

Isaiah 11 – September 1

The messianic theme of Isaiah continues in this chapter. In fact, it is essentially undeniable. It would not be fruitful to dive into the scholarly debates concerning authorship here, but let's simply say that secular scholars often reject Isaianic authorship for no reason at all other than the accuracy with which the book describes future events (from the exile to the coming of Christ). There is a certain intellectual dishonesty to rejecting the plausibility of prophecy as a presupposition to reading a book that claims to be prophetic... but anyway. The important aspect of this reality, that Christ is present in the Old Testament, is to know that God is not flying by the seat of his pants. He is not scrambling to figure out how to save his wayward creation. Rather, it was prophesied from Genesis 3:15 on! The same is true here in Isaiah 11.

There is far too much material in this chapter to do justice to on one page, so we will hone in on two or three important phrases. First, let's look at the first five verses, particularly verse one ("a shoot from the stump of Jesse"). This section describes God's man, so to speak. This is really how the king was supposed to live, but we know that did not happen after David. Speaking of David, this chapter evokes ideas of the Davidic Covenant made in 2 Sam. 7. God promised David that his house would reign forever. But how does that work if the Israelites are about to be sent into exile? Has God's promise failed? Of course not—there will come a shoot from the stump of Jesse—aka, from the line of David. We know this true and better Davidic King to be none other than Jesus Christ. In the way that David and his successors *failed* to live as a light to the nations, Christ will *succeed* (take a look at Isaiah 11:10). In the way that David and his successors *failed* to serve as Godly, representative heads for God's people, Christ will *succeed*. The book of Hebrews tells us that the New Covenant is superior to all those prior. Adam failed. Noah failed. Abraham succeeded temporarily, but the land and blessing seem to disappear with the exile. David and his line failed. But not Christ. We know that all of God's promises are yes and amen in him (2 Cor. 1:20). That doesn't mean we get every single thing we want; rather, Christ serves as the fulfillment to all of the covenant promises found in the Old Testament! This is why it is so important that Christ came from the line of David.

There is so much more! But let's focus now on verses six through nine, particularly verse eight (the nursing child playing with a cobra—some translations just say snake or adder). Recall that I mentioned Genesis 3:15 a moment ago. In that verse, often dubbed the *protoevangelium* or, first gospel, God promises that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. We know that this is a foretelling of Christ (seed of woman) crushing Satan on the cross and again at the eschaton. There are so many clear pictures of Christ in Isaiah, it is dizzying! It is important to note that the fall of man did not merely destroy the relationship between God and man. It also impaired all of creation. Sickness, famine, drought, uncontrollable animals, and even natural disasters are results of the fall. All of creation groans for the day of redemption (Rom. 8:19-23). Because of this promised Suffering Servant, harmony between men and God will be restored. But harmony between men and within nature will also be restored! The wolves, leopards, and lions will lie with the lambs, goats, and calves. Beautiful! And it is all because of that nursing child, the form in which Christ came, that is not afraid of the serpent. In fact, he will play over his den!

Isaiah 12-13 – September 2

At the end of chapter 11, a remnant is mentioned. This is a common theme in all of scripture, especially the Old Testament. Within all those that claim to be God's people (in this case, Israel), there is only a remnant that truly believes. After hard times like exile, it is only the remnant that remain. We said this in chapter 10 as well, but we must remember that God regularly purifies his people. Persecution, though obviously not ideal, is not something to fear. Church father Tertullian once said that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."¹ History validates this claim. When times get tough on the church, God's people rise up as a prophetic minority. In chapter 12, we read a song for the remnant. Those whose faith endures the purifying anger of God will be comforted. Then in chapter 13, we read that God's anger will turn from his people to their oppressors (currently in Assyria, but Isaiah prophetically knew of a time when Babylon would be a world power). Ultimately, this is our hope as well. We must endure God's purifying discipline, but when we are sanctified, all the wrongs will be made right.

We see something incredible and mysterious about God in chapter 13. God is foretelling the judgment of Babylon for what they have done to the people of God. Yet, we see in many other texts that God himself delivered the Israelites into the hands of their oppressors as discipline (Isiah 43:27-28, Jeremiah 20:4). Later, Nebuchadnezzar is actually called the "servant" of God (Jer. 25:9). That is crazy! God uses wicked men to accomplish his will, and then punishes them for it. No example is clearer than Acts 4:27-28 (Herod, Pontius Pilate—go read it). I am sad to say, I do not have a perfect explanation for you today concerning this topic. It has been debated with vitriol since Paul wrote the book of Romans (he is answering similar questions). Though the secret things of God are not necessarily for us (Deut. 29:29), we do have a clear plan of action: affirm what the Bible teaches. And the Bible teaches both God's sovereignty over all things *and* man's responsibility for his own sin. Believing in God's sovereignty does not eliminate the reality that man makes his choice, and chooses sin over God. That is damnable. This is why Babylon will be punished despite the fact that they were doing what God had planned for them to do (just like Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery—what they *meant* for evil, God *meant* for good, Gen. 50:20). I know this is difficult, but remember: though we cannot know God *fully* in this life, we can know him *truly*.

We must also remember that Babylon often serves as the archetype for all those who oppose God. This is one reason Babylon is mentioned often in Revelation. It is not that the nation of Babylon will rise again, but rather that a central conflict of scripture is the City of God versus the City of Man. We see this at the Tower of Babel (Babyl-on, catch that?). Though "Babylon" is referencing the sociopolitical entity here, it is also a representative of all those who oppose the City of God (the new Garden of Eden, the new heaven and earth—all synonyms). So we take hope in a passage like Isaiah 13 for the same reasons the Israelites did. Though we are oppressed for now, though we are exiles awaiting a return to our home (1 Pet. 1:1-2), there will come a day when God will turn to judge "Babylon," the City of Man, all those who reject him. And it is through Christ that this comes to fruition. It is through Christ that we have been transferred from one realm to another—from the City of Man to the City of God.

¹ *Apologeticus*, chapter 50.

Isaiah 14 – September 3

The judgment on Israel's enemies continues in chapter 14. It is a stark change of pace from the first dozen chapters or so, when God is essentially lighting into Israel through Isaiah. I am often encouraged by this change, for more than the obvious reasons. I think of it like a father who catches his son being picked on by some neighborhood bullies. The son is fighting and yelling and the father swoops in. First, he might yell at his son— "what did I tell you about spending time with these boys? Or hanging out in this dangerous area?" But after he sends his son back home, he turns to the bullies. Now it's time to defend his son. He pulls them by their ears back to their homes, harshly scolding them the entire way. You can imagine the young boy, though a bit hurt and embarrassed, cracking a smile seeing his father defend him in such a way. God used wicked nations to punish Israel. But in these chapters, he has turned away from his own son (Israel) to take care of the bullies. Let's dive into the text.

Remember, the Abrahamic blessing that was promised did not only apply to Israel. Though the nation, land, and spiritual blessing was directed to God's people, it was meant also to be a light to the nations, that they might be blessed as well. Here we get a hint of that: "...sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob" (Is. 14:1). Would ya look at that! Gentiles will one day be grafted in (Rom. 11). Funny how the whole Bible is actually a unified book (not funny—*obvious*). In this coming day, the people of God would be so definitively, securely saved that they could literally taunt the king of Babylon (verses 3-4). No specific king is in mind, but God's people would read this and recognize that their enemies would one day be destroyed.¹ Verse 12 is of special importance to us today: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!" If that doesn't bring Satan to mind, I don't know what will. Now, it is important to employ a consistent hermeneutic. An actual king of a physical place is in view here, not Satan. God is speaking to Israel about their oppressors (Is. 14:3-4). We are *not* to read scripture as allegory, as many mistakenly did in medieval times. We only have the right to interpret types and shadows as such when the New Testament authors *infallibly* do the same. However, I think it is fair to draw a comparison between the fall of the king of Babylon, prophesied in this chapter, and the fall of Satan in the end times.

Again, do not hear me say that this chapter is about Satan falling. It is about real cities who oppressed the Israelites. But the *principle* here can be applied elsewhere. Those who rebel against God's people will be judged. And God's people will be so securely saved one day that they could mock the one who persecuted them for so long. For the Israelites, that was Babylon and Assyria. For us, that is the Babylon foretold in Revelation—the City of Man—those who have rejected God and are led by Satan. The Suffering Servant is promised amidst the first few chapters of Isaiah when God is judging his own people pretty harshly. Because of the Servant's work, we know that God's people will be freed and Babylon will be judged. We know that servant is Christ. Because of his ultimate work on the cross, we will be securely saved and our oppressor will be judged and vanquished.

¹ "The Fallen Day Star," *Ligonier Ministries*.

Isaiah 15-16 – September 4

Chapter 15 and 16 are one unit. In this section, Israel is taught not to depend on any one nation more than others, but to depend solely on the Lord.¹ This passage is incredibly specific, but there are many principles that we can glean from Israel's specific experiences. First, like Israel, we must remember that our greatest ally is the Lord, not a nation. This would include even our own nation. God's people's primary relationships are with God and the people of God. In the Old Testament, that would be the Israelites. In the New, that would be the *church*. This means that we share more in common with brothers and sisters in Christ who reside in communist China than we do with our suburban American neighbors who reject the gospel. Our relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ who are Saudi-Arabian will last infinitely longer than even our best friendships with people who reject the gospel. Take that in for a second. I know it is a lot. Family is important. Friendship is important. I would argue that patriotism is important as well—at the very least, we are called to be the best citizens and seek the welfare of our city (Jer. 29:7). But the moment our faith is placed in another person, city, or nation instead of God, we have committed idolatry.

In Isaiah 15:2, the two major cities of Moab (Ar and Kir) have fled to their temple to weep because their gods (little-g) have failed to deliver them. Now they all have bald heads and shorn beards—weird, I know, but it symbolizes disgrace and humiliation. Moab was a strong city, one that Israel could partner with. And in one fell swoop, God has judged her through Assyria. We even see that there is much more sympathy for Moab than for the previous cities (15:5, "my heart will cry out"). In chapter 16, Moab, once a strong nation, is now asking Judah for refuge (16:1-2). God instructs his people to allow them to stay (these same people that were worshipping idols). Don't just let them stay, though. Grant them justice; do good to them; be a shelter to them (16:3-4). God is kind, and his people should be kind to the oppressed as well. And one day, as we see in 16:5, the throne of David will be established forever—Christ will reign on that throne! All injustice will cease. Through Abraham, the Israelites were promised to be a light to other nations. Through Moses, they receive instruction on how to do so (the Law). Through the kingship, specifically David, they receive an individual who will live it out—he will represent the nation as the ideal, and other nations will learn the ways of God through him.

This is what 16:5 is all about. It is invoking the Davidic Covenant again. Remember, God always relates to his people through covenant. So, the Israelites are all wondering—what the heck is going on. But through Isaiah, God is reminding them that his promises will not fail. In one verse, concepts from the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants are laid out. *Jesus* is the light to other nations (Abrahamic) that follows the Law (Mosaic) and is the perfect representative (Davidic). It is Christ that ends injustice. I know there are lots of very specific places and names in these two chapters, but I think it is wise to focus on the big picture. All of the enmity, not only between God and man, but between man and man (in this case, Israel, Moab, and Assyria), will be made right through Christ in due time. Through we should act as ambassadors of God *here and now*, the ultimate solution to problems like poverty, racism, domestic abuse, and other hot button issues is found in the gospel.

¹ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 779

Isaiah 17-18 – September 5

More oracles—more judgments. God is getting specific! I know it is easy for us to gloss over these chapters, but read this imaginatively. You are a member of the New Covenant people of God. For a moment, pretend you are a member of the Old Covenant—an Israelite. This is God coming to you and saying, “I will take care of your enemies, do not fear.” But he doesn’t leave it there. He gets specific. He is telling his people which nations he will punish and exactly how he is going to punish them. This is a striking reminder to his people that, though their own punishment is coming, God is not leaving them. He will slay their enemies in due time. What a great reminder for us impatient, modern Christians. God will take care of all our enemies—in due time!

In chapter 17, though, there is a bit of an aside that comes back to Israel’s judgment. In verse 4, it is said that the glory of Jacob will be brought low.” This is because, as verse 10 tells us, they have forgotten the God of their salvation. Is this not the problem in every sinful situation for us as well? This is why a great deal of the Old Testament is devoted to encouraging Israel to *remember* what God had done for them. They built memorials all over the Middle-East for this purpose! And yet, they forgot God. The God that flooded the earth. The God that parted the sea and brought them out of Egypt. The God that sustained them with manna in the wilderness. The God that gave them the land of promise. They forgot. And generation by generation, we do the same. This is why it is inexpressibly important to guard the truth of doctrine that has been handed to us (2 Tim. 1:14). In one generation, it can all be forgotten. We must plan, teach, and act with this long view in mind. We guard the deposit that has been given to us by training up the next generation (2 Tim. 2:2). This may seem a little disjointed. The reality is that a devotion on these chapters could go one of a hundred directions. In this case, it is within the bounds of the text to focus on the importance of *remembering*. This is one reason we baptize and take the Lord’s Supper. To remember! To look back to what God has done and forward to what he will do. The ordinances are our New Covenant memorials. We must guard the truth and proclaim it to the next generation (Ps. 145:4) that they may not fail to remember and thus fall under God’s judgment like Israel.

This is a little bit of an add-on, but I think it is valuable. I have mentioned covenants a lot in the last few weeks. The purpose is I believe that covenant is the backbone of the metanarrative of scripture. It is the spine of the plot. And yet, I think it is generally *completely ignored* in modern churches. Why? Because it’s a heck of a lot easier to teach moralism. Do this, don’t do this. There’s your sermon. But that’s not the gospel. Honestly, that could be a sermon for any other religion. What is *distinctly* Christian is the gospel—the story of God redeeming his creation through Christ. And the story, the narrative, shows plays out from Genesis to Revelation, from creation to new creation. Take a quick look at 17:12-14. The wicked nations thunder—like the sea. God promised in the Noahic Covenant to never destroy all of creation again through a flood. Here, he harkens back to that promise. The “flood” of enemy nations will be painful and destructive. But in time, as his will for his people is accomplished, “he will rebuke them, and they will flee away... before morning, they are no more! This is the portion of those who loot us and the lot of those who plunder us” (Is. 17:13-14). God is a covenant-keeping God. Here Isaiah, through the lens of the Noahic Covenant, reminds Israel of that truth.

Isaiah 19 – September 6

War is tragic. It makes no sense. People disagree so strongly that they feel the need to kill one another on a mass level? But nonetheless, there are times when it is necessary (and many times when it is not).¹ Deep down, we all ache for a time when war is no longer a problem, but this has never been the case throughout human history. We ache for this peace because, deep down, we know that one day it is coming. God has placed that within us (Rom. 8:19-23). Today's text emphasizes that inclination. One day, enemies will be at peace with one another. Much in the same way, we who were enemies with God will be at peace with him.

The last verse of this chapter is wild: "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance" (Is. 19:25). As promised to Abraham, Israel will be the light to other nations. This is a foreshadowing on the New Covenant people of God. There will be no ethnic or political boundaries. Rather, the church will be made up of people from all places. Egypt and Assyria, to great enemies of Israel, will one day be people of God as well. God created them, too: "Egypt my people... Assyria the work of my hands." There is a day coming when foes of God become friends of God. A miraculous conversion! Verse 18 speaks of five cities who are so thoroughly converted that they actually start speaking Hebrew. In Egypt, that is unheard of. In fact, scholars don't think that it necessarily means specifically five cities will actually change their language. Rather, it is to show the miraculous nature of the salvation. These enemies of God will be changed at their very core. To apply this text to us, do you know who the Egyptians are? That's right: us. You were an enemy with God (Eph. 2). Me, too! And God changed us at our very core. Our language doesn't need to change to Hebrew, but the way we speak, treat others, and relate to God fundamentally changes. Remember, we aren't the ethnic people of God (Israel). We are those people, the foreigners, the Gentiles, who would one day be made a part of the people of God through Christ.

Not only does this passage foreshadow spiritual peace between God and his enemies, it imagines a time when other nations are at peace with one another. Egypt was cruel, but Assyria was even worse. And yet, Israel, Assyria, and Egypt as described as living at peace with one another. Historically, Assyria and Egypt were vicious enemies. Verse 23 describes a highway built between the two cities that they may have peaceful communication and relationship. It sounds a lot like what Paul described in Galatians 3:28, where the church would be made up of "neither Jew nor Greek," but of all the redeemed. Though this kingdom is not completely here yet, it has broken into our darkness through Christ. Local churches are small colonies of this kingdom—outposts, if you will. Though we will not (cannot) usher in total peace prior to the second coming, we should live in such a way that points to that ultimate peace. As much as possible, we should live peaceably with others (Rom. 12:18). We call this the already-not yet distinction. The Kingdom of God is *already* here, in the sense that Christ has come. But it is *not yet* all that it will be. But our lives should be a preview of the *not yet* portion!

¹ For further treatment, research Augustinian just war theory (he analyzes Romans 13 in *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, book 22).

Isaiah 20-21 – September 7

When the Assyrians took the city of Ashdod in battle, it so frightened the Egyptians that they fled. Yet again, Judah had to learn the hard way that they should not depend on any foreign nation for protection. Their “connections,” as it were, would not protect them from this military power. Yes, times had definitely changed since the exodus! They were looking to *Egypt* to save them from Assyria (and/or Babylon). It may be tiresome for some of you to hear the pastors mention every other sermon how we as the people of God should not put our hope into a political party or leader. We are inevitably political, and should be involved in the civic process, to be sure. But we always caution against this particular idol because *it is the plight of God’s people* to often seek security from everything other than God himself. It could be Abraham impregnating Hagar, Aaron and the golden calf at Sinai, this situation, or the Jews rejecting Christ because he did not provide immediate political salvation. In our context, the most common manifestation of this sin is finding refuge and strength in either the Republican or Democratic party. Instead, we should see them as what they are: merely platform builders.¹ The people of God are the actors *on the platform* who, by the power of the Spirit, can enact the only change that truly matters. Yes, we should desire sturdy platforms. But bad actors on a great platform still makes for a lousy play.

Now, to the text. One of the first things you probably noticed is the whole Isaiah walking around naked for three years episode. In the modern day, he would obviously be thrown into jail for such a display. In that day and age, it wasn’t quite the same. Still, it was frowned upon. But in this case, he did so to represent the utter shame of Egypt in all this. The destitution. They have *nothing* to offer Judah. They are ashamed and laid bare before all. And this is the same Egypt that enslaved the Jews for centuries. And it is these to whom the Jews looked for salvation instead of God? Total lunacy. And here are the Jews at the end of chapter 20: “Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?” Can you imagine being the people ground that God delivered from Egypt by parting the sea and asking, “how shall we escape?” It feels so ridiculous to us. And yet, is this not what we do *every single time* we are faced with the slightest resistance? We trust God until it is time to actually trust God. I am writing this to myself as well. We sing about the God who calms the winds and waves, who created the universe, who gives life to the dead. And then we don’t get the job we wanted and scream to the sky, “WHY GOD, WHY!?” The Israelites are a parable for us. The next time you are tempted to curse God, or even to doubt God, fight that temptation. In the good *and bad*, he is doing something in your life—he is shaping you, and for that you should (and will eventually) be eternally grateful. Even in the struggle, he is preparing for you an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2 Cor. 4:16-18). And you can trust him, because He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32). God wants what is best for you, and he will do that for you. Trust him.

¹ Please see Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage*, for a more thorough treatment.

Isaiah 22 – September 8

The *Valley of Vision* is a classic compilation of Puritan prayers on nearly every conceivable subject in the Christian life. I highly encourage you to buy it and read through it. The compilers of that collection did not come up with the title on their own, though. Here we read of an oracle concerning the “valley of vision.” This is about Jerusalem (as the likely chapter heading in your Bible suggests). God often communicated with his people in the form of visions, through prophets. But now, because of their unrepentant sin, they awaited punishment (thus, the valley). As we discussed yesterday, Israel is a parable for us. When we read about them, we should ask ourselves, “What can I learn about my relationship with Christ from this? In what ways am I committing the same sins?” In today’s chapter, Isaiah is broken over the sinfulness of his city. Well, actually it is prophetic, but it is written as if current (and the prophecy certainly came true). The widespread revelry was nonsensical to Isaiah, considering that Israel should have been mournfully repenting. The people of God contented themselves with wild parties while their nation crumbled. Sounds familiar!

As we analyze the text, there are a few points that stand out. First, it is the Lord who “has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision” (Is. 22:5). We have harped on this much over the last two years, but it bears repeating again: God is sovereign over your good times and bad, and is doing something in both. Here, he is the one bringing punishment to Israel to chastise them. Next, we must consider the appropriate responses to certain situations. In this case, “the Lord God of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth; and behold, joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” What a condemnation. Despite God’s call for sorrowful repentance, the people were throwing extravagant parties. We must learn from Israel’s grave error here. There are many obvious examples. For instance, the widespread racism that plagues the American church should be repented of with weeping. As late as the 60s, it was *common* for visitors of other races to be all but physically forced out of churches by the dominant culture. This is where the “black church” originated (this was occurring before the Civil War, not just in the 1960s). Though it may not be overt (though in some cases, it is), there is an underlying prejudice in many churches that should be confronted. Instead it is often ignored and churches continue on their merry way. I want to be clear, this is not the case in every church. But it is still too common, and few in the American church have said a word.

Another helpful example may be the current plight of the Catholic church. Recently, a jury in Pennsylvania found that 300 priests sexually abused over 1,000 children. This is a horrific development. In the vast majority of cases, people have responded appropriately. But I have actually read a few Protestants (non-Catholic denominations, like us) who all but rejoiced over the “fall” of Catholic churches. Though I do not see the Catholic church as a true church (we can talk about that some time), it is appalling that someone would do anything but mourn after such a development. This is particularly true of Baptists, our own camp, who have had dozens of leaders fall *this year* because of sexual immorality. Unlike Israel in this chapter, we must seek scripture to find the appropriate response to difficult times. “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” is only an appropriate response for those who have no hope.

Isaiah 23 – September 9

More oracles! In stretches of scripture like this, it can be tempting to just skim and skip. Honestly, it feels like almost every chapter has essentially the same point: these nations rejected God/oppressed his people, and they will eventually be punished for it. There is some truth to that. But the beauty of the Bible is that the authors will often take a look at the same issue from dozens of different angles. This is common in Hebrew writing, actually. It provides a *kaleidoscopic* view of the issue at hand. Think of it like a diamond: you don't just look at it from one angle. You turn it, hold it up to different angles of light, and do your best to see it from every perspective. This manner of writing provides a full-orbed understanding of the topic, even if it can feel a bit repetitive. Part of that is because it *is* repetitive—part of that is because we as a culture have largely lost the art of patiently reading. So, in today's text, understand that much of it is the same as the previous chapters, but we are going to zero in on one aspect that gives the "diamond" a little bit of a different shimmer.

Take a look at verse 9: "The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth" (Is. 23:9). Specifically, this text is about Tyre and Sidon. But this is a principle that can be extrapolated much beyond its immediate context. In fact, it is a common thread of all the Bible. I *love* 1 Corinthians 1. I kind of want to type up 18-31 and just leave it alone. Please, go read it now. But specifically, let's look at 1 Cor. 1:27-28: "But God chose what is *foolish* in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is *weak* in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is *low and despised* in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (emphasis mine). Wow. In this passage, we get a thorough treatment of the same concept present in Isaiah 23:9. God opposes the proud, and he will "dishonor all the honored of the earth." All glory belongs to God. Any man or nation that takes glory for itself apart from God is ultimately guilty of idolatry. Martin Luther once said you don't break any of the other Ten Commandments without also breaking the first: have no other God's before me. Every time we sin, we ultimately put something else above God in our hearts. This is why God constantly uses the lowly to accomplish his will.

In the context of Isaiah, we cannot help but consider the Suffering Servant (that is, Christ). In God's economy, it is the last who will be first; it is the weak who will be made strong; victory comes through sacrifice; power comes through meekness; *life comes through death*. This reality should permeate every facet of our lives. How can we boast in anything but the cross? How can we treat others as less-than when we have been pulled up from the miry clay by grace, through no merit of our own? We now identify with the poor, because we need the inheritance that God provides. We identify with the exile, because we are exiles awaiting our promised home. We identify with the orphan, because we who were spiritually fatherless now have God as our father. We identify with the widow, because we were destitute, in need of a kinsman redeemer. There is no room for pride in the heart of the redeemed.

Isaiah 24 – September 10

People *really* get obsessed with “end-times” stuff. I love the book of Revelation (there is no end on that word), but some people look at it like *The Da Vinci Code* or something—a cool code to crack! Instead of playing Sherlock Holmes, we ought to read the book of Revelation for its overarching theme: the victorious return of Christ.¹ Like John’s Revelation, today’s chapter is concerned with God’s judgment of the whole earth. There are two sides to the gospel message: the fragrance of death to the perishing, but of life to those who believe (2 Cor. 2:16). It is actually *bad news* for those who reject God. The same can be said about the final judgment. It is wonderful news for the believing ones—not so much for those who have rejected God.

To begin, let’s look at some of the benefits for those who believe. Verse 7-9 are intriguing: “The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.” Common grace is the term for gifts that God has given to all humanity, not merely to his people. For example, a staunch atheist can still see the beauty in the Swiss Alps. An adamant Buddhist can still enjoy a wonderful meal and fellowship with friends. These are aspects of common grace. But in the final day, that common grace will disappear. The joy brought to mankind from wine and music will be no more. Only those in Christ will be able to find joy in *anything* in that day. And it will be joy like never before! I think about the overwhelming joy I experience when I share a great meal with my closest family and friends. I look around the table and sometimes my eyes well up with tears, seriously. I just can’t imagine a better way to spend an evening. But that fellowship is *merely a shadow* of the joy and fellowship we will experience with God and his people from the last day to eternity! This final judgment is a definitive statement concerning the worthiness of God. Additionally, as a sidebar, it is also a vindication of the people of God. Those of us who have been scorned will be lifted up. Because we are in Christ, we receive his inheritance as well (Eph. 1:11). The final judgment will be, in a sense, what the church has been “practicing” for every Lord’s Day for over 2,000 years.

But the other side to this is tragic. Though we receive grace upon grace, those who have rejected Christ receive judgment upon judgment. Even the common grace is dried up. There is no joy, no fellowship, no family meals. This is why we must take seriously our commission to share the gospel with others and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). We have taken up the ministry of reconciliation through Christ, and we must warn the world of the coming judgment, much like the prophets of old. We are heralds of the gospel. The results are not up to us, but let it never be said of us that we stood back and watched. To quote Charles Spurgeon: “If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies, and if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped around their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled with the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unsprayed for.”

¹ I understand there is much more to it than that; I am simply saying that we overcomplicate things and get lost in details. There is nothing wrong with close reading, but we often miss the forest for the trees, as they say. Whether that flying monster is actually an Apache helicopter or not has no bearing on the message and meaning of the Bible. Major in the majors, minor in the minors!

Isaiah 25 – September 11

After a dozen chapters of judgment oracles, what a relief Isaiah 25 is! In this song of thanksgiving, Isaiah emphasizes the redemption of God. We have discussed the “already-not yet” distinction concerning the kingdom of God. This is helpful here as well. Though redemption is “already,” in that God will deliver Israel from Assyria and Babylon, it is “not yet,” in that a final day of redemption is coming when these promises will be fulfilled. The same is true for us. The kingdom is “already,” in that Christ has come and we now have many benefits of his work on the cross. But it is “not yet,” in that we await the final consummation. This focus on the end times is called *eschatology*. I am not necessarily talking about simply studying the book of Revelation. To think eschatologically is to think and act in light of the end (which we already know). Today, let us do two things. First, let us consider what it will be like on that day. Second, let us consider then how we should live eschatologically—in light of what we already know is coming.

In verse 6, Isaiah says, “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.” Here Isaiah gives a glimpse of the day when Gentiles will be grafted into the people of God. The Abrahamic Covenant promised blessing to Israel that they might be a light and blessing to other nations. They ultimately failed, and Christ (who scripture sometimes refers to as the true Israel) fulfills that role! As an aside, I also love the picture throughout scripture of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Many images of the last day are the form of some kind of food. Even the Lord’s Supper itself—we take it now in anticipation of the feast we will share in the end. Take note: share meals with your family. It is a picture of a heavenly reality, and they will know it deep down. Share meals with your church family, your lost neighbors. A good meal has a profoundly disarming effect because we know in our heart of hearts that it anticipates the Great Feast of Heaven. In that day, God “will swallow up death forever [amen!]; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away...” (Is. 25:8). Oh how I long for that day, for that great feast.

So what? How then should we live, in light of this coming day? First, we should take our cue from Isaiah in verse 1: “I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.” That’ll preach right there. I could stand and shout. As John Piper often says, sometimes the application of a Biblical text or sermon is simply, “behold your God.” But there is more! Look at some of the ways God’s justice will be brought about: “a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in distress... the song of the ruthless is put down” (Is. 25:4-5). This is the last day—we should not expect a perfect representation of this on earth. But the local church is to be an embassy of heaven. Our earthly homes should exude the sweet aroma of our true home. Basically, the people of God should strive in their spheres of influence to *live in light of the last day*. Care for the poor and needy. Provide shade and shelter to those in distress. Tear down pride and oppose ruthlessness in our own lives, families, and churches. Are we not to pray for God’s will to be done “on earth as it is in heaven?” Keep a balanced mind, friends. Know that it will never come to true fruition prior to Christ’s return, but we should seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly in the here and now (Micah 6:8).

Isaiah 26 – September 12

Israel will be going to captivity soon. This is the punishment of God. But here, in this song, the day when they return from captivity is prophesied. Despite twenty-four chapters of judgment (it was a lot, I know), there will come a day when salvation returns to Israel. In this chapter, Isaiah is showing how God is teaching his people to rely on him—not their military power, not other nations, not even their own “walls and bulwarks.” Remember, Israel is often a parable for us (that does not mean these events did not happen; rather, they just provide a great example for us to learn from). We do the very same. We place our faith in anything but the One in which we claim to have faith! Far too often, we trust our retirement accounts, friends, significant others, bosses, favorite news channel, political leaders, and even actors and musicians before we trust the Word of God. When the dust settles, it is God who holds us fast, nothing else.

This theme is immediately present. Look at verse 1: “We have a strong city; *he* sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.” It was never the fortress of Jerusalem that protected them. It had always been God. And a day is coming when the people of God will be *safer* than when they were surrounded by mighty walls, because the salvation of God will be those walls. Israel’s defense against enemies was never dependent upon how strong their walls were. It was always dependent upon God. Now, fast-forward to the New Covenant people of God: the Church. As the late R.C. Sproul said, “He is the one who keeps us safe in His hand, and it is because of His decree and power that we need never fear that we will lose His promised salvation.”¹ Those who argue that Christians can lose their salvation do not fully understand from where salvation comes in the first place. In Romans 8:29-31, Paul explains that we are justified, sanctified, and glorified because of God’s faithfulness, not our own; “We are sustained by His power; therefore, we will be kept safe by His power for all eternity. Our survival is not dependent upon ourselves, on the defenses we can construct, but upon Jesus Christ alone.”²

This song was given to the people by Isaiah to promise deliverance from captivity. I can only imagine the despair of the Jewish people when they were captured. To them, it was as if God had abandoned them. The promises of all the covenants seemed to have failed. They were no longer a great nation; they had no blessing; there was no Davidic king. God graciously inspired Isaiah to compose this song to remind them, in the midst of their darkness, that deliverance was coming. We have this same hope! The strong city built for us is Christ. His defense will never falter. Though we are in exile, we await the promised land of the New Heaven and Earth. Though we were captive to sin, its power has been broken, and now we await complete deliverance. When you are discouraged—when the exile of this life is really weighing on you—remember this chapter. Remember Romans 8. Remember the Bible! Redemption has come, and restoration is on its way.

¹ “Resting Secure in the Lord,” *Ligonier Ministries*.

² *Ibid*.

Isaiah 27 – September 13

Throughout the book of Isaiah, God compares Israel to a vineyard. He does so again in verses 2 and 3 in today's chapter. Before we continue, it is important to note that alcohol did not have quite the stigma in that day that it does now. Yes, people still clearly abused it (hence all the verses warning people not to). However, the binge drinking and drinking to cope that we see rampant in our day was not nearly as prevalent. In fact, because there were no refrigerators, wine actually kept from spoiling better than anything else. So don't read our cultural bias into the Bible. At the same time, this is helpful in recognizing that alcohol itself is not inherently sinful (Ps. 104:15). The problem is the human heart, as always. We will idolize and abuse anything (sex, money, authority, alcohol... the list goes on and on). That has very little to do with today's lesson, but it is worth stating. Today, let's dive into that symbol of God's people as vineyard.

Notice that God doesn't compare his people to any vineyard, but a red wine vineyard. This was a symbol of excellence in that culture. I am no vintner or winemaker, but I do know of two things that must be done to ensure the health of a vineyard.¹ First, the vineyard must be cultivated. Much like the call for Adam in the Garden, the winemaker must water and prune vines, till and enrich the soil. Secondly, he must guard the vineyard from anything that might prevent it from flourishing (I am thinking of wild animals, insects, etc.); even if a vineyard is cultivated, it will not grow long if left unprotected. In this passage, God is reminding his people that he will do just those things for them. God will cultivate his people. He will place them in soil that is right for their growth. That doesn't mean life will be easy, but that God is the master gardener who will make sure that those in his vineyard will grow as he has intended. This is also the work of the Christian. Adam was charged with it in the Garden; the priesthood was charged with it (same Hebrew words for "keep and cultivate" that were given to Adam) in the tabernacle; David was charged with it for the nation; then Jesus was charged with it for humanity. Where they failed, Christ succeeded. Now, in Christ, we pick up the same line of work: the role of priest-king. We do the priestly work of "cultivating" the local church through membership, discipleship, and discipline; we do the kingly work of expanding its "borders" through evangelism and service. We grow the vineyard!

In addition to cultivating the vineyard, God promises to protect it. As John Calvin said, "God shows [in this passage] that the time for war is not yet ended, and that we must fight bravely till that enemy be subdued, who, though he has been a hundred times vanquished, ceases not to renew warfare... in order that we may not be discouraged, we must keep our eye on that day when Satan's strong arm shall be broken." Though God will chastise us and discipline us, it is in love; it is to cultivate us. But his wrath burns for eternity against Satan and all who would follow him instead of the Lord. We take up spiritual arms to fight against him, all the while keeping our eye to that last day when he will be vanquished forever!

¹ Borrowed from "Caring for the Vineyard," *Ligonier Ministries*

Isaiah 28 – September 14

God's providence often causes hiccups for people. We wonder why some people struggle, but others seem to breeze through life. Sometimes the wicked prosper, but a blameless man (like Job) goes through great trial. Why does God do the things he does? Ultimately, if we could perfectly know the mind of God, he would not be God. J.D. Greear often says, we like a God who is just a little bit bigger, little bit stronger, little bit nice version of us. The Israelites are no different. They have to be standing back and wondering, is God good? What is he doing? Is he really in control? Among other things, Isaiah addresses that in today's chapter.

In keeping with the last few chapters, Isaiah reminds Israel that a day is coming when all will be made right. We are told that "In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of his people..." (Is. 28:5). But in the meantime, what is going on? Isaiah anticipates and answers this question with a metaphor. Reread Isaiah 28:23-29 right now. He compares God to a farmer (much like last chapter's vineyard metaphor). A farmer does not do the same thing every day—his work will change according to what season it is, what crop he is farming, and other factors. As Sproul said, "There is a time for plowing, for breaking up the soil, for leveling the surface, and for planting the seed. Some plants are planted in rows, others in isolation. And when the time for threshing comes, the various plants are not treated the same."¹ How much more different we are from one another than crops! We each have our own hopes and dreams. We have our own likes and dislikes. And God knows each one of us intimately. God knows when we need leniency and when we need discipline. We might not understand it, but God is tending to his people with ultimate wisdom, like a farmer who handles all of his different crops.

As the Israelites are prepared for exile, they have many reasons to wonder what God is doing. Though the discipline of God is just and righteous, and it has been brought on by Israel's constant disobedience, it still stings. Think about a child who is getting a swift pop on the rear. It doesn't really matter if they realize they deserve it or not, they aren't going to want it. They might even run (though, growing up and in my house now, that means the whooping will be demonstrably worse). Isaiah is reminding Israel of two things, and we would do well to remember them as well. First, the foundation of Zion, "a sure foundation," that is Christ, will not be moved (Is. 28:16). In the end, all things are working together for good for those that love the Lord (Rom. 8:28). And secondly, even when we cannot understand what God is doing, we can rest knowing that he is dealing with us in ultimate wisdom. We need not get frustrated or angry with God when we suffer. In fact, if we zoom out a bit, we can see that it is downright silly. Don't hear what I'm not saying; when you suffer, it hurts. It is not silly to feel that pain—I have felt that sting. What I mean is, in the scope of eternity, our momentary suffering will seem like nothing when we are rejoicing in heaven. God knows us intimately, and we mustn't concern ourselves with how he deals with each one uniquely. Rather, we trust in his sovereign goodness.

¹ "Acts of Providence," *Ligonier Ministries*

Isaiah 29 – September 15

As I assist in writing a few of the devotions for this month, I am certain that much of what I say may have been already stated by the previous writers. Having said that, forgive me for any repetition but know that what is herein written is indeed in keeping with the heart and meaning of this chapter too. These chapters continue to be a grave warning against the people of God for their continued and willful disobedience and disregard for Him and His ways.

Isaiah is writing in this chapter about the impending judgment of God against the holy city Jerusalem itself. The name “Ariel” means lion of God is in referring to Jerusalem. It is sad to note that even as the danger of judgment is looming upon them, the people continue to walk through the meaningless motions of their festivals and feasts (v.1b). Understand at this point they are meaningless only because they have become a mere ritual with no heartfelt connection at all. What stands out to me in the first part of this chapter is the reality that it is from the hand of God that this awful punishment will befall them. We must not miss the fact that although God is going to utilize other nations (Assyrians and Babylonians) (vv.2-3), and even bad weather (v.6), which may be referring to the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments of Revelation, it is the hand of God that is against them.

Oh, what an amazing God we serve. As is so often the case, when the people cry out to God for deliverance, we are told He will hear their voices and quickly dismiss their enemies (vv.5-8). He jumps back to their spiritual dullness beginning in verse 9. We see here that it is because of their continued failure to see and hear that they miss what God is doing. Let this be a serious warning beloved – There are times when a person will not listen and then a time when he cannot listen. God will sear the conscience and close permanently the eyes and ears. I pray to God that none of us are guilty of verse 13 where it reads, “Then the Lord said, ‘Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote....’” Jesus spoke often of this in the gospels.

Isaiah writes in this chapter of a book that is sealed and cannot be opened. I can’t help but think of Jesus as He stands in Revelation 4 as the Lion of Judah slain as the Lamb of God worthy to open the book that nobody else can. Beloved, He is the potter and we are the clay (v.16) and we dare not think ourselves equal to Him. We must not forget that we are here simply because He created us to be. May we never think that the One who made us doesn’t know or understand us. Pray that the Lord would give you eyes to see and minds that comprehend the wonders of His majesty. May we sanctify His name in our lives as we stand in awe of our God (v.23).

Isaiah 30 – September 16

This chapter comes out of the gate swinging. I wonder how many times people have gathered to make plans, even in a church, but they were not God's plans. It is sad to think of people coming up with their plans and executing it to perfection only to find that it wasn't even close to being in step with the heart of God. The only way that I know to prevent that is to be sure we study God's Word in order that we might know His heart and His ways. He promises to direct our steps. He promises that His Word will be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105).

Friend, who do you go to for guidance? Where do you turn for wisdom and insight? If you have financial challenges, marital struggles, or health concerns is God anywhere in the mix in your handling of these issues? Surely you would not saddle up with the devil in order to solve your problems in this world would you? That is precisely what you do when you make alliances with ungodly people or those who are driven by something other than pleasing the Lord and trusting Him in all our ways. Notice at the end of verse 1 that when you seek solutions apart from God, you are "adding sin to sin."

Oh friends, I know that it is enticing to find security in the things of this world. We are reminded in verses 2-3 of the temptation and the foolishness of "going back to Egypt" when the going gets tough. Please know that Satan is forever trying to break your faith connection with God. If he can get you to doubt God or to a place where you no longer trust God by failing to exercise faith, then he has you right where he wants you. See, the Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Our tendency as fallen people is to run back to what we were once familiar with. When Peter denied Christ and the other disciples fled, we find them deciding to go back to what they knew before – fishing. By the way a side note here, they weren't as good as they thought as we read in the Gospel of John that they caught nothing when they returned to the waters (John 21:3).

Abraham ran back to Egypt as did Isaac in time of trial and difficulty. They sought from the world that which they should have found from the hand of God. In Luke 9:12-17, Jesus proved to us that He can provide for us. We are told in John 6 that He is the bread of life. We are told that if we eat of that bread we will be satisfied. Living by faith is certainly not easy sometimes. Being called to walk on water or to step into deeper water can be frightening. It is hard when we aren't in control; when we are in over our heads. But beloved, that is where God wants us to be sometimes. It is there that we find our inadequacies and His faithfulness, His ability, and His provision, etc.

The things of this world will not last and they were never meant to be our source of security or focus. Simply put, we are "To seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else we need will be added unto us" (Matt. 6:33). Isn't Isaiah 30:18 a precious verse? It says, "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." Amen!

Isaiah 31 – September 17

This chapter gives me great hope for my own life. When I consider the fact that I am a sinner and prone to wander from God, it does my heart good to reflect on His tender mercy and grace. Our God is so quick to forgive the person who humbles himself, confesses sin, repents of that sin, and who runs back to Him. I don't want to be the prodigal son but I sure am grateful for the beauty of that Bible lesson which demonstrates our Father's love, mercy, patience, and forgiveness. All of that is here in chapter 31 of the Book of Isaiah. Let's take a look.

As I mentioned yesterday, the tendency is to attempt to find answers and solutions anywhere other than God. I don't know why we do that but we all know it is true that God is oftentimes a person's last resort. Even then, the neglected One, is merciful when we run to Him for help. The sin that Isaiah speaks of in this chapter is what Jeremiah writes about in chapter 2 of his book. There he writes, "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). Not only had the people not relied on God, but they had also looked to other sources for the help that only He could provide. That is what the people are doing back in Isaiah. Like the previous chapter, we find the people going to a pagan nation, Egypt, for the help that only God can give. Isaiah reminds us that all Egypt can do is provide human assistance which so often is not what we need.

In contrast to the limitations of human aid, God is here described as a lion hovering over its defeated prey. God, the lion, will not be troubled or afraid of the threats of the enemy's voice (v.4). He is described as a flying bird who has a perfect view of the entire situation and a willingness to do whatever is necessary to protect Her little ones. Why dear friends would we not turn to Him first? Have we not yet learned that God declares, "It is not by might nor by power, but My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6)? I think of Psalm 20:7 which says, "Some trust (boast) in chariots and some in horses, but we will trust in the name of the Lord, our God." There is so much trouble and heartache that could be avoided if we would pursue Christ first.

If you find yourself today having turned to the things of this world (idols), it is not too late. Take a look at what Isaiah says in verse 6, "Return to Him from whom you have deeply defected." He goes on to say that when you repent, you will throw away the idols to which you have given your time, resources, hope, and heart. When you have turned back to the Lord God, then He will kick in and rescue you from the things of this world. Notice that the enemy will fall not by the sword of man but will fall by the will of God (v.8). "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe: (Prov. 18:10). Praise God for this truth. Jesus Christ is the Lion of Judah, The King of kings, the Lord of lords. Run to Him for He cares for your soul.

Isaiah 32 – September 18

This chapter gives us a glimpse into the messianic kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Unlike the bad leaders mentioned in previous chapters, we get a look at a righteous kingdom (v.1). I think it is fair to say that from our vantage point of relative ease and plenty in our day it is difficult to appreciate how wonderful this news would have been to the readers and hearers of the book of Isaiah. Until now there has been so much discouragement and dread because of the impending judgment due Israel. In this chapter, we begin to see what ultimately the future is going to hold for the people of God. I must say that it is breathtaking for the one who is longing for the day of redemption.

The kingdom is described as, “A shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry country, like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land, eyes will see, ears will hear, minds that will understand truth, tongues that can speak clearly, and right being called right” (vv.2-5). It will be a place where that which was wrong and simply persisted will no longer be allowed. Fools will not run the show and evil will not reign. Sounds good to me.

Let’s spend some time on the impact on a person’s life of the Spirit of God being poured out from on high (v.15). Notice that it says justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness in the field. I so enjoy verse 17 and 18 which says, “And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness quietness and confidence.” Friend, I know that this refers to the impact upon the collective people of God and the land but I want to focus on the personal nature of this truth too. For a person who has experienced the gift of the righteousness of Christ, there are certain characteristics that will be true of their lives. Let’s look and see.

First of all, Isaiah says that the work, the produce if you will, of righteousness is peace. Now remember my dear friends, we are not talking about self-righteousness we are talking about the righteousness of Christ that is given to a person who truly is born again. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “He made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” What a beautiful exchange – our sin for His righteousness. So, when we receive His righteousness, we are given peace (a fruit of the Spirit). Not only is there peace for the child of God, there is also quietness and confidence (v.18). Beloved, that is language that describes the inner being of a person. This is not superficial and it does not mean we will never have moments of turmoil and struggle. BUT, deep down in a true believer is a quietness and a confidence because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We have the “shield of faith”, the “helmet of salvation”, and the “sword of the Spirit” as pieces of the armor of God that aid in the spiritual battle that we fight in this world. These weapons, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, assure us of our peace, quietness, and confidence in this crazy world. Oh may you seek to know the God of peace (Phil. 4:9) who can lead your life in such a way that you may not stumble and fall. God has indeed given us all that we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Isaiah 33 – September 19

Isaiah 33 ends a section of chapters that are united by the introductory word “woe.” If you remember, the first word of chapters 28, 29, 30, 31, and now 33, is “woe.” The word “woe” signifies the calling down of a curse; it’s a serious thing! In Isaiah 33, we will look at the reason and the “cure” for the curse (i.e. the judgment of God) that Isaiah calls down.

Isaiah’s victims are many in this chapter. Nowadays, we could say that he’s on a rant and no one is safe! The first verse is directed specifically to Assyria, but generally to anyone that would rise up against God’s people. Isaiah is saying what he has said and will continue to say—God is sovereign! Nothing happens apart from God’s will and away from His watchful eye and powerful arm. Assyria might have been destroying Israel for a time, but that time would come to an end.

After a lengthy first verse, Isaiah turns his sight toward his own people. They had refused to wait on the Lord earlier (Isaiah 30:15-16) and they had trusted in Egypt instead of God (Isaiah 31:1). Finally, as we see in verse 2, the Israelites (Isaiah included) repent. Naturally, what follows repentance is praise. Isaiah is now looking to the future glory of Israel. But, after a moment of joyous anticipation, Isaiah returns to the disastrous present situation.

Verses 7-9 reveal that man’s plan does not work. Verses 7-9 say that both men of war and high-ranking diplomats failed to bring victory and that the land was virtually destroyed. Is there a better time for the Lord to bring victory than when all else has failed?

As is often the case, the Lord’s plan takes time to unfold. It takes time because it is a perfect plan, a plan that lets mankind fail time and time again, so that we will come to a place where we finally realize our need for God. Friends, do not despise trials and tribulations for through them your faith is refined! Take heart and wait on the Lord.

So what brought God’s judgement down? What incurred these trials? The evil of Assyria and the faithlessness of Israel. What lifts the judgement of God for Israel? Repentance and turning back to God. Now, things are different today, after the work of Christ, and so we ought not see our suffering as judgment from God that will end when we repent; that’s not really how it works anymore. How it works now is that Jesus took on all of God’s judgment and we are free to see trials not as punishment, but as grace. Of course, we still need chastisement, but it comes to us not out of wrath and justice, but out of love, mercy, and grace.

Who is this great change-agent of history? Who turned the world upside down? None other than “the King in His beauty” (33:17), Jesus Christ. The Israelites were waiting for Christ to bring His Kingdom to earth and we, on this side of the cross, are His ambassadors, now ushering in the Kingdom of God. One day, we will dwell in an “undisturbed habitation” (33:20), in “a tent which will not be folded” (33:20). Just as Israel had to look to God and His future deliverance while they endured trials and tribulations, we must now do the same. “for the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; He will save us.” (33:22).

Isaiah 34 – September 20

Today and tomorrow will serve as a two-part exercise. Our chapter for today, Isaiah 34, tells of God's wrath to come against the nations (not including Israel) and our chapter for tomorrow, Isaiah 35, tells of Israel's future glory. So, we will take two days to do some intense comparing and contrasting. Today, in Isaiah 34, what we see is pretty clear: God's wrath is swift, terrible, and as eternal as He so chooses.

Before we dive into a chapter solely devoted to God's judgement, let us hear from Dr. Barry G. Webb¹ on God's judgment in Isaiah 34:

Judgement is not a comfortable subject. Even the LORD himself finds it 'strange' and 'alien' (28:21). But it is an indispensable part of the Bible's teaching about the last things. And the reason is obvious, if we quiet our feelings long enough to give it a careful thought. Judgement is the natural corollary of the fact that God is king (chapter 33). A king must rule, or he is no king at all, and that means that rebellion must finally be put down. The fact is that God is almost unbelievably patient, but Isaiah is clear that his just anger is a reality to be reckoned with, and we delude ourselves if we think otherwise... God has put the world on notice that he will not tolerate insurrection for ever.

These are strong, but nevertheless true words from Dr. Webb. It is far too easy for us to see God's judgement as unfair, unjust, or arbitrary. Yet, the fact that God has let anyone live on this beautiful earth is more grace than anyone deserves. Adam and Eve should have been destroyed, but even the "original" sinners were given grace and allowed to live and have a family. Friends, understand this: there is no injustice in God. There is justice, and where there is no justice there is grace. If someone goes to hell, it is justice. If someone goes to heaven, it is grace. Never does God display injustice.

If there is something about God we do not understand, such as his justice for example, we must do two things. One, we must remember God's *character*. God's law is never separated from his character. Do you believe God is loving and kind and gracious and merciful and patient and faithful? If you do, then know that his law can be no different. And if you don't believe his character is as I said, then look no further than the cross. What greater "injustice" has ever been committed than Jesus Christ crucified for *your* sins? Do you want justice from God so badly? I didn't think so. I don't know about you, but I am so grateful that Christ received (justice) what I should have received. Secondly, we must remember that if we knew all of God's ways, then, well, he wouldn't really be all that great of a God! What then would be the difference between us? I want a God who knows better than I! Amen? If God says smoke will rise from Edom forever (34:10), then I trust that Edom deserved it and I bow to the authority of The King to punish his rebellious subjects.

Isaiah 34 is a hard, sad, terrifying chapter. The wrath of God ought to make you quake in your shoes. In the shadow of that wrath—that you and I fully deserve—how much brighter does the light of Christ shine? Christ is the hope of the nations.

¹ Dr. Webb served as head of the Old Testament department at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, and is now a Senior Research Fellow at the college.

Isaiah 35 – September 21

Wrath yesterday, grace today. “Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). In Isaiah 35, we see the future glory of the redeemed bride of Christ. Personally, I love that Isaiah doesn’t waste time with an introduction of any sort, but simply dives right in to a picture of the new heaven and new earth.

Contrasted with the barren and bloody land of the pagan nations, God’s people will live in total restoration. Can you picture it? All the vegetation is always blooming, the dry ground is fertile, the sadness is gone and joy has taken its rightful place in the hearts of all the people. Sickness and all manner of ailments are no more. And best of all: “they will see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.”

Sometimes people say that when they get to heaven, they’ll have a million questions for God. But when I read chapters like Isaiah 35, I can’t help but think that my questions will fade away with the darkness that I leave behind. C.S. Lewis captures it well in the first installment of the series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He writes:

“Wrong will be right, when Aslan [a picture of Jesus] comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”

The ice is melting, my friends. Let me show you why you should think a little more optimistically about where our world is headed.

Lest you think that as American Christianity goes, so Christianity around the world goes, you should know that the majority of Christians in the world live outside the United States. You should know that other countries are sending missionaries to America as we speak. We like to think that America is the Christian capital of the world, but we are the only ones thinking like that anymore. We are no longer the center of gravity in the world of Christianity. It is easy to look at our own country and think that “the world” is growing worse, but that is a misguided view. The Kingdom of God is growing and spreading rapidly in places like South America, Africa, China, and South Korea. Christ’s church is in *no* danger of succumbing to the evil in this world. None of us know when the vision of Isaiah 35 will be realized, but that is no excuse to not do all that we can here and now to usher it in.

First and foremost, we preach the gospel. But our preached gospel is false if not evidenced in our lives. James says that faith without works is dead. *Dead*. Not deficient or anemic or dying or average or just okay, but dead. Don’t think that all your job as a Christian consists of is telling others about the faith. That’s supremely important, don’t get me wrong, but are you loving your neighbor? Are you stewarding your resources (time, energy, money, materials) well? Let us live in light of our ultimate reward in the new heaven and new earth.

Isaiah 36 – September 22

Dr. John MacArthur notes that Isaiah 36 and 37 are the “historical consummation” of chapters 1-35. Finally, after 35 chapters, we begin to see Jerusalem’s deliverance from Assyria. Technically, chapters 36-39 all form a historical transition, but 36 and 37 represent the end of a time whereas 38 and 39 form the historical basis for the rest of the book (which previews the Babylonian captivity).

In Isaiah 36, we find the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib. I don’t know about you, but this is an emotional chapter for me. At times, I find myself angered by Rabshakeh’s (King Sennacherib’s spokesman) arrogance and the cowardice of Hezekiah’s spokesmen (Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah). At other times, I find myself excited by the empty threats of the Assyrians because I know that they are indeed empty! And that the God of the Israelites, Jehovah, can and will indeed save His people! In verse 18 of this chapter, Rabshakeh basically says, “don’t believe King Hezekiah if he tells you that your God will save you... he won’t!” Now, I could get mad at the blasphemy of Rabshakeh, but I’m actually quite giddy picturing the vengeance that the Lord will take upon those that ride against Him. I also see this as a warning: do not set yourself against the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” is quoted in three separate places in the Bible (Proverbs 3:34, 1 Peter 5:5, and James 4:6). When you see the same sentence quoted three separate times that means it’s important!

I connect this verse with Rabshakeh in Isaiah 36 because pride isn’t just a mental state. In other words, you might tell yourself, “Oh, I’m not that prideful. After all, I know that God is in control and that I’m just a measly human being.” But guess what, like I’ve said a million and a half times—our actions betray our words every time! So, you might say that you don’t struggle with pride, but if you sin (hint: we all do, each and every day) then you struggle with pride. Pride was the very first sin (Satan thought he was better than God). Pride leads you to think that your kingdom is more worth building than God’s or that your plan is better than God’s. All sin blossoms from the root of pride. That is why C. S. Lewis called pride, “the anti-God state of mind.” Nothing is more antithetical to the King-subject relationship than pride in the subject.

King Hezekiah may not have been acting like a coward. In fact, I’m not really sure why he commanded his representatives to not respond to Rabshakeh. Maybe he was being patient and waiting on the Lord? Either way, whether he was doing the right thing or just being a sissy, I know that we are to wait on the Lord in the face of trouble. We are not to be prideful and take matters in our own hands, nor are we to think that God cannot handle His business. Our trouble might not be hiding in a castle facing Rabshakeh, but the devil tempts us with the same words nonetheless. Can’t you hear verse 7 coming straight from the mouth of the devil? “But if you say to me, ‘we trust in the LORD our God,’ is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away?” Rabshakeh was saying two things. He was saying, for one, that Hezekiah was a fickle king who didn’t believe in God anyways, and two, that their God wasn’t even powerful enough to keep his altars and high places from being torn down. It’s almost like we’re transported back to the garden where Satan whispered to Eve that God wasn’t really that good and wasn’t really that powerful. How will you respond when the devil whispers those words in your ear? Tomorrow, in chapter 37, we will see just how Hezekiah eventually responded.

Isaiah 37 – September 23

Today, we read about Jerusalem's deliverance from Assyria, Part Two. If you recall, we saw yesterday how arrogant and deceptive Sennacherib is and how possibly cowardly Hezekiah and his representatives are. Now, in Isaiah 37, we see Hezekiah wising up and heading in the Lord's direction. In my bible (MacArthur study bible, NASB), Isaiah 37 is entitled, "Hezekiah Seeks Isaiah's Help."

If you remember Isaiah 34, you will remember that God's wrath is swift and terrible. God's wrath is manifested again in verse 7 of Isaiah 37. Hezekiah sends his men to Isaiah and Isaiah tells them that the Lord will take His revenge against King Sennacherib and Rabshakeh and that they will fall by the sword in their very own land. In short, it didn't take much time for God to say, "I'm going to deal with this and here's how." Yet, once again, Rabshakeh is lost in his arrogance and threatens Hezekiah all the more.

We left off yesterday asking the question, how do we respond in the face of trials? Well, though he may not always be, Hezekiah here provides a great example. In verse 14, after Rabshakeh has made his threats, Hezekiah takes them before the Lord. The prayer that Hezekiah prays in verses 16-20 is nothing less than a model prayer. He begins with praise, extolling God for His transcendence and power. Then, he moves to petition. Only, his petition is not distinct from his repentance. Remember that Hezekiah didn't stand up for the Lord in the past and that is one attack that Rabshakeh levels at Hezekiah. We see in verse 19 Hezekiah repenting and admitting that the gods of other lands aren't really gods at all, but "the work of men's hands, wood and stone." And, of course, he ends the prayer in verse 20 aiming for the glory of God among the nations.

There are three things we can learn from Hezekiah's prayer. One, that praise for God ought to be the foundation. We can only come to God in prayer because He is the, "LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim." Beginning prayer is such a way realigns our minds and places the rest of our prayer in the proper perspective. Two, we learn that repentance and petition go hand in hand. We don't pray so that we can ask for more and more stuff. We repent that we haven't walked in God's way and then we ask for God to help us and others walk in His way. Third and finally, we see the goal of all prayer, "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, LORD, are God." Friends, when we say that we are praying in Jesus' name, we don't mean that we are invoking some mystical power. We mean that we are praying according to the person and will of Jesus Christ. And what is His will? To do the will of His heavenly Father. If our prayers aren't aimed at the goal of God being praised more then our prayers are not likely to be answered.

Friends, God always delivers His people. Oftentimes, if not all the time, He delivers them by working in their hearts to turn to Him as He did with Hezekiah. When hard times come, when someone you love has turned away from God, when you lose your job or don't get the job you wanted, when you encounter a physical ailment that won't go away, what is your response and your desire? I hope it is like Hezekiah's, that you are driven to pray more and pray for the glory of God. Only then will you see the Lord work for your deliverance like He did for the Israelites as we see in verse 36. The story of Isaiah 36 and 37 is God's deliverance of His chosen people. Place your faith in Him and live a life that is pleasing to Him and He will take care of you. We have seen it time and time again in our journey from Genesis to Isaiah and we will continue to see it. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

Isaiah 38-39 – September 24

Mercy, mercy, and more mercy. Isaiah 38 and 39 indicate for us that a period of judgment is ending and a new day of transformation is about to begin. On the one hand, chapters 38 and 39 foreshadow Israel's Babylonian captivity, but on the other hand they set the stage for the rest of the book of Isaiah which deals with the promise of restoration (chapters 40-48), redemption through the suffering servant (chapters 49-55) and the coming anointed conqueror (chapters 56-66); all of which are indeed hope-filled narratives.

Before we talk about the devotional aspects of these two chapters, we must make a couple important notes. First, Hezekiah's illness and subsequent healing actually take place before the Assyrian siege described in the last couple of chapters. So, in Isaiah 38 we are actually jumping back in time a little bit; verse 6 gives us that clue. Isaiah 38:6 says, "I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city." God is clearly talking about future plans, so we know that the events of Isaiah 38 and 39 actually take place before the Assyrian war. What also deserves mention is the connection between Hezekiah's sickness and healing and the crisis of Jerusalem. It is interesting to see that Hezekiah's healing is only temporary (15 years as verse 5 tells us) and we know that Jerusalem's victory over the Assyrians is only a temporary victory, for the Babylonian captivity is on the horizon. Again, this is not the most important thing you'll ever notice, but it does serve to strengthen one's faith to see the endlessly creative ways that God communicates.

Now, what we can focus on in a devotional manner from here on out is the power and sovereignty of God in Hezekiah's healing. We see an interesting contrast between this huge, unheard of miracle of adding 15 years to someone's life and the way that the 15 years are added: by a simple dressing (or poultice or whatever you want to call it). Think about that for a second: God is powerful enough to, on a whim, add 15 years to Hezekiah's life, but then He chooses to enact that miracle by instructing Hezekiah's people (through Isaiah) to make a simple bandage of figs. That's it. Just throw on an ol' fig cake band-aid and WAA-BOOM, you will now live for another decade and a half. Maybe it's just me, but I have to ask the question: why would God employ such ordinary means to yield such extraordinary results?

I only have one answer: because that's how God does it. God's plan, manifested from Genesis to Revelation, is to use "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" and "the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul goes on to say that God works in this way "so that no man may boast before God." Why did God use a cake of figs to give Hezekiah another 15 years? My best guess is so that Hezekiah would forever remain humble and continually praise the Lord. It was nothing that Hezekiah (or even Isaiah) did that added the years to his life; it was simply God working through a small, insignificant, cheap cake of figs. We could spend a lot of time talking about this, but ask yourself this today: am I okay with being a cake of figs? Am I okay with the world considering me foolish and weak if it means that God can use me? Is it a coincidence that in the next chapter (39) Hezekiah shows the Babylonian ambassadors all his riches and the very next paragraph gives us Isaiah's response to Hezekiah's showing off... "Behold, the days are coming when all that [you have] will be carried to Babylon." Maybe Hezekiah should have remembered the power and beauty of a simple cake of figs.

Isaiah 40 – September 25

There are some chapters in the Bible that lead us to cry out, like Job, “Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to you? I lay my hand on my mouth.” (Job 40:4); Isaiah 40 is one of those chapters. More than the eye can see and the mind can comprehend is held within this chapter, but what my own hard heart and dim eyes cannot escape is the glory of a God that I know I must worship. In Isaiah 40, I see a God that I know is in control, a God that I know is worthy of everything I have and everything I am. I’m tempted to write no more for fear of clouding or hindering your own experience of God in this chapter; therefore, let me quote at length the words of one far more adequate than I:

On verses 1-11

“Isaiah’s new message is for people whose whole world has been shattered. And for people like that, cheap comfort is not only a waste of time, it is cruel. Comfort that is not grounded in reality is no comfort at all. But the word that Isaiah is commissioned to bring to them is not like that at all; it is based on truth at every point. The first truth is that they are God’s people... The second truth is that they have been forgiven... The third truth is that God will act to give concrete expression to the fact that he has forgiven them [and]... the fourth and final truth is that God’s word can be relied upon. It does not decay and fade away as we do, but stands forever.”

What beautiful truths from Dr. Barry G. Webb. Take time to meditate on those four truths today. Now, let us hear again from him on verses 12-31.

On verses 12-26

“The reason the gospel is so powerful is that it is no mere human invention; it emanates from the very throne of God. It is powerful because it is God’s gospel, and what a God he is! Isaiah paints a breathtaking picture of him in verses 12-26. He created the universe as effortlessly as a skilled craftsman constructing a model on his workbench. He is infinitely wise, totally sovereign, worthy of more worship than we could ever give him, incomparable, and enthroned above the circle of the earth. Lift your eyes, says Isaiah, and see who it is who has given you his word. There was plenty on the horizontal plane to discourage Isaiah and his contemporaries, and still more their successors who suffered the humiliation of defeat and deportation. But how could they give in to despair with a God like this?... Isaiah clothes the age-old truth in vivid language so that it will penetrate the dullness of those who are almost past hope, take fresh hold of them, and life them up.”

On verses 27-31

“No sooner has the truth of God’s power begun to take effect, however, then an insidious doubt about his goodness begins to assert itself. ‘In view of all that has happened, can we really believe that God still cares for us?’ Isaiah knew the feeling only too well. But he had learnt enough about God to know that it was a hideous lie. The glory of God is not just, or even essentially, his power, but his servanthood; the fact is that no one and nothing is too small to be important to him or worthy of his attention and care.”

Isaiah 41 – September 26

If you need to be humbled and silenced by the pure majesty and transcendence of God, read Isaiah 40. If you need to be encouraged and comforted by the raw power and sovereignty of God, read Isaiah 41. Isaiah 41:10 is a rather famous verse. It says, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” This verse serves as a sort of thesis statement for this chapter. If you want Isaiah 41 summarized in just a few words, read verse 10. What I also love so much about this chapter is that God doesn’t just play nice; He makes sure to compare himself to the idols all around.

In verses 21-24, God does to idols what He did to Job, and what would probably kill us out of pure fear: He questions them. When God questions someone, like the idols here or Job in Job 38-42 or Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:9, it’s not out of curiosity or ignorance; it’s in judgement. Here in Isaiah 41:21-24, God invites the idols to predict the future or even recount the past. He goes on to encourage them to do either good or evil (in other words, to do anything!), “so that we may know that you are gods.” He finishes His trial by declaring, “you are of no account and your work amounts to nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination.” Wow-wee. That’s a “mic-drop” moment, as the kids say these days. The Lord goes through this mock trial to show Israel what and “who” the false gods really are when compared to Him, the one true God. Think about how foolish the Israelites must have felt for worshipping false gods or turning to anyone but Jehovah for salvation after a chapter like this.

Don’t you now feel a little foolish, a little silly? When we have a God as described in Isaiah 41, ruling and reigning over the earth, and that very same God loves us unconditionally and endlessly, why do we still turn to false idols that are “of no account”? Why must we still chase money, sex, power, fame, affirmation from kids, etc., for salvation? Do we not believe what God has said in Isaiah 41:10? God has *commanded* us to not be anxious and to not fear. Yet, the generation that is coming up is already recorded as the most anxious and depressed generation. That means one thing: the generation coming up is not getting proper teaching. Babies don’t teach themselves how to eat and talk and walk, and nor do teenagers teach themselves how to be anxious and depressed. The fruit of the latest generation comes from nowhere else but the root of the previous generation. I fear that kids today are not seeing trust in the Lord modeled by their parents. Now, don’t beat yourself up too much because that’s nothing new. Every generation needs Jesus because of its failings to live rightly.

Nonetheless, knowing what we now know, we have one choice. Those of us reading the Emmaus Road Devotions right now have one choice: we can choose this day to not fear and not be anxious because God is with us and God will surely strengthen and uphold us. We can reject the false gods that this world tries to shove down our throats in favor of the one true God, “the first and the last” (verse 4), the God who “delivers up nations” and “subdues kings” (verse 2). We are free to trust God to provide for us! We are free to not worry about “what we will wear” or “what we will eat and drink”, but to “seek His Kingdom” (Luke 12:22-31). You know what that means? It means you don’t have to stay awake until your teenager makes it home because you trust God. It means you don’t have to gather more and more stuff around you because you trust that true peace, satisfaction, and joy come from closeness with Jesus, not with hoarding His gifts. It means not working away all your family time to pay off debt (or, ironically, to go into more debt) because debt-free people can still end up in hell. It means trusting that God will provide as you glorify Him by spending time training up your children in righteousness. Let’s read Isaiah 41 and trust that God is still who He was a few thousand years ago.

Isaiah 42 – September 27

Today's chapter may produce a slightly uncomfortable devotion. Isaiah 42 is a bit of a precursor, or a "part 1" to Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 is famously known as the "Suffering Servant" chapter. Isaiah 42 also deals with the promised servant to come, but pictured here as He who will establish justice on earth. Of course, we know that in both chapters it is Jesus who is predicted as the servant to come. So, let us talk today about justice on the earth as the mission of Jesus.

Dr. Barry G. Webb, whom we have referenced multiple times to this point, offers a noteworthy caution on Isaiah 42: "we have to be careful here," he says, "for in the book of Isaiah *mispāt* (the Aramaic word for "justice") is a rather bigger thing than we normally think of as justice." Webb goes on to say, "[Jesus' mission of justice] is nothing less than to put God's plans for his people into full effect, and to make the truth about the LORD, Israel's God, known everywhere, especially the fact that he alone is the sovereign creator and Lord of history."

Dr. Webb's caution is important, because the term "justice" as used in Isaiah 42 doesn't mean "justice in the American penal system." We would do well not to read our American concepts and categories into this chapter. For example, justice, in this sense, doesn't mean that all illegal aliens will finally be deported. In fact, it resembles more of the opposite. On verse 3, John MacArthur, whom we all love so dearly, comments, "the Servant will bring comfort and encouragement to the weak and oppressed." The Bible tells us that the first shall be last and the last shall be first, so I simply want to encourage you to conform your notion of justice to the Bible instead of to your preferred political party.

It is possible, of course, to go too far with Dr. Webb's caution and to only think of justice in eschatological terms. In other words, I'm saying it is also dangerous to ignore being ambassadors of justice in the here and now because we think it is only for the future. We know, of course, that final and ultimate justice will only come when Jesus comes again, but that in no way prohibits our working towards it now. Are we not, in every way, to be a mirror of the future kingdom now in our very own communities? Why, then, do we see taking care of our earth (which is very much a part of our job as God's image bearers) as part of the liberal agenda? Why are we lethargic, at best, in striving for diversity and *biblical* equality? (Yes, I know the word "equality" is vastly abused these days, but it is not an inherently bad word, so let's redeem it, shall we?).

As we think more and more about the characteristics of the coming Kingdom, it is probably time to stop and take stock: do we actually want to take part in the Kingdom that the Bible says is coming? Do you want to be in a kingdom where all races are equal? Where there is no distinction between rich and poor? I fear that some of us may be more comfortable in the United States of America than we would be in Heaven.

I think, like the Israelites in verses 18-25, we need to be called to repentance (wow, a novel idea). Webb says, "Isaiah is in full flight here, and quite unsparing of the feelings of his audience. Like a good pastor, he knows that they will never know the comfort of God and fulfill their mission to be his servant people until they have faced up to their sinfulness and repented of it." Friends, Jesus' forgiveness is waiting. Let us repent of the particular areas where we have been blind and let us work with all our might towards biblical justice in the here and now.

Isaiah 43 – September 28

I'm not convinced that any other chapter of the Bible is more applicable to a suffering person than Isaiah 43. From verse 9 of this chapter all the way into chapter 44, Isaiah is penning a reminder that "Israel is to be a witness to a virtual reenactment of a new exodus from Babylon."¹ Let that sink in... the people of Israel are hearing that they will basically get to take part in a second exodus. I'm not sure that they could have received any better news! They were told in chapter 39 that they were going to be captured by Babylon, but now, their redemption is promised! What joy we can take from this chapter!

Let's jump straight into application for today: this life is tough. We will go through seasons of feeling like "Babylon" has captured us. Like we have fallen and there is no returning to former glory. We will wish for the old days or, at worst, wish for no more days. We'll think God has shut the door in our faces and left us to drown in a sea of darkness and silence.

When we face times like I've mentioned above, imagine what it would do for our souls to hear the words, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place." (Isaiah 43:1-3).

My friends, if you are in Christ, you are redeemed! How can that thought not revive your soul? If you are covered by the blood of Christ, then your citizenship is in heaven! Your name is in the Lamb's book of life! There is no more condemnation for you because Jesus paid for it! Rejoice, brethren, rejoice! There is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ, so there is nothing that can steal my joy in Christ. Like Paul, we can now say, "to live is Christ, to die is gain." That means if we add up everything that we value—including our very own life—and we lose it in order to gain more Christ, we can say, "I have gained!" What a God we serve!

There is nothing more I can say. You must pray that God will open your eyes and soften your heart to see and to feel in the depths of your soul the beauty of the truth in Isaiah 43. You must pray that every day. You must get in the Word of God each day and not get out until you've encountered the Holy One of Israel. Like Jacob, we must wrestle with God until He blesses us. It might alter our life and hurt us in the moment (see: Jacob's limp), but it reveals our passion to know God more and God will bless that, I guarantee it. He probably won't bless it with something so trivial as money, but He will bless your pursuit of Him with... Himself. Psalm 16:11 says, "in your presence is fullness of joy and in your right are pleasures forevermore." Our greatest joy, our greatest reward, is more of Christ. And if you passionately and incessantly pursue Him, you will find Him and thus receive your greatest reward. What an indescribable and unspeakable joy to be called by His name and redeemed by His blood.

¹ Mark Rooker, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. B&H Academic, (2011).

Isaiah 44 – September 29

So many hundreds or even thousands of years before Christ, we still see the good news. If you ever run across anyone who thinks or acts like the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are different, show them Isaiah 44. The outline of Isaiah 44 is as follows: the blessings of Israel and the majesty of God (verses 1-8), the folly of idolatry (verses 9-20), and God's forgiveness and redemption (verses 21-28). In short, God is great, yet turn to idols, but God forgives us anyways. There is the gospel in Isaiah 44.

Since we talked about the unfathomable beauty of the gospel yesterday, let's turn our attention to the evil of idolatry today. In order to better understand and appreciate the good news, we must likewise understand and "appreciate" the bad news. As usual, Dr. Webb's commentary on Isaiah (written in 1996) has very insightful offerings on the idolatry in Isaiah 44.

Webb says, "Idolatry is the worst sin of all, because it moves God to the periphery of our lives and puts something else in his place. It gives to something else the glory that should be God's alone. Chameleon-like, it constantly disguises itself so that we are scarcely aware of its presence, even when we are most in the grip of it. Greed, Paul tells us, is idolatry, because it turns us away from God towards things, and makes the pursuit of them the passion of our lives. The modern world is no less given over to idolatry than the ancient one; it is just that its cruder forms were more prevalent then. Of course, idolatry was a peculiarly pagan practice; Israel was forbidden to have anything to do with it. Yet it always held a fatal attraction for them, even in its crudest forms, because it seemed to work. It was not just primitive and backward people who practiced it, but the cultured and powerful – the Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Babylonians. And of course, they attributed their success to the power of their gods. How absurd, then, for their humiliated victims (Israel) to maintain that their God, the LORD, was supreme and that the gods of their conquerors were mere nothings! At times they (Israel) must have doubted it themselves, and yet they were called to be witnesses to precisely that fact... the truth is that idolatry is not only deeply offensive to God, it is also fundamentally absurd; those who indulge in it feed on ashes and their deluded hearts deceive them. Human beings make idols, but the LORD has made Israel, and displays his glory through her. What an honour! And it is an honour that we have inherited as the people of God today."

I love Dr. Webb's writing on Isaiah 44 because he just can't get over the fact that idolatry makes no sense! When you read God's words in verses 6-8, you are hit with the fact that sin is so dumb! Yet we do it day after day after day after day. You know that the best part about Isaiah 44 is, though? That God forgives and redeems. We can't completely rid ourselves of sin in this life. God knows that. But, through the blood of Christ we are F-O-R-G-I-V-E-N. God says, "I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist" (verse 22). So, now, what God expects of us is to "shout for joy!" because "the Lord has done it!" "The Lord has redeemed Jacob and in Israel He shows forth His glory," so "break forth into a shout of joy, you mountains!"

Isaiah 45 – September 30

The prophecy that unfolds in the book of Isaiah is so accurate that some have said it was written after the events and should be viewed as history not prophecy. We of course believe that is foolishness. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He sees all and knows all and would have no problem communicating to Isaiah these prophecies long before they came to pass. This prophecy relating to King Cyrus, for example, was written 150 years prior to Cyrus being king of Persia. That is stunning isn't it?

Chapter 45 begins with God referring to His plan for Cyrus' life and how his life would be used for God's purposes. You will recall that it was Cyrus who wrote the decree to let the Israelites go back to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. Remember, Cyrus and the Persians defeated Babylon. He was undoubtedly set apart, anointed, by God for divine purposes. Some believe that Cyrus had been influenced by Daniel's teaching from the scroll of Isaiah. I find it so interesting that Cyrus didn't really know God personally but became keenly aware that it was the God of Israel that was working in and through his life (vv. 4-7). Take a look at Ezra 1:1-4 and be amazed at the precise way in which God fulfills His words. We can still take Him at His Word today!

Beginning in verse 8, we get a picture of a future time in which His goodness will prevail throughout the earth. Verses 9 and 10 are there to show how utterly foolish it is to quarrel with God. To question God and argue with Him and like a lump of clay trying to tell the potter what to do. It is like an unborn child trying to tell the mother how to give birth. Remember now dear friends that it is really easy to criticize those before us who didn't have the complete picture like we do. We wonder sometimes how they could question or doubt. But, what about us? When His plan is unfolding in your life and it contains some heartache and disappointment, are we not prone to question, doubt, and argue with our Maker? This is in anticipation of the objections from the Jews against God's plan for His people to be taken captive, to be "rescued" by a pagan king, that the Messiah would be a suffering Servant, as well as God's plan to include Gentiles in His family. Do you trust God's plan?

God goes on to remind us that He is Creator and it is He who can take a man like Cyrus and arouse him to righteousness (v.13). As a result of God's sovereign choice, Cyrus will be the one who will set God's people free (v.13b). During the messianic kingdom, countries will submit to Israel. When it is declared in verse 15 that God hides Himself, all that means is that sometimes He seems hidden within the events of His ultimate plan. His plan will put to shame the plans of others who sought deliverance in idols that they created from their own hands (v.16). Unlike the inability of the idols to save, Israel was destined to be saved by the Lord would eventually not be put to shame (v.17).

Beloved, I like the truth of verse 19. God here says that His words are not spoken in secret nor are they hidden from us. He is near to us and accessible to us. He declares that only He foretold the history of Israel including their captivity and deliverance. There is no other like Him and no God besides Him. Isn't that enough for us today? He is a righteous God and our Savior. Our call today is the same as it was then, "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other" (v.22). Friends, verse 23 tells us that every knee will bow and tongue confess. Why not now as a choice of your own will, rather than later when it will be too late.