



A Bible Reading Plan for the Book of Isaiah

August 28-October 15

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



Isaiah

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church family would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through selections from the book of Isaiah. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Isaiah can be intimidating. First of all, Isaiah is lengthy - with 66 chapters, it's one of the longest books in the Bible! And, its subject matter can be a bit daunting. Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). His ministry spanned over sixty years and while he wrote primarily to the southern kingdom of Judah, Isaiah also spoke to several other nations. It's easy to get all of these countries and rulers confused. And, to make things even more challenging, the book of Isaiah is a prophetic work. Sometimes it's hard to understand prophecy and everything gets a bit murky when we start reading about the moon turning to blood, right?

Our goal for this Bible reading plan isn't that you master the book of Isaiah in its entirety or even that you read the entire book. We'll be reading selections over seven weeks from seven sections of Isaiah. Our goal is to help people begin to understand Isaiah's ministry and prophetic work, and to learn how to engage in biblical prophecy. There are many prophetic books in the Bible, but we often come with the misconception that prophecy is all about future events. The Old Testament prophets did foretell some things, yes, but you'll see that most of Isaiah's ministry focuses on him declaring God's word to God's people and warning them of the consequences if they didn't obey it. In some ways, the work of a prophet is similar to the work of a preacher or pastor.

Each week, we'll give you an overview of that week's readings to help give you some clarity on what is happening in the book of Isaiah. One of the things you'll see is that the unifying theme of Isaiah is God's supreme reign. The book of Isaiah begins with Isaiah warning the people of Judah to turn to God instead of trusting in worldly powers. He foretells of the coming exile they will face if they don't listen to God's word and turn to Him in repentance. Then, we'll see a shift in the middle of Isaiah as Isaiah begins to speak prophetically to those who will suffer exile under the hand of Babylon. Isaiah reminds them to hope in God and promises them that they will one day be restored to Him. The end of Isaiah gives us a fuller picture of



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this restoration, when God will dwell with humanity and when all people - Gentiles and Jews - will see the glory of the Lord revealed.

We're excited that you are taking this journey with us through the book of Isaiah this fall. As you engage with this prophecy, our prayer is that God's word would convict you of your sin and encourage you to place your hope in Him.



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WEEK ONE: ISAIAH 1-5 DOUG DORTCH

Overview of Isaiah 1-5

These first few chapters set the scene for Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah's primary audience is the southern kingdom, Judah and Jerusalem, and he ministers during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, who were all kings of Judah (Isaiah 1:1). In these first five chapters, we see proclamations of judgment and hope. The Lord declares that He is sick of their offerings - they make sacrifices, but their hearts are far from God. They have rebelled against Him and have chosen to follow the ways of the world and to worship foreign gods. Isaiah even compares Judah to a vineyard carefully tended by the Lord Himself - and yet this vineyard has produced wild grapes and rotten fruit. Judgment is on the horizon for the house of Jacob which has refused to heed the word of the Lord. But there is hope. Isaiah calls the people to come to the Lord and to repent. He also calls the people to hope in the Lord, reminding them that one day, God will send a Righteous Branch, a Savior from the line of Jesse, who will wash away all of their sin.

Monday, August 28 | Isaiah 1:1-31 | Doug Dortch

"A Rebellious Nation"

The ministry of the prophet Isaiah spanned a significant period of time, and is normally divided into three sections, First Isaiah (1-39), Second Isaiah (40-55), and Third Isaiah (56-66). This first section addresses the situation in Israel prior to the exile of God's people into Babylon and offers explanation as to why such a fate came upon the nation of Israel.

The name Isaiah means "God is my salvation," and points to how any hope of deliverance lies with God alone. While we can distance ourselves from God through our acts of transgressions, we can never do enough to reconcile ourselves to God; we are utterly dependent upon His lovingkindness toward us and His faithfulness never to give up on His people.

The first chapter sets the stage for the initial phase of Isaiah's ministry, which can be dated to the eighth century BC. The context is a courtroom scene, where God has brought His people to court and has leveled against them serious charges of rebellion. There is no part of Israel that has not been affected by sin. "The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it" (Isaiah 1:5-6).

While Israel might counter that there are still evidences of her faithfulness through acts of sacrifice and ritual offerings, God sees these acts as hypocritical (Isaiah 1:10-17). In His eyes, they only add to Israel's guilt. God is not pleased with this situation. He instead laments her transgression and longs for the day when Israel will be reconciled to a place of righteousness (Isaiah 1:21-31).



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We share in Israel's tendency to allow our acts of worship to substitute for a heartfelt relationship with God. On the outside everything looks fine, but too often what's in our hearts is not pleasing to God. This chapter reminds us that God will not overlook such rebellion but will call us to account. But God's justice is never anything to be feared ultimately. Regardless of how far we may have strayed, God is ever at work to bring us back into fellowship with Him. Our rebellion, therefore, is met by God's steadfast love and unconditional grace.

Tuesday, August 29 | Isaiah 2:1-5 | Doug Dortch

"The Mountain of the LORD"

This chapter of Isaiah is comprised of a vision of what God's future salvation will look like. Because God's temple had been built on a high mountain, Isaiah envisioned a coming day when its influence would be raised above every other holy place, even to the point that "all nations shall stream to it" (Isaiah 2:2). The temple would one day become an earthly meeting place where all persons would have the opportunity to realize the purpose of their creation and join in unbroken fellowship with God.

This vision was actually unheard of in Isaiah's time. In the eighth century BC, most Jews would have been suspicious of other nations, and would have had every reason to be, given how so many of those nations had made life difficult for God's people. But Isaiah's prophecy points us to how God's plan always supersedes the plans of mortal humans and even swallows them up, so that God is capable of even using world events and worldly rulers as instruments of His redemptive purposes. Later passages in Isaiah will reflect God's choice of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia (all captors) to make God's purposes a reality in Israel's everyday affairs.

In the Bible, mountains are always places of revelation. They are also places of testing. In your life, think about those tests that God allows to come your way. How might you lean upon God in the midst of them so that you come to a place where your relationship with God is strengthened and your understanding of His mercy is made clearer? I don't know of a better way for God "to teach us His ways...that we may walk in His paths" (Isaiah 2:3).

Wednesday, August 30 | Isaiah 2:6-4:1 | Doug Dortch

"The Day of the LORD"

This oracle from Isaiah returns the reader to the reality of divine judgment. God simply cannot and will not overlook human transgression. Rather than assume blame for the calamities Israel has come to know, Isaiah points out how the responsibility for the threats that have come upon the people lies ultimately with them. Their arrogance has required divine chastisement.



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But such chastisement is intended to be disciplinary and redemptive, not punitive. God does not punish simply because He is angry. God disciplines His people so that we may learn from our mistakes. Isaiah describes the weight of God's discipline in specific ways. All support of bread and water will go away (Isaiah 3:1). People will turn upon one another (Isaiah 3:3) and will be ruled over by people much younger and weaker (Isaiah 3:6, 12). Isaiah describes this coming season of doom as "the day of the LORD" (Isaiah 2:12), a time when God will allow the people to reap what they have deserved with their pride and arrogance.

We live in a day when people assume that they can get away with pretty much anything, if they're sufficiently careful and crafty. But Isaiah's oracle reminds us that God knows all and will not overlook what we do against His will. It's much better to own up to our sins and transgressions and trust that God will also recognize the sincerity of our repentance and make it possible for us to have another chance to live in His good graces and bountiful care.

Thursday, August 31 | Isaiah 4:2-6 | Doug Dortch

"The Branch of the LORD"

One lesson we should always keep in mind when reading the prophets is that while all of them speak words of denunciation that intend to move people out of their comfort zones, they also intend to move them to a place where they experience a deeper level of peace and rest. In other words, the Bible's prophets aren't just purveyors of gloom and doom; they are ultimately persons of hope.

This part of Isaiah's prophecy moves God's people in that direction. Heretofore, Isaiah has charged the people with arrogance and rebelliousness in an effort to turn their hearts back to God. Now, he points them to a coming day when "the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious" (Isaiah 4:2). "Branch" is a code word for Messiah. Here, Isaiah invites Israel to anticipate a coming Deliverer, one God-ordained, who will bring to bear such a revival that "whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy" (Isaiah 4:3). This sweep of prophetic insight refuses to minimize the flaws and imperfections of God's people and certainly does not aim to sweep them under a spiritual rug. Instead, it stares the reality in the eye and dares to propose a new and better day when such flaws and imperfections are "cleansed...by a spirit of judgment" (Isaiah 4:4). Much as God watched over His people during their wilderness wanderings during the time of the Exodus, so God will act in the same ways so that there might be shelter and protection in the face of whatever the future brings. Even now, we read hints of a coming judgment, which for Israel will mean a period of exile in Babylon, but not even a tragedy like that will frustrate the redemptive purposes of God.

This assurance is good news to all who look in the mirror and see a flawed and imperfect person staring back at them. It portends God's gift of Jesus Christ, the Righteous Branch, "who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Most importantly, it gives us the confidence that we need in the face of life's challenges



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and setbacks, as we know that regardless of what comes our way, through our faith in Jesus God's presence "will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and shelter from the storm and rain" (Isaiah 4: 6). For what more could anyone ask?

Friday, September 1 | Isaiah 5:1-30 | Doug Dortch

"The Song of the Vineyard"

The Song of the Vineyard is a traditional song of the wine harvest that Isaiah draws upon to describe God's relationship with His people. Because Israel was basically an agrarian people who lived by the harvest cycles, this song reminded them that the God who authored the seasons of the year is not an arbitrary or capricious God, but is instead one who is consistent in His provisions and ever faithful to His promises.

The first part of the song (Isaiah 5:1-6) speaks to the manner in which God shows His commitment to the flourishing of His people. "Digging" and "planting" are terms that speak to God's desire to do whatever is necessary to create a good future for those who commit their ways to Him. But God's expectation is that His vineyard produces, and when it doesn't, God is most definitely not pleased with the results.

The second part of the song (Isaiah 5:8-23) addresses the specifics of God's displeasure. God does not turn a deaf ear to the social injustices that characterize the people's dealings with one another. Throughout this section there is a recurring phrase, "Woe," that suggests lamentation and grave disappointment. People attain property rights at the expense of others. People dull their senses through excessive merriment. People persist in their rebellion and skepticism. People bear false witness and do not speak the truth. People act self-righteously and refuse to own up to their injustice. Finally, people spurn justice for self-gain and sell one another out. It is not a pretty part of the song, but it is a part that, like a mirror, is necessary to confront the nation with its unseemly side.

The third part of the song (Isaiah 5:24-30) warns the people of what will take place as a consequence of their injustices. God will send a foreign nation, one "far away" (Isaiah 5:26), the Assyrians, who will serve as an instrument of God's justice in the hopes that Israel will return to Him. The might of their power (Isaiah 5:27-30) should be enough to cause the people to return to God, but unfortunately, their rebellion and self-confidence are so great that they will refuse to do so until it is too late.

This song is therefore poignant in its message that God does not will the destruction of His people. Rather, He wills their flourishing and has committed Himself to it. But when people choose to go their own way, what recourse does God have but to allow them to experience the full measure of their transgression, until they come to the place where they return to Him? Only then can God do the work in their hearts that transforms them into the nation He always wanted them to be.



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We can learn from Israel's mistakes. God will not tolerate a proud heart. He will allow us to experience the full measure of our spiritual arrogance. But when we turn in faith to Him as He has turned to us in Jesus, we experience forgiveness for our sin and the promise of His abiding presence that enables us to grow into the people, through Jesus, that even now God is redeeming us to be. What new verses might God want to do in your life this day as you claim His promises through your faith in Jesus?



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WEEK TWO: ISAIAH 6-12 KELY HATLEY

Overview of Isaiah 6-12

In these six chapters, God is pronouncing judgement on his people starting first with Isaiah in Isaiah 6, then for the people of Judah in Isaiah 7-8, and finally for the people of Israel in Isaiah 9-10. God's redeeming grace to His people is revealed in Isaiah 11 with the prophecy of Christ's birth. Isaiah 12 is thus a revealing of what it will be like to live in the knowledge of God's redemption of His people with the coming of the Messiah.

Monday, September 4 | Isaiah 6:1-13 | Kely Hatley

"A Pattern for Weekly/Daily Worship"

Today's passage is one of the most widely used models for corporate worship service structures. I know I use it, and it is one of my favorite Bible passages. Isaiah's vision of the Lord is tremendous and powerful. He sees God on a throne with a long train on His robe that fills the temple. God is circled with seraphs who are calling to one another over the Lord saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."

When Isaiah sees God for who He is in His glorious splendor and holiness, Isaiah then is faced with the reality of his sinful life and self. In planning worship I try to follow this pattern when selecting "Call to Worship" material, opening responses, and opening songs of worship and praise. After declaring who God is to us and worshipping Him through music, our pastor leads the congregation in prayer where he normally directs us to a time of confession asking God's forgiveness of our wrong doings.

In verses 6 and 7 the angel of the Lord takes a coal from the altar and places it to the lips of Isaiah saying, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." This part of the passage reminds us that as we confess our sins before God that the blood of Christ then covers us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Verse 8a is the short sermon of this passage. God issues His word as a challenge saying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" The sermons from God's word are how we hear from the Lord in our weekly worship gatherings. Through gifted men and women who preach from His Word, God tells us what we need to hear.

Lastly, what does Isaiah do upon hearing God's Word and challenge? He responds. In verse 8b he declares, "Here am I. Send me!" In my opinion, this is one of the sweetest responses to God in the Bible. Isaiah encounters God, sees how he does not measure up to God's standard, confesses before the Lord, is cleansed of his sins, hears God's Word, and then he responds emphatically to God's challenge. Oh that we



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would respond in the same way each Sunday! Begin to pray today that God will help you to follow this pattern in your daily worship as well as when you unite together with the body of Christ this coming Sunday!

Tuesday, September 5 | Isaiah 7:1-9 | Kely Hatley

“Standing Firm in Your Faith”

Fear - why does it seem that this is our “go-to” emotion when we are faced with difficult circumstances in life? King Ahaz in today’s passage was faced with a great army of two of his enemies, the King of Aram and Pekah, the king of Israel. When Ahaz and the people of Israel heard of the unification of Ephraim (northern kingdom of Israel) and Aram, the Bible says their hearts were shaken, like the trees of the forest in wind.

Ahaz was not a good king of Judah. In 2 Kings 16 we learn that Ahaz did evil in the sight of the Lord and took part in detestable practices. He was certainly no glorious example for the people to follow regarding their worship of God. But even so, God still was watching over Judah for despite the people’s fear of their northern neighbors, God told them that their overthrow by those two kingdoms would never happen.

The most poignant part of that passage for me is the last half of verse 9...“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” These are such wise words for us today. We live in a period in history that seems to be repeating itself. It is difficult to take a stand against the world as it seems to be pushing back at Christians from every side. We all know Christians who have tried to “befriend” the world in an effort to reach others while in reality they themselves fall prey to what the world has to offer.

We must take a lesson today to trust in God. He knows what we need in our most dark times and He is faithful. We must have faith to let the Lord lead us in the path that we should go and to always place our faith and trust in Him. It is only by standing firm in our faith that we can be assured that we won’t fall for the wrong things when they are offered to us or when they come our way. Pray for the strength to have that firm a faith and then spend time with the Lord to develop it. Do not fear like a tree shaken in the forest by the wind. Instead place your hope and trust in the Lord and know that He is working His purposes out according to His best and perfect plan.

Wednesday, September 6 | Isaiah 8:11-17 | Kely Hatley

“The Fear of the Lord”

Yesterday we talked about fear in the negative sense of the word. The Bible often tells us to fear the Lord. What does it mean to fear God? The first reaction is to the word for most of us is a fear that causes us to be



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scared or frightened. Yet, there is another interpretation of the word “fear” that fits better in correlation with God. Martin Luther, famed father of the Protestant Reformation, “distinguished between what he

called a ‘servile’ fear and a ‘filial’ fear.”¹ A servile interpretation of fear is one that a person might feel toward someone who is out to do him harm, such as a captor or harsh guard. On the other hand, a filial interpretation of fear is one of family and respect. It is the type of fear that a child might have toward a parent. A child has a healthy respectful and awe-filled fear of his parent because he loves and wants to please the parent. The child doesn’t want to disappoint the parent, the source of his security and love. This is the type of fear Isaiah had toward God and that we too should strive for.

God was instructing Isaiah not to follow the ways of Judah. Their fear of their allied neighbors was the servile fear. God warned Isaiah not to “fear what they fear.” Rather, he should fear the Lord (in the filial sense of the word) and know that the Lord will be a sanctuary, a place of security, for the person who stands firm with God. In Matthew Henry’s commentary on these verses, he states, “If we thought rightly of the greatness and glory of God, we should see all the power of our enemies restrained.”² I love that interpretation for the truth that it exudes. God is above all and able to handle even our most difficult enemies. In the end of the passage Isaiah claims that truth in verse 17. He states that He will wait for the Lord and put his trust in Him.

What is your enemy today? Do you fear it (servile) more than you fear (filial) God? The Lord is a sanctuary to those who put their trust in Him. Where do you fall this day?

Thursday, September 7 | Isaiah 11:1-10 | Kely Hatley

“The Branch from Jesse - Christ’s Birth and Peace are Foretold”

This passage of scripture is one of my favorites with regard to the prophecy of Jesus’ birth. It is normally read during the Advent season in worship services, lessons and carols services, or devotions. I have always loved the symbolism of the peace that Christ brings to the world (in verses 6-9), and that message of peace seems to become more relevant with each passing year and our world appears to be on the brink of utter chaos.

Jesse was the father of King David. Jesus was a descendent from David’s line so in that sense He was also a descendent of Jesse. One of the ways my family has observed the Advent season (and counted off the days of the season) in our home is by having a Jesse tree in our house. Years ago when my children were very young, they made little Jesse tree ornaments to decorate a small tree in our church’s office. When the

¹ [1] Taken from http://www.ligonier.org/learn/qas/throughout-bible-we-are-told-fear-god-what-does-me/?utm_source=GOOGLE&utm_medium=cpc&utm_term=&utm_campaign=Dynamic%20Search%20Ads%20National; accessed 8-8-17.

² Taken from <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/isaiah/8-11.htm>; accessed 8-8-17.



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decorators of the church decided to not use that tree anymore they returned the ornaments to my kids and we took them home using them ever since.

What is a Jesse tree? According to one source, "The Jesse tree is named from Isaiah 11:1: 'A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.' The Jesse tree helps us connect the custom of decorating Christmas trees to the events leading to Jesus' birth. We adorn a Jesse tree with illustrated ornaments that represent the people, prophecies, and events leading up to the birth of Jesus. The ornaments of the Jesse tree tell the story of God in the Old Testament, connecting the Advent season with the faithfulness of God across four thousand years of history."³

Christ brings order to our messy lives and peace to our troubled hearts and minds. Verses 6-9 use beautiful imagery of fierce beasts lying together beside their normal prey with no fighting or destruction to show the peace that Christ will bring to the world. How we long for the day verse 9 speaks of where the "earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Verse 10 tells us that Christ will be a banner for all people and that nations will rally to Him. We hope for that day. We yearn for that day. We NEED that day. Today pray that God will help you to allow the Lord to quiet you with His peace and comfort in your times of desperation and trouble.

Friday, September 8 | Isaiah 12:1-6 | Kely Hatley

"The Wells of Salvation - A Canticle of Joy"

Isaiah 12 is a chapter of joy, praise, and rejoicing in response to the prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah 11. It is a canticle, a song of praise to God. What is a canticle? A canticle is defined as a song text to the Lord that occurs outside the book of Psalms. There are several canticles in the scriptures. This particular canticle has been set to music by many composers over time, and I have sung many choral arrangements of these verses. How fitting it is to follow the prophecy of Christ's birth with a chapter solely dedicated to giving God praise and glory!

One of my most favorite musical settings of this scripture is "Cry Out and Shout" by Knut Nystedt. Go to this link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAGFRL96ACs>) and you can hear a great recording of it. The lines that grab me in this chapter are verses 2 and 3. "The Lord, the Lord is my strength and song; He has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." With all of the rain this past summer it can be easy to forget the devastation of the drought of 2016. In writing this devotion I checked out many photos online of drought damage in Alabama last year. The stunning photos reveal dry, parched, and cracked lake beds, and desolate river beds and streams which no longer flowed. I do remember when it did rain last year at the beginning of December. I remember how happy I was and how refreshing it felt to see the earth come to life and look fresher even in the beginning of the dormant winter season.

³ Taken from <http://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/liturgical-year/advent/the-jesse-tree>; accessed 8-9-17.



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I think of spiritual drought when I read verse 3, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." So often our spiritual lives become "drought-stricken" and we long for the water of the well of salvation. The good news for the believer is that Jesus is our well of salvation. He told the woman at the well in John

4:13-14, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Once we receive His living water, we cannot help but respond with joy and gratitude before God. We will follow the pattern of verse 5 in our reading today, "Sing to the Lord, for He has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world." Pray to the Lord today thanking Him for His living water and as verse 4 reminds us, "Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what He has done, and proclaim that His name is exalted."



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WEEK THREE: ISAIAH 13-27 HAYDEN WALKER

Overview of Isaiah 13-27

In Isaiah 13-27, God reminds His people that He is sovereign over everything: all foreign nations (Isaiah 13-23) and in fact the whole world (Isaiah 24). His righteous rule comes with judgment of sin, however this wrath is followed by promises for peace and restoration (Isaiah 25-27).

These proclamations of God's wrath are called "judgment oracles." They are prophetic statements against the nations of Isaiah's day. The oracles were likely not actually presented to these wicked nations of the world, but were messages to Judah that God still reigned supreme even when the world political situation seemed daunting. God promised to liberate His oppressed people. Ultimately, these oracles can remind us that evil will not go unpunished, and though our world may seem out of control, God has the final word over everyone and everything.

Monday, September 11 | Isaiah 13:9-22 | Hayden Walker

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt completely helpless? Maybe sickness, instability with work, social exclusion, disability, or a severed relationship made you feel this helplessness. Perhaps you have grasped for options to help ease your situation. As the people of Isaiah's day faced the daunting threat of the Assyrians, they felt totally helpless. Unfortunately, their leaders attempted to make alliances for protection with unrighteous nations. The people of Judah, and certainly most of their leaders, would have felt some security from a political alliance with a powerful nation like Babylon. They sought security not from God, but from evil, sinful tyrants. In their helplessness, Judah did not turn to the One who could help, but to a house of cards.

In this judgment oracle, and the ones that follow through Isaiah 24, God pronounces the temporality and impotence of the nations. Babylon, which must have seemed invincible in the eighth century, would be reduced to rubble. In fact, Isaiah 13:19 records that Babylon (the Chaldeans) would be made like Sodom and Gomorrah. The palaces would not be inhabited by princes, but by wild animals. People would die violent deaths.

It is not easy to read about the type of destruction that would befall these wicked people. However, we are reminded that God does not treat sin lightly. Babylon would be judged on the basis of her own wickedness. We often like to soften the "edges" of God, the parts that we are uncomfortable with. When I read phrases like "the wrath of the Lord of hosts" or "His fierce anger," I quiver a bit. We must remember that we do not worship a god of our own making, but the one revealed in Scripture. The good news of our forgiveness is even greater when we grapple with the reality of the wrath that our sin deserves.



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Tuesday, September 12 | Isaiah 17:1-9 | Hayden Walker

Cody and I love to travel together. Before we leave home, we always have a detailed itinerary, maps, and guidebooks about our destination. Without this information, we would not understand much about the sites we might see and experience. When reading through prophetic books, I think a similar philosophy is helpful. It is good to read the passages in one hand with a sort of “guidebook” in your other hand. For this oracle, we must remember that Israel was the wicked northern kingdom, a separate nation at the point in time from Judah, to whom Isaiah wrote. Isaiah 17 records a prophecy against the people of Syria and Israel.

Additionally, we need a bit of a guide to help us understand the agricultural images used in this passage. God uses two agrarian images to demonstrate the destruction coming to these wicked people: grain and olives. In verses 4-5, it is recorded that the nation, which seemed powerful and strong, would become weak and feeble. The people of Isaiah’s day would have understood this metaphor. They knew that when grain was gathered, almost the entire crop was harvested. There would have been a few margins and corners left behind for the poor to collect. After the poor gleaned their portion, there was a virtually empty field. The nations are likened to this empty field, which has been gathered and gleaned. A very tiny remnant would remain after God’s judgment upon them. Similarly, God describes in verse 6 that out of an entire olive tree filled with produce, only two or three berries would remain. This was clear prophecy that the inhabitants of these nations would be drastically reduced.

It is only after this radical suffering that the people look to God for help (Isaiah 17:7). This causes me to wonder how often you and I respond in similar fashion? When things are going our way, do we primarily trust in our own success and accomplishments, the work of our own hands (Isaiah 17:8)? Let us learn from this oracle that we must trust in God alone for salvation at all times, not only in difficult seasons.

Wednesday, September 13 | Isaiah 20 | Hayden Walker

Signs and examples help us to grasp difficult concepts. They shed light on challenging truths; this is why preachers use illustrations in their sermons! We understand better through symbols, and so did the people of Judah. All of the other oracles in this section involve rich literary metaphors that are powerful. However, nothing can quite compare with the image recorded in Isaiah 20. Instead of just recording God’s words, Isaiah himself became a living sign to his people.

Ashdod had made an alliance with Egypt for protection against the Assyrians, but Ashdod was still conquered (20:1). The Assyrians also threatened Judah, but God’s people were not to make an alliance with the wicked nation of Egypt. To make His point clear, God commanded Isaiah to walk around naked for three years as a sign for Judah not to place their trust in Egypt or Cush (Isaiah 20:2). This nakedness was representative of how captives of war were led into captivity: vulnerable and naked. Isaiah must have made his people uncomfortable not only by his nakedness, but also through his proclamation that went against popular opinion.



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The point of this chapter is found in verse 6. While under attack from Assyria, it may have seemed reasonable to Judah to reach out to Egypt or Cush for help and protection, but these nations themselves would be led away in captivity. It was futile for Judah to trust in another nation. The only source of hope and deliverance was God Himself.

How often do we expect God to work according to our own plans and timing? To make life comfortable for us? Isaiah was a faithful servant of God, but his life was in no way easy. It certainly could not have been comfortable walking around naked for three years. Will we be faithful to respond to God's call even when it is challenging? Even when it goes against the status quo? Will we trust God to deliver us instead of trusting in the systems and powers of this world?

Thursday, September 14 | Isaiah 25 | Hayden Walker

After the last few days, you may be feeling overwhelmed at God's judgment and convicted of your own sin. I think both are very appropriate reactions to the wrath of God! Today, the tide shifts. We see the character of God as the one who will by no means clear the guilty, but also the one who is merciful, gracious, and forgiving (Exodus 34:6-7). We have seen that judgment extends to the entire world, but in our passage today, we see that God makes promises of peace that are available to their entire world as well.

Verses 1-5 comprise a song of victory that God's people will sing when God judges evil and vindicates the oppressed. While this song could be sung after the remnant returned from exile, it is also a song for us as we reflect on the victory of Jesus.

In verses 6-9, we have one of the great promises of the eschatological kingdom. God's kingdom will not be exclusively comprised of the people of Judah, but all people who trust God will be welcomed in (Isaiah 25:6). The imagery here is in direct contrast to the desolation of God's wrath; instead of barrenness, there will be delicious fruitfulness and feasting! More miraculous than what we will enjoy at the sumptuous feast is what God will swallow there: death itself (Isaiah 25:7-8). This is a complete removal of death itself from among God's people.

And yet the sting of death is still quite real for us today. But one day it will no longer be so. When God finally erases death, all tears from all faces will be dried up. As J.R.R. Tolkien famously wrote, "Everything sad will come untrue." On that day, we will finally be able to proclaim the taunt of I Corinthians 15:54-55, which draws upon this passage: "Death is swallowed up in victory! O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Believer, take heart as you wait on this great day (Isaiah 25:9). We wait with confidence that the defeat of death is real. Every broken heart will be mended. Come Lord Jesus, bring this day of victory with haste!



Isaiah

Friday, September 15 | Isaiah 26:7-21 | Hayden Walker

I grew up in a liturgical church, and we recited the Apostle's Creed each Sunday morning. Perhaps like many who grew up at MBBC saying the Creed each week, the words flowed freely from my mouth and memory long before they were translated to my heart. I can still remember the morning that the Holy Spirit awaked me to the words "resurrection of the dead" at the very end of the Creed. After the service, I met my pastor in the narthex and asked if that meant what I thought it might...that perhaps believers would be resurrected just as Christ had been. His confirmation of my wild conclusion astounded me.

The doctrine of resurrection is not only a New Testament theme; it is present throughout Scripture in powerful texts such as this (Isaiah 26:19). In fact, these verses and other similar passages helped many in Jesus' day to make sense of Easter morning.

For the people of Isaiah's day, this text could have been understood in a couple of different ways. As with much prophetic literature, there is often a near fulfillment, and a fulfillment that will take place far into the future. It well may be that these verses had both near and far implications: a promised return from exile, which would have been a type of metaphorical resurrection, and the literal resurrection of the dead at the return of Christ far into the future.

One thing is clear: these verses would have brought great hope to the people of Judah. God's faithfulness to His people was like a rock (Isaiah 26:4), and He would indeed bring them peace (Isaiah 26:12). This peace would come through God's judgment upon the wicked nations of the earth (Isaiah 26:9, 14). This passage should also bring us great confidence as believers. We can be assured that the evil in this world will be judged and God's people will ultimately prevail. Not even death has power over God's people. The reality of the future resurrection should cause us to be people of irrepressible hope!



Isaiah

WEEK FOUR: ISAIAH 28-35 WAYNE SPLAWN

Overview of Isaiah 28-35

In this section of Isaiah, the Lord addresses the sins the people of Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel) and Judah committed in trusting in Egypt's assistance to overcome Assyrian aggression rather than trusting in God's ability to protect and provide for them. This failure to trust in the Lord will result in Israel's demise. However, the message is not one of total destruction. Instead, Isaiah encourages the people by speaking of a day in the future in which God will destroy their enemies and restore them to a right relationship with Himself. As you read various passages from this section of Isaiah this week, ask God to reveal to you ways in which you are tempted to disregard or disobey God's word by trusting in other people or things to provide for your needs. Also, ask the Lord to encourage you in your faith as you read Isaiah's beautiful words concerning God's future work of deliverance.

Monday, September 18 | Isaiah 28:1-13 | Wayne Splawn

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the reader is reminded of the danger of pride. For example, in Proverbs 16:18, we read, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." When we feel overly confident in our abilities to overcome an obstacle, we often fail to make the preparations necessary to meet the demands of the challenge at hand. Even if others are warning us that we are not prepared or encouraging us to call on others for assistance, we fail to see the seriousness of the situation we are facing and end up falling flat on our face.

Proverbs 16:18 summarizes the situation Isaiah addresses in Isaiah 28:1-13. Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel) wore pride like a crown. Rather than trusting in God's word and heeding God's calls for repentance and trust in Him, the people Ephraim assumed they were in a position of strength that will last indefinitely. However, Isaiah wrote that the shine on Ephraim's crown would soon fade. Just as ripe fruit quickly disappears when it is plucked from the vine and consumed, so Ephraim would quickly be humbled (Isaiah 28:4). On that day, the Lord will be the glory of those who have remained faithful to him and His word. Even though God warned His people of their need to repent, they did not hear and heed God's message because they were confident in their own ability.

We are often more like Ephraim than we would like to admit. Rather than conforming our lives to God's Word, we often think we can handle the situations we will face in this life by trusting in our own wisdom and ability. But, when we take that approach to life we are destined to fall. The question is not, "If?", but "When?" Allow Isaiah's rebuke of Ephraim to be a powerful reminder of your need to listen to God's Word and to conform your life to His will rather than foolishly trusting in yourself.

Tuesday, September 19 | Isaiah 29:13-24 | Wayne Splawn

Words often reveal the condition of our hearts (Luke 6:45). However, there are other times in which we use our words to conceal how we truly feel. This can happen both in our relationships with other people and with God.



Isaiah

In Isaiah 29:13-14, the prophet Isaiah reveals a disturbing truth about the people of God in his day. They were religious people who were good at going through the motions of worship. They said all of the right things. However, their words were inconsistent with the true condition of their hearts. To a casual observer, it may have seemed that they were very devout people, but in reality, their hearts were far from God.

Jesus leveled this same charge against some of the Pharisees and scribes of his own day (Matthew 15:1-9). They taught the people to adhere to a system of religious rules based on human tradition that produced an appearance of godliness. These traditions eventually became so important to the scribes and Pharisees that they encouraged people to observe these traditions even if it meant transgressing God's commands. Much like the people of Isaiah's day, the scribes and Pharisees honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him.

These passages in Isaiah and Matthew serve as powerful reminders of the truth that God is very concerned with the condition of our hearts. We must be careful to continually seek to grow in our love for the Lord and for other people and allow this love to be the motivation for our acts of worship. If we do not, we may find ourselves going through the motions of religion, while our hearts are far from God. As you read the Bible, attend worship and Bible studies, and serve others in the name of Christ, ask the Lord to continually give you a heart full of love for Him. May God graciously allow us to be followers of Christ whose lives are consistent with the condition of our hearts.

Wednesday, September 20 | Isaiah 30:8-17 | Wayne Splawn

Have you ever had a friend tell you that you had something on your face or a piece of food stuck between your teeth? If so, you know how embarrassing it can be when you are oblivious to a personal flaw everyone else can see. But, after our embarrassment has subsided, most of us are grateful that someone would care enough to let us know about something we needed to change rather than allowing us to walk around looking silly.

The people of Isaiah's day did not want to hear about their sin and their need to repent. Instead, they wanted to continue going their own way rather than being challenged to conform their lives to God's will. So, they encouraged the prophets to deliver messages they wanted to hear rather than being faithful to God's word. This approach to God's word would make them more comfortable in the short run, but would ultimately lead to their destruction.

I think we can all relate to this tendency to avoid the more difficult, convicting portions of God's word. We like to hear messages that make us feel better about ourselves, but have a tendency to avoid messages that point out our sin and need for repentance. However, if we reflect on this tendency, we know that it will ultimately take us down a path in life that will lead to our harm. God's reveals our sin and calls us to repentance because He knows that we can only experience the abundant life He would have us to know if we conform our lives to His will.



Isaiah

How do we avoid the error of avoiding the difficult parts of God's word? First, we must commit ourselves to reading all of Scripture. Rather than focusing only on our favorite passages, we would do well to follow a Bible reading plan that takes us through all of Scripture so that we might hear all the messages God wants to speak to us. Second, we must be discerning when we read Christian books or listen to the messages of popular preachers. If we are never convicted of our sin through the books we read or the sermons we hear, it may be that we are only exposing ourselves to people who are composing messages we want to hear rather than confronting us with the truth we need to hear.

Thursday, September 21 | Isaiah 33:1-24 | Wayne Splawn

Here in Isaiah 33, Isaiah's message turns to a message of hope. In verse 1, Isaiah writes that the one (the Assyrians) who sought to destroy Israel would one day themselves be destroyed. Then, in verse 2, Isaiah records a prayer that represents the perspective of those in Israel who know that their only hope is in the Lord. Isaiah writes:

"O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you.
Be our arm every morning,
our salvation in the time of trouble." (Isaiah 33:2)

This prayer is a meaningful prayer that any of us would do well to pray. First, the prayer begins by addressing the Lord using the term for God that signifies His covenant relationship with His people. As a member of God's people, we need to regularly be reminded that God is in a covenant relationship with us. It is not a contract that will only be upheld if we keep our end of the bargain well enough. Instead, God loves us with a steadfast love and we can be confident of His love not because we have earned it, but because it is a part of God's character to be faithful to us. Second, the prayer rightly acknowledges that the believer constantly stands in need of God's gracious work in his or her life. This petition is not based on the belief that God owes the believer anything. When we come to the Lord and ask for him to be at work in our lives, we are asking Him to once again extend us grace. Third, the prayer acknowledges that God is our only hope. When we face a situation that is obviously too difficult for us to overcome in our own power, our most faithful option is to acknowledge that the Lord is our only hope and to wait patiently for Him.

Today, I would encourage you to pray this same prayer throughout the day. As you do, remember the character of God, reflect on your need for His gracious work in your life, and walk in dependence upon Him.

Friday, September 22 | Isaiah 35:1-10 | Wayne Splawn

Isaiah 35 offers a beautiful picture of God's future work of salvation. The people who languished under the prospect of impending defeat at the hands of their enemies needed to know that a day was coming in the future when God would once and for all defeat His enemies and restore His people. Such a message would provide God's people the hope and courage necessary to courageously follow Him through the difficult days that lie ahead (Isaiah 35:3-4). This future day of which Isaiah speaks in chapter 35 includes spiritual and



Isaiah

physical healing for the oppressed, holiness among God's people, the absence of sorrow, and the joy that comes to God's people when they dwell in His presence in perfect fellowship.

As followers of Jesus Christ who live in a fallen world, we long for this day of which Isaiah speaks to become a reality. In our personal lives and in the world at large, we constantly struggle against in the effects of the Fall. But, we have faith that things will not always be this way. In the book of Revelation, John offers the church of Jesus Christ a glimpse at what our experience will be when Christ returns and ushers in the new heaven and the new earth. Listen to how John describes this glorious, future day in Revelation 21:1-4:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away'" (Revelation 21:1-4).

For those of us who are in Christ, one day death, crying, and pain will be no more and we will dwell in the presence of God forever. As you ponder this glorious day in the future, ask God to strengthen your weak hands and feeble knees and to calm your anxious heart so that you might be strengthened to live for Him every day between today and the day Jesus Christ returns to make all things new.



Isaiah

WEEK FIVE: ISAIAH 36-39 AMY JACKSON

Overview of Isaiah 36-39

This week, we find ourselves in a historical narrative section of Isaiah. These chapters are paralleled in 2 Kings 18:13-20:19 and tell us the story of King Hezekiah. Isaiah's primary audience was the kingdom of Judah, led by Hezekiah from 715-686 BC. We'll see that Hezekiah's faith in the Lord sometimes wavered - like the faith of the Israelites. Israel has placed her faith in false gods and foreign nations rather than turning to the Lord. Her ultimate punishment awaits her: exile in Babylon. But we will also be reminded of God's supreme power - that He is a God greater than any other god or country or enemy the Israelites will face. Isaiah calls the people to trust in the Lord and to turn from their sin. As we read these verses, we'll see ourselves in the characters in the story. At times, Hezekiah chose to trust in the Lord - but at other points, he was blind to his own sinful pride. Will we choose to trust in the Lord? Do we see our need for Him in our brokenness and our sin?

Monday, September 25 | Isaiah 36 | Amy Jackson

Who will you trust? This is the question that King Hezekiah and Judah are forced to answer in Isaiah 36. The historical situation is grim. We begin this section of Isaiah in 701 BC. Israel, the northern kingdom, has fallen to Assyria, and they are threatening to take over Judah; in fact, the text tells us that "Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them" (Isaiah 36:1). Things don't look good.

The Rabshakeh of Assyria plays a prominent role in this passage; although we never are told his name, we know that he is the third-highest ranking officer of the Assyrian army. He approaches Judah's officials with a message for Hezekiah and subsequently for the people of Judah: "On what do you rest this trust of yours?" (Isaiah 36:4). It's the question we've heard throughout Isaiah, really, isn't it? Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, chose to place his trust in Assyria rather than in the Lord. His apostasy led them into the situation Hezekiah faces today as Assyria surrounds them, ready to bring siege and destruction.

The Rabshakeh calls God's people to trust in Assyria, arguing that no god could save them, because the gods of the other countries they had defeated never came to their people's defense (Isaiah 36:18-20). "Don't let Hezekiah mislead you by telling you that your God will deliver you," he taunts. Instead, he holds out a tantalizing promise, declaring that if they trust in Assyria, all will be well (Isaiah 30:16-17).

We answer the same question every day, don't we? Who will we trust? When the odds are stacked against us and when it seems like all hope is lost, will we choose to trust in God or will we choose to trust in the things and the ways of the world? Can we trust God? This chapter makes me a bit uncomfortable as I consider what might have been going through my head as I heard the Rabshakeh taunt God's people. Would I have wavered in my trust in that moment? And, do I waver in my trust today? Am I placing my confidence in my abilities or my bank account or my status in life or my own comfort, or is my confidence in God alone?



Isaiah

The fallacy of the Rabshakeh's argument is that he decided the God of Israel was just like the gods of the other nations. He was mistaken. Israel's God is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Anything else they could have trusted in - including Assyria - would be lesser. Only the Lord is all-powerful and all-knowing. He is the One who commands the winds and the waves and is the Lord of hosts - the armies of heaven and earth are at His disposal. In comparison, every other god seems small and fleeting and insignificant and weak - because it is! Why would I trust in anything or anyone else other than this God - even when the allure of worldly powers like Assyria might seem so tempting?

Tuesday, September 26 | Isaiah 37:1-20 | Amy Jackson

In many ways, this chapter is the resolution to a cliff-hanger! I used to hate when I was kid and my favorite TV shows would have cliff-hangers at the end of the season. I despised having to wait for weeks to find out what happened next. In this section of Isaiah, we are waiting to see how Hezekiah will respond to Assyria's intimidation. Will Hezekiah trust in the Lord, or will he be influenced by a foreign nation to trust in worldly strength and power, just like his father Ahaz?

Hezekiah receives another letter of intimidation from Assyria, dictated by the Rabshakeh, telling him again that trusting in their God is futile - after all, look at what happened to other countries who trusted in their gods (Isaiah 37:10-13)! Sennacherib intends to intimidate Hezekiah, but instead of intimidating him, he drives Hezekiah straight to prayer - he comes before God earnestly and with humility in verses 14-20.

There's a lot we could say about Hezekiah's prayer, but one thing that sticks out to me is that he doesn't plead to God on the basis of his own character or goodness or faithfulness as Judah's king. Sometimes when I come before the Lord to ask him for something, I am tempted to bring up all of the things that make me "deserving" of His favor. Instead, Hezekiah pleads to God on the basis of God's own character - recognizing that He indeed is Lord over all. The gods destroyed by the Assyrians were "the work of men's hands, wood and stone" (Isaiah 37:19), but Hezekiah's God is the living God, the God over all of the kingdoms of the earth (Isaiah 37:16-17).

Hezekiah comes before God enraged at how the Assyrians have mocked Him. He asks God to respond to these false claims and show His true might and save Judah. Now, did you catch the reason that Hezekiah desires deliverance for his country? He asks that Judah would be saved so "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD" (Isaiah 37:20). "Save us, so that others might know you are God!" he cries out. He doesn't ask for deliverance so that they'll be spared suffering; he asks for deliverance so that God might be glorified and others may come to see His majesty and worship Him. It's convicting for me to think about this, because usually when I'm praying to be delivered from something, it's on the basis of my own desire for comfort and ease. I don't often pray that God would save me from something as a means to give Him glory and to make Him known. *Oh Father, help redirect our hearts to trust in You more deeply and to long to see You glorified in every situation!*



Isaiah

Wednesday, September 27 | Isaiah 37:21-38 | Amy Jackson

I remember the first time I watched the classic *The Wizard of Oz*. As a child, I waited with fear and anticipation when Dorothy's ragamuffin crew made it to Oz. Hearing his terrifying voice, I knew that Oz had to be a great and powerful and fearful creature. I was certainly surprised when viewers got a peek behind the curtain to see that he was just an ordinary man. His voice was booming and foreboding, but he was just a human, after all.

In Isaiah 37:21-28, God pulls back the fearful curtain to give us a clearer picture of the true identity of Assyria's leader, Sennacherib, who has taken delight in mocking the Lord. The text tells us that he has scaled the mountains to cut down the tallest trees and has dried up the streams of Egypt with just the sole of his foot (Isaiah 37:24-25). He is strong and fearful and foreboding - but like Oz, when the curtain is pulled back, we are reminded that he is just a man. Why should Israel fear a man who has supposedly scaled the mountains when they worship a God who formed the mountains? Does a man who professes that he can dry up a region's waters terrify them? Their God once flooded the whole earth in judgment.

What's more, Sennacherib isn't just a man - he is a puppet in the hands of the living God. God warns Sennacherib that He has determined from days of old what would come to pass - He has allowed Sennacherib to come this far and to bring terror to Israel and surrounding nations to fulfill His own purposes. But now, God will intervene. As John N. Oswalt explained, "Just as God brought [Sennacherib] on stage, He can take him off again. To God, the mighty Assyrian monarch is no more than a bull with a ring in his nose or a horse with a bit in his mouth" (John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: NIV Application Commentary*).

Sennacherib is His puppet and His servant, even if he doesn't realize it - and now God has determined that his time has come to an end. The man who arrogantly mocked the Lord will meet His maker. We see God's word hold true in verses 36-39; Sennacherib and the Assyrian armies are not defeated by Israel's might but rather by an angel of the Lord. God Himself brings an end to the booming voice and the man who mocked the God of Israel, reminding us that He alone is supreme and all-powerful.

Thursday, September 28 | Isaiah 38 | Amy Jackson

One of the things you might notice about the prophetic books is that they don't always follow a linear order; this is the case for Isaiah 38-39. The events of these chapters actually happened sometime before the attempted Assyrian invasion in 701 BC. Hezekiah has become sick - in fact, Isaiah tells Hezekiah that he is deathly ill and he comes with a message from God: "Set your house in order, for you shall not die, you shall recover" (Isaiah 38:1). Hezekiah responds with grief, tears, and prayer, and for some reason, God grants him fifteen years of additional life (Isaiah 38:5).

Many commentators point out that these chapters are a mirror picture of Isaiah 7-12. Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, was a wicked man who refused to trust in God and instead sought power offered by foreign allies. Ahaz chose to put his trust in Assyria. So far, our experience with Hezekiah has been different. We've already seen that in the future he will stand strong against Assyria and pledge faithfulness to God (Isaiah



Isaiah

36-37). Yet Hezekiah, like his father, is also a human with his own brokenness. We'll see his mortality and fallibility in the very next chapter as he succumbs to Babylon's temptations.

Why does God save Hezekiah and answer his prayer? It's not because of Hezekiah's merit or personal record - instead, God declares that He will deliver Hezekiah out of His faithfulness to David. He will keep His covenant with His son David. Moreover, He will rescue His people from Israel because of His love for them and His faithfulness to them (Isaiah 38:5-6). Hezekiah is not the savior. He is a king who, in part, is faithful to the Lord - but he is still a feeble and flawed man, and he is definitely not the messiah promised to Israel.

Although God delivers Hezekiah and gives him fifteen more years of life, one day, Hezekiah will still face death. In fact, every human raised to life in the Old Testament and New Testament merely experienced a resuscitation. Hezekiah's bitter weeping in verse 3 might have been selfish, but it is also a reminder that death was not a part of God's original design for his people. Because of the fall, sin has entered our world and has broken everything - including our life cycles. Our bodies are fallen and will one day succumb to sickness - not necessarily as a direct result of our personal sin (see John 9), but because everything in the world is broken by sin. But the hope of Isaiah points us forward to a coming Messiah, to a man who would forever defeat death through His own death.

Friday, September 29 | Isaiah 39 | Amy Jackson

Isaiah 39 is a hard chapter to read, isn't it? We've seen God deliver Hezekiah from death - and in response, Hezekiah turns to put his trust in Babylon. Assyria and Babylon were both powerhouses in the Ancient Near East. Israel and Judah were small kingdoms in comparison to these large empires. Babylon was a subject of Assyria for many years but under their king, Merodach-baladan, they were looking to gain independence. So they sent embassies to the king of Judah, Hezekiah, perhaps to win him over and gain his loyalty. And, their envoys worked! When they came, the text tells us that "Hezekiah welcomed them gladly" (Isaiah 39:2). And rather than telling these foreigners all about how God delivered him from death, he chose to share his own personal glory and gave them the insider's tour of his treasures (Isaiah 39:2).

Hezekiah's sin isn't just that he was friendly to Babylon - rather, it was that he saw trusting in God as a one-time decision and not as a lifestyle (John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: NIV Application Commentary*). Certainly there were times when Hezekiah trusted in God, but the allures of Babylon were tempting enough to turn his eyes from the Lord. Isaiah's bold prediction in verses 5-7 is a foreshadowing of the day when Babylon will ransack Hezekiah's storehouse, but Babylon will destroy more than just Hezekiah's precious treasures - his children and grandchildren will be taken as slaves to Babylon. Isaiah prophesies the Babylonian exile which would take place under King Nebuchadnezzar roughly 100 years later. Hezekiah's response is indicative of the condition of his heart. He declares that he is grateful for God's word because at least there will be peace during his days (Isaiah 39:8). Has his brush with death (Isaiah 38) had any lasting impact on him at all?



Isaiah

It seems like Israel and Judah are always in need of being saved. These small kingdoms come up against giant empires and God delivers them. But that doesn't fix the problem - because the problem is internal. Sometimes their kings are evil and lead them astray. And at best, we see that their kings, even if they are men after God's own heart, are still men who are feeble and flawed. Israel and Judah need to be delivered from themselves. Their problem isn't their opponents or just their kings. Their problem is their own sin and the fact that they continue to choose to walk in the ways of foreign nations rather than trust in God.

While we may not want this section of Isaiah to end this way, we have to sit in the mess and the yuck and realize Israel's need for a savior. And, we have to see ourselves in the same kind of situation: as people whose hearts are prone to wander away from God just like Hezekiah. We need to feel the weight of despair in Isaiah 39 to really see the hope to come in Isaiah 40-66.



Isaiah

WEEK SIX: ISAIAH 40-55 AMY JACKSON

Overview of Isaiah 40-55

After the weighty historical section of last week (Isaiah 36-39), we're all ready to hear about some hope! This section begins in exile, as Isaiah prophetically speaks to the Israelites in captivity in Babylon. They have been exiled to a foreign country because they refused to trust in the Lord. They put their hopes in foreign kings and false gods, in their own strength and prowess. But God hasn't abandoned them. This section of Isaiah is full of good hope and comfort - the Lord promises that He has not forsaken His people. He will bring them home and restore them from physical exile. And, He will send a suffering servant who will fix their ultimate problem of spiritual exile - He will send a Savior to pay the penalty for their sins. God's people will see His glory revealed to all of the earth. These words in Isaiah 40-55 were comfort to those living in exile, unsure if God would keep His promises to Israel. They are also comfort to us today as we wait for the day when our faith is sight - for the day when we will dwell forever in the presence of God as His people (Revelation 21:3).

Monday, October 2 | Isaiah 40:1-11 | Amy Jackson

We pick up the scene years after King Hezekiah's blunder in Isaiah 39. Our last section ended with the sentence of exile. The people had broken the promises of God's covenant that they had sworn to keep (Deuteronomy 28); God promised to punish Hezekiah and his people for their sins through allowing them to be exiled to Babylon. Now the curtain opens on a new scene with the promises of comfort and hope.

Comfort might sound strange to our ears. Is there any hope? Could there be anything left for Israel? Has exile forever separated God's children from their Father? Will punishment go on forever? The resounding answer to the questions of Isaiah 40:1-11 is "No!". God allowed His children to be exiled, yes, but their punishment was for the purpose of restoring them. Their warfare has now ended and their sins are pardoned (Isaiah 40:2).

And who brings deliverance? The people aren't delivered by an earthly king or even by their good behavior. Indeed, Isaiah reminds us in verses 6-8 that human flesh is like grass, which withers and dies (Isaiah 40:7). Even the most beautiful flowers fade and must be discarded. I once heard one of my professors from Beeson Divinity remark that scientific studies suggest that, given the right external conditions, once we die, our bodies can decompose to skeletal form in a matter of weeks. All human flesh really is like grass. When we begin to understand our depravity and brokenness, we can sympathize with the desperation that Israel faced in exile. Who would save them from their sins?

There is comfort because a Savior is coming - God Himself! Verses 9-11 describe how He will come. He will deliver His people from exile in strength and might - and yet He is also a God who will care for His people in the same way as a shepherd tends His flock, with compassion and care. All flesh will see the glory of the Lord - the glory of this God who is mighty and all-powerful, and yet who comes near to gather His people and to bring them home. And the rest of Isaiah 40-55 helps us unpack this promise of God's coming glory.



Isaiah

Tuesday, October 3 | Isaiah 42:18-43:7 | Amy Jackson

In some ways, the end of Isaiah 42 and the beginning of Isaiah 43 seem like opposites, don't they? We start off hearing about God's servant Israel - and it's all bad news. Israel is pictured as deaf and blind, as one who "sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear" (Isaiah 42:20). When God delivered His people from Egypt, He proclaimed that they were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation - a light to the world. They were God's firsthand witnesses and received the personal revelation of His word (Exodus 19:5-6).

And yet they haven't lived this way, have they? They've lived as if they were deaf and blind, unhearing and uncaring when it comes to the things of God. They had the privilege of hearing God's word but didn't heed it. And so God gave them up to captivity and allowed them to be exiled to Babylon. It seems that all hope would be lost - and it would be, except we have this short and beautiful first phrase of Isaiah 42 - "But now thus says the LORD" (Isaiah 42:1).

God declares that He will redeem the Israelites and promises that He will not forsake them; in fact, even as He punishes them with the refining fire of exile (Isaiah 42:25), He promises to walk with them through the same fires (Isaiah 43:2). Why won't they be consumed? Because He is their God. Notice all of personal pronouns "you" used in verses 1-7. God speaks personally to the Israelites, encouraging them that He is present with them. God cares intimately for them and knows them by name.

The "but" of verse 1 here in Isaiah reminds me of Ephesians 2:1-10. In Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul reminds us how, like the Israelites, we were also "dead in the trespasses and sins in which [we] once walked." And yet God was rich in mercy and made us alive in Christ - He saved us by His grace (Ephesians 2:4-5). Have any of us done anything to deserve such redemption? Just like the Israelites, we can't earn our way back into God's graces - and yet God still shows us grace. Our God is a God who keeps His part of the covenant even when we have repeatedly broken our promise to be faithful to Him.

While our troubles may look different than the exile of the Israelites, we all walk through difficulty, pain, and shame. We mourn the consequences of our sin and brokenness. This passage is an encouragement to me and a reminder that, just as God promised He would not abandon the Israelites, He also promises that He will not abandon us. He walks closely with us. He knows us by name, and we are His.

Wednesday, October 4 | Isaiah 49:1-13 | Amy Jackson

We see a shift here in Isaiah; Isaiah 41-48 deals with the problem of physical exile, promising that God will bring His children home to the land promised to their forefather Abraham. God will deal with the foreign nations who oppressed and enslaved His people. But there's still a problem, isn't there? You see, Israel's problem wasn't just Assyria or Babylon or even exile - they were their own worst enemy. Their problem was their sin. And so Isaiah 49-55 focuses on how God's servant will deal with their sin and bring them out of their spiritual exile.



Isaiah

Isaiah 49:1-13 is the second of four servant songs (Isaiah 42:1-13, 49:1-13, 50:4-11, 53:13-53:12). Who is this servant? While we don't yet know, we see that he is called and anointed by God for the ministry of reconciliation (Isaiah 49:1). Often in the Old Testament, Israel is called God's servant - but we've also seen Israel fail repeatedly this regard. But this servant will fulfill all that Israel lacked. Israel failed to obey and failed to be a light to the nations, but this perfect servant will fearlessly declare God's word and bring salvation to many (Isaiah 49:2).

What will this salvation look like? Future servant songs will shed more light on this, but we see several images of salvation in Isaiah 49:8-10. This servant will bring God's people home. He will bring deliverance to prisoners and sight to the blind. He will guide them gently and they will no longer "hunger or thirst, neither shall scorching wind or sun strike them" (Isaiah 49:10).

Who will receive this salvation? Notice the audience here - this servant isn't just focused on Israel! He begins his song by speaking to the coastlands and "you peoples from afar" (Isaiah 49:1). This servant's work will deal with more than just ethnic Israel; the servant will "bring Jacob back to him" (Isaiah 49:5), yes, but he will also be "a light for the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). Israel was always meant to be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:3); the Israelites failed to be a blessing to the nations, but through this servant, God's "salvation may reach the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

Isaiah's immediate audience didn't know the identity of this servant or how He would break into time and space and history in a manger in Bethlehem. They didn't see this hope made sight yet. But as they waited, Isaiah commanded them to rejoice (Isaiah 49:13). God would keep His promises to His people, to comfort them and to have compassion on them. He would send them a deliverer to save them from themselves. In many ways, we are in need of the same deliverer to save us from ourselves, aren't we? We find ourselves broken in our sin, in need of someone to bring us back to God. Praise God for Christ, who took on the form of a servant, became obedient to the point of death on a cross, and was raised to life, that we might know Him and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

Thursday, October 5 | Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | Amy Jackson

It is often said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And beauty is objective, isn't it? Our definitions of beauty and attractiveness vary by culture and time period. What people considered beautiful in sixteenth century England is very different than what is considered beautiful today in America. And yet I've found that, in my own life, the people I love, value, and cherish are attractive to me because of their kindness and character and because of the joy and meaning they bring to me.

We learn something new about God's servant today in this final servant song, and it's a hard truth: He is a servant we wouldn't expect. He isn't the flashiest or more glamorous. In fact, Isaiah forewarns us that He would have "no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2). This despised and rejected suffering servant will be familiar with sorrow and grief. Our



Isaiah

eyes wouldn't linger on Him if we met Him on the street - we would turn our faces, perhaps in embarrassment and shame (Isaiah 53:3).

What does this mean specifically? Did he have some sort of scar or other deformity? While we really don't know the exact nature of his physical appearance, the text is clear to remind us that he wouldn't be the handsome and dashing Savior we expected. But again, isn't beauty in the eye of the beholder? To see the beauty of Christ, we must see the ugliness of our sin. For some, this servant and His suffering would be grotesque and offensive, because in their self righteousness and pride, they wouldn't see any need for a savior.

But for others, this servant's suffering will be beautiful, because through His suffering, He will bring us peace with God by bearing our griefs, sorrows, and sins (Isaiah 53:4-6). When we see our depravity and our need for a savior, the suffering of this servant is beautiful, especially when we consider the fact that He Himself had no iniquity or sin. Though perfect, He will be acquainted with our grief, carry our sorrows, and die the death we deserve in payment for our sin (Isaiah 54:9-10)

The name of Jesus is horrifying to Satan's empires. The kingdoms of the world want nothing to do with this suffering, disfigured servant. But for those of us who see our sin and our need for a savior, the cross and the work of Jesus is beautiful. And the rest of Isaiah points us forward to the day when we will see the most beautiful sight: Christ, the exalted servant, reigning over the new heavens and the new earth.

Oh Father, help me to never lose wonder when I consider your suffering servant - because of His stripes, I am healed. Help me see the ugliness of my sin, repent of my wicked ways, and treasure the beautiful work of Christ.

Friday, October 6 | Isaiah 55 | Amy Jackson

In Isaiah 40-54, we've been hearing about the miraculous work of restoration that God is doing - how He will bring His people home from exile, yes, but we've also learned that God is doing a far greater work than bringing physical restoration. He will send a Savior to end our spiritual exile and to bear our sin. And now, we come to the invitation.

It's one thing to hear about the work of God and the hope we have in Him. It's another thing to receive it, isn't it? The Israelites had heard of God's work and coming redemption - and now God pleads with them to do one thing in response: come. He beckons them, asking them to recognize their thirst and hunger and to seek Him in response, instead of trying to fill their hearts with fleeting worldly things that do not bring eternal satisfaction. "Come to Me!" He says, "and I will give you the bread that lasts forever and satisfies every hunger of your heart" (Isaiah 55:1-2).

It sounds easy, doesn't it? God invites all people (Isaiah 55:5) to come to His banquet, to eat and to live. He doesn't require payment or the perfect appearance. But in order to come, we have to recognize our need



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for Him - this is the true cost to us, isn't it? As one commentator put it, "A banquet table is worse than useless to the person who is either too proud or too ashamed to come and eat from it" (John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: NIV Application Commentary*). God calls His people to seek Him today and come to Him while He may be found - today is the day of salvation! He beckons us to surrender our selfish pride and drop our rags of shame and come to Him, for He is a compassionate God who abundantly pardons His children (Isaiah 55:6-7).

And those who come, they will experience God's true joy (Isaiah 55:12-13). These verses point us forward to a day when all creation is reconciled to God. You see, Isaiah's perspective wasn't just focusing on the restoration of Israel; Isaiah held onto the hope God revealed to Him that one day, everything lost in the Garden of Eden would be restored. These final verses of Isaiah 55 are echoed in Revelation 21 and 22. There will be a day when there will be no more briars or thorns, and when tears will no longer cloud our eyes (Isaiah 55:13, Revelation 21:3-4). He is coming to bring His people home and He has made a covenant with them - the same covenant promised to David - that will never be broken (Isaiah 55:3, 13).

Just like the Israelites, we receive the same invitation to come and believe, to trust in the saving work of Christ and to feast at the banquet table as we look to the day when God will dwell with His people forever in perfect peace (Revelation 21:3).



Isaiah

WEEK SEVEN: ISAIAH 56-66 MARY SPLAWN & TYLER KERLEY

Overview of Isaiah 56-66

At last we come to the end of the book of Isaiah and to his global vision of God's glory. Isaiah 56-66 pictures the day of this coming glory and helps us see how we ought to respond to God's promise of salvation. And these verses ultimately point us forward to the day when God will come to His people in the person of Jesus - when we will see God's glory because we will behold Christ (John 1:14-18). Isaiah called the people to host fast to God's promises in preparation for that day and to wait for Him in hope. In the same way, we are also waiting for Christ as we anticipate His return. As we wait, our desire is to like the one in Isaiah 66:2 who is "humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at [God's] word." *Lord, help us to wait in faith for You, to cling to the truth of Your word, and to proclaim Your peace to the nations!*

Monday, October 9 | Isaiah 56:1-8 and Matthew 21:12-13 | Mary Splawn

Isaiah is one of those books that I need a little help understanding. Poetic speech takes the place of prose, the plot seems somewhat hard to follow, and there aren't a lot of stories.

And yet, Isaiah is one of the most quoted books in the New Testament, second only to the Psalms. Combining these two factors (the difficulty of Isaiah and its use in the New Testament) has given me a plan for this week's devotions. As we explore passages in the last section of Isaiah, we will focus on ones that are quoted in the New Testament.

Today's passage (Isaiah 56:1-8) is one of hope! God is proclaiming that anyone who serves Him - Jew or not - is welcome to enter the temple of the Lord. In fact, God calls the temple "a house of prayer for all the nations."

And yet, in the days when Jesus walked the earth, the temple had become a marketplace, not a center of prayer. I imagine the temple being a loud and crowded space with stinky animals tied to posts, caged pigeons trying to fly, and vendors approaching those who have come to worship, looking to sell them something!

When Jesus enters the temple and see the chaos, He quotes Isaiah 56:7, saying: "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

What point was Jesus making? He wanted to show that those who were making the temple a marketplace were not serving Him. They were not using the space for its intended purpose. Instead they were creating barriers for the the worship of God.



Isaiah

This gives us some food for thought for our churches today. Do we make prayer a main purpose of the gathered body of believers? Are we intentional to welcome all people, regardless of nationality or race, to worship the Lord alongside us?

Ultimately, we must all remember that it is by God's grace that we are welcomed into the family of God. The next time you enter a worship space, take some time to pray silently before the service starts. Ask the Lord to make our church a place of sweet communion with Him!

Tuesday, October 10 | Isaiah 57:19 and Ephesians 2:17 | Tyler Kerley

The "Far" in our Midst: A Meditation on Isaiah 57:19

Baptists have a rich history of missionaries traveling the world to share the gospel of peace with those who are "far off." William Carey became known as "the father of modern missions" after nearly forty years of work in India. Adoniram Judson produced the first translation of the Bible into Burmese. And Lottie Moon, a woman well ahead of her time, departed as a single woman for China only one year after Susan B. Anthony was arrested merely for voting. These famous Baptist missionaries (and there are plenty of others!) understood well the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Peace, peace, to the far and to the near."

But distance is not always geographical. Consider the first great Christian missionary, the Apostle Paul. Paul understood from Old Testament passages like Isaiah 57:19 that the gospel is for all people. Regardless of social location, political affiliation, or religious identification, the gospel is for everyone. And because of this public, free nature of the gospel, Paul knew that the "far" are actually sometimes more "near" than we think.

Paul's entire ministry, in fact, was directed at addressing precisely this issue. That's why he is so concerned with collecting a financial offering from his Gentile churches to take to the Jewish church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:22-29, 2 Corinthians 8-9). Sharing their wealth with one another is a sign of the unity Jews and Gentiles enjoy with one another in the one body of Christ.

But a better example of this is when Paul alludes to Isaiah 57:19 in Ephesians 2:17: "And [Jesus] came and preached peace to those who were far off and to those who were near." Paul's echo of this verse from Isaiah summarizes well the overall goal of both Isaiah and Ephesians: Jesus came to unite all things to Himself, but he especially came to reunite a divided and diverse humankind. Jesus did not favor Jews or Gentiles over the other, Paul says. Jesus didn't preach to the whites and not to the blacks, or to the blacks and not to the whites. Jesus didn't fellowship only with those who spoke English or with those who only spoke Spanish. Jesus didn't go only to the rich or only to the poor. Jesus didn't just go to the religious or just to the irreligious. Jesus went to both. Jesus came for people from every walk of life, Paul says. Jesus came for Mountain Brook and for Ensley, and He came to make them into one body. In Jesus Christ, Homewood and Fairfield hold all things in common, for neither comes to Christ with anything.



Isaiah

Whether the distinction between us is racial, economic, or political, Jesus came to make us one. God the Father sent His Son into the world to reconcile the whole world to Himself and to bring peace to a world that is marked by violence and hostility (John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Colossians 1:19-20). The Church should be a very different world—a world of peace. Remember: Jesus came to save you only because He also came to save those who are very different from you.

We may be able to translate Isaiah 57:19 into words that we better understand. Peace, peace, to the rich and to the poor. Peace, peace, to the black and to the white. Peace, peace, to men and to women. Peace, peace, to adults and to children. Peace, peace, to the strong and to the weak. “Peace, peace to the far and to the near.”

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Wednesday, October 11 | Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4:16-30 | Mary Splawn

Have you ever had one of those moments where you were in the presence of greatness and didn't realize it? Last year during the SEC Baseball tournament, a college athlete friend of mine was in the elevator at Ross Bridge Hotel with an older man who started making small talk about baseball. Right before exiting the elevator, the man introduced himself as Fred McGriff. As the elevator doors closed, my friend lamented the fact that he had missed his opportunity to get an autograph and hear any wisdom Griffey might share about the game. He had been in the presence of a baseball legend and didn't know it until it was too late!

In first century Nazareth, something similar happened. The people in the synagogue mentioned in Luke 4 were worshiping alongside the all-time Great, the Creator of the universe, the Word of God who had become flesh and they didn't even recognize the significance of their encounter!

Let's try to imagine the scene. Jesus enters the synagogue, sits down in the large room with bench style seating along the walls to worship alongside His relatives, friends, and other townspeople. The synagogue worker goes to the closet where all the scrolls are kept and gets out the one written by Isaiah. He calls on Jesus, the carpenter's son, to read. Jesus takes the heavy scroll and carefully lays it out on a podium of sorts and unrolls it with His calloused hands until He finds the text of Isaiah 61:2. With humility and confidence, He speaks these words to the people gathered together:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

When Isaiah first penned these words some 700 years earlier, they were meant as consolation for a future hope, for the day when the Messiah would come to save the people of Israel. Now the Messiah is on the scene - He has shown up to deliver and He has graced this crowd with His presence. Salvation has entered the room, and yet...they don't understand.



Isaiah

After Jesus speaks these prophetic words, He sits down in the teacher's seat (see Matthew 23:2) and all eyes are on Him. Simply, Jesus says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The people cannot yet grasp the significance of His words and they end up running Him out of the worship place. They don't recognize His majesty. They don't embrace His salvation plan.

This is a real danger for us today as well. Jesus is at work all around us but we have to put on our spiritually-minded lenses to see Him. When we do, we recognize Him at work in the casual conversations we have, in the people we meet, in the situations we find ourselves in, and in the struggles we incur. Jesus is in the elevator with you, He's at your church and your job, and He's in your heart (as a believer) reminding you that you are anointed with the same Spirit that brings hope to the hopeless and news of salvation to the sin sick.

So today, watch for Jesus. Who knows where you'll see Him at work? And when you do see Him, tell the world, because through your witness, someone might just believe in Him.

Thursday, October 12 | Isaiah 64:1-7, Psalm 33:20, and John 6:28 | Mary Splawn

"No eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him."

Waiting is a theme all throughout the Bible and it is a theme of our lives. Isaiah was waiting on a time when God will show up and Zion would be restored. We are waiting for prayers to be answered in many different areas of our lives. And ultimately, as followers of Christ, we are waiting for the day when Christ will return to take us to our eternal home in the new heavens and the new earth (Isaiah 65:17).

We look forward to a time when sin is no more. But in the meantime, we wait. We wait for treatment, because in this world marred by sin, sickness is rampant. We wait for restoration, because in a world filled with sinful people, we have conflict, hurt, and acts of selfishness. We wait for freedom and justice, because evil often seems to win the day. And we wait for physical and material blessings, because unlike Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden before sin entered the world, our bodies give out and we must labor hard, sometimes without reward.

So, what is the right way to wait on God? As Psalm 33:20 tells us, "We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield." In this prophetic passage, Isaiah remembered God's showing up at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19) and finds comfort knowing that since God showed up before, He will act again on behalf of His people! He even goes so far as to say, "You haven't seen anything like what God will do when He shows up!" He trusts that God will intervene and he knows that when God does, it is going to be amazing! Some 2700 years after Isaiah, we also wait in hope, remembering how God acted in Scripture and how He has acted in our lives.

Also, we fix our eyes on Jesus. Isaiah desired for the Lord to "rend the heavens and come down" and Jesus has done just that. John 6:28 says "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will



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of him who sent me." Jesus came to live among us sinners so that in Him we might have eternal hope and righteousness before God. He is the culmination of our hope!

Finally, we can encourage one another in the wait. Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds us, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Help us Lord, to wait together in hope. Help us to trust your timing and your purposes. Most of all, help us to lean on Jesus in whose name we pray, Amen.

Friday, October 13 | Isaiah 65:1-5 and Romans 10:20-21 | Mary Splawn

My kids love to play hide and seek. Recently, I was folding clothes when a game ensued. Wayne went to look for Webb who had hidden in the basket of clothes I was folding. Wayne looked everywhere while I played the part of folding clothes, careful not to give any indication of Webb's whereabouts. Wayne finally had to give up and Webb popped out of the laundry basket to his surprise. We all laughed about how well he had hidden himself.

As I think about the Lord, I am encouraged by this passage in Isaiah to remember that God doesn't play hide and seek with us. Actually, God does the reverse. He permits Himself to be found by those who don't even seek Him. What does this mean? Let's look to Romans 10 for some clarification.

Paul and the Roman church are trying to figure out what to make of the Jews rejecting Jesus. Paul references Isaiah by saying, "And Isaiah is very bold and says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for me.' But as for Israel He says, 'All the day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.'"

The Jews were awaiting the Messiah but many rejected Jesus as such. On the flip side, many Gentiles didn't even know to expect a Messiah, but they came to Him and were saved.

This is good news for us because we are among the Gentile peoples. The Lord has seen fit in His compassion to allow us into the family of faith. He has revealed His great love to us in Jesus and He has given us a role to play in bringing His love to others. Are you hiding that love or are you seeking ways to share it with the world around you?

Lord, Thank You for revealing Yourself to us. Show us today whom You have called us to love.