

Get Out

A sermon based on Isaiah 48:17-22

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Two urgent words are spoken to people in the following situations. Can you guess what they are?

Three children are stuck inside a burning home. A family of five is stuck in a minivan plunging into a river. A talented young man is stuck in a dead-end job. Can you guess the two urgent words that are spoken to these people? What are they? “Get out!”

In August 587 BC, Israel’s world caved in. The temple collapsed, the monarchy lay in ruins, the land became a wasteland, and all hope was dismantled and destroyed. Then a massive aftershock brought further wreckage and ruin. Seven hundred miles from home, Israel’s exiles became trapped in a basement called Babylon. The prophet Isaiah’s directive is singular, “Get out!”

Today, we often get trapped—in selfishness and sin—and too often we don’t even notice that we’re trapped because, well, it’s so common. But God shouts to us, “Get out of there!” And we thank God that he provided a way out.

When the Israelite exiles were trapped in Babylon, Isaiah shouted, “Get out of there!” But...easier said than done. With every passing year, the Babylonian god Marduk seemed more and more powerful, while Israel’s God seemed more and more secondary...more distant and detached. Slowly but surely, the exiles began to accommodate themselves to their new surroundings. Economic documents unearthed from the ancient city Tel el Murassu on the Tigris River show how blending in with Babylon brought stunning financial success. Living comfortably in a place of destruction and death became the new way of life.

It was the whole boiling frog syndrome. Have you ever heard of that before? You know, it’s said that if a frog is placed in hot water, it will jump out, but if it is placed in lukewarm water that is gradually heated, it will never get out, but slowly die. To the exiles, this Babylon basement was slowly becoming the new normal. They were in hot water! If they didn’t get out soon, they would die...and not just a physical death!

Isaiah’s charge from God, therefore, was to do everything possible to awaken Israel out of this spiritual slumber and get them out of Babylon. So he announced that the LORD **“will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations” (Isaiah 52:10)**. His **“glory will be revealed and all flesh will see it together” (40:5)**. Rest assured, says Isaiah, that **“those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength” (40:31)**, for **“a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out” (42:3)**. And in 51:17, and then again in 52:1 he cries out, “Wake, awake!”

But the climax of this preaching comes in our text, 48:20, **“Get out of Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare it with a shout of joy.”** And Israel’s response? Nothing . . . nothing! They wouldn’t leave! The lights of Babylon, the sounds of Babylon, the religion of Babylon coaxed most of them into staying in Babylon!

That's why throughout Isaiah 48, in the verses before ours, the prophet calls them stubborn, unyielding, headstrong, prone to idolatry, deaf, deceptive, and stubborn rebels from birth. All this because Israel refused to listen to the Gospel of their salvation; "listen" is the central verb of the chapter. It appears eleven times in Isaiah 48.

Can't you just imagine the people responding to the prophet? "Isaiah, haven't you heard? Babylon is the political-military-religious superpower of the day. This is the land of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness! Why should we go back to little backwater Judah? Besides, what a huge hassle it would be to liquidate our assets, pack our bags, and pull up stakes just to live in a land devastated by famine and warfare. Get out of Babylon? Isaiah, have you lost your mind?"

It's like a thirsty person choosing to drink raw sewage instead of water from a mountain stream or a bankrupt company rejecting a government bailout. The exiles were unmoved by Isaiah's poetic claims, alarming narrative, stunning anthems, and heartfelt warnings.

Our bondage began with just one more drink, one more lie, one more fling, one more glance. But one more always longs for one more, and then just one more, doesn't it? And then a massive earthquake hits and in its aftershocks we find ourselves trapped in a basement called Babylon. And what's next?

The boiling frog syndrome unleashes its hypnotic power! Sure, being obsessed with pornography, money, gossip, food, people's approval, or work is a strange place to be in, at first. The searing iron of God's law burns your conscience, makes you well-aware of what you've done wrong...at first. It's crushing to be trapped beneath tons of collapsed hopes and shattered dreams, at first.

But in time we become accustomed to living in "can't always be perfect and that's ok with me." In time we become accustomed to living in "I guess that particular sin doesn't bother me much anymore." Before too long we become accustomed to living in destruction and death. With each passing day, it becomes easier to deny that I am stuck in sin that kills and steals and destroys. But the truth? We are the ones in hot water! This is why God says, **"Get out of Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare it with a shout of joy."**

You see, it's in God's heart to call people out of darkness and into His marvelous light. He called Abraham and Sarah to get out of Haran because it was the center of moon worship. He urged Lot and his family to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah because it was the center of sexual perversion. And He called Israel to get out of Egypt because it was the epicenter of a society that brought about massive dehumanization. Ultimately, he called these people to get out because he loved them. You see, at the core of Israel's narrative is the Lord's ongoing call for His people to get out of decay, depravity, and death...same as it is for us. And our response? Too often . . . nothing!

We don't always want to listen to the Gospel of our salvation. Isaiah 30:10–11 is the classic response to the prophetic call. **"Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions; stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel (and with his holy law)!"** But, friends, deep down we're thirsty. Not for more of the same. We know it's salt water in the desert. It doesn't quench—it kills.

No. We're thirsty for a clean conscience, a fresh start; for a loving, tender hand to reach into our basement and get us out.

And it's there! Friends, this is exactly what God says to Israel, and it's exactly what he says to us. Isaiah 40–55 is chock-full of good news of God reaching down to us again and again and again! Consider these words, **"I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (43:25). "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist" (44:22).** These great and precious promises are found, fulfilled, and come to fruition in Isaiah's Servant...God's Servant, Jesus our Lord, the one murdered for us.

In the classic gangster stories, when the head of the family has ordered a "hit" (a murder), someone inevitably says, "It's not personal; it's just business." Not so with the murder of Jesus. It was intensely personal. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus with a kiss. In His hour of need, His friends ran for cover. His countrymen clamored for His death. And His very own Father abandoned Him. Even our own sins, every single one of them, helped nail Jesus to the cross. It was very personal.

But it was personal on another level. Jesus lived a perfect life for you, because you can't. Jesus suffered and died for you, for this sin and that sin and every sin. He bled for you and sweated for you. He felt the nails and the thorns for you. And because of that, Jesus comes for you in your darkness and sin. Stuck in sin (or that boiling pot of water) that you can't seem to get out of? No fear! Jesus comes to rescue, release, and free you from guilt and shame and regret...he comes to release you from sin.

And not just that. Listen to verse 17, **"I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go."** God doesn't just know what's best for you (which includes getting you out of your own way, getting you out of the darkness of your own sin through his forgiveness). He teaches you and directs you in the way you should go, or in other words, shows you how to stay out of sin.

And what's the way? Verse 18, **"Pay attention to my commands."** Psalm 119, **"Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees, then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight."** The way to stay out is here, in God's Word. The way out is a heart, so thankful and appreciative for the redemption we have through Jesus, that it longs and desires to surround itself with God's Word and the forgiveness, encouragement, growth, and strength it provides.

Friends, there's really only one response to all of this. The water of sin is warm. The pot is inviting. Get out! Now! You know a dangerous situation when you see it, and that's all sin. And you will get out because Jesus got you out with his life, death, and resurrection. And now, stay out. Stay in God's Word. Pay attention to God's commands. And God will keep you out of sin and in his care and protection and love to the end. Amen.