

“Cry for Help!” (Isaiah 30:15–33)(8.2.20)

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Our God is big. Our God is complicated. We speak about our Creator being omnipotent – all powerful. We speak about our Creator being omniscient – all knowing. We speak about our Creator being omnipresent – being everywhere at the same time. But, we have barely begun to scratch the surface of describing our Almighty Holy LORD.

To enhance our understanding we can use similes. God is like a woman nursing her child, tender and loving. God’s thoughts are as high above man’s thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. His breath is like a rushing torrent.

To enhance our understanding we can use metaphors. The LORD is a righteous judge. The LORD is our Rock. The LORD is the great physician.

To enhance our understanding we use personification. We assign human characteristics to God. God breathes, hears, and sees. The LORD has feelings of anger and compassion. To say, “His tongue is a consuming fire,” uses personification and metaphor.

The difficulty is for finite creatures to define the infinite. We are limited physically – our senses, even if perfect by human standards, are insufficient for knowing God. Our thinking and perception, even for those of the highest IQs, cannot reach the limits of the LORD’s knowledge and wisdom. Our spirit has been severely constrained by sin in our ability to fully conceive the spiritual realm of God.

I thought that I might speak about a gifted artist trying to paint a portrait of God. Now, there are three primary colors: red, yellow, blue from which all other colors are derived. If I could identify three primary characteristics of God, then maybe our gifted artist could create an adequate portrait of the LORD God. There are a few problems with that attempt. While there is some debate about whether there are an infinite number of colors, there is no debate that humans are only able to perceive a limited number. And then, there is the idea of colors outside the human visible spectrum. And, is it possible to limit God’s primary characteristics to only three?

God’s inerrant word, our Bibles, uses similes, metaphors, and personification that give us a picture of our God. But, the Bible uses another paint with which God is revealed. In and through the historical account of the Bible, we see God acting. God chooses a people for himself. Then our LORD shepherds them and orchestrates the interactions with the nations of the world. In today’s scripture, we have one such portrait.

Isaiah 30:15–33 (NIV84)

¹⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:

“In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it.

¹⁶ You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’

Therefore you will flee!

You said, ‘We will ride off on swift horses.’

Therefore your pursuers will be swift!

¹⁷ A thousand will flee

at the threat of one;

at the threat of five

you will all flee away,

till you are left

like a flagstaff on a mountaintop,

like a banner on a hill.”

¹⁸ Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you;

he rises to show you compassion.

For the Lord is a God of justice.

Blessed are all who wait for him!

¹⁹ O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. **How gracious** he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. ²⁰ Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them.

²¹ Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." ²² Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"

²³ He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows. ²⁴ The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel. ²⁵ In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. ²⁶ The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

²⁷ See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar,
with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke;
his lips are full of wrath,
and his tongue is a consuming fire.

²⁸ His breath is like a rushing torrent,
rising up to the neck.
He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction;
he places in the jaws of the peoples
a bit that leads them astray.

²⁹ And you will sing
as on the night you celebrate a holy festival;
your hearts will rejoice
as when people go up with flutes
to the mountain of the Lord,
to the Rock of Israel.

³⁰ The Lord will cause men to hear his majestic voice
and will make them see his arm coming down
with raging anger and consuming fire,
with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail.

³¹ The voice of the Lord will shatter Assyria;
with his scepter he will strike them down.

³² Every stroke the Lord lays on them
with his punishing rod
will be to the music of tambourines and harps,
as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm.

³³ Topheth has long been prepared;
it has been made ready for the king.
Its fire pit has been made deep and wide,
with an abundance of fire and wood;
the breath of the Lord,
like a stream of burning sulfur,
sets it ablaze.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: "Cry for Help!"

BODY:

This scripture is for today. This scripture is for our nation. At first, it would not seem that we have a lot in common with ancient Israel. For us, the world's premier military power, an invasion from a foreign power is unlikely. We also have geographic security. With a large population, there is also no citizenry in the world as well armed as ours. We also have great wealth and a robust scientific community.

So, on what basis do I claim the relevancy of Isaiah 30 to our context? First, we too are in a battle for our existence; except the threat to our way of life comes from within our nation. Second, we are depending on our own power instead of the power of God. Third, we have stopped listening to God's prophets. Fourth, we need revival which can only come through repentance and trusting in the Sovereign and Holy One.

Why did Israel, why did Judah need to repent? In verses 8-14 we are told they were a rebellious people, deceitful children that would not listen to the Lord's instructions. They did not want hear about visions or correction from God. Instead they said, "Tell us what we want to hear. Do not confront us with the holiness of God." They rejected God. They were deceitful and they oppressed, walking in the way of sin. Has not our culture today rejected Almighty God's call to a holy way of living?

Through the generations, the LORD had promised blessings to them for their faithfulness and obedience. At the same time, the LORD promised judgment if they followed other gods or lived in disobedience. When they were blessed, the nation became prideful and full of themselves. They were told that eventually, their unfaithfulness would lead to exile. As Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, so too would God's Chosen People be cast out of The Promised Land.

That is the backdrop for Isaiah 30 and the surrounding chapters. The 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom, called Israel, had already been defeated by the king of Assyria. They had been killed or deported. All of the fortified cities of the Southern Kingdom, called Judah, had been conquered too. Only Jerusalem was left, all by herself.

In desperation, the leaders of Jerusalem do the natural thing. Not the right thing, but the natural human response. They seek a military ally in Egypt to bring them victory. They believe that somehow they can escape through their own power.

The LORD says there will be no escape. Salvation was available to you if you repented and waited on the God of the universe. What a sad lament that they would have none of it. They would not repent. They would not trust in the ways of the LORD. Now, a thousand will flee at the threat of one. I ask you, "How are we responding to the threats and violence of a few loud strident voices?"

We must remember that it was the LORD that raised up the Assyrian king as a rod of correction against Israel. This is the same God that through Isaiah tells us, "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion." How do we reconcile this compassionate LORD with the one who brings judgment? Well, the next sentence tells us, "For the LORD is a God of justice." So, at the same time, the LORD wants to be merciful and yet must execute justice. We will come back to that in a few minutes. Blessed are all **(ALL)** who wait for him! Do not make the mistake of thinking "wait" means do nothing. Repentance is needed, a renewed repentance, a continuance of repentance, a prayerful repentance. We are commanded to cry for help! (with an exclamation point) Not a random cry but a directed cry to our GRACIOUS God. Some modern translations say "he will surely be gracious," and the King James translation says "he will be very gracious."

The people of Jerusalem are told these troubled times, the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, are from God; but, they are given in order to turn you back to your loving Creator. Again, your conscience will be refreshed and you will hear God's voice directing the way in which you should walk. Every false god will be disgraced and dismissed from your life. You will hate anything unclean and cast it out of your life.

You see, times of trial are for our own good. God's ways are what is best for us. The Lord's rules are not restrictive but empowering. Living for the LORD brings blessings.

Isaiah then proceeds with a mixture of short term prophecy and end times prophecy. In them, we see the LORD as a generous provider; we see the LORD who in judgment slaughters and brings down human towers; we see the LORD who binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted. How can we comprehend such a God in the limits of our imaginations?

Did the short term prophecy come true?

2 Chronicles 32:20–21 (NIV84)

²⁰ King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz **cried out in prayer** to heaven about this. ²¹ And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. (In Isaiah's account, the number that were killed was 185,000). So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his god, some of his sons cut him down with the sword.

Yes, the Name of the Lord came from afar,
with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke;
his lips were full of wrath, and his tongue was a consuming fire. His breath was like a rushing torrent,
rising up to the neck. And, Jerusalem was saved.

Today, our modern sensibilities are uncomfortable with such depictions of Almighty God. We avoid them. You will not often hear preachers remind you that God's arm may come down in raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail. The voice of the LORD will shatter His enemies. We do not want to hear about the fire pit made deep and wide with an abundance of fuel. We do not want to hear that the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur sets it ablaze.

Modern preachers avoid talking about the fear of the LORD. I am afraid NOT to speak about the necessity of fearing God. Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Proverbs 14:27 (NIV84) The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death. Psalm 145:19 (NIV84) He [God] fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

In Acts 9:31 (NIV84) Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, **living in the fear of the Lord.**

CONCLUSION:

Isaiah 30 shows us an amazing portrait of God. Maybe it is like a French Impressionist painting where we have to stand the right distance from it to have a proper perspective. It shows a complicated view of our heavenly Father; one that is hard to absorb in these 20 minutes of examination. I don't expect you to see it all at once and encourage you to prayerfully consider the picture painted by the scriptures.

We have read: The LORD is sovereign and holy. The Lord is the source of salvation. The Lord wants to shower you with grace and compassion. God is just. The Lord will hear your cry. Affliction and healing both come from God. He is in control of nature. The LORD has His hand on history. Life and death are in God's hands. Joy and blessings come from God. The rod of correction and judgment are also from the LORD our God.

No portrait of our God can be complete without examining the revelation of Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 (NIV84) The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

The radiance of God's glory suggests to me a spectrum of color outside of our ability to see with our eyes; but, we are able to see it by faith. Do not miss that providing purification for sins is part of the LORD's identity. Because our God is perfectly holy, our sin must be dealt with for us to enjoy the blessing of His presence.

We must realize that the burden of the sin of all humankind could only be borne by God himself. The wrath for that sin would completely destroy anything less than the Almighty Creator. When we talk

about the unique death of Jesus on the Cross we must remember that the ultimate suffering was the wrath of the Father. John 3:16 (NIV84) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

What our nation needs is the Lord Jesus. What each of us needs is the Lord Jesus. Let us **cry for help** to our God.

Romans 10:13 (NIV84) **for**, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Amen and amen. Let us pray.