

Your Kingdom Come

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[0 : 00] Well, that hymn asks a lot of questions about when, when all these things that we're promised will happen. And the chapter we're going to read now tells us the answer.

It's Isaiah chapter 32, and you'll find it if you have one of the church visitor's Bibles, I think on page 592. Is that right? Page 592.

Isaiah chapter 32. And Bob will be preaching to us shortly from this chapter. We looked last week at the preceding two chapters, oracles about great judgment on the enemies of God's people.

But here is a much brighter and a very wonderful chapter indeed. Isaiah chapter 32 and verse 1.

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice.

Each will be like a hiding place from the wind. A shelter from the storm. Like streams of water in a dry place. Like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.

[1 : 06] Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed. And the ears of those who hear will give attention. The heart of the hasty will understand and know. And the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.

The fool will no longer be called noble, nor the scoundrel said to be honorable. For the fool speaks folly, and his heart is busy with iniquity to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the Lord, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink.

As for the scoundrel, his devices are evil. He plans wicked schemes to ruin the poor with lying words, even when the plea of the needy is right.

But he who is noble plans noble things, and on noble things he stands. Rise up, you women who are at ease. Hear my voice, you complacent daughters.

Give ear to my speech. In little more than a year you will shudder, you complacent women. For the grape harvest fails, the fruit harvest will not come. Tremble, you women who are at ease.

[2 : 13] Shudder, you complacent ones. Strip, and make yourselves bare, and tie sackcloth around your waist. Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, for the soil of my people growing up in thorns and briars.

Yes, for the joyous houses in the exultant city. For the palace is forsaken, the populous city is deserted. The hill and the watchtower will become dens forever.

A joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks. Until the spirit is poured upon us from on high. And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field.

And the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness. And righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace.

And the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. However, my people will abide in a peaceful habitation. In secure dwellings.

[3 : 13] And in quiet resting places. And it will hail when the forest falls down. And the city will be utterly laid low. Happy are you who sow beside all waters.

Who let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free. Amen. May God bless to us this word. Now, could we turn back again, please, to the passage that Willie read for us.

Which is on page 592. Isaiah 32. And let's have a moment of prayer. God our Father, we pray you will give us sincere and open hearts.

As we listen to your words. And help us to pray with conviction. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth. As it is in heaven. And we ask indeed that as we live our lives on earth.

We may increasingly, by your power and by your spirit. Anticipate that kingdom which is to come. Where Jesus Christ will reign forever and ever.

[4 : 22] And we ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Now, for thousands of years, the church has prayed these words.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. When we pray these, when do we expect it to be fulfilled?

Indeed, do we expect it to be fulfilled? Because fulfilled it will most certainly be. Or Jesus would not have encouraged us to pray for it, would he?

Now, of course, you may say the kingdom will come. Whether we pray your kingdom come or not. And that's true. But the Lord gives us that prayer. Gives us that hope.

Gives us passages like this to help us to anticipate this. Now, Isaiah, as you know, is full of prophecies of the coming kingdom. Many of which are taken up in the New Testament.

[5 : 22] You remember when Jesus began his ministry, he came into Galilee preaching the kingdom of God. And they're taken up particularly in the book of Revelation.

Now, these passages have often been treated as roadmaps. A great deal of fruitless speculation about the sequence of events which will surround the coming.

A number of years ago, I was preaching in Belfast on Daniel chapter 7, which is a chapter about the coming of the Son of Man and the setting up of the kingdom. There are some cryptic verses there. There's one in particular who says that the horn, that's a symbol of power, will overthrow three kings. And I said, I've no idea who these three kings are. Or, undoubtedly, this will happen in time and space, but I can't tell you who they are.

At the end of the meeting, a man came to me and said, Oh, I know who these three kings are. Prince Charles, George Bush, and Tony Blair. That will tell you roughly the time when this happened.

[6 : 24] I said, How do you know that? He said, Oh, I'm a theologian. I know about these kind of things. That was me put in my place, wasn't it? You see, this is the problem.

Many people, they'll read these passages, and instead of saying, What is the Lord saying to us today? We'll try and work out detailed programs. Now, that doesn't mean these passages are vague.

Isaiah is not saying, Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a king like this? Wouldn't it be great if a golden age were to happen sometime? No, these are pictures given to us of what the future will be like, and they're given to help us to live now, to anticipate in our living and in our thinking the world to come.

So, our title tonight is, Your Kingdom Come. Kingdom we've already sung about, the kingdom we've prayed that will come. Your kingdom come, O God. Your rule, O Christ, begin.

Now, I said last week, the background of these chapters is the threat of Assyria, way up there on the Tigris, gobbling up the nation of Judah, from its capital Nineveh, which is where the town of Mosul is now.

[7 : 39] We've heard so much in the news about that city recently, in the battle with the Islamic State. But it's not just a message for Isaiah's own time. It's a message for us in our difficult, uncertain world.

There are two questions, really. First of all, what kind of a king will there be? Verses 1 to 8. And then verses 9 to 20, what kind of a kingdom?

So, first of all, what kind of a king? Now, this isn't the first time in Isaiah we've met this figure. In chapter 6, Isaiah says, Woe is me, for I, my eyes, have seen the king, the Lord of hosts.

Then in chapter 9, we've met him again, the child with four names, the eternal God, the child who is to come, and who will reign on the throne of David forever.

Then in chapter 11, again, the king who is to come, and we will meet him again in the next few chapters. So, first of all, the nature of this king.

[8 : 44] Verses 1 and 2. Lord Axon, who was a politician at the end of the 19th century, once said, Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts, absolutely.

Now, that normally happens in human affairs, because no one, no group of people can be trusted with absolute power. Churchill once said, Democracy is the worst form of government ever invented, apart from all the others.

And that's why we need checks and balances. No individual, however good, however gifted, however well-intentioned, can be entrusted with total power.

But this king, we are told, will reign in righteousness. When he reigns, there will be no injustice. When he reigns, there will be no oppression.

When he reigns, there will be no exploitation of the weak and the disadvantaged. And when he reigns, all unfairness and all inequity will be banished.

[9 : 49] Now, we do expect this, of course, and hope for this from our leaders, don't we? And we mustn't be cynical. Many of them are well-intentioned people who try very hard.

But very often, the problem is circumstances throw them out of balance. They make promises and probably sincerely mean to keep them. And then circumstances happen, which means they can't. The one thing that will never be said about this king is that he encounters circumstances which are beyond his control. He'll never be surprised. He'll never be taken.

He'll never be taken at an advantage. A king will reign in righteousness, and those under him will also, those who are his people, princes, will rule in justice.

Each will be like a hiding place from the wind. Now, this may not be the best translation of that verse, too. The old version says, a man will be a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest.

[10 : 49] And Alec Mateer, in his commentary I've mentioned already, says that the verse could be translated this way. A special, one special person who will reign, a shelter from the storm.

He'll protect people from the storm. The storms of oppression, the storms of terrorism, storms of injustice, the storms, all kinds of storms, deflect our mortal life.

And he will provide streams of water in a dry place and the shade of a great rock in a weary land. Now, of course, all human leaders disappoint, in the church as well as in the state.

Remember, please, that all leaders are fallible. Let me tell you this. I never realized how great a sinner I was until I went into the ministry.

Because dealing with the Word of God daily, dealing with seeing the complexities and the difficulties and so on, make you very, very conscious of your own weakness.

[11 : 57] A leader, a preacher, is not somebody who stands six feet above contradiction, and lays down the law. A preacher, a leader, is a sinner who is sharing with other sinners what the Lord has given him and what he's discovered from the Word.

So, be charitable. That's what I'm saying. When you... It's so easy to be critical. It's so easy to... It's so easy to disparage.

Which doesn't mean, of course, as I say, that we have to put... We don't put leaders on pedestals, nor do we denigrate them. Sometimes, of course, that's what happens in churches.

Ministers are placed on pedestals, and then it's kicked out from them, very often by the same people. And that's a very, very bad thing. We are all sinners.

We are all subjects of the King. And we all need His grace and forgiveness. Why, Wesley sang, Vile and full of sin I am. You are full of truth and grace.

[13 : 00] The nature of this King, He will reign in righteousness. And His people, in verses 3 to 8. The kind of King that reigns will have an effect on His people.

There will be a total transformation. Now, I want to say something that is very important here. I've talked about the sinfulness and the failures and the inadequacies of leaders.

But, in ancient Israel and in the church, there are sometimes anticipations of the kingdom. King David, in his better days, Solomon, in his better days, genuinely anticipated the kingdom.

It was a real sense of God on earth. David says, in his last words, when one rolls over people with justice, he's like the sun shining or the rain on a thirsty ground.

A good king, Hezekiah, had come to the throne. A man with faults and flaws like his ancestor David. Nevertheless, a genuine, a genuine picture of the king who is to come.

[14 : 11] And, in a later generation, his great-grandson, Josiah, was to restore the word of God to the people of God.

And there's going to be a, look at what, look at verses 3 and 4. There's going to be a total transformation. The eyes of those who see will not be closed. Now, earlier chapters in Isaiah have a great deal to say about false prophets bringing delusions and false visions of things that are not going to happen.

This king and those who serve him are going to open people's eyes to the light. And that, of course, is what genuine preaching of the word of God is about.

It's opening people's eyes to the light. So, as the apostle John says, we can walk in the light. So, there's clear vision. There is good listening.

The ears of those who hear will give attention. That, of course, is first of all listening to the Lord himself. listening to the word as it's expounded. It's also listening to each other and having a genuine, the kind of genuine relationship where genuine confidences can be shared.

[15 : 23] It's a bad thing among God's people. If you can't tell somebody about your weaknesses, for fear, it will not be made the subject of gossip. Thinly disguised, of course, as concern for prayer.

But, there must be an openness, open vision, open, good listening, and the heart, and the tongue, and so on. There must be genuine engagement of heart and mind, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual.

A number of years ago, I was at the ordination of somebody who was going into the ministry. And at that ordination, one of the speakers was a former teacher of mine, a man whom I genuinely liked and admire in many ways and from whom I learned a great deal about the Hebrew language.

And one of the things he said was, we mustn't dumb down the message. Far too many ministers seem to have nothing serious to say. And I thought, that's right.

Then I thought, the trouble is, you are one of the people who has brought this about. By destroying people's confidence in the word of God, by training people who are going to go out and preach the word that this word is not reliable.

[16 : 41] You see, you see the problem. You cannot downgrade the word of God. You cannot teach false doctrine and then expect to produce clear vision and good listening and people who are walking in the light.

So, it all goes together. It's a total transformation of attitude. That, of course, will characterize the kingdom to come. There will be no lying.

There will be no cheating. There will be no, there will be none of the things that mark so often our relationships on earth. And in verses five to seven, basically, he's saying, that will mean certain people will be discredited.

The fool will no more be called noble, nor the scoundrel said to be honorable. Now, the point is, the fool here is not somebody who regards themselves as a fool.

This is somebody who is wise in their own eyes. Remember, in the wisdom books, the fool is someone not necessarily who ignites the existence of God, but lives and talks as if God didn't live, as if he didn't hear, as if he didn't care, and as if he didn't judge.

[17 : 56] And the scoundrel, the person who cares only for himself, will, the fool speaks folly, his heart is busy with iniquity to practice ungodliness, this phrase, to utter error concerning the Lord.

The only way we're going to avoid uttering error concerning the Lord is by sticking to this book. And when we expound this book, with all our failures and all our inadequacies, we are opening people's eyes to the light.

When we start peddling our own ideas, then we begin very easily slip into utter error concerning the Lord. And that means, among other things, treating the whole of Scripture with seriousness.

Not just our passages and purple passages, but the whole of Scripture. Scripture. And what does this do? The craving of the hungry is unsatisfied and the thirsty are deprived of drink.

As Milton said, the hungry sheep look up and are not fed. It is the task of the shepherd to feed the sheep. And he, verse 8, he who is noble plans noble things.

[19 : 13] Noble here is not so much about rank. It's about character. He who is noble plans noble things. One who digs into the Word and brings it to people so that God's Word shapes us.

And notice the metaphor hunger and thirst. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. righteousness. And one thing that happens when the Word of God, it won't happen to everybody, but it will happen to some people at least, when the Word of God is preached, people begin to realize they're hungry.

Particularly if they've had a thin diet of people uttering error concerning the Lord. Begin to realize that they're hungry. They want to learn more. They want to feed on the Word of God.

So that's the kind of king, his nature and his people. Now what kind of a kingdom? Verses 9 to 20. Hear my voice.

This is the key. My sheep, said Jesus, hear my voice and they follow me. And how will this happen? Now this puzzling passage, verses 9 to 14, first of all, there is a need to repent.

[20 : 30] Rise up, you women who are at ease. Hear my voice, you complacent daughters. The prophet speaks here to a group of women who are apparently taking part in a harvest festival.

Does this mean the women are especially guilty? Of course not. Most of the book has already been condemning the men who are the ruling class in Israel both in church and state.

I think what he's trying to get at is that he's, if the men won't listen to my voice, maybe the women will and maybe they'll influence their husbands.

Some of you remember that passage in Amos. Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who live on the hill of Samaria. I have to say cows of Bashan is not as rude in Hebrew as it is in English.

It's hardly a compliment though. And what have they condemned for? They condemned for complacency. But if you read that chapter and don't stop chuckling at the cows of Bashan you'll discover that the wimpish men are being condemned as well.

[21 : 36] So you see the point is the prophet is saying don't be complacent. Notice that the words are used at ease complacent. Again in verse 10 complacent.

Again in verse 11 complacent. Probably this is an example of faith in the wrong place. If it's a harvest festival they're probably trusting in the harvest rather than the Lord of the harvest.

Probably trusting God's blessings rather than God himself. Verse 12 Beat your breasts for the pleasant field or the fruitful vine. Don't trust in these externals.

Habakkuk says at the end of his prophecy though the vine ceases and although there is no growth yet will I trust in the Lord.

And the land is probably devastated. The Assyrian invasion while it spared Jerusalem nevertheless devastated the land. We'll see that next week in chapter 33.

[22 : 37] The point is it's a warning against complacency. I think about the book of Revelation. The church is in Revelation. What is the church that's most fiercely condemned?

Church in Laodicea which is complacent. You would think when Laodicea is so condemned it must have particularly powerful heresies there.

There must be particularly personality disputes and bad living. Not a word of any of these. What the risen Lord says to Laodicea you say you are rich and increased in goods and you need nothing but I say you are poor and wretched and miserable and blind.

And that's what Isaiah is saying here. That's what the Lord is saying through Isaiah. There is a need to repent of our complacency. It's so easy to become complacent.

So easy just to let things roll on. Then in verses 15 to 20 the need for the spirit. This kingdom will not come by our own efforts.

[23 : 44] It will come by the spirit. Later prophet Zechariah says not by might nor by power but by my spirit says the Lord.

Now as I've said before looking at Isaiah these prophecies have a local and present fulfillment as well as a future fulfillment. The spirit is going to rescue Jerusalem the city of God from the Assyrians.

When the Babylonians destroy the city the spirit is going to bring them back. Because we're told in the beginning of the book of Ezra the spirit stirred up the heart of the pagan emperor.

The spirit of God is the one who does the work of God. Lake William Sill once said the Lord has only one worker the Holy Spirit.

We need to remember that. That's not denigrating the good work that masses of people do of course. It's basically saying that none of that work is done in our own strength or by our own efforts.

[24 : 52] He's going to achieve anything. Only the spirit will. The creator spirit who swept over the darkness at the beginning of creation and brought life and light.

The spirit of Pentecost. And notice the phrase, verse 15, until the spirit is poured upon us from on high. And Joel is going to prophesy that and to say that's fulfilled at Pentecost.

But it's not just the people, it's the transformed landscape. Verse 15 again, the wilderness becomes a fruitful field and the fruitful field is deemed a forest and so on.

The king who's coming, the king in righteousness, is one who will transform landscape. Notice he's also going to transform society.

justice will dwell and righteousness abide. Now, when the spirit of God is at work, this kind of thing happens.

[25 : 58] It happens when a dying church is transformed into a living congregation of God's people. It can happen in communities. There are stories, for example, from the time of the great revival, the time of Wesley, of how Wesley visited a community and preached the gospel.

And 20 years later, the visitor came to that community to be notorious for its violence and drunkenness. Now, of course, it wasn't perfect. But the change was such. He said, what happened here? An old man says, a man came among us called John Wesley. And he showed us a better way to live. So, you see, this isn't just about the future. This is about the present. This is about the Spirit of God working along the deadness of sin and death. After all, it's only the Spirit who brings life. There's lots of things we can do without the Spirit, isn't there? We can educate, we can work hard, entertain, do all kinds of things. [27 : 05] The one thing we cannot do is convert someone. One thing we cannot do is cause someone to grow in grace. Only the Spirit can do that.

And this leads to harmony, verse 17, the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness, and trust forever, happening when the kingdom comes, but anticipated, as I say, from time to time.

But we must learn never to trust those times, because the point is, sometimes, sometimes if we trust God's blessing, we forget that God is still working. This morning, in Edinburgh North, we were looking at Habakkuk 1, and Habakkuk 1 is talking about the coming of the Babylonians, the exile, and he says, I am doing a work in your days, which you would not believe, even if you saw it.

So we have to believe that even when there are no signs of growth, even when everything looks desolate and dreary, the Lord is doing a work. That's something we need to hold on to.

[28 : 19] Verse 19 seems a bit out of place. It will hail when the forest falls down, the city will be utterly laid low. I think the point here is it's once again speaking about the danger of complacency, the danger of trusting, the danger of trusting in anything other than God.

Verse 20 Happy are you who sow beside all waters, planted by the stream, as in Psalm 1, let the feet of the ox and the donkey range free.

There is plenty for all, not just for human beings, but for the animal creation as well. Isaiah is saying to us, this will happen.

It may not happen, well obviously it didn't happen fully in the lifetime of any of his hearers, it didn't happen fully in the lifetime of anyone up to now.

Nevertheless, because one day it will happen, this ultimately is the only thing that will keep us going in the Christian race. Live now, says Isaiah, in the light of then.

[29 : 33] Amen. Let's pray. Father, we pray that these glorious truths about the coming king and the coming kingdom will increasingly become part of our living and of our thinking.

Help us in dark and bleak days when there seems no signs of green shoots of recovery. Help us to trust that underneath the earth, the way the power, the creator's power is working, that one day there will be a harvest.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.