar words in the Hebrew, which various English translations try to convey with similar sounding words like support and supply.

Judah and Jerusalem would be stripped even of the enjoyment of basic provisions like

bread and water. These verses, however, focus more upon the people that would be removed from them. They would lose the men with military might, they would lose the rulers, and they would lose the prophets, diviners, counsellors, and others that would give guidance and direction to the people.

They would be left without skill, expertise, without might to perform things. The nation would be effectively decapitated, stripped of their prominent figures, and people who could have formed an effective hierarchy. This is the sort of situation that Judah and Israel suffered when they were defeated by foreign nations.

Their rulers and their authorities, their mighty men, and also their artisans, craftsmen, and skilled workers were all stripped from them, leaving them utterly subject to their new rulers, dependent upon them, and unable to mount any serious resistance. The vacuum that was left by such figures would be filled by much meaner sorts, by rulers who were weak, incompetent, unwise, and immature. Boys and infants lack both might and wisdom, and as a result, their rule could be officious and domineering.

We should think of a bossy child that throws around weight that he does not have. Since such a leader has not yet attained to self-mastery, he cannot easily lead his people by example. Since he lacks might, people will not submit to his strength.

Since he lacks wisdom and maturity, people will not submit to his insight. Since he lacks deeply proven character, people will not submit to his goodness. A people led by such rulers will be stunted by their petty weakness.

Where rulers cannot lead by genuine virtues, by self-mastery, by might, by wisdom, and by good character, they will often, in their insecurity and weakness, be thrown back upon vicious forms of rule. Rule by such figures is often violent, arbitrary, and oppressive. In a good society, we are ruled by our betters, by people that exhibit virtues to which we can aspire.

However, Judah and Jerusalem would be humbled by being ruled over and oppressed by people who were without any virtues that would commend them to exercise such preeminence. Weakness and insecurity and meanness of character would produce tyranny, and the tyranny would spread out among the people. Each would oppress his own neighbor, and as the weak, vicious, and unworthy exercised authority at the heart of the nation, authority more generally would be held in poor esteem.

The honorable and virtuous among the people would be dishonored. A healthy relationship between generations would also break down. The youth would despise the aged.

Traditions would be rejected and overthrown, and there would be a breach in the continuing life of the nation. Authority as such would break down, and order and proper

hierarchy in society with it. Yet people still have a hunger for authority and for leaders, and in the rubble that remained of Judah and Jerusalem's society, people would seek for people to rule over them.

The Prophet presents a situation where even the mere supposed possession of a fine garment would set someone apart as a potential ruler, and yet the supposed possessor of this garment does not in fact own one. His house is as empty as everyone else's, and he cannot even rule over the ruins. The desperate situation described in verses 1-7 will come upon the people as a consequence of their current sinful pride and their prideful sin.

Pride comes naturally before a fall, and there is about to come a day of reckoning, a day when people will taste of the harvest of their speech and deeds, which are both addressed here in this context. There is a contrast between the fates of the righteous and that of the wicked. Even as others are judged, it will be well with the righteous.

The organic connection between deeds and consequences is important here. It's not as if the Lord is just bringing a punishment upon people that has no relationship to their actions. Through their sinful actions, they sowed what would later yield the bitter fruit of their judgment.

Perhaps the reference to their proclaiming their sin like Sodom in verse 9 looks back to chapter 1 and the comparison of the people with Sodom and Gomorrah. Verses 12-15 focus upon the failures and the sins of the leaders, and announce the Lord's entering into judgment with them as a sort of divine lawsuit that's being carried out against them, focused upon their oppression of the poor of his people. The unworthy rulers of the people are once again described here.

Infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. The word translated women here might be better translated as creditors. As Hugh Williamson argues, this is the reading more commonly adopted by commentators today.

If women were in view, it would presumably be focusing upon their weakness in some way. Or perhaps there's also a half glance back to the figure of Athaliah, who was the great usurper, the one female ruler of the people, and the one under whom Judah experienced some of its darkest days. More likely though, looking at the context, the reference is to creditors, usurers that have a predatory relationship with the people.

This might be what is in view in the crushing of the people and the grinding of the face of the poor that's described in verse 15. The judgment is not merely upon kings, but more generally upon the ruling class, the elders and the princes of the people, and there is a special attention given to their economic oppression. The Lord's special concern for the poor and vulnerable among his people is a theme that can be traced throughout the entirety of the scriptures.

Verses 16 and following singles out the daughters of Zion and declares a judgment against them. Elsewhere in scripture we have judgments that focus upon the rich women of the people. For instance, in Amos chapter 4 verses 1 to 2, Hear this, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, Bring that we may drink.

The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that, Behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fish hooks. There the women are presented as being indifferent to, complicit with, and also as instigating the sort of oppression that their husbands are carrying out for them. Their decadent hunger for feast and finery is behind the crushing of the poor.

In these verses here in Isaiah, the fashionable clothes and accessories of these rich women are enumerated. Their haughty and vain way of going about is described. If 8th century Jerusalem and Judah had had gossip mags, these are the women that would have filled their pages.

It is important to recognize that these women are not just individuals who come under the Lord's judgment. They stand for the wider people. These are the women that would have held the attention of the rich and powerful of the people and also of the poor.

The actresses, the models, the celebrities, and the socialites of their day. In humbling them, the Lord would be humbling the entirety of Jerusalem's high society. Verse 24 speaks of five different ways in which their future state would contrast with their present.

The stench of rotteness would replace the scent of perfume. Fashionable belts would be replaced by a slaver's rope. Women with the fanciest hairstyles would have their hair shaved off like prisoners of war.

Rich robes would be replaced by the clothes of mourning. The most arresting beauties would be branded like cattle. The daughters of Zion stand for the people more generally.

They are the daughters that bear the image of their unfaithful mother, who is in view in verses 25 to 26. They symbolize and embody the false glory of the people. They symbolize and embody the character of the people among whom they enjoy such prominence.

They face a bitter fate, and their mother, Zion herself, would be left bereft. Her sons would fall by the sword, and she would be abandoned in bitter mourning. A question to consider.

How might reflecting upon the description of vicious rule within this chapter help us to understand better the character of good rule? Mark chapter 4 verse 35 to chapter 5 verse 20. On that day when evening had come, he said to them, Let us go across to the

other side. And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.

And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

And they woke him and said to him, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces.

No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him.

And crying out with a loud voice, he said, What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the most high God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me. But he was saying to him, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit. And Jesus said to him, What is your name? He replied, My name is Legion, for we are many.

And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, Send us to the pigs, let us enter them. So he gave them permission.

And the unclean spirits came and entered the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea. The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened.

And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the Legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs.

And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him, but said to him, Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And everyone marvelled. At the end of Matthew chapter 4, Jesus is followed by his disciples into the boat and out into the sea.

There are several Jonah themes within this story. They're going to a realm associated with the Gentiles, as Jonah took a boat to Tarshish. And we should remember that boat stories are rare within the Old Testament.

There is a great storm, a sleeping main character, frightened sailors waking that person up, a miraculous stilling of the storm through some action of the main character, and then the sailors marvelling. All of this invites us to compare and contrast Jesus with Jonah. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus gives the sign of the prophet Jonah concerning himself.

And here I think we are seeing Christ portrayed as a sort of Jonah. And comparing and contrasting may help us to understand something of this story. Other boats accompany them.

Some of the crowd are following them, but it's also a picture of the church set out on the waves of the Gentile sea in small boats with their saviour to protect them in the storm. And there's a reversal here as well. Jesus is sleeping as the storm is rising, and then Jesus rises and the storm sleeps.

He rebukes the wind and says to the sea, peace, be still. It's the same sort of language that we have for the exorcisms, rebuking the demons and telling the demons to hold their peace. The implicit personification of the sea is important here.

The sea represents the forces of chaos, the most powerful natural forces that no man can contain. The sea can be associated with death, the abyss. It can be associated with Satan.

It can be associated with the Gentiles and their power. And in the Old Testament, God's strength is often declared in his rebuking of the sea, his power over the sea. In Isaiah chapter 50 verse 2, Why when I came was there no man? Why when I called was there no one to answer? Is my hand shortened that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, by my rebuke I dry up the sea.

I make the rivers a desert. Their fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst. In Isaiah 51 verses 9 to 10, Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.

Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? In Psalm 18 verse 15, Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. In

Job 26 verses 11 to 12, The pillars of heaven tremble and are astounded at his rebuke.

By his power he stilled the sea. By his understanding he shattered Rahab. The power of God over the sea is seen in the creation, it's also seen in the event of the Red Sea crossing and the deliverance of the people from the power of the sea there, not just the sea itself but also the power of the Gentiles associated with it.

Later in the resurrection, Jesus will rise up from his sleep and defeat and calm the sea. And here we're seeing Christ's power over the sea, anticipating his later proof of his power over the grave. There's a great storm in verse 37, there's a great calm in verse 39, and then there's a great fear in verse 41.

All these things correspond to each other. Christ is the more powerful one, the one who's stronger than the strong man, he's the one who's stronger than the power of the wind and the waves, and he's the one who can bring peace to these situations. The don't you care question of the disciples is answered by Jesus as, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? Question is, who is really in charge? Is it that we are at the mercy of these natural forces? Or is God over all of these things? After this, they arrive in the land of the Gerasenes, it's a Gentile region.

And in this story, we don't just have Gentiles, we also have demonic possession, tombs and pigs. All of these things have a great connection with impurity. And there's an extensive description of the demon-possessed man.

He's breaking shackles, he's cutting himself with stones, a sort of self-imposed stoning. These are destructive powers that he has within him, driving him towards death. And the people futilely try to bind this strong man.

This should remind us of Mark chapter 3 verse 27. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed, he may plunder his house.

And this is a strong man who cannot be bound. A demoniac who has characteristics of his master, his master Satan himself. The demon or demons address Jesus by his name and title.

Jesus, the son of the most high God, the eschatological judge and king, the one who will condemn them to their ultimate fate. And there seems to be an attempt here to counter Jesus' power by naming him in some sort of magical appeal. Jesus counters by asking the demon what his name was.

And the demon refers to himself as legion. It refers to the number. It's a huge demonic force.

But legion also reminds us of the Roman military forces. The wild boar was the symbol of

the Roman legion in Palestine. The demons beg not to be removed from the land, but asked to be placed into the herd of pigs that are on the hillside.

In keeping with the allusion to the Roman military forces, the language has a military flavour to it. Send, permit, rush headlong. And having entered the demons, they don't seem to be able to prevent themselves from careering towards their destruction.

The herd is drowned in the waters, like Pharaoh's army was drowned at the Red Sea. Here another great military force is defeated. A military force that maybe symbolises in part Rome and its power.

All of this serves to underline Jesus' power as the son of God and the one who can bind the strong man. And there is an association between the begging demons and the begging Gerasenes. When the herdsmen flee and tell the people in the city of the Gerasenes and the Gerasenes return and talk to Jesus, they beg for him to depart.

They want Christ to depart from their land, just as the demons didn't want to depart from the land. There is a sort of similarity between the begging of the demons then and the begging of the Gerasenes. Christ is the one that they want to cast out.

He unsettles their social order. And we can see here also a reversal of the scapegoat motif. The ones that are cast out are the multitude.

They're the multitude of the demons and if indeed they are associated with the Gerasenes, we're seeing a very interesting reversal here. The Gerasenes had cast out the demoniac. That's usually the way that scapegoating works.

The multitude cast out one or two persons or a small minority. Whereas what happens in the exorcism is that the multitude are cast out and the multitude run headlong down the hillside. And it is the individual, the one who was formerly cast out, who is saved.

However, in the end of the story we see a reversal of fortunes as the Gerasenes align themselves with the demons who begged Christ not to let them leave their country and the Gerasenes who want Christ to leave their country. The multitude that associate themselves with the demons wish to have Christ removed because Christ is a threat to them. However, the formerly demon-possessed man wants to go with Christ, to be associated with him and to follow him where he goes.

In these two stories then, we see Jesus reordering the world in different ways. He quells the storm but he also drowns uncleanness in the sea. He shows his power over demonic forces and the power of the unruly sea that symbolises the greatest and most powerful and uncontrollable forces in the world.

Mark, to this point, has been a story in large measure about power and conflict and Jesus' supremacy over the demons. And here we see it moved on to an even greater

stage as Jesus shows his power over the sea and also his power over demonic legion. A question to consider.

Why do you think that the messianic secret is not being kept in Jesus' instruction to the former demoniac at the end of our passage? What do you notice when comparing and contrasting Jesus' instruction with the man's subsequent actions?