

Isaiah-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

Isaiah is a big and beautiful book; a little outlining helps us discern the beauty in the bigness. The overall outline: chapters 1-39 (like the 39 books of the Old Testament) present a discordant situation, still unresolved, uncompleted. But the following 27 chapters (chapters 40-66, like the 27 books of the New Testament) provide the necessary solution and resolution. And now, the outline of chapter 1: v.1 introduces us to Isaiah, who prophesied for at least 40 years. In vs.2-4 we see God's accusation against Israel: his children have deserted him. In vs.5-9 we read a sad and chilling prophecy of what will happen if they continue in rebellion. It all came to pass, by the way. In vs.10-20 God reasons with his people: stop living like Sodom and Gomorrah; live as the covenant people of the Living God. Hypocritical worship will not heal you. But God can cleanse; God can heal; listen to him. In vs.21-31 God laments the corruption of his people (see the use of metaphors: wife, silver, wine in vs.21,22) and invites them into redemption through repentance (v.27).

Chapter 2

In the early 5th century, in his book *The City of God*, St. Augustine wrote, "the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord." This is something of the contrast that the prophet Isaiah notes between the present Jerusalem (in all of its vileness and sin) and the final glory of the Heavenly Jerusalem to come. In vs.2-5 "the city of God" is celebrated; the Lord is there enthroned. This is the sole glory of the church, by the way. And we, the church, are to invite the world to this city, summoning the nations to the ways and the wisdom of God. However, the current Jerusalem that stands before Isaiah, described in vs.6-9, is anything but the light to the nations pictured above. It's full of earthly, self-seeking glory; not the glory of the Lord. In fact, it seems to have everything *but* God. And these are the terms by which we must examine the church today. In what (or whom) do we glory? This is an urgent matter because, as vs.10-22 remind us, "*the Lord of hosts has a day*" (v.12) in which he will stand "*against*" (used 10 times) the empty glories of sin.

Chapter 3

At the end of yesterday's chapter we read that overpowering description of "*the terror of the Lord*" (see that apocalyptic refrain in 2.10,19,21) in judgment. It was cosmic, immense majestic, global. *Today* that theme of God's judgment continues, but this is what it looks like "on the ground," so to speak. When God judges a culture that is so brazen in its rebellion as to "*proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it*" (v.9), this is what it might look like: a scarcity of material things (vs.1,7; also 3.16-4.1) and a scarcity of leadership (vs.2-4; 6-7; 13-15). The result is governmental incompetence and an oppressive sense of societal anarchy (vs.4,5). And finally, things become a "*heap of ruins*" (v.6). In Jerusalem's case, this would be a literal heap of ruins. This is what will eventually happen to every culture that defies and insults the glorious presence of the Lord (v.8). This chapter is at great pains to show the ultimate disintegration and emptiness of all "earthly" glory. Just count up the 21 items in vs.18-23! Will we bring this evil on ourselves (v.9)?

Chapter 4

Yesterday we were reading of the devastating judgment of God that will come upon all self-absorbed cultures. The emptiness of a mere "earthly" glory—which ultimately leaves you nothing to believe in—is an affront to the "*glorious presence*" (3.8) of the Lord, and will sooner or later be revealed in all its shame *before* the glory of our Lord. Well, now that glory of the Lord comes breaking through.... On the other side of God's judgment, "*everyone who has been recorded for life*" (v.3) will find salvation, will be made new in holiness; washed; cleansed (vs.3,4). There will be new growth after the destruction, like in

the days of Exodus; only now, instead of the glory of the Lord resting only over the sanctuary (as in the days of Exodus), it will rest over all (vs.5,6). The third stanza of the great hymn "Glorious Things Of Thee Are Spoken" comes from this great promise in Isaiah 4.5,6. This new growth is called "*the branch of the Lord*" in v.2, and here it speaks of the renewed, reborn community. Later, that imagery will speak of Christ (Isaiah 11.1; Jeremiah 23.5; Zechariah 3.8; 6.12).

Chapter 5

This chapter is the climax of the book's introduction. In the next chapter we'll read of Isaiah's call, and then we'll be off to the races, so to speak. Back in 3.14, the Lord rebuked the leaders of his people with these words: "*It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses.*" Now, in 5.1-7, that vineyard metaphor turns into a full-blown parable. Answering the questions of v.4 feels like we're David being set up by Nathan in 2 Samuel 12.1-7; we end up agreeing with our own indictment. Our sin is unreasonable, absurd, indefensible, and inexcusable. In vs.8-23 we have six woes; find them, count them, study them. Here the social sins that Isaiah has already mentioned are expanded upon. The increasing rapidity of the woes creates a sense of mounting intensity and fierceness of passion. Then, in vs.24-30, we read of the storm of judgment to come. The "*therefore*" in v.24 describes this judgment in terms of a logical outcome; the "*therefore*" in v.25 describes it in terms of the wrath of the judge. Verses 26-30 = the Assyrians.

Chapter 6

The urgent opening five chapters, detailing Israel's sin and calling them to repentance, help us more deeply understand Isaiah's confession in v.5 and the judgment of hardening in vs.9-10. The vision affirms several themes of this book: the great majesty and inescapable holiness and glorious power of our God (vs.1,3-4); the faithfulness of his servants (vs.2,8); the complete cleansing of those who repent (vs.5-7); the world-wide scope of his dominion, having vast implications for both judgment and salvation (v.3); the "clearing of the ground" that his judgment will demand (vs.11-13); and the renewed life that will break forth from that judgment (vs.7, and also the final words of this chapter, after God's judgment has been so thorough that only a stump remains, we read—"*The holy seed is its stump*"). Look ahead to the first verses of Isaiah 11 if you want to discern the promise and hope of new life in that stump. Ultimately, Jesus is this "*holy seed*" (v.3; Genesis 3.15; 22.18; Galatians 3.16). He is also the altar in v.6, the place of sacrifice and atonement.

Chapter 7

Chapters 7-12 are known as "The Book of Immanuel," after the references to the coming Christ found here (7.14; 8.8; 9.1-7; 11.1-10). The immediate context is a crisis for Israel during Isaiah's day, in 735 BC (7.1-9), but the prophecies given in that context extend to the latter times (9.1) and the whole of the earth (11.9,10 & 12.4,5). The name of Isaiah's son (see v.3) means "a remnant shall return," which bears witness to both judgment and salvation (see Isaiah's testimony to this in 8.18). Look at Isaiah's counsel to Ahaz in v.4: "*Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint.*" This is a good summary of Isaiah's calls for trust and faith in the whole book (see v.9b; 8.12-13; 28.16; 30.15; etc.). And why should we live in this manner? Because of the birth of the child that Isaiah prophesies in vs.10-17. Ahaz waves off the offer of a sign; he will trust in an alliance with Assyria instead (see 2 Kings 16.7-10). Rather than live by faith in the promises of God, he looks to powerful armies. But God points us to the child; see v.14 & Matthew 1.21-23.

Chapter 8

In vs.1-4 Isaiah tells us of his next son's birth, who is given a name (ahead of time) that means, as J.B. Phillips has translated it, "*Quick-pickings; Easy-prey.*" In this name, God is bearing witness (see v.18) to

Assyria's rapidly-coming defeat of Israel. In vs.5-8 we are reminded that Judah has refused the quiet help of God ("*the waters of Shiloah that flow gently*"), in favor of befriending an evil (Assyria) *to fight evil* (the other threatening nations). But having unleashed the raging torrent of Assyria, Judah will now find herself in the path of the flood—right up to her neck. And the land that is being jeopardized by this faithless foolishness is *Immanuel's* (v.8). In vs.9-15, Isaiah is working out the meaning of "*Immanuel*," which means "*God is with us*" (v.10). It means that his strong hand is upon us (v.11); that we recenter everything, including our vocabulary & our fears, *around* God Himself (vs.12,13). And for us, it is the assurance that Christ Himself is the "*Lord of hosts*" (see how vs.12,13 are used in 1 Peter 3.14,15; how vs.14,15 are used in Luke 20.18).

Chapter 9

The opening verses may sound familiar; that's because they are the verses that Matthew quotes at the commencement of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4.13-17), and are often used around Advent. Isaiah is here prophesying the dawning of the Messiah's work! We can feel a great sense of relief and hope and joy rising in vs.1-5, and it seems as if we are about to meet a Great Warrior! And indeed, we are. But surprisingly, it is a child. But that's not a complete surprise, if we remember the prophecy of 7.14. In vs.6 & 7, we discover more about this coming child... "*Wonderful Counselor*"—see Isaiah 28.29 and Judges 13.18. Wonderful often means supernatural in the Bible. "*Mighty God*"—this means exactly what it seems to mean. See Isaiah 28.29. "*Everlasting Father*"—it may seem odd that a child will be called "Father," but in the ancient world this term often referred to the perfect, ideal ruler; one who loves his people as his own children. "*Prince of Peace*"—he will indeed be a Ruler (see v.7), and his rule will bring wholeness, completion... perfect peace / shalom.

Chapter 10

Back in 5.24b,25, we read this: "they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, ***and he stretched out his hand*** against them and struck them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, ***and his hand is stretched out still.***" That stretched-out hand of the Lord is seen again in 9.12, 17, 21, and 10.4. A storm is coming upon the people of God, who have "turned aside" from following the Lord (see 10.1-4). And that storm's name is Assyria, a pagan nation. But it will be the Lord using Assyria as an axe in his hand (vs.15,34) to discipline his wayward nation. To Israel it will feel like a wasting sickness and a burning fire (vs.16,17). Assyria may boast in their success against Israel, but they are only serving God's purposes (vs.6,7); they shouldn't boast (v.15). In the end, their arrogance won't go unpunished either (v.12). The Lord's discipline will work (10.20,21).

Chapter 11

We now return to the theme of Immanuel ("*God With Us!*") and his kingdom! In vs.1-5—after the judgement described in the last chapter—we see that the tree of the house of David has fallen, but a stump yet remains. And there is a shoot or branch growing out of that stump. That shoot or branch is a man... the Messiah Himself... who somehow is both root and offspring of the royal house of David (v.1). In v.2 we hear how richly the Spirit will rest upon him, so that he can serve God's people in all the ways described in vs.3-5. Then, in vs.6-9, we have a beautiful picture of what the Messiah's reign will bring! He is indeed the "*Prince of Peace*" (see 9.6), who will win peace for his people by declaring war on all that is wicked (see the end of v.4). The heart of this peace that will define his reign is in v.9: "*the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*" This is a poetic expression of what the promised "*new heavens and new earth*" (see chapter 65) will bring. In vs.10-16 we see the nations coming home to worship the True King.

Chapter 12

I write this reflection today from a coffee shop in Birmingham, a few hours before assisting in the wedding of one of DPC's covenant children. And as I just briefly reviewed (with some quick skimming) what the first 11 chapters of Isaiah were all about... and then as I just read chapter 12... my eyes are watering and my throat has that emotional lumpy feeling and my heart is soaring with joy as I consider how the Lord is indeed the salvation and the strength and the song of his people. Just read chapter 12 slowly, thoughtfully, earnestly, with the first 11 chapters in mind. This is one of those moments when I despair of any pastor ever adequately describing the grace of salvation. Along the way so far Isaiah has occasionally spoken of God's anger at our sin (see 9.12, 17, etc.), but now he says in v.1, that though God was angry with us, he has turned his anger away, that he might comfort us. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the end of estrangement (v.1) and fear (v.2) and the poverty of want (v.3). He turned that anger upon Jesus (see 53.10).

Chapter 13:1-14:23

We enter into a new part of Isaiah's outline today. From chapter 13 through chapter 23 we are going to be reading God's "Messages to the Nations." Here we are reminded that God's kingdom is the whole world. Not just Israel, not just the church. But the whole planet, the whole of creation, the whole universe, the whole of the cosmos... and certainly all of these puny little things we call nations. See Isaiah 40.15: *"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales."* The first nation to be addressed is Babylon, and we see that God's sovereignty over Babylon is actual, spelled-out, searching, real, and righteous. I encourage you to ponder God's Message to Babylon according to this helpful outline: The Day of the Lord (13.1-16)... The Overthrow of Babylon (13.17-22)... The Tables Turned (14.1,2)... A Taunt for the King of Babylon (14.3-23). If God sent a prophet to deliver a message to our nation today, what do you think he would say? Would it follow this general outline? Let's pray for our nation, remembering Romans 2.4.

Chapter 14:24-16:14

We continue to work through God's "Messages to the Nations." Yesterday it was Babylon. Today... **ASSYRIA (14.24-27)**: Let v.24 strengthen your understanding of God's sovereignty. Also remember all the recent references to God's stretched-out hand when you come to v.27. **PHILISTIA (14.28-32)**: In v.32 of this message we see one of Isaiah's constant themes, that true peace and security will only be found in the Lord. Trust in him. Be found among his people. **MOAB (chapters 15 & 16)**: In the 9 verses of chapter 15 we see Moab's defeat and fall; all is lost. And, very strikingly, in v.5 we see God's anguish over such a pitiful scene. This poignant sympathy is seen again in 16.7,9, & 11. God's compassion is part of his holiness. See Matthew 23.37-38. And yet, this judgment is also *from him*, and *that too* is part of his holiness. In 16.1-5 Moab is urged to send a lamb to Jerusalem, where they will be welcomed with counsel and justice and shelter by the people of God, whose perfect king is coming (v.5). But, Moab is very proud (v.6). Will they?

Chapter 17

The Lord's "Messages to the Nations" continue. So far Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, and Moab have been addressed. And today *Damascus* hears how they must answer to the Lord of Hosts... but—strangely—the future of Damascus only takes up the first three verses of this chapter. Whom will God address in the rest of this chapter? Before we answer that question, let me first take you to Amos 3.1,2: *"Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'" For more on this theme, and how it applies to the church today, see 1 Peter*

4.17. Yes, *Israel itself* receives the major emphasis of rebuke in this chapter. Can you imagine her humiliation, when the message of her judgment breaks out, in the midst of all these oracles against the pagan nations? Verses 10 & 11 sum up Israel's sin. Verse 7 sums up God's redemptive purpose in this judgment. Again, 1 Peter 4.17... the church!

Chapter 18

On the day that this Cultivate will be read, we will be observing the 241st birthday of our nation. It's tempting to get all caught up in the self-absorbed celebration of being "the greatest nation on earth," and doing so uncritically. But we Christians will serve our nation much better by remembering and reflecting upon how God has always interacted with the nations of his world, and Isaiah 13-23 is a great place to do so. The nation being addressed in today's reading is *Cush*, which we may think of as Ethiopia, but which had also—at one point in her history—controlled part of Egypt. Notice the impressive way that a nation can be described in verse 2. But then notice the "quiet" way that God's work is described in verse 4; he works as silently as the seasons, biding his time. The proud nation will advance, thinking its own defeat inconceivable. But like a crop destroyed right before the harvest, God can cut it down (vs.5,6). But there is hope for the nations that repent! See verse 7. See also 2.3 and 11.10. See chapters 60-62. See Psalm 68.31-35 and 87.4.

Chapter 19

The nation addressed today is *Egypt*. First, see v.22: "*And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.*" In his grace, God smites rebels in order to heal them. Everything falls apart, so that all might be made new. And that is the beautiful truth that this chapter describes for Egypt... the most striking promise of renewal given to any Gentile nation in the Old Testament. In vs.1-15 we have a picture of Egypt being brought to its knees; everything fails. The wrath of the Lord strikes Egypt's religion & confidence (v.1), its sense of unity (v.2), its worldly wisdom (v.3), its freedom (v.4), its lifeblood (the Nile River), etc... all of Egypt's great sense of order and rule collapses into anarchy. But then, vs.16-25. Five times we read the phrase "in that day," a refrain referring to The Day of the Lord. Isaiah is here prophesying the future, massive conversion of the Gentiles to the God of Israel—under the image of Israel's most ancient oppressor. Welcome to the Kingdom of God!

Chapter 20

Even though the prophet Isaiah is walking around naked and barefoot for three years—as a very graphic picture-warning of the humiliating exile and slavery that will befall those who join in the rebellion against Assyria... that's actually *not* the most interesting thing that can be said for this chapter. Which is saying something! Though the international politics of the situation may be a bit confusing for us at first, take a look at this link:

<https://theosophical.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/biblical-archaeology-16-sargon-ii-inscriptions/>

Archaeology is always affirming the historical truth of the Bible. Just give it enough time. The sum of the situation is this: Ashdod is trying to get Egypt and Cush and Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) to join its rebellion against Assyria. God has Isaiah spend three years dissuading Judah from this alliance, in a very striking manner. And it worked. But the price of the nation's security was Isaiah's willingness to undergo personal indignity and disgrace. Does that remind you of anyone?

Chapter 21

We continue to consider God's "Messages to the Nations." Today's oracles are addressed to Babylon (here referred to as "*the wilderness of the sea*" in v.1, but see v.9), Edom (here referred to as "*Dumah*," which means silence), and Arabia. Calling Babylon "*the wilderness of the sea*" seems to

double down on two images of something that appears untamable and is always threatening to invade and intrude. But v.5 pictures the Babylonians as suddenly under attack themselves, unprepared and unaware, even as they were relaxing and feasting. On this, see Daniel 5. But note how Isaiah describes his emotional state, as he makes this prophecy, in vs.3 and 4. He is the Lord's appointed watchman, who must objectively announce what he sees and hears (vs.6,7,10), but he is also a feeling man who finds himself greatly moved by a "*stern vision*" (v.2). Verse 9 is repeated in Revelation 18.2, where Babylon is emblematic of all sinners in this world who chose to remain in their sin, rebelling against God and rejecting his offer of forgiveness. Reflect!

Chapter 22

Yesterday we saw two symbolic titles for nations (21.1,11); today we see another. Jerusalem itself is referred to as "*the valley of vision*" (v.1, see Psalm 125.2—Jerusalem is actually surrounded by higher mountains than itself). At the moment Jerusalem was full of escapist merriment (vs.2a,13), but a day of grief is coming; Isaiah here prophesies the fall of Jerusalem (which occurred in 586 BC) a century before it happened. Compare v.2b with Lamentations 4.9; v.3 with 2 Kings 25.4,5; v.10 with Jeremiah 33.4. Other connections can also be made between prophecy and fulfillment, but let the whole of this chapter simply remind us again that we—the people of God—will not be exempt from God's discipline, if we fail to live in repentance and faith before him. Could it be that there's even more "escapist merriment" (see above) going on with us today, than there was with Jerusalem then? But come down to v.22. See in that verse an echo of 9.6, and a foreshadowing of the words given to the church in Matthew 16.19 & 18.18. And then in Christ, Revelation 3.7,8.

Chapter 23

We now come to the final chapter in this section of Isaiah known as God's "Messages to the Nations," and it's directed at *Tyre and Sidon*. In v.17 Tyre is called a prostitute, and this symbol of a worldly seducer is a frequent image for evil in the Bible (see Revelation 17,18, etc.). Is your heart in danger of being seduced by any of the temptations of this world? If so, let this chapter remind you of the outcome and result of all evil. Every lie will be thrown down, along with all who belong to that lie. Remember Jonah's warning: "*Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love*" (Jonah 2.8). You can't go back to Egypt and also arrive in the Promised Land. You can't be enslaved to pornography and also have a healthy relationship with a real lover. You can't pay regard to a vain idol and also revel in a strong hope of steadfast love. "*The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth*" (v.9). Dwell before the Lord, in holiness (see the final verse of this chapter). Remember Lot's wife.

Chapter 24

As we said in our reflection on Isaiah 1: "*Isaiah is a big and beautiful book; a little outlining helps us discern the beauty in the bigness.*" Let's continue approaching this book with a careful eye to outlining. After God's "Messages to the Nations" (chapters 13-23) conclude, we now enter into what is sometimes known as "Isaiah's Apocalypse" (chapters 24-27), where we foresee all of God's enemies dealt with (24.21-22; 27.1), including death itself (25.8; 26.19). But this is still prophecy, so we're going to foresee it through Isaiah's point of view: the images of Jerusalem, Judah, Moab, Egypt, Assyria, etc. In 24.1-13, all of humanity is summoned to judgment. It's a powerful passage, which feels like utter chaos to the unrepentant. Remember how Hebrews (11.25) describes sin as "fleeting pleasure." But in vs.14-16a, the remnant of God's people sing for joy over the majestic revelation of his glory! Then, in vs.16b-22, we are back to the horrors of the day of judgment for those who are still in their sin. Terror, Pit, Snare (v.17). But then, v.23... which is Revelation 21.22-27.

Chapter 25

After yesterday's chapter (a prophecy of the Day of Judgment), we see a joyful song break out in chapter 25! Why? Because, in Isaiah's foreseeing of the Apocalypse, God has finally freed his people! **In vs.1-5**, they are finally free from all "ruthless" (see vs.3,4,5) tyranny. These "wonderful things" (v.1) were accomplished by the "Wonderful Counselor" of 9.6, who is Jesus. **In vs.6-8**, they are finally free from the darkness of death. And this is pictured as a great feast (v.6) for "all" of God's people (the word "all" is emphatic; it occurs five times in three verses. Not one of God's people will be left out! If you have repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus, this is *your* future.). In v.8, death and tears and all reproach have simply vanished, forever. "The Lord has spoken." See Revelation 21.4. **In vs.9-12**, they are free from pride. Moab (v.10) is seen as the embodiment of pride; remember, this is a prophecy seen from Isaiah's vantage point in history. But all of this will one day be given to all who wait for the salvation of the Lord (v.9). Be glad. Rejoice.

Chapter 26

The singing continues! **In vs.1-6**, we are singing over the "strong city" (v.1) God has given his people. Isaiah says it is a city of salvation, of righteousness, of faith, of perfect peace, of trust, an eternal city where wickedness has been forever trampled. **In vs.7-18**, we are singing because the long night of our waiting for this promised blessing is finally, finally over, never to return. And we weren't just waiting for evil to be removed; we were waiting for GOD HIMSELF (vs.8,9). Do you love God's name (vs.8,13) above all else? From the standpoint of eternal glory and blessedness, the frustrations and failures of today's church will be remembered in the terms of vs.16-18. Do those verses feel somehow familiar to you, looking at our current experience, in a time-warp sort of way? But now pay careful attention to God's answer to these "whispered prayers" of v.16... **In vs.19-21**, we are singing because our very bodies have been resurrected (v.19), and because—like Noah in the ark—we have found, in Christ, a great salvation in the very midst of great judgment (v.20).

Chapter 27

We now come to the final chapter in "Isaiah's Apocalypse," and we find here a beautiful description of the blessings that God's people will forever enjoy, after God finally destroys and slays the great dragon (v.1). **In vs.2-6**, the people of God are pictured as a well-loved and cared-for vineyard, teeming with fruitfulness. Contrast this with the vineyard described back in chapter 5, the failed vineyard. But such is not the case here; there are no more "thorns and briers to battle" (v.5). **In vs.7-11**, we see the difference (v.7) between how God dealt with his people (in loving discipline) and how he dealt with the enemies of his people (destruction). Verses 8 & 9 describe God's fatherly discipline which shepherds one towards the renouncing of all idolatry and the freedom from sin and guilt. Verses 10 & 11 describe the destiny of those who remain in their sin and guilt. **In vs.12 and 13**, we see the Lord bringing his people—his harvest—home. He gleans and gathers us "one by one" (v.12), even from Assyria and Egypt. Is this not what we read in Revelation 7.9-12?

Chapter 28

The next section of Isaiah's prophecies is known as "The Assyrian Crisis," and the question being dealt with here is: *will you depend on God's help or man's help?* It runs from chapters 28-31. Chapter 28 sets the stage. The setting is King Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria and the retaliations that came as a result. **In vs.1-6**, we are reminded that the Lord gave his people a beautiful place to live, yet many of them have become pitiful drunkards. But the Lord is still with the true remnant of his people. **In vs.7-13**, we see that even priest and prophet—the spiritual leaders of God's people—have become miserable drunkards. Perhaps vs.9-10 are some of their taunts to Isaiah, with vs.11-13 being his response. If they mock the ministry of the written Word of God, God will speak to them through a foreign people (v.11)...

the Assyrians. **In vs.14-29**, Isaiah brings the gospel and wisdom of God to bear on the situation. The cornerstone promise is quoted in Romans 9.33 and 1 Peter 2.6. That Cornerstone is Jesus Christ. Depend upon him. He is your help.

Chapter 29

What is this "Ariel" (vs.1,2,7)? It is Mt. Zion (see v.8), which is Jerusalem, the City of God. The word means "altar hearth," referring to the high calling of Jerusalem, the place where God dwells with his people, the place where atonement for sin is made. **In vs.1-8** we see that the nations will fight against God's people, but—though the struggle is real—the Lord will defend and deliver. How many times, in history, has this been true of the world and the church? **But in vs.9-14** we see that God has blinded the prophets of his people, as a disciplinary judgment against their own willful stubbornness. Jesus saw v.13 in the Pharisees of his day (Mark 7.6,7). **In vs.15,16** we see an important illustration used repeatedly in the Bible: 45.9, 64.8, Jeremiah 2.26, Ezekiel 8.12, Romans 9.20-21. **In vs.17-21** we are reminded that the Lord God, our only hope, can reverse anything. "Therefore," **in vs.22-24**, the patriarch Jacob can stop turning over in his grave, ashamed of his descendants. God can transform us to a people who pray, "*hallowed be thy name.*"

Chapter 30

God's people have sent envoys to Egypt, hoping to making an alliance with the Egyptians, against Assyria. They are trusting in man, not God. **Verses 1-5** is God's response. **In vs.6-8** God is mocking the decision of his people, calling Egypt by one of its Biblical nicknames, "*Rahab*," which means something like dragon. But it's a dragon that will do nothing for them (v.7). **In vs.9-14**, God is reminding his people that a poorly-built wall will collapse (v.13). In the same way, an unwillingness to hear what is true and right (vs.9-11) will leave the community ready to collapse. **In vs.15-17**, you see the very heart of Isaiah's whole ministry: return to God, trust and rest in him. He will be your strength; he will be your salvation. If not, v.17 will happen—which is the very opposite of the covenant promise of God in Leviticus 26.8. **Verses 18-33** presents one of the most personal and gracious and beautiful invitations in the whole Bible. Drink it all in. Why would we let our fear of worldly Assyrians (v.31) drive us from away from the help of God? He waits to be gracious to us.

Chapter 31

We now come to the end of this section known as "The Assyrian Crisis," which has been asking the question: *will you depend on God's help or man's help?* I hope we've all been able to make a direct line of application from the crisis that came upon God's people in this situation ("*Do we trust in Egypt to save us from Assyria? Or will we trust in God to save us from Assyria?*") to our own crises and situations. Will we trust in flesh or Spirit, man or God (v.3)? The Lord of Hosts is like a mighty lion, unafraid; he is like birds hovering, ready to protect (vs.4,5). In vs.6-9 God promises the smiting of all of our Assyrias. For the supernatural ("*not of man*," twice in v.8) smiting of this physical Assyria that Isaiah was most immediately describing, flip forward to 37.36. Isaiah, throughout this book, is pointing to God and pleading with us to "*turn to him*" (v.6). Humanity has "deeply revolted" (v.6), and the mercies of the Lord are our only hope. "*Our God is a consuming fire*," Hebrews 12.29 says. And that's the eternal, all-consuming reality that Isaiah declares (v.9; 33.14).

Chapter 32

Previously in Isaiah we've seen powerful prophecies of the coming king (Jesus): 7.14; 9.6-7; 11.1-5. Here, in **vs.1-8**, we have another. And in this prophecy we see one of the king's greatest triumphs—how his own character will be beautifully reflected in the character of his subjects. When the king reigns in righteousness, his children will rule in justice (v.1). Each one of them will use their power in the way

that God uses his (v.2). Each one will love what is noble (v.8). And then, in **vs.9-20**, we have a passage which moves from a dire warning given to a people of ease (9-13), to a terrible disaster that befalls them (14), to a time of future glory (15-20). Note that the Spirit (v.15) does not pour out his mighty blessings—fruitfulness, justice, righteousness, peace, quietness and trust forever, security, resting places—on a corrupt people. The corruption must be cleared. The people must be cleansed. The seed of righteousness must be sown before the fruit of peace can be harvested. We reap what we sow. Only a people of repentance and faith will reap peace.

Chapter 33

This chapter of Isaiah is almost like a Psalm. **In vs.1-9** we see that an enemy (v.1, the destroyer and traitor) has risen. But God's people immediately turn to God in prayer (2-4) and praise (5,6) and lamentation (7-9). **In vs.10-16**, God answers. But he doesn't only intend to deal with the enemy (which he promises in 10-12); he also intends to purify his own people—*"the sinners in Zion"* (v.14)—from their corruptions (which he speaks to in 13-16). Let these verses search your heart, child of God. Hold your habits, your words, your thoughts up to the *"consuming fire"* of v.14. And then, **in vs.17-24**, meditate upon the blessing promised to those who shut their eyes from looking on evil (15), in order to direct their eyes to the king in his beauty (17). Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5.8: *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* Perhaps this passage from Isaiah was on the Lord's mind when he said that. The Lord, in majesty, is our Judge, our Lawgiver, our King, our Savior (21,22). Our Enricher, Healer and Forgiver (23,24). See vs.5,6 again.

Chapter 34

Take a look at v.4 first. That sounds like the book of Revelation (Revelation 6.13,14, for example). And that's what it is. We are now back to an apocalyptic vision of the end of the ages, The Day of Judgment. The whole world and all its nations are summoned to this judgment, but in this passage Edom is chosen to represent the wicked. (Again, like we saw with the use of Moab in 25.10-12, we are looking at this vision from the vantage point of Isaiah's time in history.) In the Bible Edom is often emblematic of the ungodly (Hebrews 12.16) and the persecutor of the Lord's people (Obadiah 1.10-14, see v.8 in Isaiah 34). We often see in the Bible how the image of a great feast is a symbol of salvation. But that metaphor works the other way as well: verses 5-7 remind us that before guests start showing up for the banquet, there's always a great slaughter. Verses 8-17 are a haunting and dreadful poetic description of judgment. Note that vs.16 & 17 are the reverse of how that language is used in Joshua. With precision God has assigned the wicked their place. Forever.

Chapter 35

After a chapter devoted to the wasteland of final judgment for the wicked, we now enter into a chapter devoted to the glory-land of promised salvation for God's people. But this exodus journey through the desert and wilderness is so much greater than the one recorded in the book of Exodus. Why is the wilderness and dry desert suddenly blossoming with beauty in verses 1 and 2? Because your God is coming there to save you (vs.3-6)! He is coming to pick up his children and take them home. To their eternal home. Hebrews 12.12 quotes Isaiah 35.3 in a beautiful passage wherein we are exhorted not to grow weary in the midst of the difficulties of this life. A greater life is coming! Meditate upon each and every line of this chapter; it is intended for your strong encouragement. See how the renewed people of God are described in v.10: *"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."* The New Exodus!

Chapter 36

We now come to four chapters which must be taken together (36-39). Collectively they present the most difficult tests of faith that King Hezekiah ever faced. Remember: there is no such thing as an untested faith. For faith to mature and strengthen, it must be tested. Even Jesus was tested (Mark 1.12,13; Hebrews 5.8); you and I will be tested as well. The political situation in Isaiah's day, that we've mentioned here and there, now comes to a head. Read this chapter carefully, perhaps sketching out the main actors, to get a good feel for what's going on. Note some things that characterize the enemy's talk: he starts with demeaning questions (vs.5,6). He points to select facts that strengthen his case (vs.6,19). But he gets other facts completely and ridiculously wrong because he doesn't understand God and his worship (v.7). He ridicules (v.8). He threatens and tries to paralyze with fear (v.12). He attempts to coax and flatter (vs.16,17). He perverts and twists God's Word (v.10). He makes points from false religions (vs.18-20). *Your enemy talks the very same way.*

Chapter 37

Do you remember how the enemy was trying to intimate God's people in the last chapter? Today's reading is a model of faithful response in the face of intimidation. Note that King Hezekiah is not just a shallow optimist. He has put on sackcloth, that he might lament and pray before the Lord (v.1). He also calls for the Prophet Isaiah to pray (vs.2-4), speaking to him about a day of *birth*, not a day of death (v.3). He has also apparently been listening to the preaching of Isaiah; he knows of the "*remnant*" (v.4). Of course, the enemy hasn't yet given up (vs.9-13). But King Hezekiah took the enemy's letter right to the Lord, in prayer (v.14). He doesn't cave in to it through fear and he doesn't disregard it through haughty pride. He prays (vs.15-20). As often happens in prayer, a new clarity is given to King Hezekiah (see v.19). And also a new motivation (see v.20). But in the midst of Hezekiah's responses, don't forget to reflect on Isaiah's (vs.5-7;21-35). In 36.5 Sennacherib mocked: "*In whom do you now trust?*" The prophet Isaiah now answers that question. See 37.23.

Chapter 38

Sennacherib represented the first great test of faith for King Hezekiah. But there were more... "*In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death*" (v.1). Let's give attention today to Hezekiah's lament (vs.9-20). Especially because, as you see at the end v.20, the final words turn from the singular to the plural. This suggests that the gathered people of God were intended to use this lament in corporate worship. Notice in v.10 that "*Sheol*" (death) is pictured as a city or prison, with gates. But the Lord can destroy those gates and save (v.20). In v.15a Hezekiah acknowledges that ultimately this sickness came from God. But rather than pointlessly wallowing in a supposed dilemma, Hezekiah lets God's sovereignty drive him to continued prayer (vs.17-20). Some lessons from this part of the lament: God's love is being clarified for Hezekiah in the very midst of affliction. "*It was for my welfare... in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction.*" (v.17). Also note the certainty of forgiveness: "*you have cast all my sins behind your back*" (v.17).

Chapter 39

Here we have the last great test of faith for Hezekiah that is recorded for us in Isaiah. So far we've seen his faith stand up strong against the terrible blows inflicted by ferocious enemies and even sickness unto death. But. Now an even greater test must be faced. Flattery. (Notice the big smile on King Hezekiah's face in verses 3 & 4.) Sometimes the world cannot beat down the Christian with its attacks, but it can strangely melt the Christian with its supposed friendship. Archeologists and ancient world historians tell us that Merodach-baladan (v.1) was probably plotting against Assyria during this visit to Hezekiah, but the Bible doesn't mention that. Rather, the Bible is more interested in using this story as a warning against the human tendency to glory in worldly wealth and praise. The price of such foolishness is usually quite heavy, and it certainly was in this case (vs.5-7). Hezekiah was glad for the delay of

judgment (v.8). But Isaiah took the future grief of exile much more seriously. So now God begins to speak tender comfort through him (see 40.1,2).

Chapter 40

Way back in our very first reflection on Isaiah, we said this: *"The overall outline: chapters 1-39 (like the 39 books of the Old Testament) present a discordant situation, still unresolved, uncompleted. But the following 27 chapters (chapters 40-66, like the 27 books of the New Testament) provide the necessary solution and resolution."* And now here we are, about to enter into the "New Testament-like" part of Isaiah... and indeed, just read this chapter, first of all, as an introduction to the beauties of the coming of the Lord Jesus. In vs.1-11, we are prepared for the coming of the long-promised Lord, when his glory shall finally be revealed. See v.3 in Matthew 3.1-3. Find Jesus' work as our Good Shepherd (John 10) in v.11. In vs.12-31, we find a poetic celebration of who our God is, and sincere reflection on it will smash, shatter, and destroy any small-minded ideas you may have about the Creator and Ruler of this world. The goal and endpoint of the poem is verse 31; read it and renew your hope in the One whose very presence dwarfs all the galaxies.

Chapter 41

The very first verse calls for silence. It feels somewhat like that moment when the judge enters the courtroom and the bailiff summons us to hush our noise and rise. And indeed, that seems to be the point at the end of v.1: *"let us together draw near for judgment."* The second verse introduces us to one whom God has *"stirred up from the east,"* who is rapidly conquering the world. This approaching warrior will be identified as King Cyrus in 44.28, but the point here (see especially v.4) is that The Lord God Himself has summoned Cyrus, to serve His purposes of judgment and deliverance. The whole world is trembling in panic and trying to be strong (vs.5-7), but God's people are warmly reassured in vs.8-20: *"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend"...* (it's no wonder we often text verses from this particular section of Isaiah to fearful friends whom we want to comfort). In vs.21-29 we return to the tone of the earlier part of the chapter, with the High Judge now summoning the nations and their idols to the bench.

Chapter 42

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once described Jesus as *"the man for others."* Keep that characterization of the Lord in mind, as we enter into what are called "The Servants Songs," these four or five passages in Isaiah that bear beautiful prophetic witness to the person and work of the Lord Christ. The Servant Songs are: 42.1-9; 49.1-13; 50.4-9; 52.13-53.12, ending with the joyous 61.1-4, a listing of some of the gifts the Servant will distribute to God's people when he comes (a list that Jesus takes upon his lips in Luke 4.17-21 and 7.22). If you read all the Servant Songs straight through, take note of the increasing emphasis on suffering. But here, in this opening Song, the emphasis lies on his gentleness and tenderness. If Bonhoeffer described Jesus as *"the man for others,"* how would he describe the church? Like this: *"The church is the church only when it exists for others... The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling, what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."* Amen.

Chapter 43

Look at the first two words of this chapter: *"But now."* That's a recurring feature in this part of Isaiah: 43.1; 44.1; 49.5; 52.5; 64.8. And it's a crucial feature for understanding how the gospel works. In each instance, it occurs right after a description of how we sinners tend to turn away from the love of God. And yet—*"but now"*—the Lord, in relentless grace, returns to pursue us with his love again. In vs.1-7, the Lord assures his true people that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against them (as Jesus put

it, in Matthew 16.18). Why not? These verses list several theological reasons: creation, redemption, calling, love, adoption, and the honor of God's name. **In vs.8-13**, the Lord speaks frankly with his people about their blindness and deafness (see 42.18-20), and he reminds them of their high calling: they are witnesses and chosen servants, called to know, believe, and understand (v.10). **In vs.14-21**, the Lord again promises exodus and redemption for his people. But in **vs.22-28**, we see again the response of sinful hearts. Yawn. Apathy. Rebuff. Grace is despised.

Chapter 44

Remember yesterday's reflection, about the repeated "*But now's*" that we read in this part of Isaiah? The question of God showing mercy to such a hard-hearted, rebellious people seemed to be a closed matter after the last verse of chapter 43. And then you turn to chapter 44... "*But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!*" The gospel is all of God's initiative, none of man's deserving. We are often ungrateful, foolish, and proud. But that does not negate God's calling on our lives as "*servant*" and "*chosen*." In v.2 we even read the name "*Jeshurun*,"—an affectionate nickname God has for his children, meaning something like "my dear upright / straight / just people." For more of our nickname, see Deuteronomy 32.15; 33.5,26. God here promises great things to his dear Jeshurun—the outpouring of the Spirit (v.3), and a world of Gentile conversions to the true God (v.5). These new "offspring" (v.3) will be signposts marking the flow of God's Living Water, like a line of trees marking the course of a river in a thirsty land (vs.3,4). See the book of Acts.

Chapter 45

We made no comment upon this yesterday, but in 44.24-28 the Lord emphatically claims to control the course of history itself. And that claim is then dramatically manifested in 44.28 with the name "*Cyrus*"—the pagan king to whom God was making veiled reference back in 41.2-7,25. But in 44.28, God specifically called him by name. Note that this happens a century and a half before Cyrus was born. It's as if someone named and described, in vivid detail, the work of Vladimir Putin back in 1802—the year that Napoleon Bonaparte became president of the Republic of Italy, the year that Washington D.C. was incorporated as a city, the year that the first non-Indian settlement was established in Oklahoma. In 44.28 God called Cyrus his "*shepherd*," saying that "*he shall fulfill all my purpose*." God will employ this world ruler for God's own ends, his purposes of judgment and deliverance. Now, with that background, drink in Isaiah 45. To read of Cyrus, see 2 Chronicles 36; Ezra 1,3,4,5,6; Daniel 1,6,10. And Google, for that matter. This really happened.

Chapter 46

The utter, impotent folly of idolatry has been a consistent theme in Isaiah (see, most recently, 40.12-20; 44.9-20; 45.20). To devote your life to idolatry is an embarrassment, according to Isaiah, and he just keeps saying it. But don't reduce this warning merely to the bent-knee worship of images carved in wood or stone, something that "other people" do. Idolatry is any adoration and service given to "*things*" (44.9) created by God and shaped by man. And it is as modern as it is ancient. It is absurd (44.18-20). It is blasphemous (Romans 1.18-25). And now, in Isaiah 46, the prophet brings his attack on idolatry to a climax. The idols people bear and carry as burdens in pagan processions cannot save them (vs.1,2,6,7). Meanwhile the Lord has been bearing, carrying, and saving his people since before their birth (vs.3,4). Nor can the idols predict or control the future (see 41.23). But God has proven, in Cyrus, that he gives purpose to all history—past, present, and future (see vs.8-11, noting that v.11 has Cyrus written all over it). Hence, the invitation (vs.12,13).

Chapter 47

James 2.13 says, "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy." Babylon has shown no mercy; God Himself bears witness to this in v.6: "I was angry with my people.... I gave them into your hand; you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy." Therefore, we have this description of Babylon's doom. Imagine the scenes in vs.1-5: thrown down to the dust, toiling away like a slave, stripped naked in shame and disgrace, sitting in silence, going into darkness. That's quite a fall from where Babylon presently sits, as Isaiah prophesies (see v.8). Nonetheless, God has spoken. Mention is made, several times, of Babylon's sorceries, enchantments, charms, and horoscope-type magic (vs.9,11-14—all a matter of archaeological fact, by the way, see also Ezekiel 21.21), by which she will try to deliver herself of this doom. But it will all fail. And her old allies, like fair-weather friends, will all abandon her, wandering away, "each in his own direction" (v.15). Bow to God's Word or you will bend to his judgment.

Chapter 48

Our second ever Cultivate Song of the Month was "My Song is Love Unknown," a beautiful hymn written by Samuel Crossman. It begins: "My song is love unknown, My Savior's love to me; Love to the loveless shown, That they might lovely be." Think of that. God shows love to the loveless, that they might lovely be. Now look at what God says of his people in verse 1: they "confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right." See also vs.4,5, & 8. This has been a theme throughout: 40.27; 42.18-20; 43.22. But it is against that darkness that God's love and patience and faithfulness shine out so brightly. He is loving the loveless, that they might lovely be. His love is unearned (v.9), purifying (v.10), and resolutely adamant (v.11). He has called his people to himself (v.12), in unflinching love (v.14). Therefore he commands his "love-to-the-loveless-shown, that-they-might-lovely-be" people, TO GO OUT FROM BABYLON AS REDEEMED SERVANTS, in v.20. But note the final theme, in vs.18 & 22: all of this self-will forfeits the peace we could have known.

Chapter 49

There are so many riches here! First of all, we didn't get to mention the last line of 48.16 yesterday: "And now the Lord God has sent me, and his Spirit." Do you see this beautiful glimpse—as seen from afar; the New Testament will take us much closer—of the Trinity? The "Lord God" is the Father, who sends "me" (the Son, Jesus) and "his Spirit." That same "me" (Jesus) speaks again in 49.1; 50.4; 61.1. With that, we now turn to 49.1-13, the second of the "Servant Songs," that were first introduced back in chapter 42. Israel was called to be the servant of God in this world, but Israel proved herself unfit. The world was waiting for the True Servant... the True and Faithful Israel... Israel Reduced To One... The Lord Jesus Christ, whom is here called "Israel"—the True Israel, prepared and sent out on mission (vs.1-3), to redeem the fallen Israel (v.5)... and many more besides (vs.6, as well as 8-13)! This True Servant will conquer through his service. But, as we said back at the first Servant Song, his service will involve much suffering and rejection (see vs.4&7).

Chapter 50

In the first "Servant Song," (42.1-9) it was the patient gentleness of the Lord Jesus that was prophesied and revealed. In the second, we got a glimpse of his toil and rejection (49.4,7). And here, in the third of the Songs (50.4-9), we see that the Servant (Jesus!) will have to confront fierce evil and endure a particularly aggressive, forceful hatred. Do you feel the shadow of the cross in this passage? However—strangely—the momentary sense of discouragement that we saw in 49.4 has now vanished. He has set his face like a flint, he says. Just meditate for a while on vs.6-8, and give thanks for the steadfastness of your Savior, as he set out to rescue you from destruction. But, to return to Isaiah's place in history and his calling in prophecy, note that the Servant's suffering won't be explained (WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO HIM???) until these Servant Songs continue to unfold, in chapter 53. But, for now, we see that he is

obeying his Father (v.5), willingly (v.6), trusting in his Father alone (vs.7-9). The epilogue then turns to us, with the choice of life (v.10) or death (v.11).

Chapter 51

Does your faith need to be nourished and strengthened today? Then vs.1-8 are for you! Remember what Paul teaches us about faith in Romans 10.17: *"faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."* So. Pray earnestly today that you can *"hear the word of Christ."* And now, having so prayed, take a look at the starting words in vs.1,4, & 7. *"Listen to me... Give attention to me... Give ear to me (4b)... Listen to me."* Verses 1&2 call us to consider what the power and blessing of God can do with and through *"but one,"* Abraham. Then, in vs.4&5, consider what the power and blessing of God will do in this world. Verse 6 then calls us to consider the power and blessing of God in the world to come. And then, finally, in vs.7&8, we can rightly consider what it really means that in this world the people of God will sometimes bear *"the reproach of man"* and all of his *"revilings."* That kind of temporary difficulty in the life of the Christian must be received and understood in the light of all eternity. This is a great time to go back and reflect deeply on 50.9,10.

Chapter 52

Back in 51.9,10 Israel was praying to the Lord: *"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord."* And now, in 52.1, the Lord answers, using the same words: *"Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion."* The Lord is here speaking to his people about the *"good news"* (gospel) of peace and salvation and the sovereignty of their God (see all of vs.1-12, but especially v.7). Note that v.3 says the people of God shall be redeemed without money. The New Testament (1 Peter 1.18,19) elaborates: *"[know] that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."* And that is a perfect intro to the fourth Servant Song, which we find in 52.13-53.12. We'll investigate it more fully tomorrow, but take note of the general outline today. It has five stanzas, with each stanza containing three verses. In stanzas 1 & 5 the Servant is exalted. In stanzas 2 & 4 the Servant is rejected. In stanza 3, the heart of it all, we see the cross.

Chapter 53

This chapter is the heart of Isaiah. The fourth Servant Song—*remember, the Servant is Jesus*—starts in 52.13 and ends in 53.12. There are five stanzas, each of them three verses long. In 52.13-15, we see the Father's endorsement of the Servant and his astonishing work. In 53.1-3, we enter into the mighty contrast between what God was revealing in the Servant and the reaction of humanity (see, for example, Matthew 27.39-44 and 1 Corinthians 1.23). In 53.4-6, we have come fully to the cross. This is the heart of the heart of Isaiah. Here the Servant's sufferings are finally explained. He was bearing our griefs; he was carrying our sorrows (v.4). He was receiving punishment for our sin (v.5a), so that we might be saved (v.5b). Meditate on v.6 until its truths of sin and atonement fully penetrate you. In 53.7-9, we see the trials, the death, and the burial of Jesus predicted, with vivid detail. In 53.10-12 we find prophecies of resurrection and triumph. The saving will of the Lord has been revealed (v.10). The Servant (v.11) has borne our sin and made us righteous.

Chapter 54

Chapter 53 was all about the cross, reminding us that the agony of calvary was the price Jesus paid for our salvation. Where do you think the flow of thought in Isaiah's prophecies will take us now? In chapter 54 we find joy and gladness, a growing community, assurances of peace and a summons to courage, with promises of strength and blessing. The Apostle Paul quotes v.1 in Galatians 4.27, linking the whole sense of vs.1-10 with the Genesis story of Sarah and Hagar, in order to teach about the true

church (see Galatians 4.21-31). God's people are children of promise, born from above, to live in freedom: "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*" (Galatians 5.1). And then, this prophecy in vs.2&3 is exactly what you see being lived out in the world-wide expansion of the church throughout the book of Acts. The Lord is tenderly calling straying sinners back to himself, like a husband unconditionally loving a once-estranged wife (vs.4-10). The picture of the church's blessing continues beautifully in vs.11-17.

Chapter 55

Can you find a more inviting, a more welcoming, a more gracious call in all of the Scriptures? And the call actually seems to go out twice: vs.1-5, and then again in vs.6-13. Let's simply try to grasp something of the gracious heart of our God in this welcome today. In v.1, we read the invitation "*come*" four times. To more fully appreciate the emphatic sincerity and warmth of this, see Revelation 22.17, John 6.35, and Matthew 11.28. In v.1 we also see the curious exhortation to buy, even though you have no money. That seems strange at first, but what better way to emphasize the wild abandon of God's grace—it is completely yours, as if you purchased it yourself... and yet, you can't purchase grace, it is total gift. In vs.1-5 the picture seems to be that we are thirsty and starving and need sustenance for life. And that is true. But the picture in vs.6-13 goes further: here we are "*wicked*" and need salvation. This is certainly true as well. We see the classic description of true repentance in v.7, including the negative aspect (*forsake*) and the positive (*return*).

Chapter 56

As we saw yesterday, chapter 55 of Isaiah is perhaps the summit of God's welcoming call to needy sinners, to come and feast and find satisfaction, forgiveness, peace, and joy. What might we expect to find, as we turn to chapter 56? Well, in the first eight verses, we find God's welcome of the outcast beautifully continued. But those who are brought in under the welcome of God should expect to find their lives more and more shaped into a reflection of the very character of God: justice, righteousness (v.1), the blessing of Sabbath-rest-keeping and abstaining from evil (v.2). These are standard menu items at the table of salvation, where God's righteousness stands revealed (v.1). If you truly "*come*" (the word used 4 times in 55.1), you will truly eat. And, as your mom use to say, you are what you eat. In vs.3-8 we see God's love and welcome extended even to those whom the world treats very cruelly: foreigners and eunuchs. Note also here (vs.2,4,6) the importance of Sabbath. This is a mark of love for and loyalty to God (see 58.13; Exodus 31.13).

Chapter 57

From 56.9 ("*All you beasts of the field, come to devour—all you beasts in the forest*") through 59.15a ("*Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey*")—note how those beginning and ending verses are ominously connected—we have entered into a part of Isaiah known as "The Shame of Zion." This is where a Holy God is dealing with the corruption and sin found among his people. In 56.9-12, the spiritual leaders of God's people ("*His watchmen*") are rebuked for their laziness, self-absorption, greed, and foolish escapism. In 57.1-13, we see that the evils of apostasy have now flooded into the lives of God's people. But, in 57.14-21, we see that "*where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*" (as Paul says, in Romans 5.2). Notice the Lord's emphatic repetitions in v.14 and v.19. Notice how vividly God is presented as the Savior of his people. He removes every obstruction (v.14), he who inhabits eternity comes to revive his people (v.15, ultimately fulfilled in the incarnation), and so continue to reflect on his grace through v.19. BUT: vs.20,21.

Chapter 58

We are still in the section of Isaiah known as "The Shame of Zion," introduced in yesterday's reflection. Chapter 58 is a very important and instructive part of this slice of God's Holy Word to sinners like me and you, for our God does not happily suffer the irritation of pious, hypocritical nonsense from our mouths. Notice this passage begins with a trumpet call, to fully seize our attention (v.1). Empty, mechanical religious observances on our part—*carefully disconnected from how we treat the weak and poor and powerless around us*—do not please God; they nauseate him (vs.1-5). If you want to know what kind of "religion" pleases God, study vs.6-14. Being God's people is demonstrated in how we treat the oppressed, the hungry, the homeless poor, the naked (vs.6,7). We must forgo our "*pointing the finger*" (v.9), and find out what it means to fill our lives with a constructive love for the good law of our Lord. Soak up all the beautiful metaphors in vs.10-12. And in the midst of what it means to truly love neighbor, don't forget what it means to truly love God (vs.13,14).

Chapter 59

In vs.1&2, we have the classic explanation for why God seems absent, unhearing, and impotent at times. He is none of those things! But our sins "*have made a separation*" (v.2) between us and our God. Such is the evil of our sin: it alienates us from our Lord. What can rescue us from the resulting anarchy and poison and death (**see vs.3-15a**) that must come of such estrangement? There is only one possible rescue, and it is majestically described in **vs.15b-21**. Or, better put, **HE**, the Solitary Rescuer is majestically described in those verses, for there is only One who can "*intercede*" between God and sinner (v.16), and "*he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives*" (v.19). Christian, your God was "*displeased*" (v.15b, but see the literal translation in the footnote: "*it was evil in his eyes*") that you should remain separated from him, in your sin. See God's anguish over this evil reflected in the heart of the Solitary Rescuer Himself in Luke 19.41,45. Is the consequence of your sin evil in your eyes as well? Let this passage show you Jesus.

Chapter 60

We just studied a section of Isaiah known as "The Shame of Zion," which then ushered us into a triumphant passage celebrating the One who would come to rescue Zion from her shame. And now, in chapters 60-62, we enter into a section known as "The Glory of Zion," which shines with the radiant beauty of the blessings that Jesus will bring. But the language will describe these beauties from Isaiah's perspective in history, using Old Testament images, such as "*Jerusalem*" (62.1,6,7), etc. It is *our* glory to search out what this means in terms of "*the Jerusalem above*" (Galatians 4.26). To get started, you could see how openly Revelation 21 draws on Isaiah 60, in describing the glories which are to come. **In vs.1-9**, we see a picture of the flow of world-wide converts into the people of God, as the Lord beautifies his people (v.9). **Verses 10-16** underscore the conquest of the Christ. To resist God's way in Christ is suicide (v.12, see Psalm 2), for God will make his people "*majestic forever, a joy from age to age*" (v.15). The coming glories continue in **vs.17-22**.

Chapter 61

In the first 4 chapters of the Gospel according to Luke, the forerunner John is foretold, Jesus is foretold, songs and prophecies are given voice, the long-awaited Messiah finally arrives in the midst of shepherds and angels, he is presented at the Temple, he grows up in Nazareth, the forerunner John begins his work, the genealogy showing God's faithfulness is given, Jesus is baptized and tempted, and then he begins his ministry with a mighty sermon (Luke 4.17-21). What Scripture text would Jesus choose for this sermon, as a clear revelation of what his mission would be? He chose Isaiah 61.1-4. Jesus plainly understood this passage as prophecy that his coming would fulfill (Luke 4.21). In Isaiah's day, parts of this prophecy had a literal fulfillment in the hope of *liberty being proclaimed to captives* of the Babylonian exile (see Isaiah 61.1), but Jesus came to proclaim a greater, spiritual liberty from a greater,

spiritual captivity (as the imprisoned forerunner John—see Luke 3.20—had to be taught in Luke 7.18-33). Rejoice, child of God. See verses 10 & 11.

Chapter 62

As I write this reflection (30 minutes before The Great American Eclipse starts, on August 21), I have been spending a lot of time lately officiating at weddings. And it's been a great honor and privilege to do so. One of the great privileges is to bear close-up witness to the joyful enthusiasm of the grooms! I have never yet seen one yawn when his bride makes her dazzling appearance. But I've seen several tear up and cry. With that image in your mind, look at verses 1-5. I'm tearing up now just reading it. Zion, the church, the people of God are the bride. She yearns for her husband and for the profound blessing of her family. The Lord God, the Creator, the Redeemer is the Groom. And he will not keep his love for his bride to himself (v.1a). He cannot contain the blessing he plans to give her (v.1b). He is not ashamed of the extent of his glorious and tender ambitions for her (v.2). He is not at all shy in describing what she is to him (v.3). The Lord's bride shall be an outcast no more (v.4a)! The Lord delights and rejoices over the one whom he has made beautiful (vs.4b-5).

Chapter 63

Back in 59.15b-21 Jesus was prophesied as the Solitary Rescuer of his people. Here, in **63.1-6**, he is presented as the Solitary Avenger (see the "*alone*" in v.3) of his people. Yes, there will be a "*day of vengeance*" (v.4) in which God's justice will finally be paid in full (see Romans 12.19). To see a New Testament parallel: Revelation 19.11-16. Never forget that Jesus is a Warrior. In fact, the very first thing said about him in the whole Bible, in Genesis 3.15, is that he will crush the head of his enemy. But, also never forget that he offers sinners refuge from his wrath, at his own expense. "*Let them lay hold of my protection, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me*" (Isaiah 27.5). In fact, even here, God announces in the very first verse: "*It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.*" In v.1 Edom and Bozrah represent the world of sin continuing in wicked rebellion, without repentance (also 34.6). Why is Christ "*alone*" in this, with "*no one to help*" (vs.3,5)? Is he the only one who cares enough? The only one with power enough? Yes.

Chapter 64

Chapter divisions are not original in the Bible, and sometimes they are not as helpful as they could be. (To get a sense of how "unoriginal" they are: chapter divisions were first added in 1227 AD & verse divisions were first added in 1551 AD.) The chapter division in Isaiah 64 is not helpful. A better "chapter" would have been 63.15 - 64.12. In that span of verses you find one prayer, and it's a very intense prayer, struggling with a sense of estrangement from God, but wanting to believe the promise of acceptance with God. And in that one prayer you find the phrase "*you are our Father*" three times (twice in 63.16, again in 64.8). With that brief introduction, read that whole section now as a unified prayer. The sense of estrangement can be found in 63.15b; 63.17,18; 64.5b-7; and 64.10,11... with 64.7 showing that the fault for the estrangement lies with the people, not with God. And yet, "*you, O Lord, are our Father,*" three times over (63.16; 64.8). And this God has promised to act for those who wait for him (64.4). Sometimes prayer ends with questions (64.12).

Chapter 65

We now enter the final two chapters of Isaiah. Whenever I read this book, I always expect a grand, triumphant, striking, resolute finish, one that would have to be described with lots of exclamation points!!! But instead, it's been well described as a "searching" ending, one somewhat similar to the ending of the whole Bible, in Revelation. **In vs.1-16**, we see that God divides the world into two kinds of people, and it is NOT Jews and Gentiles. God is ready to be sought by those who do not ask for him, to

be found by those who do not seek him; he is calling out "*Here I am!*" to Gentiles, with his hands outspread to them, all day long (vs.1,2). Rather, the dividing line in God's world stands between those who seek him (v.10c) and those who forsake him and forget him (v.11). But now study **vs.17-25**. There is a new world coming. And note that the new world is described exactly in terms of this old world, with just one thing missing: sin... and all the sorrows and death that it has brought with it. A healed world of joy, life, security, fellowship with God, and peace with man.

Chapter 66

The first two verses remind us that you cannot put God in a box. You cannot build a wall of your preferences around God, and insist that he respect them. Those who hated Jesus in the first century were trying to do so, and Stephen quoted this part of Isaiah to them (Acts 7.48-50). Right before they killed him (Acts 7.54,57,58). But God will dwell with us, under certain conditions: "*this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word*" (v.2b, see also 57.15). Remember Jesus' parable in Luke 18.9-14? "*The tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*" Let us pray for the humble and contrite spirit. Remember 48.18: "*Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.*"

-Reflecting on Isaiah-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Isaiah. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Isaiah before we move forward?

"This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him." Psalm 18.30