

2. The Delight of Trusting in God

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[0 : 00] Now last week we started a short series called Looking at the World as God Sees It and we're looking at Isaiah chapter 41 which you can find on page 601. Today we are particularly going to be looking at verses 8 to 20. I'm going to read from the beginning of the chapter so we can put these verses in context. In this chapter, Isaiah 41, God the Lord is speaking.

This is what he has to say. Reading from verse 1. Listen to me in silence, O coastlands. Let the peoples renew their strength. Let them approach, then let them speak. Let us together draw near for judgment. Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him so that he tramples kings underfoot. He makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow. He pursues them and passes on safely by paths his feet have not trod. Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last. I am he. The coastlands have seen and are afraid. The ends of the earth tremble.

They have drawn near and come. Everyone helps his neighbor and says to his brother, be strong. The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer, him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering it is good, and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved. But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its furthest corners, saying to you, you are my servant, I have chosen you, and not cast you off. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded. Those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but shall not find them. Those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand. It is I who says to you, fear not.

I am the one who helps you. Fear not, you worm, Jacob, you men of Israel. I am the one who helps you, declares the Lord. Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth. You shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and shall make the hills like chaff. You shall winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. And you shall rejoice in the Lord. In the Holy One of Israel you shall glory. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, the Lord, will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.

I will set in the desert the cypress, the plain, and the pine together, that they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this. The Holy One of Israel has created it. And this is the word of the Lord to us today. Seeing the world as God sees it.

[3 : 59] The poet Blake once said, when you see the sunrise, what do you see? Do you see a golden disc in the blue heavens? Or do you see a multitude of the heavenly host crying, holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty? Now both things are true, because when you look at the sunrise, you do see a golden disc in the blue heavens. But when you look behind that, you see the power and the might of the creator. This is what this chapter is about. This chapter isn't saying, forget about the visible world, ignore it, it's not really there. This chapter is saying, yes, the visible world is there, the things that happen and are happening. And yet, behind them, there is God himself, the creator. Last week, we looked at the danger of ignoring that God, the Lord of history. And today, we're going to look for a few moments at the delight of trusting in God. And these verses, verse 8 to 20, focus on God's people, Israel my servant,

Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham. But it's not exclusive. When God talks about his people, he's always looking out to what here is called the ends of the earth. And then in verse 20, there's an invitation to everyone in the world. God calls his people so that through them, others can see the world as God sees it. And the heart, I think, of this section is verse 16. The last two lines of that verse, you shall rejoice in the Lord, in the Holy One of Israel, you shall glory. Seeing the world as God sees it does not lead to grimness and joylessness. It has to be said sometimes, when you go to Christian assemblies, it does seem like that. It has to be said. And I'm afraid that's too often true. And that's often a criticism that enemies of the gospel make. That for the gospel is grim, the gospel deprives you of what life is really about. In fact, it's the opposite way around. It is the creator and his great offer of salvation which causes people truly to rejoice. Not to be flippant, not to be silly, but truly to rejoice when they see that their God is in control. This is a God who transforms everything. So first of all then, verses 8 to 13, this God is the master of everything. You, Israel, my servant. This word servant is going to be one of the great themes of these chapters of Isaiah. It's going to culminate in the suffering servant in chapter 53. So what does it mean when God says to his people, my servant? First of all, in their own story, you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen. Now, if you read the story back in Genesis, you'll find that Jacob was in many ways a very unattractive character. He was a cheat. He was a liar. He was a thief, really. And yet God transformed him into Israel, a prince with God. That's what God does. God transforms people's lives. I don't know most of you here.

I don't know what your life is like at the moment or what it's been. But the important thing this passage is saying is God can transform you. God can take your life, whatever mess it may be in, and he can make it into something that is beautiful, something that is attractive.

How often people think that what people need is not transformation but education. Now, I'm a great believer in education. I've been a teacher all my life and I think education is important.

But education only changes the superficial things. We need to be transformed right from the inside. We need a new heart. This is God's initiative. And instead of the idol worshippers whom we read about in the last section, the whole of history is in his grasp. And he calls Abraham my friend.

[8 : 11] God wants you to be his friend. Think about that for a moment. The God of the universe, the God who made heaven and earth, the Lord of history, the God who transforms everything, wants you to be his friend.

You may feel inadequate. You may feel that nobody loves you. Well, here is one who loves you. God himself wants you to be his friend. And also this God not only calls his servants but he protects them.

Verse 10 to 13, I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. This isn't just a passive companion. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you. Now if you look back at verse 7, the gods whom the nations make, they actually have to be upheld. They have to put them on a firm base so they don't topple over. This God, by contrast, upholds and he does it actively. Strengthen you.

Help you. Because there is no enemy in heaven and on earth who can stand against God. If we believe that the Lord is the maker of heaven and earth, then there is nothing at all in heaven or in earth, in time or in space or beyond it, which God cannot control because he's totally active on behalf of his people and totally committed to them. Once in Birmingham, there was a little group of Quakers who had bought a little chapel on a piece of waste ground. They were very, very pleased with this because they'd never had a place to meet before and they were delighted that at last they had found a home. It wasn't long, however, before they received a letter and this letter said, we want to buy this piece of ground. We were here before you and basically we're bigger and more powerful than you because this is a letter from John Lewis, the great commercial business of John Lewis. They were going to buy this and of course the poor people would have to leave their chapel. A few days later, the big brass of John Lewis also received a letter. We would like to buy your place.

[10 : 26] We have been here longer than you. And of course the board of directors burst out laughing until they looked at the signature at the bottom of the letter, Cadbury. Behind that pathetic little group of people stood the giant Cadbury Empire. And we've got to remember that the forces against God's people seem overwhelming as it did to these people in Birmingham. And yet, the God of heaven strengthens, helps, upholds. You see, we can't choose not to be a servant. We don't like the word servant.

We're a servant to all kinds of things. Circumstances. We're our own bodies. We're all kinds of things. But we can choose who is going to be our master. What master do we want to have other than the Lord who made heaven and earth?

So he's master. But another thing about him in verses 14 to 16, he is the redeemer. The one who pays a price so that we can belong to him. The one who protects us. The one who takes us into his family.

Read the book of Ruth. Boaz becomes Ruth's redeemer. Takes her into his family and makes her his wife. Isaiah loves fairly extravagant metaphors and pictures. You worm, Jacob.

And there's 50 now. Make of you a threshing sledge. New sharp and having teeth. Imagine a worm being transformed into a threshing sledge. It's extravagant. It's meant to be extravagant.

[12:03] That's not what God does. Because he transforms everything and everyone. And of course, it's not so much that the worm is a creature that most of us don't like to have anything to do with.

It's its fragility. It's frailty. It's vulnerability. And here, God is transforming weakness into strength. I will make of you a threshing sledge.

And not just a threshing sledge. This is some threshing sledge which threshes the mountains and crushes them and makes the hills like chaff. In other words, what God is saying is, When I am with you, there is nothing on earth that can stand against you.

Seeing the world as God sees it. And that is why he says, You shall rejoice. Verse 16. You shall rejoice in the Lord, the one who keeps his covenant, and the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah's favorite phrase for God. This phrase, the Holy One of Israel, occurs more often in Isaiah than in the rest of the Old Testament put together. Going back to his great vision when he saw the Lord.

[13:14] Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his glory. What does that mean, the whole earth is filled with his glory? The glory of God comes from a word that means to be solid, to be real.

What he's saying is, If you trust in God, you are building on reality. You're not building on fantasy. You're not building on idols. You're not living in la-la land. You're building on something that is true, something that's real.

And the other meaning of the word glory is light. The light of God by which you see reality. So, he is the master, he is the redeemer. But, above all, verses 17 to 20, he is the creator.

He hears and answers prayer. When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, I, the Lord, will answer them. Who are the poor and needy? The poor and needy is everybody.

Because we cannot help ourselves. Ultimately, we are totally dependent on the Lord. Those of you who have been Christians for many years, I wonder if you've ever said, when you face the difficulty, All we can do now is pray.

[14:29] The truth of the matter is, that's all we can ever do. Because prayer is the means by which our weakness is brought into contact with God's power.

Prayer brings our vulnerability, our weakness, our helplessness into contact with God's power. You see, this is more than help in difficulties.

I thought about God who helped in difficulties. This is a God who is going to transform the whole world. I often say to the Corn Hill students, it's only partly tongue-in-cheek.

There are two parts to the Bible, not the Old and the New Testaments, but Genesis 1, verse 1, and the rest. Genesis 1, verse 1, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And the rest of the Bible unfolds that great truth. And it points to the fact that one day he will create a new heaven and a new earth. And that's the point here.

[15:25] I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water.

Water, life-giving, and trees which are so often a symbol of new life. Why is the world not like that now?

The world is not like that now because it's under a curse. But it still belongs to God. I want you to think for a moment of two different pictures. I want you to think of a landscape which is desolate.

A landscape which is barren. A landscape which has been ravaged by war, by earthquake and so on. There are children screaming in terror.

Parents are frantic. Everything looks cursed and broken. Think of another lens.

[16 : 25] I want to think of another picture. It's a riverside on a summer day. Children are playing happily with their parents beside them. The countryside is beautiful.

The whole atmosphere is one of joy and tremendous peace. Now to ask you, which world do these belong to? The answer, as you well know, is they belong to the same world.

Our world. Because our world is still suffering from the curse. But one day, that first picture is going to disappear. And it's all going to be peace and glory and joy and love.

So if we see the world as God sees it today, we'll neither pretend that the world is totally evil and there is no future for it.

Nor will we pretend everything is lovely. We will know that it is still good, although fallen, and that God has a future for it. I want you to notice verse 20 though.

[17 : 28] This is not just something to think about. This is something, this is a message that they may see and know. This is something to tell people. See and know.

Not just see, but see the world as God sees it. Understand it as he understands it. May consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this.

And the Holy One of Israel has created it. This word create here, only ever used of God. Used over and over again in Genesis 1. This God is the creator.

So what does it mean to see the world as God sees it? It means to delight in the fact that we can be his servants and his friends. It means to rejoice in the fact that he is our redeemer and welcomes us into his family.

And it means to look forward with confidence that one day there will be a new creation in which all will be good because God will have destroyed all that is evil.

[18 : 31] And God will place in that new creation the people whom he has redeemed to fulfill his ancient purpose, which is to be responsible stewards of God's creation.

Next week we are going to look at our final study, which is the delusion of turning to others. But I want all of us today to go away into our circumstances, whatever they may be, rejoicing in this God who transforms.

Let's pray. Lord God, you are so good to us. And we pray that in our circumstances, many here will be in circumstances of great difficulty and hardship.

All of us have problems and fears and worries. But we pray that this glorious prospect of the new heaven and the new earth and this sense of the present protection of the Lord who made that heaven and earth will fill our hearts and allow us to go on our way rejoicing.

Rejoicing in the Lord who keeps his promise and who will never let us down. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.