

“His Ways – Not mine!”

Isaiah 55:6 –11

December 30, 2007

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The text is this: 9 *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Sometimes we wonder why things are the way they are. We wonder why we have to suffer, for example. We wonder why others suffer. It doesn't seem to make sense. But, sometimes we can see the hand of God in it all. Sometimes we cannot see it at the time, but we can see it later.

For example, my back pain.

Several years ago I suffered from intense back pain. I was nearly reduced to crawling. Then I had back surgery and when I woke up from that surgery I knew the doctor had done his job. The bulging disk that was pressing against my nerves creating intense pain was gone. The doctor had relieved the pressure. I could have hugged him. The pain of recovery that followed was nothing compared to the pain that the disk had been causing me.

I wondered why I had to suffer for weeks, even months. During the recovery time, I was scheduled to go to the Dominican Republic with the mission team. I wanted to go. My ticket was purchased. But I surely wasn't going to be very useful, I thought. My friend, Pastor Lubin Beaucejour, was going for the first time as the leader of a new evangelism team. John Powers suggested that my purpose for going that year would simply be to pray. Take a portable folding camping chair, he suggested, and when Pastor Lubin begins to talk to people, just sit down and start praying for him. I really liked the idea. That began a new ministry for me. Pastor Lubin and I began to be a team. He talked while I prayed. That's the way it has been for several years now. I may not have had prayer as my primary purpose if it hadn't been for my back surgery and my total inability to help with construction.

Then I began to understand: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.*

9 *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

God's ways are always good.

- His ways are good in their intent.
- His ways accomplish good things.
- You can trust Him.
- You can put your faith in Him.
- God will accomplish His purposes.
- It's a joy to be used by God and to let Him use you in the accomplishing of His purposes.

The context: It's always helpful to be reminded of **the context** in which this was written.

God had sent his prophet Isaiah to warn Jerusalem and all of Judea that **judgment** was **coming**. It most surely came. The Babylonians ransacked **the city**. The protective **walls** of the city were smashed down. The **temple** was destroyed. The King's **palace** was destroyed. All of their gold was carried off into Babylon. Their **soldiers** were attacked. People were **killed**. Great

atrocities had taken place. All the Jews were dragged off into “**Babylonian Exile**” and were not allowed to live in that city as long as Babylonian power existed.

I can imagine Israelites crying out to God and asking **why things had to be so bad**. The answer came with these words.

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the LORD.*

9 *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Finally, **the Medes and the Persians defeated Babylon**. The Israelites, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, were **allowed to return** back to the city of Jerusalem, to rebuild the walls, to rebuild the temple, and to make Jerusalem a great city once again.

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declares the LORD.*

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The answer is: God is in control. The answer is: **God will accomplish His purposes.**

*10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without
watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and
bread for the eater,*

11 *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

The word that prophesied judgment, also prophesied redemption and restoration: **12 You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace;**

*the mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.*

13 *Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree,
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.*

*This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be
destroyed."*

For those who belong to the Lord; for those who are faithful to Him; for those who trust the Lord **despite their questions, despite their personal suffering, despite their own anguish**, God has a promise.

12 **You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace;**
*the mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.*

This poetic picture is that even the **mountains and the hills will rejoice** on your behalf. You see **the trees blowing in the wind**, and their branches colliding with each other in the breeze. **Actually, they are clapping** and they are waving their arms and praising God with you.

You will go in and out of the city in joy and in peace. The city which was once destroyed and ravaged by war, will one day be a city of peace and you will come and go with great joy.

The beautiful city of Jerusalem had been ravaged by war and allowed to lie in ruin for 40 years. Briars and thornbushes were all that flourished there. But, now things were going to change. *Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.*

Pine trees grow to be very tall and stately.

Example: As a kid brought up on the farm, my brother and I used to walk back to a big pine that was 50 feet tall. We would climb to the very top of it. It afforded us a great view of things. I loved climbing it when a strong breeze was blowing. It would sway in the breeze. I was not at all afraid. I knew that huge tree had been there for many years and it would be there for many more. It wasn't going anywhere. And as long as I held on, I wasn't going anywhere – except back and forth as I got a free ride at the top of this magnificent old pine tree. **What a wonderful tree!** *Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree.*

Myrtle trees:

... and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. Myrtle trees don't get as tall as pine trees, but they are beautiful. Their leaves are evergreen. They aren't like pine needles. They are a waxy green leaf and they don't shed their leaves. The Myrtle trees have a beautiful white star-like flower, which has a most beautiful aroma.

*13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree,
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.*

This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."

For the Lord's renown:

This will be for the Lord's renown. The world will look upon it and say, "**This is what God has done!** The Lord will be praised.

- It isn't about puffing up the **Israelites**. It's about God.
- What the Lord wants to do isn't about puffing up **some particular government**. It's about the Lord.
- What God will do **among us** isn't about puffing up the **Baptists, or the Methodists, or the Congregationalists, or the Catholics or the Episcopalians**. It's about what God has done. It's about what God is doing.
- It is for the Lord's renown.

What God wants to do among us is beyond our wildest dreams. We could never have thought it up:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, (your thoughts are too puny)

neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. (my comments: Our tendency is to keep telling God what we think He ought to do. We would be better off to cry out to the Lord the words of Jesus when he said, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done".)

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".

Example: Dear friends whose baby died -

Dear friends of mine had just lost their **infant daughter in some rare, freak accident** when the baby had been hospitalized. The baby had had some kind of breathing problem, I think. They had inserted an intravenous feeding tube and something went wrong. It never should have happened. It's a tragedy when these things occur. But some horrible freakish thing occurred. The doctor had to come out to the parents and announce that their precious little baby died.

I was single at the time. I had no wife. I had no children. **I grieved for them, but I certainly didn't understand the depth of their grief.** I sent them a sympathy card with these words hand-written at the bottom. I suppose these words were **simply taken as well intentioned words of a friend who simply didn't understand:**

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".

I think if I had received those words when I was going through a tragedy, I don't think they would be very comforting.

- I couldn't have comprehended it.
- I couldn't have taken it in.
- I would have said, "Yeah, thanks kid! You don't get it. You don't understand how hard this is, but I'm sure you mean well."

But these words are still true. These words are **true even when we are not ready to hear them.** They are true **even when our hearts are too burdened** to receive them. They are true when we have fallen into a pit and we don't know which way is up. They are **true in the good times** when we can quote them. They are **true in the bad times** when we don't want to hear it.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".

It wasn't the end of the story for this couple. The story is so sad that you'd never write the script for something like this. It's too unbelievable. You see, they had **another baby** a year or two later. The husband had become a pastor of a church. I think the church was really lucky to have him. It was a small church in a small community in the northwestern part of New York. They had a Wednesday night prayer service. This young Mom and

Dad and their little baby were driving home from the prayer service. They were taking a parishioner home who needed a ride. They dropped her off, and headed back out onto the road when a speeding drunk came flying down the road **and crashed into them killing both the husband and the precious new baby.** The **mother** was hospitalized for days, but she **lived.** She was now alone. God had taken two infant children and her dear husband. She must have felt so very alone in this world.

I didn't resent these verses: maybe because **I was having trouble believing them myself.**

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declares the LORD.*

*9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways
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This dear woman who had been a pastor's wife and a mother of two infant children **never remarried.** She **moved back to the hometown** in which she was raised. She **lived with her parents (who were dear faithful Christians)** until they died. But she lived out her life as an **exemplary Christian who bore witness to the constant grace of God.** She had a presence about her – a sweet loving presence of God that absolutely defied comprehension. When you were in her presence you felt like you were in the presence of God.

I had lost contact with her for several years. **My dear older brother** brought me up to speed on what happened to her. She had contracted a **terrible disease**. I don't remember the specifics. It was something **like Lou Gherig's** disease, which eventually took her life. It was amazing, though. When my brother saw her **near the end of her life** when she was **obviously in such pain,** she had a **radiant beauty** about her. She maintained a **steadfast faith and trust in the Lord** that inspired all those around her. Finally, **her death was like the passing of an angel** back into the presence of God.

She didn't need to hear those words from me. She knew them to be true in the very depths of her soul:

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the LORD.*

*9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways
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I don't know what the New Year will hold for you.

- I don't know if it will be filled with sickness or good health.
- I don't know if you will experience prosperity or poverty.
- I don't know if you will experience happiness or sorrow. I hope for the best for you. I wish you a Happy New Year, but I can't guarantee it.
- I don't know if your journey will be like a walk on the beach or if it will be like a hard journey through the mountains of life.
- But I know this: If you *trust in the Lord.* If you *seek the Lord* "while He may be found"; if you forsake any *wicked ways* and all *evil thoughts*; if you *turn to the Lord,*

He will have mercy upon you and will freely pardon. And, this experience will be true for you.

If you remain faithful to Him, and trust in Him, you will know, in your heart of hearts this truth:

*"...My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the LORD.*

*9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways
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Let us pray!