

Message to the South (part 1)

Melville Junction – The story of God and Us

05 September 2010, Dean Donaldson

1. Have you noticed how we have just had a series of movies come out depicting the end of the world?
 - Book of Eli
 - The Road
 - 2012

I only found out recently that they came about because of a phenomenon called solar flares. Some scientists have predicted that solar flares are going to take place in the year 2012.

Interesting, but what do we make of it. Let me talk about The Book of Eli, if you have not seen it I think it is well worth a watch.

- A story about a people who survived the flash, 30 years later and there is one remaining bible in the world.
- A remnant has survived, the world is mostly in chaos, people killing each other for no reason, eating each other etc.
- One Bible has survived and there are two agenda's for the book.
- One person is protecting it – so that it can be used for the regeneration of humanity.
- The other person wants it for the power it will give him to control people – rule over them (he says that it has been done before).
- The most challenging thing about the movie to me are 3 comments that the protector of the book says when asked:
 1. He says that people lived in selfish abundance before the flash – we threw away what people kill each other for today.
 2. He has spent so much time reading the book that he forgot to live by its words.
 3. The lesson from the book as far as he could understand is that we should do more for others than we do for ourselves.

It really challenged me...the way I live, the way we essentially treat each other. God can speak to us in many ways (even through a movie).

The reality is that the solar flare is something that happens from time to time and is not necessarily life threatening.

But one of the things I did was imagine the world coming to an end in 2012 and asked myself. Would I would live differently between now and then. It is quite challenging, can I ask you to do that now. Take a few moments to chat to the people around you in small groups. Would you live differently if the world was going to end in a year and a half?

The reason I am doing this exercise is to help us understand the book of Isaiah this morning but before we go there I want to take us back to the beginning of our series. Even before the beginning.

2. Why are we going through the bible from beginning to end this way? Does anybody remember?

Acts 2: 42-47: ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

- This is the first church; they are Hebrew so they are well versed in the story of God and his people.
- They believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and understand what that means.
- They are filled with the Holy Spirit...
- So why do they look completely different to the church today.
- We are going on this journey to find out how we, the church has gone off course...because in that 1st church God added people to their number daily who were being saved.
- Look around, does it still happen like that in churches today?
- What went wrong...so far in the story I can see what has happened. Somehow the church us...has made this story about something else, we have made it about our salvation. We focus on our salvation...what we need to do to be saved.
- It becomes very me focused; we can even be those who live in fear of our salvation. So we come up with doctrines, we get into arguments with other followers of God about being saved through grace or through works.
- But all along we see that salvation belongs to....God. Nothing we can do can save us, only God can save us.
- The thing that God has called us to is not to wonder about our salvation, or work for it...to earn it or whatever.
- The Story of God and us this story that has been unfolding in our Bible is about God bringing about a world that is dependent on God, a world that reflects His goodness, His mercy, His love, His grace, His justice. A world that is in harmony...peace.
- That world looks like this in the book of Isaiah: (11:6-9)

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

- God wants people to bring about His rule, His ways and live in covenant with Him but somehow people have always managed to turn it into something else.

- I think the church today has made it about my salvation and not what God has intended from the beginning.
- So as we go on...please don't listen to my words and say that he is preaching a salvation by works message because I am not preaching about salvation at all. I leave salvation to God, what I am talking about is Gods desires and expectations for his people (us).
- Let's look through the book of Isaiah, the message is to the nation of Israel or to what is left of Israel the Southern kingdom or Judah.
- But the message is clear for us today...let's start to live by what we read.

3. Isaiah - what we need to keep in mind when we read Isaiah is when it was written and to who.

- To the Northern and Southern kingdoms, during the Assyrian threat. We see that God raised up Assyria to bring judgement on the Northern Kingdom because of their despicable practices. Then Assyria over steps their bounds and tries to destroy the southern kingdom as well but God intervened and essentially brings Assyria to her knees.
- After this the southern kingdom are called to live in covenant with God but they turn to idols, sacrifice their children to Molech...injustice and bloodshed take place in the streets, the poor are oppressed etc. So God warns about coming destruction from Babylon, He calls the Judah to turn back to Him.
- Isaiah speaks to the people in exile Babylon and to the remnant who return – a future hope.
- 3 Horizons – the message of Isaiah seems to have layers though, it focuses on 3 time frames. The 1st is to the current threat and warnings, the 2nd is telling of the Messiah and the 3rd looks at the end of time or the day of judgement.
- This week I want to look at the first horizon, what was going on now...
- Israel faces destruction unless they turn back to God...It is like the book of Eli. How does Israel live knowing the world is about to end world was going to end?
- Turn to Isaiah 58 with me, **Isaiah 58** (Read it) helps me understand the story the best.

4. Isaiah 58 (work through text and explain)

¹ "Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
Raise your voice like a trumpet.
Declare to my people their rebellion
and to the house of Jacob their sins.

² For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
They ask me for just decisions
and seem eager for God to come near them.

- God is tired of Israel
- They want God to come to them, help them and they think they do what is right in His eyes.
- They want stuff from God, seeking Him out to help them.
- But God is clearly displeased with their methods.
- I think about the church today and wonder if we do the same

³ 'Why have we fasted,' they say,
'and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?'
"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.

⁴ Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.

⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for a man to humble himself?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD ?

⁶ "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe him,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

- This recurs in Isaiah & the other prophets, it has become about empty rituals.
- Shortcuts to get blessings from God.
- Isaiah 1:11 -17 puts it differently.
- But essentially Israel focuses on what they want, and make token efforts to please God so that they can still ask him for what they want.
- They put their faith in idols, and other nations but when trouble hits they turn to God.
- In Isaiah God says to them that they put their faith in other things now let those things save you.
- Do we treat God like that, fast & pray when we need something.
- Put our faith in mammon (money) but when that fails we turn to God for help.
- How many rituals have we put in place to avoid doing what god actually asks from us.

- It can't be any clearer
- Do away with injustice, help the poor, the needy, be less focussed on yourselves than you are on others.
- Stop worshipping God with empty rituals and start worshipping him with your actions.
- When they do that their deeds will be a light before them
- God we be their rear guard.
- Then, when they call He will answer.
- In case we think this was for them and not for us...look at Jesus (we will go into that next week)

¹¹ The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

¹² Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

¹³ "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the LORD's holy day honourable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,

¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the LORD,
and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob."
The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

- God calls them to follow His way and His laws
- If they do that then He will take care of their needs.
- This has been the pattern of God since the beginning.
- And it continues today...
- Jesus said: seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
- They wanted an easy formula to the blessings of God...God only wants them to focus on His kingdom and His righteousness and we can't get away with treating people badly in that kingdom.
- There is no easy formula.

- If the world as you know it was going to end, would you change the way you lived?
- I would, in fact I am going to start to open my home more...intervene when I see injustice etc.
- Can we really make a difference, if everybody in this church looked around themselves and reached out to one person in need, God's light would go ahead of us and He would be our rear guard. We would find favour in our community and God would add to our numbers daily those who were being saved.
- I asked you in the beginning if you could give your salvation away would you? I think that the correct answer to that is, yes. If I could give my salvation up for the sake of somebody else's salvation then I should want to do that.
- If you could do that with your salvation then it would be so much easier to share your earthly possessions, to stop living for ourselves and to start really making a difference.