

"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you people who seek the LORD: Look ... Listen ... my salvation will remain forever, and my righteousness will never be abolished.

During these last few, and closing, weeks to the regular season of the National Football League, you'll often hear the *destiny* phrase. You know the one, "Such-and-such team controls their own destiny: win out and they're in the playoffs." Longtime sportscaster Bob Costas liked to point out, though, that once a team is under its own control, destiny no longer plays into it.

Arguments could be made, of course, both *for* and *against* Costas' point. But there is no argument to be made against the *destiny* that is clearly laid out through the prophet Isaiah nearly 3000 years ago. According to the Lord the Israelites, to whom Isaiah was writing, were truly *People...of...Destiny!*

I know, rather melodramatic. But take Isaiah's directives in our text on this New Year's Eve Day: ***Listen... and look...you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD***, for today's message through Isaiah is a message of *destiny*. And as we ***look*** and ***listen***, please...

If we're going to use a word like *destiny*, it is important to understand what that means. Simply, when it comes to spiritual matters, God has a plan and all people are a part of it. Now maybe that's an oversimplification, but for our purposes today, it is enough - God has a plan and all of us are a part of it.

Again, ***look*** and ***listen*** to the word of the Lord through Isaiah the prophet, ***Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and***

who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; ² look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many. Yes, God had made a promise that ***Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him.*** (Gen. 18:18)

Israel, therefore, is a *people...of...destiny*. God had promised, on oath, by his *own name*, that, in spite of it all, Abraham's descendants would be cared for, protected, prospered, and brought along the path of God's plan. In fact, though at times it was the thinnest of *tender shoots*, it is a family tree that survives even to this day. God's plan for his chosen people gave them this confidence: ***The LORD is certain to comfort Zion. He will comfort all her ruins. Certainly he will make her wilderness like Eden and her wasteland like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of music. ⁴ Pay attention to me, O my people. My nation, listen to me!***

Of course, God's plans are not always *easy* to listen to. They are not always *clearly* seen. Simple they are *not*. Yet, the Lord *is* crystal clear in *several* places in Scripture that his plans are beyond our understanding. In fact, just a few chapters after our text for today Isaiah records, ***Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my plans are higher than your plans.*** (55:8,9) And if you'll recall, we just heard it in our Christmas services from St. John, ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was***

made that has been made. ⁴ In him was^[a] life, and the life was the light of mankind. ⁵ The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it. (1:1-5) And again in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he writes, *...the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Co. 1:25)* Sadly, even, or perhaps especially, God's chosen nation of Israel often had a hard time seeing God's plan and tried to *control their own destiny*.

Imagine for a moment: You're driving down the road, hands on the wheel, when suddenly the person sitting in the passenger seat next to you grabs the wheel and yanks it to the right. That may sound far-fetched, and yet (as some of you have heard before) it happened to me once. To this day neither of us know what got into him that day. But the truth is, it has happened to all of us when we try to *control our own destiny* – only, it's *us* yanking the wheel from *God's* hands.

Oh, I know, we don't necessarily think of it that way, but as we anticipate another year of grace and make our plans for 2021, praying that it will be better than 2020, how will we react when God's will and ways are different from our own? How will we feel when we don't get all the desires of our hearts? How will we handle it when God jerks the wheel back to the 9:00 and 3:00 position where it should be? No, let our *faith ... not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power*, as Paul puts it to the Corinthians. Let us *speak God's wisdom that has been hidden in mystery – before the ages, and that God destined for our glory before time began. (1 Co. 2:5,7)* For God's plan – our destiny – is clearly identified in Ephesians chapter 1. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.⁴ He did this when he chose us in*

Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, ⁶ and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves.⁷ In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ.

You see, it wasn't just the Israelites who were *people...of...destiny*. No, as the Lord prophesied through Isaiah, *the law^[a] will go out from me, and I will establish my justice^[a] as a light to the peoples. ⁵ My righteousness is near. My salvation goes forth, and my arms will bring justice to the peoples. The seacoasts will wait for me. They will have confidence in my arm.*

The Lord is talking about *you!* [name]... [gender]...*of...destiny!* You come, this last day before another year of grace, in the full confidence of God's unfailing love. He has loved you since before time began and he will bring you along his paths in accordance with his will to that prepared place that will remain *for you* even after time has come to an end. *Lift up your eyes to the heavens. Look closely at the earth beneath, because the heavens will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants will die like gnats.^[a] But [the Lord's] salvation will remain forever, and [his] righteousness will never be abolished.* On the brink of another year of grace, rejoice that God's unfailing love is yours, by grace, through faith - a gift from him, to you, as a member of his holy family – for *you* are his very own *child ...of...destiny*. Amen.