

## Read Isaiah 1

### **Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Isaiah 1:16**

I've got to say that shooting an M-16 was one of the great experiences of my life. I had almost no experience with guns before that and I found myself truly enjoying the art of shooting. After we finished our first firing session with them, our drill sergeants told us we were going to clean our rifles. I thought, "How hard can it be? Wipe it down, clean out the barrel, and you're done." If you've never taken one apart, you wouldn't believe the amount of small moving parts that become dirty as a result of firing the weapon. I had no idea how to clean the thing, so we had a class on how to do it. We took it apart, and learned to clean it and put it back together. I thought that stripping and cleaning the weapon would be impossible to learn, but thanks to the instruction I received I was able to do it without any help soon after.

There were about 6 or 7 passages in this chapter that really struck me, but I chose this one because I think that Christians need to deal with this important truth: God can empower you to overcome sin, but you have to make the choice to do so. My drill sergeants instructed me on how to clean my weapon, but ultimately it was my responsibility to make sure it was cleaned, not theirs. We see that Isaiah was living in an Israel that didn't really fear God. They choose evil, and when they felt bad about their choices they gave extra offerings or had extra church functions. God was simply tired of it. He tells them in verse 15 to stop wasting their time in prayer if they aren't willing to leave their sin behind. We know that Jesus forgives us of the guilt and punishment of our sin. So why does God instruct us in verse 16 to wash and cleanse ourselves? **Because we are accountable for our own sin. I've heard people say, "I prayed and ask God to take away the sin of \_\_\_\_ from me, but it's still there." Sins remain not because God doesn't hate it, but because you do not hate it. He will empower you through the conviction, reminders and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in regards to your sin. But the simple truth remains that any sin you have in your life, is a choice you are making to leave it there. What sin do you need to get serious about? Have you been putting the accountability on God to overcome your sin? You have to take the stand against sin in your life.**

## Read Isaiah 2

### ***Men will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble. Isaiah 2:19***

Saddam Hussein thought he was the man. No matter what you think of the war that has raged in the streets of Iraq for years, there is no denying that the Iraqi people are better off without Hussein ruling over them. He decided who lived and who died. He ruled through fear and terror and as a result of his pride, he took on nations that were too great to be taken on. In the end, he ran and hid in a hole. I'm sure he sat in that hole in rural Iraq and thought, "How did I end up here?" If you're going to play king of the mountain, you better make sure you're the biggest kid in the fight.

Again as I read the Bible I am constantly reminded of the consistency that exists throughout the Word of God. Isaiah is writing about Jesus establishing his 1000 year reign on the earth. It will be an amazing time of peace that will see people take the metal of weapons and build them into implements of harvest and peace. However, there will be those who will be taken by surprise at the return of Jesus. This verse parallels Revelation 6:15-16 where we see these people not only hiding, but actually hoping the mountains and caves will fall upon them. These were people that had idols in their lives and had been worshipping created things instead of the Creator. Saddam had made himself an idol, and when he realized that his power and might were pretty limited, his only choice was to hide. **Do you ever feel like hiding from God? Just last night I was thanking God during my prayer time that despite the sin that still finds its way into my life, He still loves me and I don't have to hide from Him. David told us how idiotic it is to try to run from an omnipresent God back in Psalms. He's everywhere, so where can we go to escape Him? The times we feel the need to hide from God are actually the times we need to seek Him out. God loves it when His people say, "I'm sorry." Don't hide from God, and don't try to hide your sin. Allow His conviction to motivate you to change your life.**

### **Read Isaiah 3**

#### **The LORD arises to contend, and stands to judge the people. Isaiah 3:13**

One afternoon we got to a classroom during basic training, and the instructor was late. So Drill Sergeant Montez sat on the stage up front, kicking his feet and letting us ask him any question we wanted. This was peculiar, but he told us details about being stationed overseas, having a family in the army, and tons of other stuff. I suddenly wasn't so afraid of him. Finally our instructor showed up and taught the class, and afterwards we were lining up outside to march back. Some kid called out to Montez, and I had a feeling it was going to be bad. Montez screamed at this kid for talking to him, and eventually punished the entire platoon for his actions.

Montez was able to be two people. During those classroom moments I realized that he wasn't a Drill Sergeant because he wanted to hurt people. He had chosen this duty because he wanted to train young soldiers, and he cared about how that was done. As quickly as he could be our advocate, he could be our adversary. God has the ability to be one of two people to us as well. Isaiah says that God arises to contend and stands to judge. Contend means to "defend or support", and I get the picture of God rising gently to defend those who stand in front of Him who have chosen to live submitted to Him. But, He stands, perhaps quickly, to judge those who have ignored Him. In verses 10-11, Isaiah says that standing before God will go well with the righteous and not so well for the unrighteous. **How will you stand before God? How do you stand before Him today? Sometimes we think of God judging us after we die, but we stand before God everyday. Is the Lord ready to contend for you when you deal with adversaries around you, or is He willing to allow your own sinful actions to bring judgment upon you? You have the choice, every day in regards to how you will stand before God and if He will arise in defense or stand in judgment.**

## **Read Isaiah 4**

**There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain. Isaiah 4:6**

My wife and kids came back from the library recently, only to discover online that there were still books that we had not brought back. Nikki asked our 7-year-old son, Tyler, if he had checked his room for these books, which he said he had before they left. He looked again and came back within a minute with the missing books. Nikki said there was a late fee of a \$1.50 and Tyler had recently been given a dollar by a woman in our church, so I told him to bring me his dollar to help pay for it. This made him pretty sad because he had plans for that dollar. Nikki told him that he would have an opportunity to earn it back, which I initially didn't like. But then I realized, there's nothing wrong with giving him hope in the midst of discipline. And that night in his prayer time, he even asked God to help him not be upset about losing his dollar.

Just like Tyler and I, God gave Israel hope in the midst of discipline. God has been laying out, through Isaiah, what's going to happen. Babylon will come and defeat them and carry many of them off. That's why verse one talks about having one woman to seven men. Babylon defeats Israel because God's people have turned themselves into a pagan nation. As a result, God wants Israel to have a fresh start and He chooses Babylon to give it. But even as disappointed as God is in His people, God gives hope for renewal. He promises to lead Israel just as He did out of Egypt with the cloud by day and fire by night, allowing them to constantly see His presence. He promises to be a shelter and a refuge. **Have you recently been under the discipline of God? I know that in times that I am paying the price for my sin, I am ashamed to be near Him. But if I come to Him in humility over my sin, it doesn't always mean the consequences won't come, but God shows us that He will not abandon the humble. He'll leave the proud, unrepentant Christian out to dry for a while if needed, but humility brings God close. The greatness of God is shown in so many ways, but the way He loves us even when He's disciplining us has to be one of the most comforting characteristics of God. He truly loves us in spite of who we are.**

## **Read Isaiah 5**

**Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Isaiah 5:20**

When I was in the National Guard, I had a friend named Don. I don't know how we became friends because we were polar opposites. I talked to him about God and my relationship with Jesus. Don talked about his latest sexual escapade. I talked to him about this and told him that it was going to catch up with him one day. He laughed it off, even through a few STDs. To him, Christianity was just all about ruining his fun. Then one spring break he came home and said it wasn't fulfilling anymore. I had never seen him so upset. He never came to Christ while I knew him, but he began to see that what he was calling "good" just wasn't cutting it in his life.

Israel was suffering from an identity crisis in Isaiah's day. They had the law, so they knew what God's standards were. However, they weren't living by them and as a result, good became evil and evil became good because they were simply doing whatever came out of their own brains. I think many Christians sin out of ignorance of the Word of God. There have been many life changes I have made because I was reading the Bible and saw the broken areas of my life as a result. For the Christian, we have to make sure that we call sin what it is...sin. **Are you justifying sin in your life? Are you giving a reason why your sin is ok for you? Premarital sex is not ok for the Christians that are truly "in love". Stealing is not ok because you really "needed it". Examine what sin you have allowed to remain in your life, and admit to God that you have been calling evil good.**

### **Read Isaiah 6**

**In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Isaiah 6:1**

John had preached in many churches to fill the pulpit, and this one seemed no different. It was a small country church. It didn't have huge facilities, a dynamic worship leader, or exciting music. But, something was different about this church as John began to preach. He mentioned it afterwards to many of the members who simply gave a knowing smile. They acknowledge that the Spirit seems to move in their church on Sundays, and then they asked John if he had noticed the shack in the pastor's backyard. John indicated that he had, and the members told him that their pastor spends 2-3 hours in there on a Saturday night praying for the worship services. As a result, others began praying as well. The Spirit was in their church, because they invited Him and expected Him to be there!

Isaiah was living in Judah during a tough time. King Uzziah had been a great king, and the people were missing him. In the midst of this, Isaiah goes into the temple and he sees the Lord. There were probably other people in the temple that day, but only Isaiah was able to see this vision of the Lord. He had heard about God, but now he was seeing God with His own eyes. Isaiah had a personal encounter with God. My guess is that just like this small church in Tennessee, Isaiah went to the temple (i.e. he went to church) expecting God to show up! **How do you approach God's house? Do you go to church because it's Sunday and that's what you do? Do you go expecting the minister to bring you closer to God? Or do you go expecting God to show up? Are you happy to go to church and go through rituals and routines instead of the real presence of God? Ask God to move in your worship services and ask Him what He expects of you as you come into His presence.**

### **Read Isaiah 7**

**thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. Isaiah 7:7**

My children come to me quite often telling me what their brother or sister said to them. It might have been a threat to damage their favorite toy or something about getting a spanking for a bad deed. So many times, one of my children has come to me very upset until I simply say, "That's not going to happen." Once they hear me assure them that their

toys and/or bottoms are in no real danger, they calm down. They begin to realize that someone made statements that they couldn't back up.

Judah had a serious situation and they were being told by their enemies that defeat was inevitable. However, a declaration by their enemies did not trump the declaration of God. God simply says, "It ain't gonna happen." Sometimes we get caught up in the threats of the world and we forget to trust God and fear him only. Instead we find ourselves fearing man, who can touch our lives, but not our souls. **What words of men have you worried? Is there talk in your work place of cutbacks? Do you hear constant bad news regarding your investments that you have spent so much time on? Let us remember that the only one with the power to make declarations over our lives is the Lord. If you lose your job or your money, God is aware. Nothing comes to pass without his knowledge. Trust in the Lord, and seek His peace in your times of confusion.**

### **Read Isaiah 8**

#### **Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. Isaiah 8:16**

A man recently came up to me after I had spoken in church. I had shared a story of us singing songs of the Lord over our children as babies and how it seemed to calm them down. We are a household of music, and my assumption is that our children remember those songs from the womb. This man came up and said they sang a Japanese lullaby to their oldest one while his wife was pregnant with their next child. After the next child was born, he was soothed to that lullaby even as an infant, proving to this man that his unborn child heard the music. I told him, "It's great for us to see our children enjoy singing and hearing praises to the Lord." He didn't really care for that statement. He was not a believer and amongst the truth God shared through me that night, all he listened to was one good story that vaguely related to his life.

Binding up the testimony and sealing the law among the disciples does not mean that we are to be silent about who we are or what we believe. It means that when people approach us, as we live our lives to honor the Lord Jesus, testimony and the truth of Scripture should come forth. This man wanted a nice story to share. I wanted to make the point of how God sings over us according to Zephaniah 3:17, and that just as my children were defenseless and helpless as we sang over them, it soothed them. You need to understand that the lost are not looking at the world through the truth of God's Word. They think it's great that it works for you, but it's not for them. Make sure that you live your life with a testimony and the Word of God ready for anyone that God would choose to send your way. **Remember that your testimony isn't how bad a sinner you were and so you became a Christian. Your testimony is also who you are now because of Jesus Christ. Be prepared today to share the Word of God and your story of faith with someone who doesn't know the reason for your faith. In fact, make it a point that you will not end this day until you have attempted to do so.**

## Read Isaiah 9

**Yet the people do not turn back to Him who struck them, nor do they seek the LORD of hosts. Isaiah 9:13**

God is at the center of everything. It's hard to determine the difference between what He causes and what He allows, but we know that there isn't a circumstance or heartache that God is unaware of. On 9/11 people asked Christians whether God caused 9/11, and if not why did He let it happen? I don't know, but I do know that 9/11 caused many people to consider a God that they had long forgotten. I don't think that God lacked compassion as those people died, however the opportunity for America to take notice that she wasn't protected from such atrocities didn't grow us closer to God for long. The fastest growing religion since 9/11 has been the religion of Islam, the faith of the very terrorists who struck against us. That's foolishness to not only ignore God, but to choose falsehood over truth.

God allowed the enemies of Israel to come upon them, and still God's people refused to call upon God. They neither considered nor turned from their sin, and they definitely did not seek God. God is called the Lord of hosts here, a term indicating his command over a heavenly host that could defeat Israel's enemies. God was exactly who they needed, and He was able to meet their specific need, but the people were unwilling to ask. **What needs do you have in your life? How are you going about meeting them? Have you spoken to the Lord about them, or have you given up because the answer didn't come in your time? It would be enough if God were just this great, big God. But He is more. He is able to be specifically who you need Him to be in any given circumstance. Start relying on the Lord with specifics and not just generalizations to make your life better. And if He allows heartache and pain to come into your life, seek Him out. Don't attempt to handle on your own, what God intended for you to ask Him to handle in your life.**

## Read Isaiah 10

**As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria Isaiah 10:10**

When I was playing basketball in junior high, we had a large variety of schools that we had to drive to because of our very rural location. So often we knew little to nothing about these teams other than their mascots. So in our typical junior high fashion, we decided that whoever had the best mascot would probably win. We were the eagles, and we saw ourselves beating up on the wildcats, hawks and bulldogs. We were concerned about playing the lions, rangers and bears though. By the end of the season, we began to realize that it doesn't matter what your mascot is called. It doesn't translate to the court.

As Assyria comes to bring the beat down on Jerusalem, they mention that the previous nations had greater idols than Israel does. This impression probably came from the fact that those previous nations had large idols and made quite a show out of yelling and calling on them to save their nations. Israel doesn't go running off to an idol, which makes them appear to have nothing and no one to count on. He wasn't their mascot for

them to rally around. He was their God to be completely devoted to. **Do you sometimes treat God as an idol? Sometimes we can act as if He's not around just because we don't think about Him. You don't have to go to the church or hold your cross to be close to Him. You just have to pray. Have you been treating your faith and your God as an idol? Running to Him when trouble comes, but neglecting to maintain and strengthen your relationship in the good times? Let others around you see that you worship a God, and not a religion.**

### **Read Isaiah 11**

**They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:9**

Living in the 21st century, people feel that we are more knowledgeable now. We can get news from anywhere in the world in just a few moments. In fact, with all the internet news outlets and multitude of cable news channels, it would seem that we should have our finger on the pulse of just about everything. But information is not knowledge. We have many people seeing the news and taking the word of "professionals" regarding what it means. There is so little real knowledge out there, that we may know of events, but people don't necessarily comprehend them any better than we have at previous points in human history.

We read of an amazing time in Isaiah 11. These events will take place as a result of Jesus' reign here on the earth. It will be vastly different from the world you see today. Death and fear will no longer be the orders of the day. And as amazing as it will be to see humanity live on the earth as God originally intended, the greatest benefit will be the knowledge of the Lord. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. Today there are 1.6 billion people who have never heard the name of Jesus. The earth is not full of His knowledge yet. **According to Isaiah 11, one day every person on the planet will know exactly who Jesus is. The earth will be different because the knowledge of the Lord will be everywhere. How has the knowledge of the Lord changed you? Do you recognize your sin now and struggle against it, or do you recognize it and simply feel worse? God has given us knowledge through His word to reveal to us the kind of lives we are to live. Having Jesus reigning on the earth will be great, and there will be no mistaking the will of God for humanity at that point. But let us not forget that our unseen God is everywhere and calling to us to pay attention to His words today. Are you living with information you know of God or knowledge you are gaining in your daily walk with Him?**

### **Read Isaiah 12**

**And in that day you will say, "Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples; Make *them* remember that His name is exalted." Isaiah 12:4**

I had a chance to go to Philadelphia with a group of teenagers from all around the country. These teens were working on sub-standard housing within the city as part of a summer missions project. During this project, I had a conversation with one of the

residents named Keith. He was watching the work and I was talking to him about why the kids were doing it in the first place. I explained that these teenagers were sleeping on the floor back at a local church and that each of them had paid \$260 to come work on Keith's house. He was completely surprised by this, thinking that they must be getting some sort of pay. He asked, "Why would they do that?" I said, "Because they love you Keith, and they want you to know God loves you too."

Isaiah continues to write about the day that Jesus will reign, and we saw yesterday that the knowledge of the Lord will be in all the earth. However, we are to make known the deeds and works of God. Those teenagers were doing great work in Philly, but if we failed to share the reason for the work, then the trip would have been wasted. Those teenagers came to work in Philadelphia because God had worked in their lives. Otherwise they probably would have just hung out at home doing nothing. **Do you thank God when He is working in your life? Do you share that thankfulness with others? God's work is not just for our benefit, but for the benefit of those who know us and need to meet God personally. This is His purpose. He desires to be glorified, and in so doing, others might see His greatness and come to Him through Jesus Christ. Your testimony isn't just for church, but it's for the man on the street who needs to know that God desires to work personally in his life.**

### **Read Isaiah 13**

**And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah 13:19**

I've never been to ancient Rome, but I have seen it on television! Rome was such an amazing empire, and now all we have are a few decrepit structures here and there. Rome was the super power of its day, but now it is gone. It's a good reminder to us that nothing lasts forever outside of our God. Look at the nations of the world today, and it will be different tomorrow. Nations rise and fall with regularity. Atlases and globes fall out of relevance within a short time as people gain and lose their independence all over the world.

I'm sure a prophecy against Babylon at the time of Isaiah would have been like prophesying that America would vanish today. They were strong, they were mighty, and they had a tremendous belief in themselves. However, they did not last because they did not honor God. It doesn't matter how wonderful humanity considers something to be. It matters how God looks upon a nation or situation. **Is there anything that you are counting on being around tomorrow that would devastate you if it wasn't? We cannot allow routine and people to be what we rely on for our stability. Losing my wife and children would be an immeasurable blow for me to deal with, but ultimately I would be able to through the love and preservation of God. Or what if you were to lose your house, your money or your job? Are you counting on these things to always be there, or do you count on the Lord? If you are trusting in something or someone more than God, you had better prepare yourself for the moment when that person or thing is removed.**

## Read Isaiah 14

**How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! Isaiah 14:12**

Seeing a new boxing video game featuring long retired boxer Mike Tyson was a shock to me. Tyson is one of those guys that just won't seem to go away. He had a couple of good fights, and as a result, had leeches crawling out of the woodwork trying to attach themselves to this guy's star. And over time Tyson made choices that destroyed his professional and personal life. Now Tyson is trying to forge a comeback, though not in the ring, but simply a comeback of his image. The problem is that he's fallen from such a height, it's just not possible to climb back up there.

I think I'm starting to put this together in my mind. God wants us to be like Him. We are to be holy, matching the character of God. Satan wants us to be like him. He wants us fallen and miserable as he is. Jesus describes Hell with the term Gehenna which was the name of the dump outside of Jerusalem. The dump of Hell is Satan's final residence and he wants others there to share in his misery. So when we are choosing between whether to sin or not to sin, we're choosing between the hope of Heaven or the dump of death. Good things only come from God. Satan has never once provided or produced anything good in his time against humanity. Satan fell from a great height as the #1 servant of God. It's a height he can never reach again. **The next time you find yourself mulling over sin, think about what you're accepting and what you're rejecting. You can either accept the garbage that Satan offers which will stink up your life and bring you down to the pits with remorse, or you can accept the good things that God offers that will enable you to be able to look yourself in the mirror. You choose to accept trash or treasures.**

## Read Isaiah 15

**They have gone up to the temple and to Dibon, even to the high places to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba; everyone's head is bald and every beard is cut off. Isaiah 15:2**

Hideyoshi was the ruler of Japan in the late 16th century. During his reign, he commissioned an enormous Buddha statue for a shrine in the city of Kyoto. The statue took 50,000 men five years to build. Just as the work was completed, the great earthquake of 1596 brought the roof of the shrine down on the statue, and ruined it. Accounts say that Hideyoshi went to the shrine with a bow and fired an arrow at the statue. He yelled, "I put you here at great expense, and you can't even look after your own temple!" When tragedy came, Hideyoshi didn't get the response from his idol that he had been hoping for.

I think back to the story of Job when I read this. It says in verse 1 that Moab had been devastated and ruined, and that certainly was an apt description of Job's life. But, Job did not look for comfort in man-made things, because they were all gone. Moab still had its idol temple, but we don't know what its condition was. Likely the temple was left, but the inside had been looted. They were worshipping a shell of their former religion, and they

felt completely hopeless. Job certainly mourned the losses in his life as these people did, but he made great statements of faith regarding who God was in the midst of Job's difficulties. **Do you seek pity or power in those moments that life kicks you in the teeth? So many Christians will share their problems with others so that they will know, but they don't really share the problem with God. Weeping and mourning in the midst of tragedy is not wrong, but forgetting God during those times is. He is still on His throne (Isaiah 6), and has not been unseated. Think ahead to how you will respond in tragedy. Are you prepared to fully trust the Lord, and to be a witness for those around you who may not know Him?**

### **Read Isaiah 16**

**Send the *tribute* lamb to the ruler of the land, from Sela by way of the wilderness to the mountain of the daughter of Zion. Isaiah 16:1**

Recipes used to scare me to death. I enjoyed my mom's cooking for many years, and then traded it for my wife's. I was always amazed how someone could throw together ingredients and get these amazing dishes. Then I finally tried cooking from a recipe myself, and found that it wasn't as hard as I had made it out to be. Paula, Rachel and Martha always make it look so simple, and I began to realize that it really is. Sometimes we just assume something is too hard, and we give up on it before we've really even started. I have a Peanut Butter and Chocolate Goopy Butter Cake that says I can follow a recipe!

I can't believe all the complicated answers I've received from people when I ask them about heaven. People begin fumbling for some sort of checklist that might please God, and I try to communicate that salvation is a lot easier than that. Perhaps we want something different, but it's as simple as trusting in Jesus Christ. Moab was a nation that had suffered from an ego problem for a long time. Now as they find themselves on the verge of destruction, they seek help from Judah. And what does Moab send? A tribute lamb. Basically it would have been a small, unblemished lamb that would symbolize an offering, and the humble fashion in which Moab was approaching them. They didn't march their army in and show off. They humbled themselves. **That's the gospel. We humble ourselves. We don't think for a moment that we deserve the salvation that we have been blessed with. We present ourselves humbly, seeking that whatever gift or talent we are being praised for, we direct the praise towards God. It's like the recipes. They're not complicated, once you actually take time to read them. God's Word clearly communicates the gospel to us. Let us remember our part in it: simply accepting a great gift from a great God for those who humble themselves to receive it.**

### **Read Isaiah 17**

**For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge. Therefore you plant delightful plants and set them with vine slips of a strange god. Isaiah 17:10**

In 1956, the United States Congress passed an act to make "In God We Trust" our national motto. Since then, it has been put on our money and within the halls of Congress itself. As the new U.S. Capitol Visitor's Center was being completed, many noticed that the re-creation of the congressional chamber omitted "In God We Trust" from its location in the original chamber. And one wall mistakenly said that "E Pluribus Unum" is our national motto. This has all been corrected now that the exhibit is opening, but I wonder if it really makes any difference.

God made it clear why Damascus was facing destruction; they had forgotten God. He was the God of their salvation and their refuge, and yet somehow they had forgotten Him and put their trust in idols. As Americans we may try to claim "In God We Trust" as some magical motto that proves we love God, but it does no such thing. Empty words carried on quarters don't indicate the real motives and intentions of our nation. And it's been clear that our country trusts just about anyone other than God. Even Christians desire a "godly" president, only to be disappointed by his priorities. We have to remember that God is in charge, and as long as our nation continues to ignore the real decision-maker, our nation has no guarantee of tomorrow. **Salvation is so great, because it proves so much about God. He's a promise keeper and lover of people. But, remember how He described Himself to Damascus. He was the God of their salvation and of their refuge. We don't just run to God to be saved, but we run to Him anytime that we find ourselves running. God is more than just someone to handle your sins, but instead to handle your entire life. Give Him the opportunity. Prove that it is in God you trust.**

### **Read Isaiah 18**

**All you inhabitants of the world and dwellers on earth, as soon as a standard is raised on the mountains, you will see *it*, and as soon as the trumpet is blown, you will hear *it*. Isaiah 18:3**

When we were living in Columbia, Missouri, we were able to easily drive by the University of Missouri's football stadium anytime we wanted. About the time my son turned six, he became a football fanatic. We finally went to a spring scrimmage that year, and Tyler knew where we were going. As we drove towards the stadium I could see him peering out his window, and noticing as the crowds of people grew. Finally, he could see the stadium started asking all of us if we could see it. He had been waiting and as soon as he got that glimpse, he wanted everyone to see it.

We've all had those times of anticipation, but how often do we anticipate and prepare ourselves for the presence of God? What if we were as excited about seeing our church on the horizon as we are a football stadium? Some scholars believe this chapter is a prophecy about Ethiopia, but that is not absolutely certain. What is certain is that when God sets up a banner, you will see it. There will be no craning of the neck or time of searching. God's banner is a declaration of His power and authority in any situation. Not only will He raise a banner, but He blows the trumpet in order that we will look. We must realize that at every moment, and not just when we recognize it, God is in complete control. **Why would He raise a banner and blow a trumpet? To get our attention. I**

**know as a Christian, how easy it is to have your attention fall onto your spouse, children, and job. It's unfortunate, but sometimes God has to pull out all the stops in order to get the attention of His people. Are you ignoring God's attempts to get your attention? Difficult circumstances, like losing a job, are tough to deal with, but sometimes they are the only way that God can get us to put Him first. I know those times in my life set me straight. So are you looking for God's banner, which will stand forever, or trying to raise your own which will simply grow tattered and fall?**

### **Read Isaiah 19**

**The LORD will strike Egypt, striking but healing; so they will return to the LORD, and He will respond to them and will heal them. Isaiah 19:22**

I was thinking about how the atmosphere of church has changed over the past generations. I can see in our church today those who came from a generation of sitting in silence and those who have come and want to be more expressive as they worship. Both groups of people care about their relationships with the Lord, but their methods are different. It doesn't mean that both groups aren't able to worship the Lord in their own way, but because they look different from each other, sometimes they are confused for being absolutely separate. We need to stop worrying so much about how everyone else is responding in worship, and consider how we are responding.

How many times have I heard that the argument that someone doesn't read the Bible because the God of the Old Testament is not the same as the God of the New Testament? People who say that, usually have never read the OT and are just taking the opinion of someone else as their own. This passage is great evidence to me that we serve a God who does not change, though His methods are different as a result of Jesus' arrival and the accessibility to the Word of God. God makes it clear that He is going to bring calamity on Egypt, and that He knows this will cause them for a time to turn to false Gods. His ultimate purpose is that they would return to Him, and it says in verse 22 that while He is striking He is healing. God will do what is necessary to get our attention. If we are being particularly oblivious to Him, that may require stronger actions than when we are living a closer life to Him. **How do you think God is trying to get your attention today? Is it through Holy Spirit reminders that you've been choosing to ignore? Is it through your children who may be sharing simple reminders to you of the things you should be doing? Is it a fellow Christian or your spouse encouraging you to make a change? Do not bristle up against someone telling you the truth about yourself. Always pray and ask God if what you're being told about yourself is true, and be humble enough to accept it if it's so.**

### **Read Isaiah 20**

**at that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips and take your shoes off your feet." And he did so, going naked and barefoot. Isaiah 20:2**

I'm often amazed at the examples that people are willing to make of themselves for the benefit of others. I saw a man give a painful testimony of how his addiction to drugs cost

him the life of his son when this father accidentally ran over his son while strung out on cocaine. People are taken from jails into high schools and speak of the high price of drinking and driving, communicating not only the punishment of the legal system, but also of your own conscience.

Being an example is not an easy thing, and Isaiah had done nothing wrong, yet God used him to be a humiliating example to others. God was communicating that Egypt and Cush would be completely humiliated reduced to even losing their clothing in their defeat to the Assyrians. Did Isaiah literally go naked? I'm not sure. God specifically says that the buttocks of these peoples will be uncovered, but I'm not sure that Isaiah would have been asked to sin to prove a point. Being reduced to just your undergarment, usually a long, thin cloth garment that went under the tunic, was considered close to nakedness, so perhaps it made the point. **So what is the point for us? Are you willing to be used as an example to others? Admitting my past issues ranging from lying to shoplifting haven't been easy, but my hope is that people will see that Jesus saved me from real sins, and not just some generic mischief. People hear the message of forgiveness and ask, "Yeah, but will God forgive me for this?" I think our lack of transparency as Christians has caused those who don't know our Savior to wonder if He would really accept them in the first place. He will and has a desire for them, but He may require us to be an example of what we once were in comparison to who we are today. Are you willing to be that example, or would you rather hide behind a veil of forgiveness and fail to show the miracle that came when Jesus forgave you personally for your personal sins?**

### **Read Isaiah 21**

**For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow and from the press of battle. Isaiah 21:15**

I love my wife like you wouldn't believe, and there is one little thing about her that drives her crazy and makes me laugh: her ability to forget what she was doing. I don't mean she has Alzheimer's, but she sometimes will start so many tasks that she forgets the first one as she has moved onto the fifth one. I can't tell you how many times she has brewed tea, and then let it go bad because she forgot to finish making it. She has started using a task list that seems to be helping, but that just depresses me. I'm gonna miss the laughs!

So many nations have fallen at the hands of the Lord. And as we see this prophecy on Arabia, I notice that the men of Arabia fled from their own drawn sword and bent bows. It means they were ready, but they left the battle unfought. Was it because they realized there was no hope in the battle? Due to the way they are written of, it's my belief that this was their reputation. When the "press of battle" came and victory wasn't so certain, they didn't fight harder, but they gave up. They left things undone and unfinished. **What about your life? What have you left undone? A commitment to pray and draw closer to God daily? Have you ignored His call to give your life to missions? Have you started the stand against a sin in your life, only to decide that you won't give it up? Unfinished tasks leave us with regret, especially when they are tasks that God**

**has clearly asked us to take on. Today, evaluate what you have left undone and what you need to do to complete His call for your life.**

### **Read Isaiah 22**

**But the LORD of hosts revealed Himself to me, "Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven you until you die," says the Lord GOD of hosts. Isaiah 22:14**

Did you know that the average American has eight credit cards? What in the world are we thinking?! People want what they can't afford, so they use these magical cards at the store and suddenly the merchandise is theirs. But when the bills come, and come, and come for months and even years on that credit card, the purchase becomes a lot less important. Many people have decided to stop using their credit cards on a regular basis, and that's a great idea. But, they still have to pay the bill. That doesn't just go away because they now have made the right choice.

I wanted to write on this verse because I thought there could be a question about God's forgiveness in this circumstance. He says they will not be forgiven until they die, but don't miss that they will be forgiven. The word "forgiven" here doesn't easily translate into English from the Hebrew. It literally means "separated from us." My feeling is that the people are forgiven, and that God is referring to the consequences of their actions. Judah may feel that God has forgotten them, but some sins have consequences that go beyond the forgiveness of God. They are bills that still have to be paid. I think it's similar to the generation of Israel that passed away in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. I think just like then, these consequences were going to remain as a reminder to the younger ones who were watching. **Have you asked forgiveness for something, but you're still feeling the effects of your bad choice? That doesn't mean that you haven't been forgiven, but God is allowing the consequences for some reason. You need to talk to Him about what that is and what He wants you to learn from this situation. How could you be teaching others?**

### **Read Isaiah 23**

**Is this your jubilant *city*, whose origin is from antiquity, whose feet used to carry her to colonize distant places? Isaiah 23:7**

9/11 was one of those events that you just don't anticipate. We had seen death and destruction overseas for years and we had come to expect it there. As I watch old movies and television shows I see the World Trade Center towers featured prominently on the New York skyline. It was a difficult day to live through, and a tough day to believe. It was on that day that I realized this nation of mine wasn't so invincible after all.

Tyre was the New York City of its day. It was a trade city right on the Mediterranean and wickedness was as available as trade. Tyre was a relief to weary sailors and a place that many thought would stand continually. It was built both on the coast and on an island that was far enough away from shore that it could not simply be reached by swimming out to

it. However Tyre faced a double destruction. Here in Isaiah 23, the Chaldeans (or Babylonians) were going to destroy the city itself. Some 200 years later, Alexander the Great would use the ruins of that city and throw them into the sea to build a bridge out to the island, which he subsequently destroyed as well. **Many of us are counting on things that have given no promise of tomorrow. I see non-marriage relationships break up, and people treated them as if they would last forever. I've seen people who appeared to be in the prime of life suddenly have their lives give out. God is the only guarantee. He does what He says He'll do. It's the only thing we have to count on in life. Start trusting in Him, otherwise when the things of this earth fail, you will have a difficult time coping with the loss of a world that should not be your first love.**

#### **Isaiah 24**

##### **Terror and pit and snare confront you, O inhabitant of the earth. Isaiah 24:17**

Floyd Collins was a spelunker from Kentucky who's family actually owned some tourist caves. Collins was called the "best cave explorer ever known." He knew how to investigate and explore caves, and he attempted to find an alternate entrance into Sand Cave that belonged to his family. While exploring it his lamp went out and a small boulder fell on his leg, pinning him inside the cave. Efforts were made to get Collins out, who was only trapped 150 from the entrance of the cave. Soon media attention was turned towards him and at one point as many as 10,000 people were at the entrance, some selling hot dogs, souvenirs, and making it a carnival atmosphere. Eventually, Collins died in that cave after nearly a week. The rock that pinned him was only 26 pounds, but was angled in such a way that rescuers simply could not get him out. It took 2 months after he died for his body to finally be recovered.

I'm sure that Collins entered that cave confident of his ability to get out. He didn't anticipate any trouble, but trouble was all he found. We don't like to think about it, but there are pits constantly laid out for us. At this time, pits were often large holes dug in the ground that were covered with vegetation from around the area in the hopes that an animal might fall in unsuspecting. We must always be ready for the traps and schemes of the devil. I often pray that God will prepare me for the day by giving me wisdom to see the traps that are being laid for me. I ask for wisdom to see the temptation before it even comes upon me. **Do you find yourself falling into pits and traps and then getting mad at yourself for falling to that same sin again? Ask for wisdom to see the sin before it even approaches. Prepare yourself to stand against the sin that so easily entangles you by praying specifically about it. You don't just have to pray for sin after it's over. Pray for it before it even gets a chance to start and that you will see the exit that God has provided for you when the temptation comes. God always provides a way of escape.**

#### **Read Isaiah 25**

**O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; for You have worked wonders, plans *formed* long ago, with perfect faithfulness. Isaiah 25:1**

I always get nervous when I'm getting ready to take my family somewhere. We're headed off to a weekend of fun in Pittsburgh this week, and I start to wonder if we're going to have problems. Will it be tough to find a place to park near the stadium? Will everything be all right with our hotel? The reason I worry and wonder, is because I've had plans before that didn't work out as well as I would have liked them to. Despite attempting to plan ahead, my plans were thwarted by bad hotels and less than desirable conditions.

The wonderful thing about our God is that He's never taken by surprise. There's nothing that has or will happen in your life that God was not fully aware of beforehand. How does that make you feel? Some people see that as a level of control that they are not fully comfortable with. Others see it as a reassurance that they are not alone in their day to day lives. I think it all comes back to Jesus. Jesus dying on the cross was the plan before the earth was even created. He knew the Garden of Eden would not last, but it was created to show us that even in a Utopian setting, we choose sin. Now the birth, life and death of Jesus required hundreds of prophecies to all be fulfilled, which they were and as a result, the death and resurrection of Jesus gives us hope that we can truly be forgiven of our sins and have eternal life. So if God can pull off that plan for all humanity, don't you think He probably has the best plans for your life? **Are you asking Him to make you aware of what those plans are? Are you ignoring the plans because they don't line up with what you think they should be? No matter what you might choose for yourself, if your choices are not the choices of God, your life will not be in order. The heartache in our lives usually comes from sinful moments that we choose our plans over His. Are you ready to leave heartache behind, and seek out what He has specifically designed for you? Then pray about it!**

### **Read Isaiah 26**

**Open the gates, that the righteous nation may enter, the one that remains faithful.  
Isaiah 26:2**

I was talking with the mother of a teenager I had been counseling. His life was a mess, full of addictions, lies, and a long list of ungodly choices. I spoke with the young man and asked Him about Jesus. He had all the Sunday School answers, and he knew what it meant to be saved, but there was no fruit in his life to prove that he had ever gone beyond head knowledge. I was talking to the mother about this later and she said, "Oh, I know he's saved." Really? I'm not sure if she knew he was saved, or wanted to believe that he was. But, there was nothing in his life since the day he prayed a prayer that proved he had any commitment to Jesus Christ.

I find it interesting that as the return of God's people is celebrated, you see two words coming together. What made the righteous nation righteous? Their faithfulness. We know that our righteousness as believers comes through Jesus Christ, and it is nothing of ourselves. But in order to receive that righteousness from Him, we must pledge our faithfulness to Him. We don't ask people to "try Jesus" if nothing else has worked. We are telling people that no one else can do what Jesus can in their lives. We don't try Jesus, but we put our complete trust in Him. **Are you a faithful Christian? Do you seek the wisdom of God in hard times, or just push on the best you know how? Are you**

**going long stretches without prayer or being in the Word of God consistently? Are you sharing your faith with those around you who have no hope? To be righteous, we are to be faithful. Let us ask forgiveness for those times we have been faithless, and that we would instead live everyday knowing and believing that God has plans for every day of our lives that we must pay attention to.**

### **Read Isaiah 27**

**"Or let him rely on My protection, let him make peace with Me, let him make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5**

As I learned more about history it became clear to me how much can change over the course of a generation or two. I grew up in a world where Japan and Germany were our friends. My grandparents did not. It's interesting to see nations that were once locked in a desperate struggle for control and survival have now become allies against evil elsewhere in the world. People prefer peace over war. My hope is that the generations who fought those wars taught their children that while conflict is sometimes necessary, it should be avoided at all costs.

The Bible makes it clear that we have to make peace with God. No matter what my standing is with Him now through Jesus Christ, it doesn't change the fact that I was once an enemy of God. I did my own thing, served my own will, and ignored Him until something really major came up in my life. As Christians, we have made peace with God through His Son. **Do you know some folks around you who are not at peace with God? Perhaps they blame Him for a personal tragedy. Perhaps they see God as the one who could make their lives better, but chooses not to. We are in the business of reconciliation. As Christians we have the opportunity to bring people into friendship with God. Even though they are His enemies, He still loves them. He still has a desire for them. Let us look at people who are hostile towards our faith and towards our God, as people that God is still reaching out for through us who carry the message of Jesus.**

### **Read Isaiah 28**

**Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone *for* the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed. Isaiah 28:16**

Picking out my classes in college was tough for the first couple of years. I knew roughly which classes to take, but when I would try to sign up for a class that was already full, I didn't always know what to do next. I worried that I would be signing up for the wrong class or doing something to slow down my time towards graduation. Then I finally got a good advisor. I had one before, but not a good one that cared about me. He sat me down and helped me line out exactly which specific classes I would be taking over my final years, and showed me alternate classes in the event that some on my list had already been filled up. It certainly made my life a lot easier to have that direction from him.

God has been making it clear to these nations that they have no promise of stability. If they are violating the laws of God, then He was going to keep turning them upside down. But God promises the delivery of a cornerstone. We don't think about it as much now, since cornerstones in our day are just to put the date of the building on. But in this day and age, people knew that if your cornerstone was weak, then the whole building was in jeopardy. These nations were in jeopardy because they had a weak point. The cornerstone that God is speaking of is not some large piece of granite, but the person of Jesus Christ. These nations took on other advisors, but God wanted them to see that no one cared for them like He did. When He comes into our lives, we may still experience discipline for our wayward actions, but God does not remove and exile us as He did with these nations. Why? **Because we have made a commitment to Him through Jesus Christ, and God is fully committed to those who have given their commitment to Him. I know you feel times in your life that there is a lot of instability, but think about how much worse it could be. Don't just thank God for what He's done in your life, but thank Him also for what He's helped you to avoid in your life. Thank Him for the things you worried about that never came. He has established stability in our lives, and we need to live out that stability on a daily basis.**

### **Read Isaiah 29**

**Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, and whose deeds are *done* in a dark place, and they say, "Who sees us?" or "Who knows us?" Isaiah 29:15**

I am terrible at keeping secrets. In ministry you have to keep people's secrets which isn't much of a challenge due to their private nature. But, having fun secrets is tough for me. When my wife was getting ready to fly home from Peru, she thought someone else was picking her up from the airport. Instead, I decided that the kids and I would greet her there at the end of her 10-day trip. One day while emailing me, she asked if I knew who would be picking me up, and I indicated I did know. Despite my intentions of not telling her it was me, I blew it and spoiled the surprise. She said she was excited to know ahead of time, but I still think it would have been better if she had walked down to baggage and then seen us there.

Sometimes we hide plans from other people for a good reason. But when we hide our plans from God, we are usually going in the wrong direction. Now the obvious question is, "Can you really hide your plans from God?" No, but you can try. This passage is giving more of an indication that you are leaving God out of the decision making process. You have a plan that needs to be made, and you never pray about it. You never seek godly wisdom. You just put it together and do it, mainly because you know God's not going to be supportive of your actions. So you attempt to hide them, but hiding your plans will not allow you to have what you want. The Devil is a liar and he will tell you that this secret plan will give you what you've been hoping for, but it's a lie. You might get what you want in the short run, but the long-run guilt and other consequences are never worth it. **The Devil is not around for your benefit. So what plans are you hiding from God? What situations are you trying to keep His hands off of? The**

**more you work alone and on your own, the better your chances of ending up in a valley of disappointment that you'll wish you had never wandered into.**

### **Read Isaiah 30**

**Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him. Isaiah 30:18**

I received a tremendous blessing yesterday from someone, and all they did was ask a question. They were reading in Romans 7 about how Paul has things he wants to do and doesn't want to do, and yet he gets them mixed up. There are times that his spiritual priorities, that are very important to him, somehow get pushed to the back and his selfish, fleshly priorities reign instead. I needed a reminder that I'm not the only one who gets defeated at times. I was feeling low because over the last few days, my prayer life felt full of holes. I didn't feel I was connecting with God, and I knew part of it was somehow my own efforts. So this was a great reminder to me that we are forgiven by God. He is not quick to forget us when we are spiritually weak, but He is quick to show us compassion and grace when we are ready to receive it.

I think that sometimes my view of God from before salvation still hangs with me. I didn't know Him in a personal way, and I believed that He existed as the judge of the universe. The people of Isaiah's day knew of a God, but many of them lacked a personal relationship with Him, as evidenced by the discipline that God had to bring upon them. The thing to remember about God is that in the midst of punishment, His compassion and grace never vanish. He chastises us in the hope of bringing us to repentance and a desire to remain closer to Him than even before. **Are you feeling sorry for your sin? Are you feeling as if God has no further desire for you? Remember that He is a God of compassion and grace. He didn't save you because of how great you were, but because of how great He is! He saves people who do not deserve it, and holds onto them as they live lives that continue to prove they don't deserve it. I'm not who I was before Jesus, but I'm not who I want to be yet either. In those moments that selfishness reigns in me, God's compassion and grace will be waiting for me as I realize my sin and turn from it on a daily basis.**

### **Read Isaiah 31**

**For in that day every man will cast away his silver idols and his gold idols, which your sinful hands have made for you as a sin. Isaiah 31:7**

Early in my Christian life, I was sorry for my sins that I committed. There were some sins in my life that had been there a long time, and I was beginning to learn how wrong and destructive they were to me. So I attempted to let God know that I didn't want to be that person, but saying sorry just isn't enough. When I would fall into the same sinful pit the next time, I would say sorry all over again. But, I wasn't doing anything to make a change. I wasn't removing the temptations, or preparing myself to win against the sin that was coming to knock on my door. Realizing that repentance meant that I said sorry and then worked against the sin was an important step in my walk with Jesus.

God says there will be a day that his people stop trusting in everything and everyone but Him. We are definitely like that today. We may genuinely love God, but we save prayer for a last resort. We don't leave sin alone until it's burned us so bad that we may be dealing with long-term consequences. God says in the day that His people return, they will cast away their idols that they made with their own hands. These idols were sin, and had been crafted by the very people of God. I'm sure there was some attachment, because they put the effort into these things to make them beautiful. But ultimately, these were just ugly reminders of what happens when God is not first in your life. **So what sins are you crafting with your hands? What sins are you actually working to have happen in your life? You cannot keep saying sorry while you continue to plan out ways to sin. You must leave behind whatever it is, and perhaps your sin requires drastic steps. Take them, otherwise God will take them for you and you will have to deal with His unavoidable discipline, and a lot of shame.**

### **Read Isaiah 32**

**No longer will the fool be called noble, or the rogue be spoken of as generous. Isaiah 32:5**

Rick Pitino is not noble. After being a basketball coach for 30 years, by his own admission he teaches honesty and integrity to his players. Recently it came out that a few years ago, this married father of five had a one night stand with a woman at a restaurant after hours. He was fully aware of what he was doing and even had a coaching assistant with him at the time. When the woman later tried to extort money out of him to keep the secret, Pitino went to the police. So over a few days details began to come out, including the fact that Pitino paid her \$3000 to pay for an abortion when she told him she was pregnant. But, fans say there is no reason for him to go and that he's a stand up guy, even noble, because he took care of the situation.

It's amazing to me that in our culture fools and rogues can gain any respect amongst their peers. People desperately try to hide their sins and then when they admit what they were caught for, we're supposed to respect that? What about the people who reject the temptation in the first place, or those who readily admit and repent? It seems that we hold up the people who admit their mistakes after the fact, but those who admit right away don't gain any ground in this society. **We do not become noble or generous by selfish ways. We become noble by showing integrity, even in the toughest of circumstances. We prove our generosity when we give without recognition. Are you quick to admit your mistakes? Are you willing to admit your sins outright to the Lord? Are you willing to serve Him, even without the recognition of others? (Don't be too quick to answer that one...think about how you serve.) Are you willing to give encouragement to those who repent immediately and admit their mistakes towards you?**

### **Read Isaiah 33**

**For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; He will save us—Isaiah 33:22**

The founding fathers of our country were brilliant men. I'm pretty sure I could have never come up with many of the great things that they included in our constitution that are still with us today. One of their best ideas was the idea of checks and balances. The Legislative, Executive and Judicial branch each have the ability to check each other and maintain a regular balance of power. At least that was the intention. Unfortunately, the Judicial branch has gained more power than was intended for it due to life terms by judges and the inability to overrule their decisions in either the Executive or Legislative branches.

I think it's marvelous to see that we have a God that checks himself. He is our judge and has every right to determine the discipline that should be administered due to our actions. He is the lawgiver and has determined what is right and wrong. He is our king, and has the complete authority to make any decision. And despite the fact that God is everything, and so far above us, it is He who saves us. He made the rules, and as judge He sees our successful and sinful responses to them. He is the king, because His authority was established when He created everything! And in spite of all of this, He will save us. **He knows who you are. He knows what you do. He knows what you think, and yet He is the only one who can save you. Even though others around you may not think you're worth much, He always has, does and will. How about thanking God today for His willingness to save you despite your completely unworthiness to be saved? I know it's the greatest joy of my heart to know that a perfect God has loved this imperfect person.**

### **Read Isaiah 34**

**Thorns will come up in its fortified towers, nettles and thistles in its fortified cities; it will also be a haunt of jackals and an abode of ostriches. Isaiah 34:13**

Where I grew up in the Midwest, old houses weren't a rare occurrence. The area I grew up was full of them, but they all had a common theme: they were dilapidated. Some were rumored to be from the mid 1800's, but they were always missing roofs, and had as many weeds growing in the living room as they did in the yard. So it's been different now to live in the Northeast where old homes are just a part of life. But, here they don't have weeds in the living room. I've walked into many of these old homes, and been impressed how they have stood the test of time with some well over 100 years old.

So why do some homes decay and others remain? Effort. Someone abandoned those homes in the Midwest and the surrounding countryside was happy to reclaim the property. Here in Isaiah 34 we see that even fortified cities, once abandoned, can have the same fate. God makes it clear that if He desires for someone to be defeated, they will be. They may have the greatest fortifications, but that can never stand up against God. **How is your life looking? Are the walls up, but there are weeds in the living room? Sometimes we put our faith a little lower on our priorities, and the weeds of life begin to creep in. Old habits and new sins find their way into the space that was filled with the forgiveness of Jesus. We must take care that we never allow our faith**

**to become an afterthought. We must be ready to stand and take care of the faith that we have been entrusted with. We must actively pursue a closer relationship with our God. A house without a roof isn't much of a house. And a Christian without a strong faith isn't much of a Christian. What areas of life do you need to work on and resist the dilapidation of the world?**

### **Read Isaiah 35**

#### **Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Isaiah 35:3**

World Changers is a youth mission organization that takes students for one week to several places inside and outside of the United States. The purpose is to help those who have sub-standard living conditions while also meeting the spiritual needs of the residents. Students are divided into crews to cover the different works sites during the week, and there are special jobs within the crews. My favorite was that of Crew Encourager. The purpose was to watch for kids who were quicker to give up than to press on. Many of these kids had never shingled a roof or built a deck before, and sometimes they were hesitant. My job was to encourage them in their work and to keep their energy and spirits up. It was great when at the end of the week, students would tell me that I helped them to keep working when they didn't really want to.

Isaiah here is sharing that after all the trials and defeats are over, the people are now victoriously walking to Zion. I like this passage because of the imagery. Even though God's people as a whole were being blessed, God's people are always made up of individuals. They were to think of those around them as well. When it says to encourage the exhausted, the word exhausted literally means those who's hands are hanging down. It doesn't mean they're lazy, but they simply feel no ability to continue doing what they are supposed to, even in a moment of victory. Even as Christians, we are walking in ultimate eternal victory, but sometimes we still get beat up by the world on a day-to-day basis and it's as if we are hand droppers. **It's time we start looking around for people to encourage, instead of waiting on others to encourage us first. Would I like to be encouraged more? Sure, everyone would. But, if I attempt to be an encouraging person to others, the likelihood is that others will encourage me too as a result. And don't ignore the encouragement of the Lord. There will be times He's telling you to do something that you're just not sure you can. If God has called you to it, He's going to get you through it. So who's day could you make by letting them know what a good job they are doing?**

### **Read Isaiah 36**

**'Beware that Hezekiah does not mislead you, saying, "TheLORD will deliver us." Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Isaiah 36:18**

Stonewall Jackson was an example to his men. During the Civil War, Jackson was known as a brilliant commander, but that's not why he's remembered. At the first battle of Bull

Run, the Confederate lines began to fall apart and men were running away. However Jackson and his brigade were holding firm. This prompted a Confederate general to yell at the runaways that Jackson was still standing like a "stone wall". Apparently the example served well, and the Confederates not only returned to the line, but turned back the Union advance. This caused many to put their trust in Jackson as their leader, until he died from complications of pneumonia. His death was a major blow to Confederate morale. They had believed in this stonewall, which was now crumbled. Robert E. Lee wrote that he wished for the good of the Confederacy that it had been him who was stricken instead of Jackson.

Leaders ask us to put our trust in them all time. Political candidates tell us that if we just trust them, they know what to do. I've always wondered why a Presidential candidate doesn't just admit that they have no idea about the situation in a particularly obscure nation. But, they fake it in order to give the impression that they fully grasp everything. Hezekiah had asked the people to trust him, but there was a difference in trusting him over many leaders. Hezekiah trusted in the Lord and not in his own abilities to keep his people safe. Perhaps it was people understanding the king's trust which caused them to do as Hezekiah asked in the face of a large and dangerous Assyrian army. **Who do you put your trust in? Who do they put their trust in? I trust my wife as she home-educates our children, because I know that her trust is in the Lord. If affects everything she does as a mother and teacher. We should desire godly leaders in every situation. And in some cases, God may be asking us to be that leader. Let us be sure that we don't place our trust in people who have placed their trust in only themselves.**

### **Read Isaiah 37**

**'For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.' Isaiah 37:35**

Early in my Christian life I was an "issues Christian". I liked to debate (yell at people) regarding issues such as same sex marriage, political scandals, and abortion. I must have talked about these issues hundreds of time, but the gospel rarely came out of my mouth. I always seemed to be angry at someone over their ungodly point of view. One day I was talking to my Dad about this and he asked me, "Why are you getting into these arguments?" I told him that I was trying to defend God and His Word. He responded by saying, "Why do you think that God needs you to defend Him?" That took me down a peg. I was arguing for myself, and not for God.

Why does God do the things that He does? It always comes back to Him. Not because He's an ego maniac, but because He's worthy of such attention. Anyone who places their attention elsewhere, has also placed their eternity elsewhere. We saw yesterday that it is important to follow a leader who follows THE LEADER. Hezekiah was such a man, and his ultimate desire was for God. As a result, since God was being fully trusted, He protected Judah for His name's sake, but also for the sake of David? What does David have to do with it? God made a promise to him that would not be fulfilled until the time of Jesus. By rescuing Judah in this moment, God was keeping His promise to a person

who wasn't even alive anymore. **Is your day today going to be for God's name? Will you pay attention to your words and actions, remembering that they reflect on you and the God you serve? Especially amongst lost people today who know of your faith, we have an obligation to not act fake but to act in faith. Defending my faith is fine, and there is no problem with that. But my God needs no defense. One day me and the people I argue with will pass away and God will still be here. Today ask God to help you remember that everything you do today should be done for Him. The way you speak to your boss, treat your spouse, and perform your daily to do list are not separated from your relationship with the Lord.**

### **Read Isaiah 38**

**"Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. Isaiah 38:5**

I was in 9th grade band class when we had a substitute teacher. I was always respectful to substitutes, but for some reason my friends were really making fun of this one. So I started in as well, and had to be reminded by the sub to be quiet a couple of times. Finally, he pointed at me and told me to go to the Principal's office. Mr. Denbow was the new principal and everyone was afraid of him. Our school allowed teachers to give swats with a paddle, and all accounts said that Mr. Denbow loved to give them. I had never heard of someone going to his office who wasn't rubbing their behind when they got back. So I came to his office and he had me sit down and I started crying. He asked why I was in the office, and I told him what I had done and how I hadn't listened to the substitute. He offered me a Dr. Pepper out of his mini-fridge and then we just talked. After about five minutes he asked if I had learned my lesson on respect, and I assured him that I had. Going into that office, swats should have been a done deal, but for some reason Mr. Denbow gave me a reprieve.

Hezekiah needed a reprieve as well. He has just gotten news that his sickness is going to take his life and he should prepare to die. Hezekiah doesn't yell or argue with Isaiah the messenger, but instead goes directly to God. He reminds God of the way he has lived and served his nation. We don't have any record of him actually asking for a healing, but perhaps those words came out in his heavy sobbing at the end of verse 3. He must have asked for healing though because God sends Isaiah back to tell Hezekiah that his prayer has been heard and that he will live another 15 years. So why does God tell the guy that he will not live, and then allow him to live? Let's not over complicate the issue. Hezekiah had a serious issue and he took it to the Lord. He didn't rush in the best doctors or try to fix the problem on His own. He went straight to the One who held control over his life and asked for a different future. And God granted it to him. I think part of it may have been that Hezekiah's concern wasn't just for his own life, but that of his people. Assyria was still waiting in the wings to try to take down Judah, and Hezekiah probably didn't want to leave his people without a leader. **Is there a situation in your life that seems to be a foregone conclusion? Have you accepted that conclusion or have you spoken to God about it? I think the reminder is that what may appear hopeless to us is completely under the control and authority of God. In essence we are making our**

**difficulty a god, because we are giving it control of our lives. What "impossible" situation have you failed to bring before the God of the entire universe?**

### **Read Isaiah 39**

**Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "For there will be peace and truth in my days." Isaiah 39:8**

When I was in high school my parents gave me all my lunch money for the month. It broke down to \$2 a day, which should have been sufficient. The school lunch was only about 65 cents, but I didn't want to eat school lunch. Our school allowed us to eat off campus, so I would go to Taco Bell a lot, but every once in a while I would go to Burger King and get a Whopper meal. The problem with this is that at the end of the month, I started to run out of money. Sometimes I made decisions without thinking about how they would affect me down the road, but that was always a valuable lesson to me on paying consequences in the future.

Every time I read this, I find myself unable exactly how to take it. We see two statements, one on Hezekiah's lips and one in his mind. He hears that his wealth and even his sons will be carried off many years later, and he says it's good because he thinks it means that things will be fine until after he dies. This would be of no comfort to me and I believe I would attempt to undo what I had already done. Hezekiah wasn't prepared to pay for the future consequences of his actions, and as a result he didn't care that the consequences would fall on someone else. **Are you willing to choose sin because you think you can avoid the consequences? There may be sometimes that you do, but the consequences always fall on someone. Consequences come for a reason, because they are designed to remind us that sin is stupid. It gives little of what we want, and a lot of what we don't. We expect reward, but we get regret. What sins are you trying to avoid the consequences of? Instead of avoiding the consequences of your sin, why not try to avoid the sin instead?**

### **Read Isaiah 40**

**Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary. Isaiah 40:31**

Have you ever felt your muscles beginning to burn when you're running or exercising? That's because as you exercise your body begins to create lactic acid. Some people think that this has long-term negative effects on the body, but there is no proof of that. As you continue to press on without a break, the acid continues to build and you may really feel that your muscles are burning. So how do you get rid of it? Take a break. As you breathe and oxygen enters your body more easily, the acid breaks up and you are able to start all over again.

Israel needs new strength. They need newness as a nation and we see Isaiah speak of the coming of John the Baptist who would declare the news of Jesus before His arrival. And how do the people of God gain strength? By waiting on the Lord. God often does the opposite of what you would imagine, just as the acid dissipates while we rest. We are strongest when we feel weakest and weakest when we feel strongest. God uses the foolish people of the world to shame the wise. And new strength doesn't come through our own efforts, but through the efforts of our God. I know that many times I'm not good at waiting and I sometimes run ahead of what God desires. I usually find myself sitting around later waiting for God to do what He chooses to do, or I have to walk back to where He actually wanted me. **How do you gain strength? Do you finally get still and pray or do you continue to work looking for your own solutions. The strength of God is totally sufficient, so if you find yourself getting tired and unable to do all that you feel you're supposed to, then you have reached a good stopping point. Ask God today to help you be patient and to trust in His strength instead of your own.**

### **Read Isaiah 41**

**But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend, Isaiah 41:8**

Many of my friendships in life have been accidental. It probably wasn't until college that I ever worked to make friends with people that I found interesting. My best friend in elementary school sat next to me on the last day of school in 3rd grade and starting talking to me. We were buds by the end of the day and stayed that way until I moved in 9th grade. Then in my new town a kid came over to my house where I was playing basketball in my driveway. He asked if he could play, and from then on Danny and I played basketball, wiffleball or football almost everyday for 3 years. This was just a pattern where friendship had to be started by others because I didn't think that people really wanted to be my friend. Honestly, I'm still that way a little bit even today.

People who say the God of the Old Testament isn't the same God of the New Testament, haven't read the OT for themselves. Here is a perfect example of the compassion and love of God being shown to an entire nation. Judah's preservation as a nation was coming as a result of a promise that God made to a friend. He told Abraham that a nation would come forth from him and that as a result all nations would be blessed. That ultimate blessing was through Jesus Christ. Why was God a friend to Abraham? Because Abraham wanted Him to be. **God doesn't only befriend spiritual giants, because Abraham certainly had his sin issues. But God does call us friends when we choose to live our lives for Him. He cares for you in a way that none of your earthly friends ever will. Have you been feeling a bit distant from God lately? One of the great reminders for me as a believer is that God is worthy of all my worship and He is one to be feared. But in the midst of all that, God still desires a friendship with me. And that's why I can repent because I know I'm confessing my failures to someone who will never cease to love me.**

### **Read Isaiah 42**

**I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images. Isaiah 42:8**

I am so tired of the confusion that surrounds my name. Having the name Heath hasn't always lead to the clearest introductions when I've met new people. Heath has been mistaken as Ethen, Keith, Pete, Steve, and Henry once. It's so frustrating, especially now that my name has become more common and people still can't seem to get it straight. Even people I have known for a while will occasionally call me "Keith". I just want to say, "That's not my name!", and then call them by the wrong name. Wow, maybe I need some counseling about this.

Whenever you see an English bible with the word LORD capitalized it represents the actual name of God. The letters are YHUH and it's spelled out in many ways including Jehovah or Yaveh. While in English we are pretty flippant to attempt to pronounce or say God's name, the Jews would never do this. In fact, no one is completely certain on how to try to pronounce it. But when the commandment says not to take the name of the Lord in vain, I don't think it refers to us saying the English word "God". I think it refers to those who attempt to use the unpronounceable name of God. However, the name does indicate the unique Lordship of God. No one else can claim the position and authority of God. Even though the AntiChrist will seem to come close during the tribulation, his fall at the hands of God will prove that ultimately he does not deserve such a title. No one else deserves our praise and attention like God does, because of the uniqueness of who He is. **Yesterday we talked about God being our friend, but He is also our Lord. God knows where the line between discipline and friendship exists. He is the only one who can love perfectly while being displeased with our actions. Ascribe to the Lord the uniqueness of who He is today. Recognize in your own mind and words that you serve a God who is unique. He is not like any of your other friends, and there are mysteries about Him that will never be comprehended.**

**Read Isaiah 43**

**You have bought Me not sweet cane with money, nor have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices; Rather you have burdened Me with your sins, you have wearied Me with your iniquities. Isaiah 43:24**

(I ultimately chose this verse today because of God saying He was burdened by our sins, and I want to explain it. However, I find verse 10 to be fascinating because it is God's answer to the question "Who created God?") My children are of an age that they are starting to do more things for themselves, but they're not completely independent yet. I see new parents and how overwhelmed they are by these needy little munchkins. But then something happens as they grow older: they begin to actually do stuff! It's so nice to see my kids no longer just ask for stuff, but to show care in return. Maybe they ask if they can give me a back rub that I didn't ask for or they volunteer to wash windows or clean the bathroom for Mommy. Those are small things, but I enjoy knowing that my children are givers and not just takers.

There is a lot in this chapter about sin and forgiveness. God indicates that He is Savior (verse 3) providing an Old Testament proof that Jesus is God. He also says in verse 25 that He will wipe out sins and remember them no more. So what does He mean here in verse 24 when God says that He is burdened and wearied by their sins? Notice the first part of the verse. The people have been unreliable in bringing their offerings to the Lord. They are simply bringing their problems while offering nothing in return. God doesn't forgive us on the merit of the kind of lives we live or the way we ask for forgiveness, but simply because of who Jesus is. However, a person who has given their life to the Savior doesn't just ask what God can do for him or her, but what we as believers can offer back to Him. **God was not tired of people asking for forgiveness, but instead He was tired of the selfishness that showed up in the way they asked. When you ask for forgiveness do you do so as if it's a right? Do you demand from God, but rarely allow Him to demand from you? The simple fact that we have the ear of the Creator of the universe should be enough of a reminder that when He desires to have our ear, that we would give it. Let's listen as much or less than we talk when praying. Often God speaks to me His will in the silence of my prayer times.**

#### **Read Isaiah 44**

**'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced *it* to you and declared *it*? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any *other* Rock? I know of none.' Isaiah 44:8**

What do we fear most? Usually, it's the unknown. There are so many issues in life that are unknown to us. We worry about the development of our unborn children. We worry about the job that we so desperately need. We just worry about the future in general. And while we don't always carve our idols out of wood, we certainly have them. Dare I say that some of us have set worry up as an idol? We worry about the future more than we thank God for the past. I have to remind myself that there is so much behind me that God has already carried me through, the future is no different.

God is not confined by time and He sees perfectly His plans for us as one plan and not various pieces scattered about. Is there really any other God besides Him? God's question is valid. Why do we worry? Just because we have not heard from God in the way we would like doesn't mean that He is ignorant of our situation. And who are the witnesses against fear? God's people. If one of us is living in fear, then another of us should be living in remembrance and reminding our brothers and sisters in Christ of God's work in the past on our behalf. Remember that God is your Rock. **There is no one like Him, and you have evidence in your life of that. Even if you are a new Christian, remember how amazing it was to you that God was willing to forgive you in spite of who you were. Yes, remember that God. That is the God you serve, and He's still prepared to amaze you.**

#### **Read Isaiah 45**

**I have not spoken in secret, in some dark land; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'seek Me in a waste place'; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, declaring things that are upright. Isaiah 45:19**

When I was growing up in Jr. High and High School especially, I always knew where the juiciest information was. It wasn't in the school newspaper, which was always a joke. I hope that no student has ever tried to show their school newspaper writings when trying to get a job in journalism one day. The place to get information was in the corners of hallways or whispered in front of open lockers. It may have not always been true, but it was certainly always interesting. The best news was always the secret hidden news of those in the know.

I often have people ask how they can find God's will for their lives. One of the first things I tell them is that the Bible has specific places where God reveals a general will for all believers (Romans 12:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17). Regarding God's specific will for us, there seems to be a belief that we pray to know God's specific will for our lives, and then we have to wait a long time to find it out. The problem with this line of thinking is that God's will doesn't come in spurts. He has a will and plans for you everyday, so if you're asking you need to also be listening. Isaiah 45:19 says that God doesn't keep His words a secret or hide them in the dark. He wants you to know His will, but you have to ask Him. Don't just tell others that you wish you knew God's will, but ask Him as well. **Are you asking for His will or just complaining that you don't know it? God has no desire to play hide-n-seek with you regarding His will for your life. You need to simply seek it out and then when He reveals it, you need to do it. Follow God's general will in Scripture that applies to everyone, and then His specific will for you will be much easier to see and understand.**

### **Read Isaiah 46**

**Even to *your* old age I will be the same, and even to *your* graying years I will bear *you!* I have done *it*, and I will carry *you*; and I will bear *you* and I will deliver *you*. Isaiah 46:4**

I spent a lot of time at my grandma's house in the summers of my childhood. It was a 4 bedroom house with a basement and I spent a lot of time playing inside and outside of that house. Over the last couple of years, I've gone back and noticed something: that house isn't as big as I remember it. I used to play basketball in the basement, but now I look around and wonder how there was ever room to do that. The bedrooms upstairs look small and cramped. Apparently things are just bigger when you're a kid. I wonder if the Grand Canyon seems more grand to an 8 year-old.

The more we live the more things change. Communications have vastly improved over just a decade. Cars, music, and even jobs aren't the same as they used to be. Humans are constantly changing, and often seem to crave it. So in this world where few things remain consistent, it's a comfort to know that the Lord does. God is able to save you and cover your sins. When you're breathing your dying breaths, it will still be true. His promises are sure and you can count on them. Why doesn't God change? Because He's already perfect. If God were to change it would eliminate some level of His perfection, and the God you

know today could be different tomorrow. **Have you thanked God for His unchangingness? I'm glad that God will not come to me tomorrow and tell me that the blood of Jesus is no longer enough for my sins. He will not ask me to work my way to Heaven. He will ask me to serve Him as Lord. He will not let you down, but He will lift you up. That's just who He is. Trust Him now like you did when you trusted Him to cover all your sins, in spite of how bad you knew your life was.**

### **Read Isaiah 47**

**You felt secure in your wickedness and said, 'No one sees me,' your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; For you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me.' Isaiah 47:10**

If I walk into a room and it really startles one of my children, I start looking around for the violation. My daughters love to have imaginary tea parties in their room, but for some reason imaginary liquid cramps their style. So they like to fill up the tea pot with water and bring it in their room, which they have been told is a no-no. I walked in one day when they were having a tea party and they sure looked worried to see me in there. So I walked over to the table and found water on it as well as in the tea pot and their cups. I guess they really thought they could just do whatever they wanted in the privacy of their room and no one would ever find out.

Privacy from people doesn't equal privacy from God. Babylon was a violent nation, and as they began to wrestle with their own violence, they decided that their sins were secret. Their own reasoning said that people really had no idea what was going on anyway, and so there was no reason to make a change. As believers in Jesus Christ we need to be careful to never make that mistake. How many husbands and wives or sons and daughters have brought great stress on their families by choosing sins that they thought would remain secret? How many churches and youth groups and Sunday School classes have been utterly shocked by the sinful choices of their members? We may reason that our sins aren't really sins or that they aren't really affecting anyone else. No matter what our excuse, that's all it is...an excuse. **What are you trying to hide from others? Are you trying to hide it from God? Sin that we hold onto never improves our lives in anyway. You may have reasoned in your heart why this isn't really sin or isn't a big deal, but the fact that you are trying to reason it away says a lot about your choice. Ask God to show you what sins you have allowed to remain and ask Him to remind you that you are never out of the presence of the living God.**

### **Read Isaiah 48**

**You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; and you have been called a rebel from birth. Isaiah 48:8**

People that grow up in church sometimes have too high of an opinion of themselves. One year we decided to do some surveys within our church to get people's testimonies of how they came to know Jesus Christ. Some of the surveys had clear indications that these people had given their lives to Jesus and knew Him in a personal way. But some of them didn't. I remember one survey from an elderly woman who wrote in her testimony that there wasn't a time that she didn't love God. Well that's not true. Even as a baby we love ourselves pretty selfishly, desiring our needs to be met at any and all times. Even my children who are now Christians and grew up in a Christian home, knew of Jesus, but they didn't always love Him. It was surprising to me that this person was unable or unwilling to write the fact that she was a sinner and had a time of separation from God.

We have been rebels from our birth. That's what is so sweet about salvation. You realize that despite all of your sins, there is a perfect God who still loves and wants you. None of us were open to Him from the beginning, but after a time we have the ability to make a decision for selflessness instead of selfishness. But who would you expect to have their ears closed to God? A non-believer for sure, but aren't there times that we close our ears? We hear what God is saying to us through the Bible, a concerned friend, or even a sermon and we take time to admit our sin. Then we rebel and justify. Remember that God came and saved us when we didn't deserve it. He continues to hold us in His saving hand although we still don't deserve it. **Let's thank Him today that He was so willing to save those who were truly enemies to Him. And let us not take for granted that because someone is in the church that they know the Savior. Let's get to know people and hear their testimonies. Even if they are saved, perhaps the Lord will show us ways to be an encouragement to one another. Let's stop living so disconnected from one another and let's truly know our brothers and sisters around us.**

### **Read Isaiah 49**

**And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength) Isaiah 49:5**

I had a friend named Adam who is just an awesome Christian. I met him in college and there was no doubt that his faith in Jesus Christ was the most important thing in his life. One evening our pastor had asked him to preach the sermon and it was powerful. Adam knew how to handle the Word of God and I found myself completely blessed and impressed. After the sermon was over, our pastor talked about how we may have a future preacher in our midst. But Adam just shrugged it off. He knew that wasn't his calling. Adam is now a doctor, and continues to do impressive work. And he continues to be a man serving God, despite the fact he doesn't do it behind a pulpit.

Isaiah knew that God had given him a task, specifically to bring God's people back to Him. Some people look at this and think that God mapped out Isaiah's life in such a way that he had no choice except to be a servant of God. But isn't every believer supposed to be a servant of God? Isn't it God's desire that every person on the planet would be saved, and therefore be His servant? We know that God has plans for each of us as individuals.

Don't you suppose that those plans all include some measure of Kingdom work? Perhaps you do it as a youth minister, teacher, police officer or stay at home mother. Does the vocation indicate someone's dedication or ability to serve God? Some of the people who have ministered most to me in my life are people that have never even contemplated being in the ministry. **What are God's plans for you life? Do you feel that you have a good grasp of what God wants you to do and where He wants you to go? Do you realize that those plans are going to include Kingdom work? Ask God to remind you that no matter where you are, who you are with, or what stage of life you are in, that you are His servant above all else. Let's remember that at our job, in our free time and with our families today.**

### **Read Isaiah 50**

**The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. Isaiah 50:4**

When I found out that we had to wake up at 4:30 am during basic training, I was not a happy camper. Even though we got to bed a lot times around 9:30 or 10:00, 4:30 just seemed to come way too early. So when 4:30 came around, one of us would turn on the barracks lights and start the task of getting everyone out of their bunks. People might be tired and not wanting to get up, but I always reminded them of one thing, "You don't want to be in your bunk when the drill sergeants show up." That usually got the sleep out of the eyes and the body out of the bed. They knew I was right, and that it would be better to just get up now.

There are lots of weary people out there. I hear people often say that they don't have enough time in their day to accomplish everything they need to. That's because we try to cram too much in. We live in a world of multi-tasking, instant communications, and portable offices. People are tired, and they need encouragement. I fear that we have all become so busy and so self-centered that we rarely have a moment to build relationships with people anymore. We facebook or twitter, but does that really communicate some level of care? Isaiah says that he has the tongue of disciples. He knew truths about God based on actively serving Him as a disciple. People need that kind of encouragement. They don't need academic words about God from the new best-seller, but they need people who are living a life of faith to encourage them based on having already gone through the same things. **Who are you encouraging as a disciple? That means when you see someone having a rough time you don't just share pop psychology, but you share Scripture. You share your testimony of going through something similar. If you having nothing to share from your faith with others, it's likely your faith is flat. Look for the weary around you. And if you are one of the weary, look for believers around you that you respect and try to follow the example of. If a believer came to me that I barely knew and asked for prayer and counsel regarding a situation they are currently going through, I would be humbled that they asked and happy to talk and pray with them. Most believers would.**

### **Read Isaiah 51**

**Lift up your eyes to the sky, then look to the earth beneath; For the sky will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not wane.**  
**Isaiah 51:6**

Albert Pujols may end up being the greatest baseball player of all time. His stats so far in his career mirror or best those of some of baseball's greatest names. As a Cardinal fan, if he ever went to play for another team I would be crushed. We all want him to finish his career in St. Louis. But what about when he's 50? Or 70? Will we still want Albert taking up a spot in the lineup everyday? While he may remain a Cardinal in our hearts after he retires, but there will come a day that he no longer plays for the team.

There is a great truth here in Isaiah 51:6: the salvation of the Lord is forever. We recognize that salvation is what allows us to move from earth to Heaven as a result of the forgiveness we receive from Jesus Christ. But, do you realize that after we've been there 10,000 years that the only reason we can remain there is because of Jesus? You'll be just as covered by the blood of Jesus Christ after you enter heaven as you are before entering. There will come a day that Albert is no longer really on the team, but that day will never come for us as believers. We do not gain merit as we enter Heaven, but enter on the merit of Jesus Christ alone. **Do you sometimes worry about the day you stand before the Lord? Do you sometimes wonder if your salvation is real? The fact that you would ask these questions indicates that you care about your relationship to God. But you are not just trusting Jesus for salvation at the moment of your death. His salvation rests on us for eternity and it has already begun. You will not be rescued at the moment of your death, because at the moment you gave your life to Jesus Christ you became an alien of the earth, just waiting for the moment that you will be where you finally belong. Thank Jesus today that His salvation is eternal. It's not something to wait on...it's something you possess through Him now.**

### **Read Isaiah 52**

**How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, "Your God reigns !" Isaiah 52:7**

My first ski experiences came with our church youth group. Our trips to various Colorado ski resorts are some of my favorite memories as a teenager. We would get up as quick as we could so we could literally ski all day. As the day started to wind down, we tried to be more aware of who was around us. We knew that as dinner time came rolling in, our youth leaders would start tracking us down and reminding us to wrap it up for the day. So if we got to the bottom of the mountain before dinner, we always tried to sneak back on the lift for one more run. It was such a downer when we were heading down the mountain and ran into a youth leader. Fun time was over.

While youth leaders may not bring good news on mountains, you can! This chapter is specifically referring to someone who came to Zion (Jerusalem) to announce the good news of God's restoration. Jerusalem was located amongst many high mountains, so it

was only accessible by its main roadways. As a result of the destruction of other nations, those roads were probably in very poor shape. So for someone to come declare good news, they would have traveled over the mountains to deliver it. What news is so important? The fact that "Your God reigns"! He is God even to those who have not recognized Him as such yet. **And do you know what mountains need to be scaled? Not just those that seem to separate neighbor from neighbor and keep us from sharing the gospel with those who live next to us, but we need to scale the literal mountains that surround people groups who have never heard. Have you considered serving God through missions? If God wants to use you in this way, it's likely that you've already had it in your mind. Maybe you've dismissed it because you don't know enough or live a good enough life to be a missionary. Maybe you decided it wasn't really God telling you, but just an emotional moment after a missionary presentation. You have good news of peace and happiness that many people around the world need. Someone has to tell them. Will you?**

### **Read Isaiah 53**

**All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. Isaiah 53:6**

I like to pay people back. When someone takes me out to lunch and pays my bill, I like to do the same for them within the next week or two. And if they refuse, it's really tough for me. Like many people, I don't want to feel that I owe anybody anything. Usually people choose to do something nice in order to simply bless you, but we live in a society where it's hard to accept kindness without trying to give something in return. We like to repay people for the good things they've done.

Not so with God. God gave us good things when He had absolutely no reason to. Isaiah says that all of us have turned to our own way. There are really only two choices in life: to turn to Jesus or to turn from Him. We may all turn our own way, but ultimately that means that we are turning from Him. And even though ALL OF US are wicked and selfish, the Father put that sin on His Son. Jesus Christ took your sin on the cross. He doesn't go back there when someone else decides to recognize Jesus as the Savior of their lives. He's already taken the punishment and offered the gift to anyone who accepts it. **You may know people who have turned steadfastly from the Lord, but are they really any different than you were before you were saved. They are choosing their own way, just as you and I did. Let's communicate to people not that Jesus wants to pay for their sins, but that He has PAID for their sins. All they have to do is let go of their life and place it firmly in the grip of a God who has loved them and saved them. And when we have moments that our sin disheartens us, let us remember that the sin is already paid for. Let's repent and be steadfast in following Him.**

### **Read Isaiah 54**

**"For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken," says the LORD who has compassion on you. Isaiah 54:10**

We're living in a "tough" economy right now. People are losing their homes and their jobs and there are certainly a lot of lives that are being shaken up right now. But as I drive around I wonder really how tough our economy is? We still have McDonalds. There are still busy theme parks. Malls don't seem to be dormant. People who lost their homes were often people that made poor decisions on using their home's equity or buying a home they could only barely afford. People are going through some tough times, but it's hard to say that it's absolutely surprising.

How do you deal with distractions? Do you recognize that's what they are? Sometimes we get so bogged down by the circumstances around us, that we lose sight of our own personal responsibility in the matters. We often bring the distractions upon ourselves without much help from anyone else as we find ourselves burned by our own discontentment. But in the midst of these difficult times, the Lord's love and peace do not disappear. He is still there waiting on you to call on Him. Not just to make the situation better, but to make you better and help you avoid your past. **When have you said that God left you? Do you look back on times that you seemed all alone and now can see that God was right there with you? I have some of those times, and it was hard to see then because of the self-pity I was wallowing in. I had to realize that God was just as powerful and just as concerned over me as in my good times.**

### **Read Isaiah 55**

**Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Isaiah 55:2**

If you were to receive a large sum of money, what plans would you make with it? If it were me, I would initially begin listing out all the things that I think I need that I have managed to live without for so long (New TV, Satellite, New Car). Then we might start thinking about paying down debt that has been weighing us down. Then we might think about saving some of it for a rainy day, which is a great idea. But do you see how quickly you would be inclined to think of me, myself and I? Would we give an initial thought to how God may want us to use this money for ministry? We might after a while, but how long would it take?

This passage doesn't mean that we can't buy things that aren't food. Many financial counselors will tell you to prioritize for food, shelter and clothing, but they rarely lead you towards the spiritual and eternal investments. My desire at one time was to have more money that I could buy more stuff with. Later I started to think about how I could bless ministry causes that God has laid on my heart. When we think of money, we think of our needs. We think of temporal things that will rust, break, or be put in a yard sale by our children one day. God has provided you with financial resources to take care of yourself and your family if you have one. But don't forget that you are a steward of what God gives you. Purchase your needs, but don't focus on your temporal wants over the spiritual. **If you find yourself struggling to handle your money responsibly, ask God to help you. Ask Him to give you reminders when you begin to spend your money on wants to the point that you may go into debt to supply your needs. God wants to**

**trust you with the small things (personal income) so that He can grow you and trust you with great work for His Kingdom's sake. It starts as simply as learning to buy what you need and avoiding what you don't.**

### **Read Isaiah 56**

**Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." Isaiah 56:7**

My wife recently returned from a trip to Peru, and after all the amazing experiences she had there, I felt fortunate that she chose to come back! The people of Peru were extremely receptive to the Gospel and she had many opportunities to introduce lost people to Jesus. One of my favorite stories came from another member of the team who said that during one evening, the mission team was worshipping with a local church. The back doors were left open and when the service had concluded about 30 people had walked into the church. When the mission team asked why these people had wandered in, the people said they walked by and heard such joy and saw such happiness that they had to come in and see why! As a result of that joy in worship and the prayer for the lost, some of these people came to know Jesus in a personal way that night.

Jesus actually quotes this passage when He drives the moneychangers from their tables in the temple. It is supposed to be a house of prayer, but it had been turned into a den of thieves. Most people think of prayer when they think of the church, but in actuality there just isn't enough prayer really going on. People are praying for themselves, or other members, but so rarely are they praying for the lost. And God says He will make His people joyful in His house of prayer. Joy and prayer should go together, but I rarely see that. We think the more serious we are, or the size of our prayer vocabulary may cause our prayers to carry more weight. Joy comes when you pray as led by the Holy Spirit and you see God's results. Not always the results you were hoping for, but it clearly is something that was brought about by a God who cares and who listens. **Is your house of worship a house of joy and prayer? If not, then what are you going to do about it? You can pray and ask God to move in the hearts of your church family. And if that is the church home you have, encourage other Christians who complain about the deadness of their churches. We have read for weeks about the spiritual deadness of Israel, but it didn't mean that God couldn't restore them back to life. We need to pray that God would restore our churches and His people back to life.**

### **Read Isaiah 57**

**You were tired out by the length of your road, yet you did not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found renewed strength, therefore you did not faint. Isaiah 57:10**

I remember when I was in Kindergarten and we were living in Germany. We found out we were going on a Volksmarch ("people's march") with some of the other grades in our school. A Volksmarch is no joke for any age, and is a hike of six miles. Do you know why as a five year old I was so motivated to walk six miles without complaining? Number one, they didn't tell us how long it was, and number two, they told us there was a

prize at the end. And sure enough when we got to the end there were Germans there dressed in the green beer festival outfits you've seen, handing us commemorative plates. They were written in German with the date and location of the march. I treasured that plate and had it hung on my wall until we made one move too many and it was finally lost.

It's amazing what you can do with the right motivation. Some people are so quick to give up. They accept a challenge to read the Bible and pray every day until it becomes too difficult. They commit to share the gospel with someone in a month, but then finally give up because it's too difficult. We have to be slow to give up. The motivation for us should be that God gives us the tools and the strength to accomplish any task He calls us to take on. So many times we think we can't take another step. We can't do it again because it was so hard. But the truth is that we usually quit before the battle has been lost. Just like that Volksmarch, you need some sort of motivation. **What is God calling you to do that you're calling hopeless? Where do you feel defeated in life? Have you asked God to give you victory and strength, or are you trying to depend on yourself to get the job done? His desire is for us to recognize our weakness, to recognize His strength, and then to rely on Him instead of ourselves. If you're feeling defeated by sin, laziness, or just the world, then you need to refocus your eyes on God through prayer and reading His Word instead of focusing your eyes so clearly on your own problems.**

### **Read Isaiah 58**

**Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Isaiah 58:6**

When I was a kid our family loved Siberian Huskies. They are extremely playful and whether inside our outside the house they were really great dogs. When my mom was still married to her first husband, we had a huge pen out back that they were able to run around in and took up a lot of the back yard. We would take them on walks and out to parks to let them run free also. But then my mom got a divorce we kept one of the dogs and he was kept on a chain in the back yard. I hated it. He looked so sad just lying there, and he still jumped around and tried to play when we came out to feed him. He just wasn't made to live on a chain. One day, our dog got loose and ran off and even though I missed him, I was really happy he wasn't living in a small space being jerked around by that stupid chain anymore.

Sin is our chain. I'll never understand why we choose freedom in Jesus Christ and we see how awesome this new life is, but there are moments we choose to chain up our hearts and souls by attempting to find happiness in the very sins that Jesus saved us from. God removes the yoke upon us to allow us to go free. And he didn't just take the yoke off, but Jesus took it for us. God didn't ask us to out run sin on our way to Heaven. He asked us to choose obedience over disobedience and then Jesus took on the punishment for our disobedience. And He did it gladly. **What are you chaining yourself up over? Is it a sin you struggle with, or is it a sin you willingly choose to throw yourself into? Or do you just find yourself falling into random sin as a result of a distant relationship**

**with God? Every time we choose sin, we choose bondage. God has given us freedom, but Satan always brings the opposite. Sin will never give us the payoff that salvation has. I have never thought that any sin I've chosen since I was saved was ever worth the guilt and conviction I experienced afterwards.**

### **Read Isaiah 59**

**But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear. Isaiah 59:2**

When my children make a bad choice, it really affects me on two levels. First of all, I feel disappointed because they disobeyed me and showed little respect for what I have told them. Secondly I feel bad because I feel that I have failed as a parent. Even though my children are responsible for their own choices, I try to think about whether my actions are matching my words as I teach my children right and wrong. But that disobedience causes a disconnect, if only for a short time. Perhaps one of my children deliberately disobeys me, and after five minutes comes and asks me for a popsicle (which has totally happened before). I am not very inclined to meet this request, because it's not what I want to hear out of their mouths. If they came to apologize for what they did, then I become more inclined to listen to anything else they might have to say. Disobedience is not just covered by the passage of time.

I don't think some Christians like to think this, but I feel that this passage and others teach us that our sins block our prayers. That may seem like I'm saying that God answers us based on our works instead of our relationship with Jesus. Salvation is the reason we even have the opportunity to be heard by God, but we cannot expect that while we live in open sin, God is going to respond to our every prayer as if we were diligently serving Him. If you are living in sin, and you are praying about anything other than repentance, you are wasting your breath. God desires for us to live lives of repentance from the moment we receive Jesus Christ. People are putting the responsibilities of a two-way promise on only one person. Salvation is Jesus promising to save us, IF we will recognize Him as Savior and Lord. That means we recognize His ability to save us and our responsibility to follow Him. You cannot just ignore Jesus as Lord, which is what we do when we choose to hold onto sin, and think that we can expect God to answer our every prayer. **Do you feel like your prayers are hindered? It doesn't always mean that it's sin. It might be that you simply need to eliminate other distractions during your prayer time (get alone from your children, pray in various places to avoid prayer becoming routine). But we need to always be ready and willing to ask God to show us our sin, and prepare us to deal with what we are shown. Sin hinders your relationship with God. He still loves you, and He loves you enough not to let you off the hook for your sin.**

### **Read Isaiah 60**

**For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you Isaiah 60:2**

Spiritual darkness is greater than physical. While darkness covers the earth, deep darkness covers the people. Your eyes can adjust to the night and after a few moments,

the darkness doesn't look quite as black. But if you're lost, no amount of time will remove the deep spiritual darkness that you reside in.

As a Christian, think about the excitement you feel when you learn a spiritual lesson or you overcome a sin that has weighed you down for many years. Think of the relief and joy you feel to overcome something and to know that you have pleased your God. Lost people don't experience this kind of joy. They hope that they're ok, but they can't shake this feeling that something is wrong with them. **The lost person around you is in a darkness they cannot escape without Jesus. And the likelihood is high that without someone to tell them, they will never know the light that they could dwell in, and the difference it can make in their life. We need to be ready at any moment to share the gospel with someone. Who did you miss sharing with yesterday?**

### **Read Isaiah 61**

**The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted ; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; Isaiah 61:1**

For a short time I considered being a military funeral services NCO. It basically meant that I would help in notifying families that had lost loved ones in combat as well as being a part of military services that would be held for them afterwards. In talking to chaplains and hearing from those who volunteered for it, they all said it was one of the toughest and rewarding jobs they ever faced. You are telling a family that their son or daughter just lost his or her life, often as a result of the actions of someone who was trying to kill them. But, in giving the letter from the soldier's commander, and remembrances that were passed along from combat buddies, the families take some solace in the fact that their family member chose this life and didn't die without meaning or honor.

Just like a family that has lost a loved one, there are a lot of silent broken hearts out there that need good news. Despite that fact that so many people have no relationship with God and don't put much effort into seeking Him, there are many I come into contact with who still ask themselves questions about what will happen after they die. Just as Isaiah was anointed by the Spirit to share the good news, all of us as believers in Jesus Christ have that same Spirit living in us. And do you think that His desire to bring salvation to people has lessened any? **How are you taking opportunities to share the gospel with people? What do you need to do different to prepare yourself to be ready to share? Maybe you just need to keep a gospel tract on you. All you have to do is open it and read it to someone or let them read it for themselves. We have a wonderful gift in Jesus Christ. Let's prove it by sharing it. These aren't just people choosing a different path. They are prisoners to sin and that sin will lead them to an inescapable Hell unless they choose to follow Jesus as Lord.**

### **Read Isaiah 62**

**And give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Isaiah 62:7**

My children want a dog. You may wonder how I know, but it's really not a result of my incredible intuitive skills. It's more because one or all of them asks me every week about when we're getting a dog. I told them that we would look at doing so after we moved, and they are sure holding me to it. The last time I said no on a pet was when a cat was hanging around our place. I tried to get rid of it for several days, until I realized my kids were petting it on a daily basis. Eventually we found ourselves with a cat. I think my children have conspired to wear me down until there is dog hair in my future.

I think Isaiah 62 is a really fascinating chapter regarding our relationship to the Lord. He told His people that He was going to restore Zion to something great, but in the meantime the people should remind God of that. Verse 6 talks about permanently placing watchmen who are watching for nothing more than a fulfilling of God's promise. And here the people are told to give God no rest until they see Jerusalem become a praise in all the earth. Why does God need to be pestered? It's not because of His inability or unwillingness to keep His promise. God wants the people to prioritize Jerusalem. Do they really care, or is just something they would like to see happen? Christians talk about a revival that is needed in America, but if it were really important to us, we'd be praying for it. **What do you pray for most often? Whatever the answer is, that is what's most important to you. It's not what you say to man, but what you pray to God. He knows what's on your heart and your lips. He knows what you want before you even mention it. But we are to "give Him no rest" while we have a passion on our heart for His Kingdom. Let us not be quick to stop when we hear nothing. Let us remain in prayer knowing that the answer could be just around the corner.**

### **Read Isaiah 63**

**I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has granted them according to His compassion and according to the abundance of His lovingkindnesses. Isaiah 63:7**

I took a break between choosing my scripture this morning and actually writing my devotional. So I decided to do what this verse says. I made mention of the lovingkindness of the Lord. I simply spent this morning thanking Him for everything I could think of. It was an amazing time, because I had forgotten how many things I had forgotten! He does so much for us. Some of it we ask for and some of it He just gives because He's a loving Father to us, but it's funny how quickly we can forget. I wonder why my children can be ungrateful and times and then I remember who their father is! I can sure take for granted the goodness of God.

Even though Israel has come through some tough times, they are not at a loss for remembering God's goodness and praising His name! Isaiah recognizes that even when times seemed bleak and judgment was at the door of God's people, God was not far removed. He was still around loving and caring for His people. **So today are you willing to put your requests on hold and simply thank Him and praise Him? It was an amazing start to my day this morning, and we know that God desires for us to be thankful people. It helps drain the selfishness out of us, because we realize for at**

**least a few moments that something came to us not because of who we are, but because of who God is!**

### **Read Isaiah 64**

**When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence. Isaiah 64:3**

I've had a broken dresser for probably about as long as I've been married. It's not a real dresser, but it's just one of those short plastic ones with the three small drawers. One evening I was listening to the Missouri Tigers men's basketball team. They were just giving away the game during tournament time, and I finally lost it. With 2 minutes, we were down by 11 and the other team had the ball. I turned off the radio, went in our room and slammed that dresser so hard, the drawer broke into a bunch of tiny fragments. My wife has "allowed" me to keep that dresser as a reminder against anger. Oh, and the Tigers came storming back in the last two minutes and won the game. So I didn't even know we had won until the next morning. I didn't see that coming.

Unexpected things are...unexpected. We often times begin laying out how something is going to happen. We are just sure we know what a person will do in a situation, or what the consequences will be in a circumstance. So when we have prepared ourselves for one thing, and get something totally different, it's shocking to us. We'd certainly be better not setting expectations so much in a situation, and simply waiting to see what happens. The Lord is prepared to do awesome things that we do not expect. We sometimes do not see them because we pray for less than God desires to give us. As a result, we miss out on what God could have given us as we take what we asked for. **It's a simple lesson, but one that we need to get: we are not equal to God. In our righteousness, in our wisdom and in our plans. God works on a level so much higher than us, often times we would describe it as unexpected. What are you expecting in situations in your life? Are they God's expectations and desires or have you forgotten to ask Him again. As His ways and thoughts are higher than ours, the unexpected should be expected from Him. We need to be prepared to accept His solutions over our own.**

### **Read Isaiah 65**

**No longer will there be in it an infant *who lives but a few days*, or an old man who does not live out his days; For the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be *thought* accursed. Isaiah 65:20**

As a minister, I am so tired of the curse. I understand why the curse of sin is upon us as people and upon our planet. But I am so tired of seeing people I care about go through difficult physical ailments or to see families that lose young or unborn children. It's tough as a minister because people expect me to tell them why such difficult things happen. And the honest truth is, I don't know. I don't have an answer for every choice God makes, and sometimes they cause me real difficulty as I attempt to sort them out myself. The assurance in that situation is looking at the amazing job God has done working in my life, even when times were tough, and knowing that He desires to work in the lives of others in the same way.

This passage causes questions for some people. Some think that it's after the Jews return to their homeland from exile. However, the passage about the wolf and the lamb grazing together seems to indicate something slightly more special than that. If the wolf is grazing, that indicates that his nature has been changed to what it was before the Fall in Genesis 3 when animals were all plant eaters. However, since people still die, it cannot be the final heavenly stage of earth, so it seems to refer to the Millennial kingdom when Jesus will reign on the earth for 1000 years. Can you imagine what that time will be like? Babies won't die after a day or two of breathing, and anyone who doesn't live to be 100 was probably doing something foolish to bring about an early demise. So it's not heaven, because death is possible, but it's the intermediate step that God is going to use to make the final transition. **Have you been living in this world so long that it's sometimes hard to believe that another world is in our future? I believe that Revelation 22:20 is an encouragement for us to pray a speedy delivery of this future: "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Let us live as people who are longing for the next world instead of holding on desperately to this one. Let us pray today as God's people for the quick return of our Savior and the eternal kingdom that awaits us! God has something better than this.**

### **Read Isaiah 66**

**For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory. Isaiah 66:18**

When someone does something nice for you, you often ask "What's the occasion?" We can sometimes become suspicious when someone does something nice for us, or wonder what they want in return. Isn't that terrible that we live in such a society? Now Marcie isn't like that. Marcie keeps my desk stocked in hard candy, and various chocolates from time to time (though I've asked her to help me cut down on that a bit). I know why Marcie brings me that stuff: because she cares! She's my friend, and she loves doing it for me. I know that her actions meet her thoughts, and there's nothing behind the scenes to analyze.

Don't you wish there were more Marcie's out there? Well if you wish that, think about what God desires. He sees people who portray themselves as one thing by their actions, but He sees the thoughts. He knows the "what" and the "why" behind those actions. He knows the selfish motives that often can drive us, and cause us to place ourselves in greater priority. This isn't a "Santa Clause" passage where God is trying to remind us that He knows if you've been good or bad. **This passage is particularly relating to God's glory. His desire is that people would willingly serve Him and glorify Him. So He knows when praise His coming from the mouth and not the heart. He knows when our bodies are in church, but our minds are elsewhere. He knows when we tell someone we'll pray for them, when we know that we won't. Think in the coming days about your thoughts towards others in relation to your actions towards them.**