

# God will be God and the World will Know It

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now and we're going to read in the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament. If you have one of our blue church visitors' Bibles, I think that's page 593.

We're in Isaiah chapter 33. Bob File has been leading us through some of these central chapters in Isaiah in recent weeks and we come to another chapter here that is full of the promise of the Lord who will act on behalf of his people, exalted to rule.

So Isaiah chapter 33 and verse 1. Ah, you destroyer who yourself have not been destroyed, you traitor whom none has betrayed.

When you've ceased to destroy, you will be destroyed. When you have finished betraying, they will betray you. Oh Lord, be gracious to us.

We wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble. At the tumultuous noise, peoples flee. When you lift yourself up, nations are scattered and your spoil is gathered as the caterpillar gathers, as locusts leap, it is leapt upon.

[ 1 : 22 ] The Lord is exalted for he dwells on high. He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. And he will be the stability of your times. Abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge.

The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure. Behold, their heroes cry in the streets. The envoys of peace weep bitterly. The highways lie waste. The traveler ceases.

Covenants are broken. Cities are despised. There is no regard for man. The land mourns and languishes. Lebanon is confounded and withers away. Sharon is like desert.

And Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves. Now I will arise, says the Lord. Now I will lift myself up. Now I will be exalted.

You conceive chaff. You give birth to stubble. Your breath is a fire that will consume you. And the peoples will be as if burned to lime, like thorns cut down that are burned in the fire.

[ 2 : 23 ] Hear you who are far off what I have done. And you who are near acknowledge my might. The sinners in Zion are afraid. Trembling has seized the godless.

Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings? He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly. Who despises the gain of oppressions. Who shakes his hands lest they hold a bribe. Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed. And shuts his eyes from looking on evil. He will dwell on the heights. His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks.

His bread will be given to him. His water will be sure. Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty. They will see a land that stretches afar.

Your heart will muse on the terror. Where is he who counted? Where is he who weighed the tribute? Where is he who counted the towers? You will see no more the insolent people.

[ 3 : 26 ] The people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend. Stammering in a tongue that you cannot understand. Behold Zion, the city of appointed feasts. Your eyes will see Jerusalem, an untroubled habitation.

An immovable tent whose stakes will never be plucked up. Nor will any of its cords be broken. But there the Lord in majesty will be for us.

A place of broad rivers and streams where no galley with oars can go. No majestic ship can pass. For the Lord is our judge. The Lord is our lawgiver.

The Lord is our king. He will save us. Your cords hang loose. They cannot hold the mast firm in its place or keep the sail spread out.

Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided. Even the lame will take the prey. And no inhabitant will say, I am sick. The people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.

[ 4 : 33 ] Amen. May God bless to us his word. Now, could I ask you please to turn to page 593 and to chapter 33 of Isaiah.

And we'll have a moment of prayer. Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place. We thank you for the gospel, which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. We pray as we listen to the gospel word, to your living word tonight.

It will indeed be changed. It will indeed be strengthened. It will be challenged and encouraged. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I imagine that many of you will have visited the British Museum in London.

If you haven't, and if you're in the area, I certainly recommend it. And if you're there, make sure you visit the Assyrian rooms. These are splendidly furnished with relics from old Assyria, from Nineveh, and elsewhere.

[ 5 : 52 ] And in the entrance to the room, there are two gigantic bulls with human heads. They look intimidating enough in the sanitized 21st century. They must have been totally intimidating when they were actually seen in reality.

Now, in one of the rooms, there are a series of splendid wall panels, which show the siege and capture of a city. Now, once the language was deciphered, it was discovered that this city was Lachish, which was Judah's second city, some 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

And this was the story that's mentioned in the Bible, mentioned in Kings, and later on in Isaiah, of how the great Assyrian army under Sennacherib came and devastated the land of Judah.

And they took the city of Lachish. It's a most terrifying experience as you look at it, because the brutality of the invaders and the panic of the defenders can be seen even after all those centuries.

The interesting thing is there's a particular panel on which the Assyrian officers are offering sacrifices to their gods, praying for victory on the next day.

[ 7 : 15 ] The next day was the day which was scheduled for the attack and capture of Jerusalem. Think of it. The Assyrian officers offering sacrifices to their gods, praying that he would allow them to take the city of Jerusalem.

And that, of course, is not what happened. These officers and the rest of the army are destroyed by the angel of the Lord in front of Jerusalem. And Zion, founded on the mountain, as we sang, was saved.

But before that happened, Sennacherib had sent an insulting letter to Hezekiah. And you don't need to turn it up, but just a few pages over in chapter 37, where the story is told that I've just mentioned. Chapter 37, verse 14. Hezekiah received this letter in which Sennacherib said, There's no point in you standing up to me. I've defeated all the other cities, all the other gods.

There's no contest here. A bit like, I suppose, a bit like Hamilton Academicals taking on Chelsea. There is no contest. And there's no contest here either.

[ 8 : 29 ] Your city will simply fall. This is what the Bible says. Hezekiah received the letter from the hands of the messengers and read it. And Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.

And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, O Lord God of hosts, God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth.

You have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, O Lord, and see. And hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.

Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire. For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone.

Therefore, they were destroyed. Now, that is the situation behind this chapter here. The Assyrian army, flushed with the conquest of Lachish, with Judah under an iron hill, are making their way to Jerusalem.

[ 9 : 37 ] And just one further point, before we look more closely at the chapter. As the Assyrian army left Lachish in the Judean highlands and made their way to Jerusalem, you would have to pass through a valley famous in biblical history.

The valley of Elah, where David had confronted and defeated Goliath some centuries before. If you know that story, remember David said to Goliath, You come to me with a shield and a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, whom you have defied.

Read that story in 1 Samuel 17, and then read the story in Isaiah in Kings. And you see one story, a later story of Hezekiah and Sennacherib is modeled on that.

David is once again standing up to Goliath. And David is facing Goliath, not with stones and spears and slings, but in the name of the living God.

Our title tonight is, God will be God, and the world will know it. Now, God is God at the moment, whether the world knows it or not. It's a passage about God, who is a consuming fire, which both destroys and purifies.

[10:56] We sang a moment or two ago, He burns with holy fire, with splendor He is crowned. That's the situation. The particular situation of the chapter, but obviously it's a far wider application, as we'll see.

So first of all, in verses 1 to 6, the Lord is the Savior of Zion. The Lord saves His people. The Lord delivers His people from their enemies.

As chapter 37 describes this. But it's a wider thing. Look at verse 3. At the tumultuous noise, peoples flee. When you lift yourself up, nations are scattered.

In other words, this is not just the destruction of an ancient empire. This is the God who made heaven and earth, defending His people against their enemies.

And look at verse 2. Oh God, be gracious to us. We wait for you. This is where Isaiah is taking the prayer of Hezekiah, and making the prayer of all the people.

[12:04] Be our arm every morning, our salvation in time of trouble. So first of all, we have the destruction of the destroyer.

I, you destroyer, who yourself have not been destroyed. The Assyrian king was a bully, and the Assyrian king was a cheat. 2 Kings 18 talks of how Hezekiah had a wobbly, and sent money to Sennacherib to try and buy him off.

But Sennacherib took the money and came anyway. There's no way you can negotiate with a person like this, who is simply determined to destroy.

And Sennacherib was eventually betrayed by his own family. We know both from the Bible and from the Assyrian records that his own sons killed him, killed him, murdered him, as he was praying to his God in the temple.

See, Hezekiah's God was able to save Hezekiah. Sennacherib's God was not able to save him, because Sennacherib's God was simply an idol, a wooden or metal idol.

[13:13] So, it's this kind of double dealing that the prophet is speaking about here. Ultimately, society falls apart if there's no mutual respect and honesty.

And, of course, this happens throughout history, doesn't it? When nations make treaties with each other, very often not totally intending to keep their word.

Think of all the confusion at the moment about the Brexit negotiations. People saying different things, and, of course, when people say different things, they all pretend they are totally united. It's a kind of yes, prime minister situation where people say things, and they don't necessarily mean them. Now, that situation is not just a contemporary one. That's been the case all through history. There was the destruction of the destroyer, and then there is the prayer of the remnant. I mentioned already, chapter 2, O Lord, be gracious to us.

[14:17] We wait for you. Why does God protect his people? God protects his people because of his grace. The very heart of the relationship with the Lord is grace.

We wait for you. Isaiah is later on to say in the great fourth chapter, those who wait for the Lord, those who hope for the Lord, will renew their strength and mount up with wings like eagles.

Verse 5, The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high. He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. This is the kind of God that he is.

And he will be the stability of your times. Notice abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge. There is nothing niggardly or ungenerous about God.

God saves and he saves abundantly. It's one of the great Bible words, the abundance of God's grace. Abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge.

[15:23] I suppose wisdom is how to use knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom are close, but not identical. It's been said that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, not a vegetable.

But wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Well, be that as it may, knowledge, I mean, you could have masses of knowledge without the wisdom to use it. But in salvation, the salvation of God, we belong together.

The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure. So, in this situation, there's a threatening, terrifying juggernaut of an enemy.

Enemy who has rightly said, we've smashed everybody else, and you're not going to stand up against us. And over against him is the Lord, the God who made heaven and earth. That's what Hezekiah said in his prayer that we read a moment or two ago. Lord, these gods were destroyed because they weren't gods. They were simply human inventions. But you made heaven and earth.

[16:27] Very heart of Israel's faith in the word of the psalmist. My help is in the Lord who made heaven and earth. And therefore, there's nothing in heaven and earth can stand against Him.

So, the Lord saves Zion. Then in verses 7 to 16, the Lord judges the nations. Now, this is a picture of the devastated land.

As I've just said, the Assyrians failed to take Jerusalem, but the land was devastated. And incidentally, it's fascinating. These wall panels I've talked about were discovered in Sennacherib's palace when Nineveh was dug up in the 19th century.

And they weren't just on the walls of a room in his palace. They are on the walls of the principal room, the throne room in his palace. Now, why on earth decorate your walls with the taking on the obscure mountain town that probably no one in the city had ever heard of, except for one thing. Purely, he was hiding the fact, or trying to hide the fact, that he had failed in his object. He had failed to take Jerusalem. He'd taken Lachish, but Zion, founded on the mountain, had not been taken by him.

[17:49] That's tremendous ground for faith. Although one of the tragedies was, in later generations, that led to complacency. In Jeremiah's time, Jeremiah had to say, look, just because you live in Zion, that doesn't make you safe from Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

The point is, here was a godly king, and a godly remnant, who were praying to the Lord. Jeremiah's time, a hundred or so years later, was a complacent people who said, the Lord will never allow his city to be taken.

It's absolutely amazing that, in AD 70, when the Romans took Jerusalem, and raised it to the ground, many of the rabbis were still saying, with the exile behind them, the Lord will come to rescue his city.

He will never, ever abandon his city. Now, it's perfectly true, of course, the Lord will never abandon his people, Zion city of our God, but, if a particular, if his people turn away from him, then they will be judged.

That's what's happening all around us today. You hear people saying, Jesus said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, but it's his church he's building.

[19:02] Not a denomination, not an institution, it turns away from him. That's so important. And in order to bring about his purpose, then, verses 7 to 16, he judges the nations, devastated land, heroes crying the streets, the envoys of peace, weep bitterly.

Nobody's interested in peace. All they're interested in is bloodshed, and destruction. The highways lie waste, the traveler ceases, covenants are broken, cities are despised, there is no regard for man.

Imagine for a moment, if we were reading these words, in the city of Mosul, at the moment, which has been so devastating, or the city of Aleppo, all these places that have known horrors of war and destruction, rather like what the Assyrians did millennia ago.

Just think about these words. This would describe the situation so well, wouldn't it? There is no regard for people. People are simply there, they're expendable.

So there's the broken land, the land mourns, or perhaps the earth mourns. The word for land can mean earth, and very often there's a kind of interchange of meaning.

[20:17] The land mourns, and languishes. This is the curse of Genesis 3.18. The land curse because of human sin, and because of human violence.

Lebanon here is a symbol of strength. The Lebanon is confounded and withers away. Sharon, a symbol of beauty. And Bashan and Carmel, a symbol of fertility.

The whole economy of the land is broken. The beauty spots are devastated. Everything about the land reflects the human weakness of verses 7 and following.

The breakup of ordered society. The devastation of the land. The end of the economy. But ultimately, you see, this is a picture of humanity without God.

Even if we are blessed to live in the kind of situation that most of us are blessed to live in, without these kind of things happening, ultimately, humanity without God is, as in verse 11, you conceive

chaff.

[ 21 : 30 ] You give birth to stubble. All human endeavor without God. All human activity without God is doomed to fail. As Psalm 1 says, the wicked are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Evil self-destructs chaff and stubble. And in these circumstances, if God is judging the nations, then there's a summons to faith.

Hear you who are far off what I have done. And you who are near, acknowledge my might. Once again, that's the universal theme of the gospel.

Paul picks this up in Ephesians, those who are near and those who are far away. Very often a symbol of the whole of humanity. A call to faith. Now this first part of Isaiah, chapters 1 to, really to 39, centered around the theme of faith.

35 years before this, Hezekiah's father, the godless Ahaz, had been told by the prophet, if you do not stand in faith, you will not stand at all.

[ 22 : 43 ] And Hezekiah, in spite of wobbles, in spite of weaknesses, does stand in faith. And therefore, the city is safe. Ahaz does not stand in faith.

I say this universal call, hear what I have done, and you who are near, acknowledge my might. And, of course, you can see this is not just simply an ancient call. This is what the gospel is saying, isn't it?

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hear, you who are far off, what I have done, and you who are near. And Paul applies that to the Jews who are near, and to the Gentiles who are far away.

The same gospel. Need to be persuaded. Because, the sinners in Zion are afraid, trembling, as sees the godless.

Now you can imagine everybody in Zion, everybody in Jerusalem, is terrified as the Assyrian army approaches. That there would be those who would simply fear and panic.

[ 23 : 44 ] Whereas Hezekiah feared, and brought the letter to the Lord, and prayed to the Lord. Who among us, verse 14, can dwell with the consuming fire?

Who among us can dwell with the everlasting burnings? Our God, says the letter to the Hebrews, is a consuming fire. Now fire destroys, but fire also cleanses.

The cleanses. And, it's like so much in the whole book of Isaiah, that we have to go back to chapter 6. When Isaiah faced the Lord, in the temple, the blazing fires around him, the burning ones, the seraphim, that's what the word means, crying, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts.

Isaiah says, I can't, I can't live. I've seen the Lord. I'm sinful. I'm going to die. And what happens then? One of the seraphs takes a coal from the altar.

Throughout, the burning coal from the altar, symbolizing the, the burning fire of God, which destroyed, but cleanses, and touches his lips.

[ 24 : 55 ] And he's told, your lips are touched, and your sin is covered. See, what happened to the prophet, shows, this can happen to others. Because, the prophet, is bringing this message, so that people will change.

Verse 15, he who walks up right, righteously, and speaks up rightly, who despises the gain, of oppressions. Faith isn't just words. It's what we would call, a lifestyle.

Who walks. Walk, is the Bible, metaphor, for the whole Christian life. Let's say, we would call it lifestyle. Walking in the spirit, Paul says. Walking with the Lord.

The refusal, to exploit people, who despises, the gain, of oppressions. Lest they hold a bribe, and so on, who stops his ear, from hearing bloodshed.

Refusal, in fact, to exploit people. See, back in verse 8, the prophet says, there's no regard, for humans. But, in a society, which is cleansed, by the fire of God, which has seen, the holiness of God, all that changes.

[ 26 : 06 ] People, respect each other. People, refuse to, bully, and exploit, each other. Who stops his ears, from hearing of bloodshed, shuts his eyes, from looking on evil.

People, who do not have, a harsh, and critical spirit. And, that's so important, isn't it? When, faith, faith, is something, that changes, total life, and total lifestyle.

He will dwell, on the heights. His place of defense, will be the fortresses, of rocks. Now, in the immediate context, that of course, means the safety, of those, who are in the mountain, mountain citadel, of Jerusalem.

But, it's far wider, than that. God, in scripture, is regularly, called the rock. The rock, on whom we build. The rock, where we are safe. So, there's security.

Excuse me. There is also, provision, bread, and water. Bread, and water, symbols, of not just, of the elements, themselves, but that God, will satisfy, hunger, and thirst.

[ 27 : 16 ] So, the Lord, the savior, of Zion, and the judge, of the nations. And finally, verses 17, and to the end, the Lord, reigns in his city.

Last week, in chapter 32, we looked at the great passage, a king will reign, in righteousness, a man will be a hiding place, from the wind. And once again, the kind of king, that he is, your eyes, will behold the king, in his beauty.

They will see the land, that stretches afar. Who is the king? Obviously, ultimately, Jesus will reign, where the sun, does his successive journeys run. As I said last week, in, these ancient kingdoms, there were glimpses, of the king, who is to come.

David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, these were people, who had shown, concern for justice, and lack of oppression.

David had said, in 2 Samuel 23, the one who rules, over people, must be just, ruling, in the fear of God. And when that happens, that's like the sunshine, after darkness.

[ 28 : 28 ] It's like the rain, refreshing the desert, and so on. And so, I see the king, in his beauty, you see a land, that stretches afar. Now, in the immediate context, not just cowering, behind the walls, of Jerusalem.

It's the idea, that the broad, open spaces, of God's love. Samus says, you have brought us, into a broad place. Salvation of God, brings us, into a broad, into broad, and open spaces.

Where we have, both freedom, and security. Your heart, will muse, on the terror. Where is he, who counted? Now, the point here is, in verses 18, 19, is, the picture here, is of what had happened, at Lachish, and other cities, and was expected, to happen at Jerusalem.

The enemy officers, parceling out, oh, weighing the tribute, counting the towers, and so on. Now, that's not going to happen. They are people, of an obscure speech, stammering in a tongue, that you cannot understand.

An insolent people. Those who saw Jerusalem, as a prize of war, to be divided among them. I think that's what these, verses refer to. And, far more, in the world to come.

[ 29 : 52 ] This will be, universally true. There will be, no oppression. There will be, no exploitation. There will be, no violence. There will be, no evil.

And above all, there will be, no death. But, we have to see, in these ancient stories, a real picture of that. Kind of trailer, if you like, of the main film.

Because, the chapter ends, of the prosperity, and security, of the city. Now, I saw off with Isaiah, there's a whole riot, of pictures, of mixed metaphors, and a wonderful, tapestry.

Behold Zion, the city, of our appointed feasts. The great, celebrations, like the Passover, where people, where people celebrated, their God, who had rescued them, and continued to rescue them. And pointing to the greater Exodus. After all, every time we meet around, the Lord's table, we proclaim, the Lord's death, until, he comes.

[ 30 : 54 ] The Lord's, the appointed feast, the Lord's supper, is a picture, a trailer, of the, of the world to come. And, you're, an untroubled habit, an immovable tent.

Now, an immovable tent, of course, is a mixed metaphor. In this world, the whole point about a tent, is that it is not immovable. The wonderful thing, about the world to come, is that so many things, that are not possible, in this world, become gloriously possible, and wonderful.

In the book of Revelation, there's tremendous amount, of mixed metaphors. There is a city, which has walls. Not because there are enemies, but to show its security. But these walls, also have open gates, which people come into.

And so it is here. Things impossible on earth, work there. You see, the picture, of the new creation, I think, always has two main elements. One, is permanence, and security.

The rock, the immovable tent, whose stakes, will never be plucked up, nor any of its cords, be broken. But there's also, the sense of tremendous freedom.

[ 32 : 06 ] The wide open spaces, you will see the land, that stretches afar. Now on this earth, it's very difficult, to combine, security, and freedom of movement.

It's, these are two things, which are nearly balancing. You know how, the tendency of some people, is to sink into ruts, which are permanent enough.

The tendency of other people, to flit around all the time. In the new creation, the blessings of both of these, will be evident. There will be both roots, and wings.

There's a mixed metaphor for you. And the point about metaphors, and pictures, we don't try and work them out. So don't anyone come after me, until, if you have roots, you can't possibly fly. That is not the point. It's the language, is straining at its boundaries, to show us, how wonderful, the new creation will be. The Lord, in majesty, will be for us.

[ 33 : 07 ] I think that phrase, 21, the Lord, they're the Lord, in majesty. The astonishing thing is, for us, isn't it? After all, he's there in majesty, already.

But, when it's for us, that is tremendous, isn't it? After all, as I had talked about this, in a different way, earlier on, hadn't he said, Emmanuel, God with us.

And that's the new creation. God is with us now. God will be God, and the world will know it. And then, it will be permanent. Just as in Eden, God visited, beginning of the story, the end of the story, in the book of Revelation, the dwelling, the tent, the tabernacle of God, is with humans.

He will be with them. They will be his people. They will be his God. Where no galley with oars can go, nor majestic ship can pass, I suppose a metaphor, saying he's king of the seas, he's king of the waves, he's lord of the whole of creation.

The Lord is our judge. The Lord is our lawgiver. The Lord is our king. He will save us. I think that's the point of verse 22. Your courts hang loose.

[ 34 : 21 ] They cannot hold the mast firm in place. In other words, we're not going to achieve this by our own efforts. The city of God is not built by us on earth. Look at Revelation.

The city of God comes down from out of heaven, from God. It is his city. And surely verse 24, 24, sums up full salvation.

No inhabitant will say, I am sick. People who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity. Now, as you know, the Bible talks about what's sometimes called the now and the not yet.

Jesus has come now. The kingdom has come. Because of that, there is healing. There is salvation. But of course, we can never say on earth, no one can say, I am sick.

And we can never say that we'll never suffer illness and ultimately death. But in the new creation, there is forgiveness of sin and there is total healing of the body.

[ 35 : 22 ] And that's something that was shown in the miracles of Jesus. You all remember the story of the man who was lured down through the roof by his four friends. Jesus promised him two things, didn't he?

Your sins are forgiven you and rise, take up your bed and walk. And the one visible thing which could be seen authenticated his authority to forgive sin.

But in the new creation, there will be full salvation of body and soul. It will not be disembodied existence in a shadow land. Paul says in Philippians, we await a Savior from heaven who will change our lowly bodies.

Not vile bodies as the old version unfortunately said. Our bodies are not vile, they are fallen. But they are not vile in that sense. And make them like his glorious body in the new creation.

Well you see, this picture, and we're going to see more about this next week in chapter 35, this picture of the new creation is full salvation, body and soul.

[ 36 : 32 ] And I'm going to wait till next week to read from Narnia. I was going to read from it tonight, but then I thought I'll wait until the final sermon to do that. God will be God.

Our bodies and souls will be fully saved and the world will know it. Amen. Let's pray. Paul says, Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart the things that God has prepared for those who love him.

Father, we pray that as we walk through this world so much good, so much evil, so much love, and yet so much hatred, that we look beyond the world where death will be no more and where it will be glory and wonder and there the Lord in majesty will be for us.

And we praise his name for it. Amen.