

3. A new kind of politics - The rule of the Servant: He deserves universal praise

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[0 : 00] Now let's pray together. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

To him who alone does great wonders, to him who by understanding made the heavens, to him who spread out the earth, to him who made the great lights, the sun to rule the day, the moon and the stars to rule the night, for his steadfast love endures forever.

God our Father, on this beautiful summer afternoon, we praise you for your ancient promise that as long as the earth remains, summer and winter, seed time and harvest, day and night will never cease.

And we praise you for the daily and yearly fulfilment of that promise, reminding us of your goodness and graciousness, reminding us of your commitment to the creation that you have made, and pointing forward to the time when that creation will be renewed and restored, when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

And we rejoice in every good gift of yours. We have been given life, we have been given measure of health, we have been given families and loved ones, friends, and everything richly to enjoy.

[1 : 25] So many things which your generosity and your tremendous grace has given to us in our daily lives. But we know, Father, this is a fallen world.

We know this is a world under the curse. And we know that we contribute to that by our sinfulness. And so as we turn aside for these moments, to think about your creation, to think about your work in the world, and your words which spoke these worlds into being, and one day we'll remake them. And that word which comes right down now in the busyness of our lives, amid the bustle of every day, and speaks to us the truth. The truth that can set us free.

The truth that can remake us. And we confess our sins. We know that we say we have no sin. We deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us. So we want to confess our sins.

We want to ask that forgiveness which, when your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, your servant, entered time and space, he laid down his life.

[2 : 31] He died for us on the cross to forgive our sins. And he was raised again so that we could stand before you justified, redeemed, forgiven. And so we praise you, Lord.

May our lives be filled with praise. Not just the words that we sing, but we pray that these words that we sing may be the thoughts of our hearts.

And we pray that what we sing with our lips, what we mean with our hearts, that we will carry out in our lives. And so each of us comes to you this afternoon, eager to hear what you, the Lord our God, will say to us.

And so we give you our thanks and ask your blessing in the name which is above every name, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, as I said, we are continuing in Isaiah 42.

And our subject today is verses 10 to 17. It's on page 602 of the few Bibles. If you're using these, Isaiah has spoken about how God in his greatness and goodness will one day send into the world his servant who will die for our sins and rise again and who will one day rule the earth.

[3 : 51] We're going to look at verses 10 to 17, but I'll begin at verse 8. So that's on page 602, Isaiah 42, beginning at verse 8. And God is speaking.

I am the Lord, that is my name. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare.

Before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth. You will go down to the sea and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants.

Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy. Let them shout from the top of the mountains.

Let them give glory to the Lord and declare his praise in the coastlands. The Lord goes out like a mighty man. Like a man of war, he stirs up his zeal.

[4 : 58] He cries out. He shouts aloud. He shows himself mighty against his foes. For a long time, I have held my peace. I have kept still and restrained myself.

Now I will cry out like a woman in labor. I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation.

I will turn the rivers into islands and dry up the pools. And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know. In paths that they have not known, I will guide them.

I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do and I do not forsake them.

They are turned back and utterly put to shame who trust in carved idols who say to metal images, You are our gods.

[6 : 00] Amen. May God bless to us that wonderful and exhilarating passage from his word. Why does God want us to praise him?

Because this is a song of praise to the servant who deserves universal praise. You all know the kind of people who always are praising themselves and expecting you to praise them.

The kind of people who are forever talking about themselves. When they ask you the question, how are you, that is only the introduction of telling you how they are at great detail.

Their subject is one and it is themselves. They love it and they love praise and if we are honest we recognise that in our own hearts.

It is often been said the definition of a bore is someone who talks about himself when you want to talk about yourself. Now, if that is unpleasant and unpalatable in humans why does the Lord God, the creator of heaven and earth want our praise?

[7 : 11] Because after all, when this happens in humans it is a sign of insecurity often. People don't feel they are valued and therefore they have to every time you meet them go into a litany of their accomplishments and their achievements.

Why is it that God, the creator and the redeemer wants to be praised? The point I want to make is this, that God wants to be praised not because he needs it but because we need it.

We are most human. We are most the kind of people God created us to be when we are praising him. We are created to praise God. We are created to enjoy God as the shorter catechism says.

And that's really what Isaiah is talking about here. See, Isaiah is talked about the great doctrines of the faith. God is the creator, God is the redeemer. How do we respond to that?

Do we respond to that by saying, oh yes, that's terribly interesting, I'll go away and read a book about it. No, Isaiah says, sing to the Lord a new song. If you really believe that, if these doctrines grip our hearts, then we are going to praise him.

[8 : 20] Clearly we can't be indifferent about it. If God is going to transform and remake everything, then the only true response is praise. And you notice this in scripture, if you read your Bibles a lot, that the apostles and the prophets are forever breaking into song.

That's what happens here in verses 10 to 17. And there are two parts to this. First of all, there is the summons to sing in verses 10 to 12.

Isaiah calls on the people of that day and on the people today to sing to the Lord. And I want me to sing a new song. Now that new song clearly responds to the new things in verse 9.

New things I now declare. This is one of the wonderful things about God. He always has something more and something better to come.

Now, Earl Stephenson said, to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive. And we know that in our own human life. we anticipate something. And often when it comes it's an anticlimax.

[9 : 30] But God, it's always better. Something better. Something new. What God has done and what God will do. Now, this summons to sing has two parts to it.

First of all, there is human praise. Sing to the Lord a new song. His praise from the ends of the earth. All people throughout the world from, what you would say, from the North Pole to the South Pole, from East to West, are being summoned to sing.

Those who go down to the sea and the coastlands said this already in Isaiah. The coastlands are the far islands. Sometimes, sometimes the word is translated islands. Isaiah looks westward to

where the new empires of Greece and Rome are already beginning to flex their muscles. But also, near at hand, the villages that Kedar, the nearby desert. Sela is the old enemy Edom. You see what he's saying here. Call on God's enemies to praise him. Call on them to rejoice. That's why song and praise are so powerful in evangelism. If people come into a church and God's people are singing in a mournful, melancholy way with their faces fixed on the ground with a certain kind of embarrassment, that's not likely to attract people. [10:46] But if God's people are singing their hearts out, that is going to be a powerful evangelistic tool. It doesn't happen everywhere, does it? An African brother went to a church in the north of Scots.

And apologies to those who come from the north of Scots. And I love you all. And he distinguished himself throughout the opening worship by saying, Hallelujah, praise the Lord. But there was still worse to come. When the preacher got up to speak, he said, Praise the Lord, brother, preach it like it is. And an elder, an old elder there, couldn't stand this any longer. And he stood up and fixed this brother sternly and says, We don't praise the Lord here. Well, you see, singing the praises of the Lord is powerful in evangelism. After all, you go to a football match, you don't doubt that people are committed to their teams. You don't doubt the quality of singing there is pretty atrocious as we know, and the quality of the words even worse.

[11:51] But you cannot doubt their commitment. And this is part of what it means because we're not just giving information, we are declaring loyalty. When we sing Jesus is Lord, we are planting his banner in enemy territory.

We are challenging the world and challenging the powers of darkness. It's said in the 17th century civil war that when Cromwell's iron sides raised their sands, the cavaliers trembled.

So when we sing to the Lord, we are challenging the powers of darkness and we are anticipating the time of universal worship. So there is human praise.

But secondly, there is the praise of creation itself. You will go down all that fills it. The desert, the sea, the desert and the earth are called on to praise the Lord.

Now how does inanimate nature praise the Lord? Well one way in which it praises the Lord is by demonstrating to people at large that they are what God made them to be.

[12:56] Creation is good. God made it to be good. So when you look on a day like this, the sunshine, when you walk by a river, walk through meadowlands, look up at the mountains, they are praising the Lord, glorifying the creator by being what he made them to be.

But of course, creation like humanity does not praise God perfectly. There is not just moonlight on the waters, there is not just sunshine and so on.

There are tsunamis, there are dust bowls, there is evil in the universe. But we are pointing to the day when the whole of the universe will be restored.

See what Isaiah is doing here? Isaiah is calling on the people of the world and indeed the universe itself to join in the praise that he heard from the seraphim back in chapter 4.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his glory. And one day that will be obvious. God will be God and the world will know it.

[14:03] God is God now but the world doesn't know it. So that's the first thing, the summons to sing. But secondly, verses 13 to 17, the substance of the singing. It's not enough to sing lyrics because we can sing trivial, banal lyrics which may make us feel good but don't actually present any great truths in them.

We need to sing hymns which honour God and build up faith and are a message to the world.

That's nothing to do with whether they're ancient or modern. Older people have to realise that an awful lot of great stuff is being written today.

And younger people need to realise that the great hymns of the faith which have sustained people throughout the centuries are wonderful. After all, if we take the great hymns of the past we must compare like with like.

Don't take and can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood and compare it with some trivial ditty about isn't Jesus wonderful, wonderful, wonderful which actually does occur in the hymn books.

Compare it with how deep the Father's love for us or in Christ alone. Great stuff has always been written. Great stuff is still being written. And these are an honouring God, a building up of the faith

and a message to the world.

[15:20] What is the message here? Isaiah mentions three things and I'm only going to mention them as well. I know when you say three things you thought it's halfway through the sermon. Is this in the beginning? No, I am halfway through.

First thing is that God is a warrior. Verse 13, the Lord goes out like a mighty man. Now when you read in the Old Testament that the Lord is a warrior they're thinking of one particular thing. They are thinking of the story of the Exodus. How God rescued his people and destroyed his enemies. People of Isaiah's own day had seen that as well and the great Assyrian army came against them and Hezekiah, good king Hezekiah, prayed to God the warrior, the God of the Exodus. In other words, God is big enough. As we, back in chapter 40, who is like the Lord? So when we sing about God's power, when we sing about God as creator, we mean that there is nothing, there is no one in this entire universe or throughout past, history, present, or history to come that can oppose Him.

That needs to be part of the substance of our faith. That needs to be part of the message to the world because if the world regards God as some kind of private hobby, if the world regards God as something insignificant which one or two people happen to like in their spare time, then that God is not going to be able to deal with the giant evils of our time.

[16:45] That God won't be able to tackle the financial crisis. That God won't be able to tackle the insecurity throughout the world. God is a warrior. The second thing they think is a contrasting one in verse 14, I will cry out like a woman in labor.

See, if we simply emphasize God is a warrior, then that could suggest brute force, simply. But here He has the tenderness of a woman bringing forth a child.

And after all, that's what He's done with the whole creation and indeed with those who come to Him. They are the children of God. You see, He says, for a long time I have held my peace.

I imagine that's the same thing as Paul says in Acts 17 when he says the times of this ignorance God overlooked. But now He commands everyone to repent.

God's purpose is like pregnancy. It's a planned outcome and it's a dated outcome. God has planned it and God will bring it out. And Isaiah had a great deal to say about who this child is.

[17:52] Back in chapter 7 in that the child will be called Emmanuel, God with us. In chapter 9 unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.

You see, these two complementary aspects of God. He is great in power. He is mighty. There's nothing and no one can oppose Him. But He is tremendously tender and loving like a mother with her child.

One of the most beautiful phrases used in the whole Old Testament about God and His people is used in the prophet Hosea. Where the prophet is mourning His people having turned against Him and says, I remember when you were a child when I taught you to walk.

If people say the God of the Old Testament is bloodthirsty, judgmental, take them to Hosea. I taught you to walk. Look at the tenderness and the care.

So He is the warrior He brings to birth. But the question always arises is, is He going to be able to deliver? Will He finish the task? It seems to me that's what verses 15 and 16 are about, which are telling us that His coming will turn the world upside down.

[19:08] The warrior, the child bearer, and the conquering king who will turn creation, I will lay waste mountains and hills, turn the rivers into islands and dry up the pools.

He has absolute power over creation. None of those, I mean, mountains and hills are no obstacle to Him. Rivers are no obstacle. Indeed, He's going to say, Isaiah is about to say in chapter 43, verse 2, when you pass through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you.

Rivers often in the Old Testament and sea are often a symbol of the anti-God powers, the realm of darkness, the realm of Satan. He's going to deal with that. And Isaiah 40, the kind of thing that Mary says in her great song, He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the humble.

I will lead the blind. Notice, there is blessing for those who are helpless, those who cannot see. I will turn the darkness before them into light.

What are the first words of creation? Let there be light. As the gospel always do, it brings light. It opens the eyes of those living in darkness. It turns them away from the muddle and confusion of sin, the oppressiveness of evil.

[20 : 34] These are the things I do and I do not forsake them. Sometimes Isaiah is saying, these are the things I do. That's the kind of God I am and I do not forsake them. I'm not going to stop doing it.

When the Lord says, He is faithful to His people for a thousand generations, that's a Hebrew way of saying, He is faithful to them forever. It's not that He's going to say in the thousand and first generations, sorry guys, in a thousand years, faithfulness is over.

You're on your own now. It's a way of saying, He will never forsake His people. But as always with Isaiah, as with all faithful prophets and preachers, there is a warning as well as a promise.

Verse 17, They are turned back and put utterly to shame who trust in carved idols who say to metal images, You are our gods. There is judgment for the idolater and indeed for what they trust in.

One of the psalms says, Those who trust, idols are futile and so are all who trust in them. The idol worshippers themselves become idols.

[21 : 49] So, we have two options, don't we? We have the way of idolatry, turning our back on the light, turning our back on the creator and walking, stumbling further into darkness.

Or we have the way of praise. We can join in this song. The song of the seraphim, the song of creation, the song of God's redeemed people.

And as I finish, as we learn in the book of Revelation where that song is spelled out. The book of Revelation says there are two elements in that song.

One is Amen, which looks to the past and says, God's purposes have been faithfully carried out.

The other is, Hallelujah, for the Lord, our God, the Almighty reigns.

And you know, it wouldn't do us any harm if we said Hallelujah a bit more than we do. Amen. Let's pray. Hallelujah, for the Lord, our God, the Almighty reigns.

[22 : 55] Father, we know that is a fact, but we want to proclaim it as well as a song of praise. And so bless us as we leave here and go back to the good things and the bad things, to the routine and to the unexpected.

Bless us and guide us and lead us into the way of light. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.