

Isaiah 45-66 Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

This page has devotionals and sermon illustrations on Isaiah from Today in the Word, F B Meyer, G Campbell Morgan, C H Spurgeon, and many other sources.

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ISAIAH 45

Isaiah 45:3. I will give thee the treasures of darkness.

If you can find no bright side in your trouble to look upon, polish up the dark one. - D L Moody

Isaiah 45:7. "I create evil"—not sin, but the punishment thereof. - D L Moody

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 45](#)

Isaiah 45:21. A just God and a Saviour.

When the Son of God was made of a woman, and made under the law, there was heard the most awful voice that ever was heard in the universe yet: "Awake, O sword! against the Man that is my fellow, and smite the shepherd,"—smite him! When there was a man in the world that was Jehovah's fellow, there was some one who could magnify the law, in smiting whom justice could obtain its demands. The sword of justice smote him, struck him, cut him. The sword of justice had a commission to smite the Man that was Jehovah's fellow: it smote Him in Bethlehem; it smote Him all along the highway of His life, even to Calvary. On Calvary, the strokes of the sword fell heavy; the glances of that sword then darkened the sun; the strokes of the sword shook earth, shook hell; it kept smiting and smiting the Man that was God's fellow, till at last He cried, "It is finished!" Then the sword fell down at the foot of the cross, hushed, lulled, pacified: and it lay there till the third hallowed morning, when it was found changed into a sceptre of mercy; and that sceptre of mercy has been waving among mankind ever since. BEAUMONT.

Isaiah 45:24. In the Lord have I ... strength.

A believer's watchfulness is like that of a soldier. A sentinel posted on the walls, when he discerns a hostile party advancing, does not attempt to make head against them himself, but informs his commanding officer of the enemy's approach, and leaves him to take the proper measures against the foe. So the Christian does not attempt to fight temptation in his own strength; his watchfulness lies in observing its approach, and in telling God of it by prayer. W. MASON.

Isaiah 45:5-12, 18

I am the Lord, and there is no other. - Isaiah 45:5

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

How does a parent gain the right to discipline a child? Simply by virtue of being the child's parent. That's how God designed the family to work (Col. 3:20-note).

Consider, then, a small child who does not want to obey his mother. "Mom," he says, "you're not my boss any more. I can take care of myself. Even though you're my mother, I don't acknowledge your right to guide or discipline me. I think I know better and can do better on my own. I reject your authority--I'll handle things from here on out."

How do you think such a child would do in the real world? No doubt you're shaking your head in dismay.

Yet this was precisely Israel's attitude in today's Scripture reading. Even though God was the Maker of their nation (Isa 45:11), they preferred to go their own way. This attitude dismayed Isaiah, who said that for Israel to quarrel with her Maker was foolish, out of order, and pointless (Isa 45:9, 10).

God knows best, and His power is irresistible. He is not merely the "top dog" among other gods (like Zeus of Olympus)--He is the one true God (Isa 45:5, 6, 18). Even though King Cyrus (see Isa 45:1, 13) doesn't acknowledge Him, God will use him to bring the Israelites home from exile in order to glorify His name. Though Cyrus worshiped Babylonian gods, what he did was by and through God, for He is sovereign even when He is not worshiped.

God is sovereign over everything, from light to darkness, from prosperity to disaster (Isa 45:7; cf. Ps. 50:10, 11, 12[note](#)). His sovereignty is not random or cruel, but purposeful and righteous (Isa 45:8). He is like a potter working with clay, shaping us according to His will (Isa 45:9; cf. Isa. 29:16 and Isa 64:8). Do we doubt or resist this? Creation provides compelling evidence (Isa 45:12).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The main point of today's devotion is that creation reveals God's right to rule the universe (Isa 45:12, 18). Now let's make that point more personal: God has the right to rule you (cf. Ro 9:20, 21-note)!

Isaiah 45:9-25

We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. - Isaiah 64:8b

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

When you were in school, did your art teacher ever ask you to use clay to mold a candy dish or other object? Such an activity might have been timed so that you could take your handiwork home as a Christmas gift for your parents.

At first, you started off with grand ambitions of sculpting a masterpiece. As the deadline drew nearer, however, you thought you'd settle for wrestling the stubborn muck into any recognizable shape. Your candy dish ended up lopsided, but your mother still saved it proudly for many years.

Today's reading pictures God as the Potter and ourselves as the clay. At one level, this is literally true. God formed man from the dust of the earth, breathing life into clay (Ge 2:7). Interestingly, the word "formed" has the same root as the word "potter" in Isaiah 45:9.

On another level, this metaphor demonstrates God's sovereignty and righteous judgment. He shapes the destinies of nations (cf. Jer. 18:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). He sent Israel into exile, and He will use Cyrus to restore them to their homeland. We often think of this metaphor only in individual terms—God molds us. In Scripture, however, it is more often used in bigger terms—God directs world history. That's why near the end of today's reading the whole earth is called to salvation and worship (Isa 45:22, 23, 24).

For us, this image is a lesson in obedience. To rebel against God is as wrong and unthinkable as clay quarreling with a potter. It's ridiculous and presumptuous for us to question Him or to doubt His plan and power (Isa 45:9, 10). God has every right to do as He pleases in making us fit and useful vessels (Ro 9:20, 21-note). Submission and obedience are our proper and righteous responses.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today would be a good day to compare your attitudes to Scripture. If you are the clay, is your heart soft before God, the Potter?

Isaiah 45:9 Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.

God moulds us as a potter does his clay. In doing this; He comes to a point where our nature seems entrenched in all its might. We can yield everything but this. But not to yield this is to neutralize our yielding in all beside. That is where the soul strives with God. It is the battlefield, the crisis, the crease-line of destiny.

We may strive with God in two ways, saying, What makest Thou? or, He hath no hands; either by accusing Him of not having a definite purpose, or by alleging that He is not taking the best method of accomplishing it. Have you ever questioned the love, or wisdom, or purpose of God, in the molding and education of your soul? Or have you questioned the benevolence and wisdom of his

methods? To do either of these is disastrous to peace of heart and growth in grace. We must will and dare to believe that God is doing his very best for us, and doing it in the very best way.

The fate of those who strive against their Maker is very terrible.

They are counted as potsherds. "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth." What is a potsherd? A shred of pottery, which may have been part of a beautiful vase, but now as a broken fragment is good for nothing but the rubbish-heap. See it protruding from the cinders! This is the fate of the castaway, which the apostle feared. The image says nothing as to our eternal destiny, but assures us that we may miss all opportunity of serving the purposes of God. Agree, therefore, with thy Divine Adversary quickly, lest He cast thee aside, or touch thee in the sinew of the thigh that shrinks, and thou limp through the remainder of thy days.

- F B Meyer

I will gird thee, though thou hast not known Me.—Isa. 45:5.

In this chapter we have four messages of Jehovah, closely related to each other in that they take up and elaborate the fact announced in the previous message, that Jehovah had appointed Cyrus to perform His pleasure. The first of them is addressed to Cyrus, and indicates the fact of his government by God, ending with a Woe against him that rebels against that government (Isa 45:1-10). The second re-emphasizes this fact that Cyrus will act under the direction of God (Isa 45:11-13). The third foretells some of the victories which will come to Israel, when she is saved by Jehovah with ever-lasting salvation (Isa 44:14-18). The last takes in the widest world outlook, and calls upon all the nations to look unto Jehovah in order to be saved (Isa 45:18-25). Cyrus was raised up and used by God, and then set aside. Thus, there was a partial fulfilment of these predictions. But their ultimate fulfilment is not yet. Kings will yet be the instruments of God, under the authority of His Servant, for the accomplishment of His pleasure; and every glorious foretelling will have perfect fulfilment. The words we have emphasized occur in the message directly to Cyrus, and they reveal a principle of perpetual application. Connect it with the sentence found in the first verse, "I will loose the loins of kings," and its significance becomes more clear. The kings and rulers of the earth are all in the grasp of the might of God. Their loins are unloosed, or they are girded, by that power, in order to the ultimate carrying out of His pleasure. There may be in human affairs revolt and rebellion against God, working ruin to the rebels; but, so far as the ultimate accomplishment of His purpose is concerned, men can do nothing against Him.- G Campbell Morgan

Isaiah 45:22 "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

The text was "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." He was an ignorant man. He could not say much; he was obliged to keep to his text. Thank God for that. He began, " 'Look,' that is not a hard word. A fool can do that. It does not need a wise man to look. A child can do that. How simple." Then he went on, " 'Look unto me.' Do not look to yourselves, but to Christ." And then he went on in his own simple way to put it thus: "Look unto me; I am sweating great drops of blood for you. Look unto me; I am scourged and spit upon. I am nailed to the cross. I die, I am buried, I rise and ascend, I am pleading before the Father's throne, and all this for you."

Stooping down, he looked under the gallery and said, "Young man, you are very miserable."

So I was, but I had not been accustomed to be addressed in that way.

"Ah," said he, "and you will always be miserable if you don't do as my text tells you, that is, look unto Christ." And then he called out, with all his might, "Young man, look! In God's name look, and look now!"

I did look, blessed be God! I know I looked then and there, and he who but that minute before had been near despair had the fulness of joy and hope. And that instant he who was ready to destroy himself could have stood up there and then to sing!— C H Spurgeon

Note: In the above quotation CHS describes his conversion experience on Sunday morning, January 6, 1850, when he was 15 years old. A heavy snowfall prevented him from reaching the church which his mother recommended, and he turned into a Primitive Methodist Chapel in Colchester. The preacher himself was snowbound, and a layman who made no claims to education preached extemporaneously on Isaiah 45:22 to fifteen people, one of whom was CHS. Who could have guessed that God would use this seemingly insignificant occasion to make history? Preachers and Sunday school teachers, take heart!

ISAIAH 46

Isaiah 46:9-13

God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. - Psalm 46:1

Last November, Britain's Prince Charles was greeting a group of children during a visit to Riga, Latvia, when a young woman reached out from the crowd and slapped the prince across the face with a flower. Charles flinched and pulled back as police grabbed his assailant and took her away. The prince was unhurt and continued along the street speaking to bystanders.

The reason for this assault provides a perfect illustration of the complex and disturbing times in which we live. The woman told police she attacked Prince Charles to protest Britain's role in the U.S.-led bombing of Afghanistan following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Think about that international tangle for a minute. A young person in a Baltic country was protesting a Western European nation's involvement in a war that was provoked in the United States and was being fought in Central Asia. Our world is not only a smaller place than ever before, but a more confusing and dangerous place than ever before.

We are definitely in the middle of hard times as a nation and as God's people. You'll recall how quickly and almost frantically various religious and political leaders took the stage after September 11 to assure us that Islam was a religion of peace, and that the terrorists did not represent the vast majority of their people. Trying to prevent revenge attacks on our Muslim neighbors is a worthy goal, but this action calls for us to ignore differences and to strive for religious unity that threatens the truth of the gospel. It will take courage for Christians to lovingly but firmly "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Look at the "declaration of dependence" the writer of Hebrews made. It is based on the promise quoted above: "So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Heb 13:6-note). The psalmist expressed a similar thought: "Therefore we will not fear" (Ps 46:2-note). It's understandable that moments of fear will come in your life. But if your confidence is in the Lord, you can rise above the fear and discover a new level of trust. Ask God to help you keep your heart fixed on Him.

Isaiah 46:4 I have made, and I will bear.

We must not press these words unduly, because we have doubtless warped our original constitution by habits of sin and selfishness, for which we are largely responsible. In these we may look to God for deliverance, but we cannot hold Him responsible.

But there are other attitudes of character and circumstances of life which are the direct result of God's appointment. He allowed us to be born with such a temperament, of such parents, and in such a home. He knew exactly what was to be the climate and color of the land of our birth. He permitted us to begin our life-race with certain infirmities and disabilities, which have been apparently a great hindrance to our success. He has allowed us to enter a business, or become united in the marriage tie, which seems entirely hostile to our best interests. But all this should only cast us the more upon Him. "He will bear," as He hath borne, our griefs and our sorrows. It is when we touch the lowest depth of our trouble that we most clearly hear Him say, Child, my grace is sufficient for thee; thy weakness is that which the more calls forth my strength; I will turn it for my glory through thy life.

By his grace He bears and upholds us in the circumstances in which He has placed us; and more than this, He bears in patience and love what our willfulness puts upon Him. He bare our sins in his own body on the tree; and now He bears with our murmurings, petulance, and rebellion.

O God, Thou hast made us, and not we ourselves; we are thy people and the sheep of thy pasture; still bear with our wanderings and sins, we entreat Thee, till Thou hast made us what we would be, and made us meet for thy use. - F B Meyer

I have made, and I will bear.—Isa 46.4

The prophecy now celebrates the might of Jehovah as manifested in the destruction of Babylon. This has two movements, contained in this and the next chapter. Here the theme is that of the contrast between the gods of Babylon—Bel and Nebo—and Jehovah. Perhaps there is nothing even in the Biblical literature more powerful than this chapter in its unveiling of the essential difference between false gods and the true God. With the finest poetic imagery and passion, the prophet pictured the gods of Babylon, and so all false gods, as being made by men, carried by the men who made them, set in their place by these men, unable to move from the place where they are so placed, and incapable of answering those that worship them in days of distress. Over against that, the truth about the living God is graphically and briefly expressed in these words which we have stressed. He makes, and He carries. Briefer sentences will help us to realize the contrast more perfectly. An idol is a thing which a man makes, and has to carry. The true God makes the man, and carries him. This has application far beyond the bounds of what we designate as heathendom. When a man turns from the living God, he always makes a god for himself, and that god becomes an en-cumbrance; he has to carry it, and the burden is too heavy—he is heavy laden. When a man worships the true God, he worships his Maker, and he is carried, and so he finds rest. "Little children, guard yourselves from idols!"- G Campbell Morgan

Isaiah 46:3–4 Idols found wanting, but Jehovah found faithful

'Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I

will carry, and will deliver you.' Isaiah 46:3-4

As for this 'carrying' of which the text speaks, assuredly that is no new thing. The Lord carried us in our infancy. Our first spiritual blessing came of our being carried: we were sheep going astray and the Shepherd came after us; when he found us, he carried us upon his shoulders rejoicing and brought us home. After that we were lambs in the fold, and he gathered the lambs in his bosom and carried us. Many a rough place have I encountered in my life's pilgrimage and I have wondered how I should ever get over it, but I have been carried over the rocky way so happily that the passage has made one of the most charming memories of my heart. I begin to like rough places, even as Rutherford fell in love with the cross he had to carry. When the road is smooth, I have to walk, but when it is very rough, I am carried. Therefore, I feel somewhat like the little boy I saw the other night. His father had been carrying him uphill, but when he reached a piece of level road, the boy was a great lump to carry, so his father set him down and let him walk. Then the little gentleman began to pull at his father's coat and I heard him say, 'Carry me, father! Carry me again!' Just so. Any sensible child of God will still say, 'Carry me, Father! Carry me still!' The Father's answer is, 'I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry ... you.' Therefore call upon him and ask that, when the road is rough or miry, he will carry you—and he will. - 365 Days with Spurgeon (Vol 5)

Isaiah 46:4 I WILL CARRY YOU.

We are poor fools when we begin to deal with the future. It is a sea that we are not called to navigate. The present is the whole of life. When we enter the future, it is the present.

Still, some of you worry as you feel infirmities coming on. "What will I do when I come to extreme old age? My friends will be gone, and I will have no one to support me. When these fingers cannot work, when my brow is wrinkled and I can scarcely totter to my toil, what will I do?

Ah! "His mercy endures forever" (Ps. 136:1). It does not stop at seventy or pause at eighty. It will carry you safely over ninety if your pilgrimage is prolonged.

The other day I visited a number of elderly people in a nursing home. Some had not been able to leave their bed in years, and I thought it far better to die than to live like that. But I was wrong. If Christ should make that bed as soft as downy pillows with His presence, there might be a glory in the nursing home and a heaven in the midst of poverty. They would learn that even in a nursing home, "His mercy endures."

"Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Is. 46:4).

You whose days of weakness are coming, trust in the Lord and do not be afraid. He will not fail you. He will not forsake you. - C H Spurgeon - "Beside Still Waters"

Isaiah 46:10 IN THE FACE OF THE FUTURE.

World events are not tangled, confused, or perplexing to God. "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (Is. 46:9-10).

Jehovah's power is apparent, from the least to the greatest, for God is in all and rules all. He guides the grain of dust in the March wind and the planets in their immeasurable pathways. He steers each drop of spray beaten back from the face of the rock. He leads the north star (Jer. 31:35). God is the dictator of destinies. He appoints both the ideas and the end. He is the King of kings (Rev. 19:16), ruling rulers and guiding counselors.

He is the same in the crash of battle or in the hush of peace. He is the same in famine or in the joy of an abundant harvest. He is Lord. He does according to His will, not only in heaven but among the inhabitants of this lower world.

The storm may rage, but all is well, for our Captain is the governor of storms. He who trod the waves of the Galilean lake is at the helm, and at His command winds and waves are quiet (Matt. 14:27).

Courage, dear friend. The Lord, the ever-merciful, has appointed every moment of sorrow and every pang of suffering. If He ordains the number ten, it can never rise to eleven, nor should you desire that it shrink to nine.

The Lord's time is best. The span of your life is measured to a hair's width. Restless soul, God ordains all, so let the Lord have His way. - C H Spurgeon - "Beside Still Waters"

ISAIAH 47

Isaiah 47:8 - Things don't always go according to your plans. -[Rich Cathers](#)

The folks in Babylon had never known defeat. They had all their five year and ten year plans written in stone. They had thought that they were in control of their future. But they were wrong.

Illustration - The Mermaid

Three guys are out having a relaxing day fishing. Out of the blue, they catch a mermaid who begs to be set free in return for granting each of them a wish. Now one of the guys just doesn't believe it, and says, "Okay, if you can really grant wishes, then double my IQ." The mermaid says, "Done." Suddenly the guy starts reciting Shakespeare flawlessly and analyzing it with extreme insight. The second guy is so amazed, he says to the mermaid, "Triple my IQ." The mermaid says, "Done." The guy starts to spout out all the mathematical solutions to problems that have been stumping all the scientists in various fields-physics, chemistry, etc. The last guy is so enthralled with the changes that his friends that he says to the mermaid, "Quintuple my IQ." The mermaid looks at him and says, "You know, I don't usually try to change people's minds when they make a wish, but I really wish that you would reconsider." The guy says, "No, I want you to make my IQ five times higher, and if you don't do it, I won't set you free." "Please," says the mermaid, "You don't understand what you're asking, it will change your entire view on the universe. Won't you ask for something else...a million dollars, anything?" But no matter what the mermaid said, the guy insisted on having his IQ increased by five times its usual power. So the mermaid sighed and said, "Done." . . . And he became a woman. The point is, things don't always go according to your plans. Are you willing to submit to God's plans for you? (James 4:13-17) There is a God in heaven who is both powerful and interested in your life. Your life does not go by unnoticed by Him. He is able to work in your life and will do it. Learn to be flexible. Sometimes God's plans aren't the same as your plans.

Isaiah 47:1 Come down, and sit in the dust.

All through the history of the chosen people there has been a great antagonist. In the days of the sons of Noah, Babel; in the days of the kingdom, Babylon; in opposition to the Church, Babylon the Great. And deeper than any earthly embodiment, always the spirit of the world, which exalteth itself, and setteth itself against God. Babylon was used by God to execute his purposes on Israel; but she altogether mistook the situation, and attributed her success to her prowess and the might of her arms. She acted with the utmost mercilessness and pride towards the nations of her time; and, therefore, when she had so far fulfilled the Divine purpose, her own judgment drew near.

Look at home! To colonize; to civilize heathen races; to make roadways across the ocean, along which the Gospel may travel; to link the whole world by the nerves of telegraph-wires; to give the Bible to every people under heaven — such has been the mission of the Anglo-Saxon race. But how much evil has mingled with it all! Think of the opium traffic, the sale of fire-water, the land-grabbing! Remember the impurity, the drunkenness, the godlessness, which have followed in the track of army and navy! Consider also the way in which our peoples are giving themselves up to pleasure-seeking and luxury, to Sabbath-breaking and irreligion, to spiritualism and so-called Christian science! And then ask whether there is not grave cause for apprehension. That Babylon should fall seemed utterly unlikely to the men of Isaiah's time; as unlikely as the fall of the Anglo-Saxon race. But it befell; and she who had sat delicately on the throne, was bidden to do the menial work of a slave. - F B Meyer

Thus shall the things be unto thee wherein thou hast laboured.—Isa 47.15

These words occur in the second part of the prophetic message celebrating the Might of Jehovah, as manifested in the destruction of Babylon. Having—in the first part of the message (Isa 46), contrasted the gods of Babylon with Jehovah, the prophet uttered this "taunt-song," in which he foretold the doom of Babylon by likening the city to a woman, who having lived in luxury, is cast out to penury and to shame. In the course of this song, the prophet referred to those enchantments and sorceries in which he said Babylon had laboured from her youth (see Isa 47:12). He tauntingly called upon her to test the false teachers to whom she had listened by seeking their aid against the determined doom; and declared the uselessness of such appeal because of the fierceness of the flame of the Divine wrath. This is the meaning of these words. Babylon had laboured from her youth in her traffic with the under-world of evil. That reference to "her youth" carried the mind back to the beginnings of Babylon, which were at Babel, where men attempted to frustrate a Divine purpose, by federating against God. This action was the result of traffic with evil conceptions, and evil spiritual forces. The process had run on through all the history. Babylon as a spiritual apostasy, persists unto this time. Its final testing will come in the flame of the anger of God. In that testing the futility of these dark forces of the under-world will be clearly manifested. "They shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame." Men who have trusted in them will be left desolate, for "Thus shall the things be unto thee, wherein thou hast laboured." - G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 48

If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river. Isaiah 48:18

Early in history, people came together on the plain of Shinar. In their pride they decided: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves." To save them from their own self-centeredness and folly, the Lord confused their languages in order to make their boastful project logically impossible. If they couldn't talk to one another, they couldn't get the job done (Genesis 11).

Sooner or later, God always strikes down the proud. We know from yesterday's reading that the idols of Babylon wouldn't be able to resist God's decree, and now as further assurance of His care and justice, chapter 47 gives a poetic description of the future fall of Babylon. She who had been a queen among nations would become a slave. How proud were the Babylonians? They believed their empire would last forever. They thought they were invincible and could get away with any kind of wickedness. Worst of all, they said, "I am, and there is none besides me" (Isaiah 47:7–10)—a claim that is true of God alone.

"Listen up, Israel!" Isaiah was saying (Isaiah 48). "Don't be stupid! Why are you trusting idols to save you? Not even Babylon's idols will save them. Give worship where worship is due. God will not allow His glory to be wrongfully given elsewhere." He continued to recite God's credentials in an attempt to get the people to respond in faith. He urged them to remember His care throughout history! If only they would listen—they could flourish in peace and righteousness. (Today's verse is the original context of the popular chorus, "Peace Like a River"—a warning and exhortation about lost blessings.)

Feeling superior is the wrong response for us. Honestly, are not our hearts close kin with the Israelites' hearts? We need to pray that God will replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (Ezek. 36:26).

APPLY THE WORD In today's reading, the future fall of Babylon is prophesied as a present exhortation to Israel. The nation was reminded that God is in control and of all the miracles He had worked on their behalf in the past. How about you? Are you mired in present circumstances? Do you need to remind yourself of God's faithfulness in your past? If you keep a spiritual journal, write out a testimony of one such event or episode. Pray for opportunities to testify of how God has worked in your life in order to encourage others and praise His name.

Isaiah 48:10 THE FURNACE OF AFFLICTION.

God's people are opposed by the current of the times, just as their Master was. It will cost sorrow and tears if you fully follow your Master. Do you want to be heavenly? I know some that, in a measure, already are. Their speech betrays that they have been with Jesus. Mark well this fact: they are a tested people and many of them are sick. We are little of what we should be until the Lord puts us on the anvil and uses the hammer. He is doing that now with some of you. Do not complain. Let the soft whisper of this promise sustain you, "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Is. 48:10).

You have struggled hard, my brother, to rise out of your situation, but as often as you have striven you have fallen back to your hard lot. Do not be depressed. Live in your calling with contentment, because the Lord has said, "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

Young person, you have been to college, and you were completing your degree. You hoped to become a well-known scholar, but your health failed. Do not be depressed, for the Lord says, "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

Merchant, your firm is going to pieces, and you will be poor. But you have faith in God. It is the Lord's will that you should struggle. He says, "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

Mother, you have lost a little one, and another is sick, so you say, "I cannot bear it." But you will bear it, for the Lord says, "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

Are you alone? Weep no more. The Lord loves you when no one else does. He says, "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction." Some of you are like ferns. You only flourish in the damp and in the shade; too much sunlight would not be good. Your Master knows that if He put you where you would like to be, it would be deadly. Thus He writes, "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction." - C H Spurgeon - "Beside Still Waters"

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

Isaiah 48

Isaiah 48:10. I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.

It is a great help when passing through the fire to know that we are there because there is gold to be extracted or silver to be refined as well as dross to purge away. EL NATHAN.

Isaiah 48:22. There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.

As the ant-hill, when stirred, sets in motion its living insects in every direction, so the conscience of the sinner, disturbed by the Spirit or judgments of God, calls up before its vision thousands of deeds which fill the soul with agony and woe. M'COSH.

Isaiah 48:10 - The Refiner's Fire - [Rich Cathers](#)

(1 Pet 1:6-7)

God refines our faith like a goldsmith refines gold. It's my understanding that a goldsmith will heat the gold ore until it's in a molten state. As he keeps the heat on, the impurities all come to the surface. The goldsmith will keep skimming off the impurities until the gold is pure. He knows it's pure when He can see His own reflection in the gold.

Illustration - Charles Spurgeon said: I bear willing witness that I owe more to the fire, and the hammer, and the file, than to anything else in my Lord's workshop. I sometimes question whether I have ever learned anything except through the rod. When my schoolroom is darkened, I see most.

Isaiah 48:11 For mine own sake, for mine own sake, will I do it.

God finds his supreme motive in Himself. Mark how strongly He insists on it. "For my Name's sake will I defer mine anger; and for my praise will I refrain from thee." And in this verse He twice repeats, "for mine own sake." Surely this is a matter for extreme comfort and congratulation.

If God had saved us because of some trait of natural beauty and attractiveness which He beheld in us, He might turn from us when it faded before the touch of years, or the change of our inward temper. The woman whose only claim on attention and homage is in her face — who has no other qualities to command and retain respect, must often dread the inevitable effect of time. It would be therefore a cause of perpetual unrest to us if God's motive were only one of pity or complacency.

But God's motive is his character, his name and nature, the maintenance of his honor in the face of the universe. In the face of the universe of intelligent beings He is too deeply implicated in our salvation to show signs of variableness or the shadow of turning. He did not begin to save us because we were worthy or lovely, but because He would; and therefore He will not give up because we prove ourselves weak and worthless and difficult to save. There are times with us all when we can but cast ourselves on his infinite grace and say, "Save me for thine own Name's sake." And when we have been overcome by sin, it is good to go to Him and say, "Father, I have nothing to plead but thy own nature and name declared in Jesus: for his sake, because Thou hast made a promise to Him, and to me in Him; for thy glory's sake defer thine anger, forgive my sins; save me for thine own Name's sake." - F B Meyer

There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.—Isa. 48.22.

These words really stand separate from the chapter, and constitute a conclusion to the first section. We shall find them again at the conclusion of the second section (Isa 57.21). In this chapter the prophetic word celebrates in a very remarkable way the mercy of that God Whose majesty and might had already been described, and Whose manifesto and messages had been given. This message of Mercy emphasizes the failure and unworthiness of the people of God, who are the house of Jacob, even though called by the name of Israel; who do swear by the name of Jehovah, and talk about the God of Israel; but not in truth or in righteousness. Their obstinacy is declared to be the reason of the predictive element in prophetic teaching (see Isa 48:3-8). Nevertheless, in spite of all this, for His own sake, Jehovah spares His people. He laments over their disobedience, and their consequent lack of prosperity; but He is their Redeemer, and will deliver them. All this having been said, there breaks in this great prophetic announcement: "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked." Mark its relation to the whole movement of this section. From first to last the motive has been that of revealing the Purpose of God to bring Peace to His troubled people, and to the world. To this end He moves in His majesty, His might, and His mercy. This is the revelation of the manifesto and the messages. Nevertheless the people receiving this prophetic ministry, and all readers of it, are suddenly and sharply recalled to holiness and righteousness by this solemn word: "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked." When we rejoice in the redeeming activity of God, which we have a perfect right to do, let us never forget this truth. It has two values. First: it accounts for the absence of peace to-day. Secondly: it reveals the only way by which peace can come tomorrow.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 49

Isaiah 49:1-7

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. - Isaiah 49:6

Jesus commanded His followers to go to the world. Sometimes the world comes to us.

For example, during the men's 1994 soccer World Cup, hosted in the United States, nearly one hundred churches, mission agencies, and parachurch groups cooperated in an evangelistic "Up for the Cup" campaign. The group distributed millions of pieces of literature, including tracts, a special Sports Spectrum magazine with player testimonies, and a New Testament. In addition, Missionary Athletes International organized more than one hundred soccer clinics for more than six thousand kids, with about 550 making decisions for Christ.

In modern times, sports provide an excellent means of crossing boundaries with the message of Christ. Athletic events have proved to be effective platforms for sharing the good news of salvation throughout the world.

This good news is prophesied in today's Scripture reading, one of Isaiah's famous "Servant Songs." We've seen God's plan for the nations in passages of narrative and poetry, and today we see it in prophecy as well.

The "Servant" (Isa 49:3) is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Some people believe that "Israel" is a specific reference to Jacob. However, the prophet is saying that God is calling His chosen people back to Himself.

The Messiah is specially chosen and prepared by the Father (Isa 49:1, 2, 3, 5). He will encounter difficulties and opposition, but God will reward Him in the end (Isa 49:4, 5, 7). His mission is not only to Israel, but to the Gentiles as well (Isa 49:6; cf. Isa. 14:1). In the end, every knee will bow (Isa 49:7; cf. Phil. 2:9, 10, 11-note)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In these days of electricity, the biblical image of light (Isa. 49:6) might not be so vivid to our imaginations. So here's a brief object lesson to remind yourself or your children of the power of light to dispel darkness.

Isaiah 49:15 I WILL NOT FORGET YOU.

"How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?" (Ps. 13:1). Can God forget you? Can Omnipotence forget you? Can unchanging love forget you? Can infinite faithfulness forget you? David seemed to think so, and some who are in deep trouble might agree. You have been praying for mercy but cannot find it. You think that God forgets. You have been seeking peace but cannot find it. You think that God forgets. Perhaps you were the happiest of the happy as you bathed in the light of God's countenance, but now you are the unhappiest of the unhappy. You are at a distance from God, trying but unable to get back, and you think that God forgets. Wave upon wave of trouble rolls over you. You hardly have time to breathe between the surges of grief, and you are ready to perish with depression. You think God forgets.

That may be how it looks. But it is not possible for God to forget anything. "Can a woman forget her nursing child?" Mark that expression. The child still draws nourishment from her bosom and that is just what you are doing. You think God forgets, but you are living on what He daily gives. You would die if He did not give His grace and strength.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15–16). Hold on to this great truth, "I will not forget you."

God has not forgotten to be gracious. God has not forgotten you. - C H Spurgeon - "Beside Still Waters"

Isaiah 49:16 CONTINUALLY BEFORE ME.

Can Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16), your brother (Matt. 12:50), ever forget His people? No! He has been made like us (Heb. 2:17). He can sympathize with our weakness and in all points He was tempted as we are (Heb. 2:18). He has inscribed us on the palms of His hand, and our walls are continually before Him (Is. 49:16).

Can we look into the face of the Crucified and believe that He is indifferent? It cannot be. Jesus is never indifferent to His people's trials. Do you think that Christ came from heaven to save you and that He is now indifferent? Do you think that He lived here for thirty years of work and weariness to redeem you and that He will now throw you away? Do you believe that He endured Gethsemane's terrible garden with its blood sweat and that He is not concerned about you? Do you think that He bore all of God's wrath on your behalf and that He now considers your salvation a trifling thing? Do you believe that He went to the grave (Matt. 27:59), rose again (Matt. 28:6), and is gone within the veil (Heb. 10:19–20) to plead your cause before God and that He has no real love for you? If what Christ has done for you cannot convince you, what can?

"Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it" (Song 8:7). - C H Spurgeon - "Beside Still Waters"

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 49](#)

Isaiah 49:5. My God shall be my strength.

Give what Thou commandest, and then command what Thou wilt. AUGUSTINE.

Isaiah 49:14, 15. Zion said, The Lord, hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.

God's promises are dated, but with a mysterious character; and, for want of skill in God's chronology, we are prone to think God forgets us, when, indeed, we forget ourselves in being so bold to set God a time of our own, and in being angry that He comes not just then to us. GURNALL.

Isaiah 49:23. They shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

These waiting seasons, trying though they are to flesh and blood, are nevertheless precious ones for the soul. Ah, how much do we learn in them that will pass on with us into eternity, and draw from our lips there the loudest praises! Yes, it will be then seen that our waiting time here has been the most precious part of our heavenward journey. How will the joy of that world of unbroken rest be enhanced by the trials and struggles of life's pilgrimage, where not one wave of sorrow shall ever break over the soul! Each shall look back and exclaim, "He hath done all things well!" F. WHITFIELD.

Isaiah 49:1-7; Isaiah 49

See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples. Isaiah 49:22

Handel's Messiah is his best-known musical composition. Though now associated with Christmas, this masterpiece was originally intended for performance at Easter. The scriptural lyrics were selected by Charles Jennens, an Oxford-educated literary scholar and friend of Handel's. After Handel composed the music, the oratorio premiered in Dublin as a benefit for men in debtor's prison. When it was played a year later in London, King George II was in attendance, and when he rose for the Hallelujah Chorus he began a tradition that endures to this day.

Messiah tells the same story as the Servant Songs of Isaiah, the story of a Savior who suffered and died for the sins of the world. The alternate shorter reading for today is the second Servant Song. The emphasis here is on the special call and mission of the Servant. The scope of His mission is the entire world. Just Israel was not enough—the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles and bring salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). Distant nations are summoned to hear this prophecy, for it applies to "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

What will the Servant do? "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword," a phrase that indicates both revelation and rulership (Isaiah 49:2; cf. Rev. 1:16). He is the One in whom God will display His glory; that is, in Him the promises to Israel will be fulfilled and in Him God's plan of redemption will climax (Isaiah 49:3). Even though He'll be "despised and abhorred," God will raise Him up; kings will bow down before Him (Isaiah 49:7).

Although the Servant's mission won't be limited to Israel, the nation will be restored, and the rest of Isaiah 49 dwells on this. God could no more abandon Israel than a mother could forget her child (Isaiah 49:15). The captives will be freed and restored to their covenant land and relationship, for "those who hope in [the Lord] will not be disappointed" (Isaiah 49:23).

APPLY THE WORD This second Servant Song deals with the call and mission of the Servant. What is your own calling and mission? God's call can't be found through a vocational aptitude test, but neither will it come as a message written in the sky. Calling and mission flow from spiritual walk and character, our community with other believers, and also from our ongoing obedience to what we already know. If you're not sure what God's call in your life might look like, ask other trusted Christians to join you in prayer that God will lead you.

Isaiah 49:1-7

Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down. - Isaiah 49:7

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

D. L. Moody told of the time when William Carey, the great missionary, was at a party attended by the governor-general of India. Also present were military officers, who viewed Carey with contempt. One of the officers said, "I believe that Carey was a shoemaker, wasn't he, before he took up the profession of a missionary?"

Carey spoke up with typical humility. "Oh, no, I was only a cobbler. I could mend shoes, and wasn't ashamed of it." Moody saw in

Carey's attitude a reflection of Christ. Later Moody wrote, "The one prominent virtue of Christ was His humility... In His entire submission and dependence on His Father, this virtue--consummated in His death on the cross--shines out."

Jesus the Messiah demonstrated this beautiful humility as He set aside the glory and privileges of being in heaven with God the Father to become God's Servant on earth. Jesus is the Servant-King, who came the first time to give His life as a ransom for sinners and will return a second time to claim His throne.

Isaiah foretold the Servant role of Messiah in a series of prophecies often called the "Servant Songs." Today's prophecy is especially intriguing because in it, the Servant Himself speaks about His unique ministry and relationship to the Lord God.

We can read these verses with an insight Isaiah didn't possess, because we see their fulfillment in the events of Jesus' life.

Sometime in eternity past God the Father designated His Son to be Israel's Messiah and Savior. The Father then sent the Son into the world with the "sharpened sword" of His Word (Isa 49:2) to redeem Israel.

The Messiah then speaks of His rejection (Isa 49:3) and takes comfort in the fact that His exaltation comes from God (Isa 49:4, 5). And His ministry would be victorious because God decreed that the Servant would also be the Savior of the world.

The Servant's ministry continued after His rejection. Isaiah prophesied His future exaltation, which the New Testament reveals will occur at Jesus' second coming (Phil. 2:10, 11-note).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Every time we open our Bibles, we need to open our hearts to the searching power of God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12-note says the Word can reach to the depths of our souls in making God's truth known to us. One way we can prepare ourselves for this encounter with God is to pray for a willing spirit and listening ear as we study. We suggest you write the words "Hebrews 4:12" on a card and use it as a bookmark in your Bible for the rest of the month. The card will be a reminder to begin your daily study with prayer.

Isaiah 49:1-3

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Like so many great servants of God, Matthew Henry felt God's call on his life at a very early age. It was said that Henry, who was born in 1662, could read and comment on the Bible at the age of three. He received Christ as his Savior at age eleven. Henry was determined to become a minister as his father had been, and he served in a church in Chester, England, for twenty-five years. Those early exercises in Bible study paid off, too, as Matthew Henry published a Bible commentary that is still widely used today.

God's call on the life of His Servant, Jesus, was evident even before His conception. The Servant of the Lord, whose portrait is drawn in the prophet Isaiah's Servant Songs, says of Himself, ""Before I was born the Lord called me"" (Isa 49:1).

The Servant is the speaker in these opening verses of Isaiah 49. He invites the distant nations to listen to His words, because His birth and mission will impact them as well as Israel. This call to the ""islands"" and the ""nations"" echoes Isaiah 42 where it is prophesied that the Servant will establish justice on the entire earth (Isa 42:1, 4).

The Servant says His mouth is like a ""sharpened sword"" (Isa. 49:2), terminology that reminds us of John's description of the risen and exalted Christ (Rev 1:16-note, Re 2:12-note, Re 2:16-note).

As we read today's passage, the picture of the Servant and His ministry comes into clear focus. Because the Servant is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, we understand verse 1 as a reference to the events surrounding His birth. The sharpened sword in His mouth reminds us that Jesus was the Word of God in the flesh.

In Isa 49: 3, God calls His Servant ""Israel,"" leading some to believe that the nation itself is the Servant. But it is obvious that the Servant is distinct from Israel, for He is called to bring Israel back to the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you remember when you first felt the calling of God on your life? The Bible urges us again and again to recall God's grace and blessings on our lives and praise Him for His goodness. What better way to start a new work week than to look back and rejoice at the people and circumstances God used to bring you to Himself? Even five minutes spent recounting God's grace in your life could set the tone for your entire week.

Isaiah 49:3

Saying to those who are bound, 'Go forth,' To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' Along the roads they will feed, And their pasture will be on all bare heights. Isaiah 49:3

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

After months of captivity, the hostages in the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru, were liberated last spring. Peruvian authorities, listening to tiny microphones hidden around the residence, heard the hostage-takers playing soccer and realized they had their long-awaited chance. More than 100 army commandos detonated a bomb to stun the captors and rushed the compound, freeing all but one hostage, who died in the gunfire.

We have spent enough time in Isaiah's second Servant Song to know that the Lord's Servant was sent to set captives free. As we step back from Isaiah 49 to see how this great prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, we meet the Savior in His hometown of Nazareth.

This should have been a real highlight in Jesus' career on earth. Here was the anointed Son of God, the miracle-worker, the great Teacher, the One who could draw crowds, returning to the place where He was raised.

You would think the people of Nazareth would hold a parade, or at least a banquet, for their most illustrious citizen. After all, Nazareth wasn't the kind of place that would be remembered for much of anything (Jn. 1:46).

Even though the mere presence of Jesus should have been enough to cause excitement, there was also the message He came to deliver. It was the good news of freedom for the captives (Isa. 49:9)!

We saw earlier this week that the ultimate fulfillment of the Servant's ministry of setting captives free will be in His millennial kingdom. But Jesus' announcement at Nazareth provided a foreshadowing of that ultimate fulfillment. And considering that the captives are those in the spiritual bondage of sin, Jesus' sacrifice for sin on the Cross was the very act of release itself.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

There are many ways in which we may feel ""held captive"" in our spiritual lives. Is there something you need freedom from today?

It's possible for us to fall prey to habits and attitudes that can bring us down. It may be an attitude of bitterness or unforgiveness that we have allowed into our lives, or a physical indulgence that is damaging to our body, keeping us in perpetual spiritual defeat.

Isaiah 49:1-13

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. - John 9:5

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

In Keeping the Spirit of Christmas, Handel H. Brown writes, "There is a beautiful contrast between light and noise. You watch the sun rising in the east, quietly stealing into the sky, dispelling the night, and gently waking all nature to life. It does not shout... It moves silently across the world, transforming it. And so it is with Jesus... He is the Light that enables us to see things more clearly."

We celebrate Christmas on December 25, just three or four days after the day with the fewest hours of daylight. It seems appropriate that each year our days grow increasingly dark until just before Christmas--when Jesus was born to bring light into the world.

Before Jesus was born on earth, Isaiah 49 tells us that God chose Him to bring light into a dark world (Isa 49:1). The birth of Jesus was an act of love that God had planned from the beginning of time. God was willing to send His only Son to earth for us.

Christ's mouth is "like a sharpened sword" (Isa 49:2), an image that recurs in Scripture several times. In Revelation 19:15 [note](#) we see a similar description of Jesus with a sharp sword. This should remind us that although God does love us, the truth of God also brings judgment on those who do not accept Christ. Jesus is both gentle and just.

Although the nation of Israel did not accept Jesus when He first came (Isa. 49:7), God in His mercy made salvation through Christ available to all people (Isa 49:6). God promises to restore Israel (Isa 49:8), and all people who have been freed from the bondage of sin can feel the excitement in the words, "Come out ... and be free!" (Isa 49:9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Christmas is a season of music--and we have so much to rejoice over. If your church offers a Christmas carol sing-along, consider participating for the opportunity to sing out with others. You could also organize some Christmas caroling with your friends or family

members.

Isaiah 49:1-23

You have prepared ... a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. - Luke 2:32

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Researchers have noted that rates of depression and anxiety are higher during the winter and in areas of the country that receive less sunlight, but they didn't know whether this was a correlation or if the lack of sunlight was the cause. Even if there was a connection, there didn't seem to be much remedy other than moving to a sunnier location. Now Seasonal Affective Disorder, the depression some people experience from a lack of light, has been recognized, and sufferers are able to get special light machines that imitate sunlight and reduce their symptoms. Just as sunlight is necessary for our physical and emotional health, the Bible uses light as a metaphor for salvation, indicating that God's light is essential for spiritual life.

As we've seen in our study, God's intention for choosing Israel was that it might be a blessing to other nations. Yesterday we saw that God was faithful to meet the needs of Gentiles even when the nation was in great crisis and rebellion. We also know that eventually this sin would lead to the nation's exile. Elijah was one of the early prophets whom God raised up to warn the people to repent and to display the power of the living God when the people were worshiping lifeless idols. But God also used the prophets to articulate His promises of restoration and future hope. In Isaiah 40-66, we find a series of powerful prophecies, sometimes called the Servant Songs, that refer to the Servant of the Lord.

In Isaiah 49, we learn that this Servant will restore Israel to the Lord. For a nation facing exile, this was certainly comforting to hear. God's plans for the Servant extended to the ends of the earth: "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6). Indeed, the work of this Servant will be so great that kings will bow before Him.

Although there are obvious messianic hopes in today's passage, it's also true that the nation itself had been called to be a light to the Gentiles. Part of Isaiah's message included a reminder to the nation of God's intended purposes for them.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The theme of "a light to the Gentiles" extends well into the New Testament. We first see it in Simeon's praise in Luke 2:29, 30, 31, 32. Simeon well understood that Jesus was the promised Servant of Isaiah. Interestingly, the term is appropriated by Paul in Acts 13:47 concerning his own call to the Gentiles. When his Gentile listeners heard about God's plan for them, they rejoiced! These links between the Old and New Testaments help us to see that missions is no afterthought in the plan of God!

Isaiah 49:4-6

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Mission annals recorded a noteworthy obituary earlier this year. Gikita Waewae, who died in Ecuador in February at age eighty, led the small band of Waorani (formerly called Auca) warriors who killed Jim Elliott and four other missionaries in an Ecuadoran jungle in 1956. This martyrdom, easily the most famous of the twentieth century, seemed to many like a waste of five young men's lives. But God used the incident to draw thousands of young people into missions and to open the hearts of the Waorani people, including Gikita Waewae, to the gospel.

God has always worked in mysterious ways. The martyrdom of the "Ecuador Five" is evidence of that. Consider also the Servant of the Lord's lament that His ministry was for "no purpose," "in vain," and "for nothing" (Isa 49:4).

The prophet Isaiah must have puzzled as he recorded these words as coming from the Servant's own mouth. How could such a glorious Person view His purpose as futility?

Today's reading is a great example of the advantage we have in reading Isaiah's Servant Songs on this side of the Cross, with the full revelation of God in our hands. In light of this, it's our understanding that the Servant's reference to "futility" in His mission was fulfilled in Israel's rejection of Jesus at His first coming (Isa. 49:7).

But it is impossible that God's sovereign purpose would be thwarted by any human action. Here is where the mystery of His working comes to light. Israel's rejection of her Messiah became the occasion for God to send Him to offer salvation to the Gentiles. Not only will Israel be restored, but the Servant will also become the light that brings salvation to every corner of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's thrilling to see how God works His perfect will in people's lives despite setbacks and suffering.

However, it's not as easy to be glad when we are facing a painful or trying circumstance that seems to have no purpose. It can be hard to get a proper perspective on a problem, especially when God is not yet finished with the trial.

Isaiah 49:7-9

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

When the Magi came from the East to worship Jesus, the newborn king of the Jews, it is doubtful that they understood the full impact of their role in the divine drama. But the fact that these nobles, whether three or three hundred, came to bow down before Jesus is a great testimony to the prophetic truth of God's Word.

What happened in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) was just a small foreshadowing of the worship the Messiah will receive when He comes again. At that time, He will receive universal praise and worship.

Jesus was despised and rejected by Israel at His first coming. He was the ""servant of rulers"" in His earthly ministry (Isa 49:7). But at His return, earthly kings and princes will leave their thrones to fall before Him.

The second Servant Song of Isaiah reaches beyond the first coming of the Messiah to encompass His return in glory as King of Israel and Ruler of all nations. Even though the triumphant Second Coming of Jesus Christ is yet in the future, it is as certain as the character of God.

How do we know? Because God Himself promised His Servant that it would come to pass. The Lord is the speaker in Isa 49:7, 8, 9. And because He is faithful and is the ""Holy One of Israel"" who has chosen the Messiah for this mission (Isa 49:7), nothing can prevent Him from carrying out His will.

Verses 8-9 look ahead to the millennial kingdom of Christ, called here the ""time of [God's] favor"" and ""the day of salvation."" The reference to Messiah as a ""covenant"" for the people of Israel echoes Isaiah 42:6, where we learned that the Messiah's mission would serve to fulfill God's promises.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you bowed before Jesus and confessed Him as your Lord and Savior (Phil. 2:10, 11note)? We certainly hope you have. But we try not to take it for granted that all of our TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL readers have put their faith in Christ and have the assurance of sins forgiven and eternal life.

Isaiah 49:10-13

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Comet Hale-Bopp created quite a bit of interest last spring as it passed near the sun and was easily visible in the night sky. The comet was discovered in July, 1995, while it was still out beyond the orbit of planet Jupiter. Astronomers say such a discovery was unusual, since comets typically need to be closer before they can be observed. But Hale-Bopp is extremely large and bright, making it visible to telescopes even from such a great distance.

With a nucleus four times larger than Halley's Comet, Hale-Bopp easily outshines its well-known fellow comet. In an even greater way, the Servant of the Lord easily outshines any person who came before Him--or since, for that matter.

This is because the Servant is not a mere human, not just another brilliant light in God's heaven. He is, as we have seen, Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth. As we complete the second of four Servant Songs in the book of Isaiah, Jesus' glory shines through in all of its splendor.

The final verses of the Song in Isaiah 49 describe a time of joy and restoration unlike any we have yet seen on earth. God the Father is speaking to the Servant, offering incredible promises regarding what He will do in ""the time of [His] favor"" (Isa 49:8).

This is a reference to Christ's millennial kingdom, a period yet in the future when the people of Israel will return to their land from the corners of the earth (Isa 49:12). In that day, God will fulfill the promises of His new covenant to Israel (Jer. 31:31, 32, 33, 34) as the Servant fulfills His ministry as ""a covenant for the people"" (Isa. 49:8).

It doesn't take much imagination to picture the joy of the ""captives"" (Isa. 49:9), people held in spiritual as well as physical bondage, as they are led to freedom and blessing by Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Verse 13 reminds us that singing is one form of heavenly worship we will evidently be doing throughout all eternity. Since that is the case, we need to be practicing now! Singing is a wonderful way to enhance your daily worship and devotional time. If you don't have a good hymnal close by, make sure to add one to your devotional library.

Isaiah 49:2 In the shadow of his hand hath He hid me.

These words were addressed to Israel, and must be applied to Him who alone has expressed the true genius and spirit of the Hebrew people, that Prince of the House of David whom we call Master and Lord. And in so far as we belong to and resemble Him, we may claim that God should make these words true of us.

The mouth, like the sharp sword, recalls the portrait of the Son of Man, out of whose mouth a sharp two-edged sword proceeded. We may well ask that our words should partake of the nature of the Word of God, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword (Revelation 1:16).

Hidden in the shadow of God's hand is a safe and strong position for the Christian worker. We all need more of the shadow, and we need not fear it when it is cast by his hand. Our life must be hidden with Christ in God, if we shall come forth largely to influence men. Do not be afraid of the shadow, Christian worker.

The polished shaft is one which is free from rust. Nothing removes rust like friction, whether by the file or sand-paper. We have often to submit to the chafe of tiny irritants in order to keep us polished.

In his quiver hath He hid me. — Always ready for use, within reach of God's hand, waiting to be adjusted to the bowstring, and launched through the air to some joint in the harness; such should be our attitude. But again it is impressed upon us that we must be hidden through long periods of cessation from active use, content with the darkness of the quiver until the moment of our mission has arrived. Then forward, with the might of God's hand thrilling through our souls. - F B Meyer

Isaiah 49:1 - God has a purpose for you. - [Rich Cathers](#)

Jesus isn't the only one who was called of God from His mother's womb. David wrote (Ps 139:13-18) You too have a purpose for life, one designed by God: (Eph 2:10)

Illustration - The late C.S. Lewis said that people can ask only three basic ethical or philosophical questions. To describe them, he used the metaphor of ships at sea. When sailing ships leave port to embark on a journey, sailors must determine three things, according to Lewis. First, they must know how to keep from bumping into one another. This is a question of "social ethics." In other words, how do we get along with one another on this journey called life? Second, they must know how the individual ships remain seaworthy. This is "personal ethics," and it deals with the individual's vices and virtues - with character. Finally, sailors must decide where the ships are going. What is their mission and their destination? This last question is the ultimate one for us. What is the purpose of human life? Why are we here?-- Ed Young, *Been There. Done That. Now What?* (Broadman, 1994), p. 10.

Illustration - In a Peanuts comic strip, there was a conversation between Lucy and Charlie Brown. Lucy said that life is like a deck chair. Some place it so they can see where they are going; some place it so they can see where they have been; and some place it so they can see where they are at present. Charlie Brown's reply: "I can't even get mine unfolded."

God has a design and purpose for each of our lives. He has made only one you, and He made you with specific strengths and weaknesses, relationships, abilities, giftings, talents, all to be used for a purpose. Sometimes we don't like the idea that we must conform to some kind of purpose in life. Yet we won't find true fulfillment until we discover that purpose and begin to pursue it.

Illustration - I have here a guitar string. It is free. I twist one end of it and it responds. It is free. But it is not free to do what a guitar string is supposed to do, to produce music. So I take it, put it in my guitar and tighten it until it is taut. Only then is it free to be a guitar string. By the same token we are free when our lives are uncommitted, but not to be what we were intended to be. Real freedom is not freedom from, but freedom for.

Illustration - An American Indian tells about a brave who found an eagle's egg and put it into the nest of a prairie chicken. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them. All his life, the changeling eagle, thinking he was a prairie chicken, did what the prairie chickens did. He scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat. He clucked and cackled. And he flew in a brief thrashing of wings and flurry of feathers no more than a few feet off the ground. After all, that's how prairie chickens were supposed to fly. Years passed. And the changeling eagle grew very old. One day, he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. Hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, it soared with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings. "What a beautiful bird!" said the changeling eagle to his neighbor. "What is it?" "That's an eagle—the chief of the birds," the neighbor clucked. "But don't give it a second thought. You could never be like him." So the changeling eagle never gave it another thought. And it died thinking it was a prairie chicken. - Ted Engstrom, *The Pursuit of Excellence*

Do you have a sense of purpose in your life? Have you settled for the life of a prairie chicken when God made you to be an eagle?

Isaiah 49:16 - God hasn't forgotten you.(Heb 13:5) - [Rich Cathers](#)

It's during the tough times that we struggle most. It's then that we wonder if God still loves us.

Illustration - Listen to a teacup tell it's story:

"There was a time when I was a red lump of clay. My master took me and he rolled me and he patted me over and over and over. I yelled out "Let me alone " but he only smiled and said, "Not yet". And then I was placed on a spinning wheel, suddenly I was spun around and around and around. "Stop it I'm getting dizzy," I said. The master only nodded and said "Not yet" Then he put me in an oven, I'd never felt such heat. I wondered why he wanted to burn me and I yelled and I knocked on the door and I could see him through the opening and I could read his lips. As he nodded his head he said "not yet." Finally the door did open "whew", and he put me on a shelf and I began to cool. "That's better" I said. And then suddenly he grabbed me and he brushed me and he began to paint me all over. I thought I would suffocate, I thought I would gag, the fumes were horrible. And he just smiled and said, "Not yet". And then suddenly he put me back into an oven, not the first one but one twice as hot, and I knew that I was going to suffocate. And I begged and I screamed and I yelled , and all the time I could see him through the opening, smiling and nodding his head, "not yet, not yet . And then I knew that there was no hope, I knew that I wouldn't make it . I was just ready to give up when the door opened and he took me out an he put me on a shelf .Then an hour later he came back and he handed me a mirror and he said "Look at yourself". And I did. And I said, "That can't be me, I'm beautiful "

If God loves me, will He keep me from times when I'm uncomfortable? No. In fact, those are some of the times He has purposed specifically to help you grow and become more useful. He's got His eye on the timer and the thermostat. He knows just what you need. He hasn't forgotten you.

Isaiah 49:16 "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

I may illustrate this by our Savior's hands. What are these wounds in thy hands, these sacred stigmata, these ensigns of suffering? The graver's tool was the nail, backed by the hammer. He must be fastened to the cross, that his people might be truly graven on the palms of his hands. There is much consolation here. We know that what a man has won with great pain he will keep with great tenacity. Child of God, you cost Christ too much for him to forget you.— C H Spurgeon

And He said unto me: Thou art My Servant; Israel, in Whom I will be glorified.—Isa. 49.3

We now come to the central section of this prophecy; and any stressing of particular sayings, which failed to see them in relation to the whole, would be disastrous. Having revealed the Purpose of God to bring Peace through His Servant, the prophecy now presents the Servant of God, Who is the Prince of Peace. The section presents Him, first as sustained through Travail (Isa 49–53) ; and then as singing in Triumph (Isa 54–57). The first part is made up of words of the Servant, and oracles concerning Him. This chapter opens with the voice of the Servant Himself telling of His call. These are the first words of Jehovah in that call. They are inclusive. To this foreordained One, Jehovah says: "Thou art My Servant;" and the value of that is interpreted in the words: "Israel, in Whom I will be glorified." Another man had borne that name, meaning Ruled-by-God; but he had failed to fulfil the ideal. The nation had borne that name; but in its history God had not been glorified. Now to another Man the suggestive name is given, and in Him the purpose will be accomplished. God will be glorified; and through Him eventually the failing nation will realize its high destiny—through it God will be glorified. The Servant is conscious of the difficulty of the service to be rendered, and speaks of the apparent vanity of His spending of strength; and records the word of Jehovah which sustained Him, declaring that the realization of Israel's destiny is too light a thing for Him; He shall be also a light to the Gentiles, God's salvation to the end of the earth. Let the rest of the chapter—its words to the Servant spoken by Jehovah, and its declarations to Zion—be considered in the light of this record of the call of Jehovah.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 50

Isaiah 50:10 Who is among you that ... walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God.

This is God's way. In the darkest hours of the night His tread draws near across the billows. As the day of execution is breaking, the angel comes to Peter's cell. When the scaffold for Mordecai is complete, the royal sleeplessness leads to a reaction in favor of the threatened race. Ah! soul, it may have to come to the worst with thee ere thou art delivered; but thou wilt be! God may keep thee waiting; but He will ever be mindful of His covenant, and will appear to fulfill His inviolable word.F. B. MEYER

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 50](#)

Isaiah 50:4-9

The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious. - Isaiah 50:5

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

The Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper wrote that Jesus Christ's endurance carried Him through the great struggles He faced on earth. "First in the wilderness, then in Pilate's judgment hall, and finally upon the cross, [Jesus] was steadfast. He endured. Satan left nothing untried in his efforts to destroy that glorious, holy, divine life. But the holiness of Jesus was neither marred nor even slightly soiled."

Kuyper's thoughts underscore the uniqueness of our great Savior, who gave Himself willingly to be God's Servant. He who was without sin willingly laid down His life to redeem us. Jesus' absolute sinlessness is what makes His sacrifice for our sins effective.

Once again in Isaiah 50, the Servant speaks for Himself and declares His obedience to God, the extent of His sacrifice, and His confidence that God will uphold Him in His purity.

It is painful to read of the suffering that our sin caused the Lord, even more so when the Servant-Messiah describes in His own words what He would endure. Isa 50:6 is so specific in its detail that we could easily forget this is prophecy, written at least six hundred years before Christ's birth.

The Bible teaches that from God's perspective, Jesus was "the Lamb that was slain" before the world was ever made (Rev. 13:8). That's how much He loved a world that He knew would reject and crucify Him!

It would be amazing enough if Jesus just endured the suffering that came upon Him in the course of carrying out His ministry. But Jesus "offered" Himself as the sacrifice for sin. He chose the cross, moving toward it with deliberate commitment (Isa 50:7; cf. Lk. 9:51) even though, as Kuyper said, Jesus knew that Satan would try everything to destroy Him.

Jesus knew He would not fail, however, because His Father would vindicate Him. The Servant would face His accusers in a series of trials, but they would have nothing to say against Him. Jesus' holiness was never in question.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Servant's questions, "Who is my accuser?" and "Who is he that will condemn me?" (vv. 8-9) are echoed by the apostle Paul in Romans 8:31, 32, 33-note, Ro 8:34-note. We are the ones encouraged to ask the questions in Romans. We can do this not because we are without sin, but because Christ paid for our sins on the cross. Think of it. No one can ever bring up any charge against you if your sins are forgiven in Christ. Doesn't that make you want to thank Him today?

Isaiah 50:4-6

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

During the Battle of New Orleans, American commander Andrew Jackson used martial law powers to jail a local newspaper editor who had criticized him. The editor appealed to a federal judge and obtained a writ of habeas corpus. So Jackson had the judge jailed too. But when martial law was lifted, the judge returned to his bench and issued a contempt citation against Jackson. The general appeared and paid a \$1 (? - typo) fine, then told a supportive crowd, ""Concerning obedience to the laws... as the first duty of a citizen I did not hesitate to comply with the sentence.""

The Servant of the Lord was also obedient, even to His hurt, although the sentence against Him was totally unjust and applied with maximum cruelty.

It is difficult to read these opening verses of Isaiah's third Servant Song without wincing at the thought of the suffering Jesus endured

on our behalf. Isa 50:6 is the only reference we have to a form of torture Jesus must have suffered before being nailed to the Cross.

What did the Lord's Servant do to deserve such punishment? His only ""crimes"" were teaching the Word of God, as we saw yesterday, and offering those who were spiritually weary the rest and refreshment of His salvation (Mt. 11:28, 29, 30).

Isa 50:4, 5 are a wonderful picture of the obedient Servant, ever ready to hear and obey. After all, what is a servant's first obligation but to obey his master? Jesus asserted throughout His ministry that everything He did was in perfect agreement with and obedience to the Father.

That obedience took Jesus all the way to the Cross--and in the Servant's own words, ""I have not drawn back"" (Isa 50:5).

It's true that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, ""My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me."" But the telling moment came when He added, ""Yet not as I will, but as you will"" (Mt. 26:39).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We think of the Lord's Prayer as our model for prayer as believers, and rightly so. But Jesus' prayer of surrender and obedience in the Garden is also the prayer God wants to hear from our lips. Is it possible that you are hesitating to take a step of obedience or surrender that God is calling you to take? Perhaps it involves the issue we talked about on September 5.

Isaiah 50:7-9

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

During Woodrow Wilson's first term as President, his wife Ellen died, and Wilson was devastated. Some months later he met a widow named Edith Galt. After a brief engagement, the couple was married in December, 1915. In the 1916 election, Wilson's opponents began circulating stories of his marital improprieties, suggesting that his wife had died of a broken heart. Wilson wrote to his former pastor, ""I do not know how to deal with the fiendish lies... other than to invite those who repeat them to consult anybody who has known me for any length of time.”

The Servant of the Lord knew exactly what it felt like to be slandered and falsely accused. No person has ever endured so patiently injustices and lies like the ones told against Jesus Christ by His accusers. Even Pilate, an experienced player in the game of setting up an opponent for a fall, was amazed that Jesus could hear so many charges against Him and not answer (Mk. 15:3-5).

But Jesus knew that His vindication lay not in hiring a defense lawyer and amassing evidence confirming His innocence. He left His defense with God (Isa. 50:7, 8a).

Jesus knew exactly what awaited Him when He set out for Jerusalem and the Cross. But as the Lord's obedient Servant, He ""set [His] face like flint"" to do the Father's will (Isa 50:7).

Now let's not get the wrong idea about the Servant's refusal to defend Himself. Jesus wasn't silent before His accusers because He was too meek to speak up. His silence was in fulfillment of prophecy--another Servant Song, as a matter of fact (Isa. 53:7).

Jesus knew the appropriate times to remain silent and when to speak up--earlier in His ministry, He was bold in challenging the religious leaders to prove any charge against Him (Jn. 8:42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47). The language there is very similar to the Servant's challenge in Isa 50:8, 9 of today's text.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Woodrow Wilson's invitation to his accusers to check out the facts is a tried and true way of killing gossip.

As disciples of the One who was wrongly slandered more than any man, we should be the first to refuse accusations against another person without the facts. Why not make this commitment to the Lord concerning gossip: the next time a piece of gossip is brought to you, try to defuse it by offering to accompany the tale-bearer to the source(s) to seek the truth.

Isaiah 50:10-11

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Many of us have heard the chilling German folk story of ""The Pied Piper."” In this centuries-old tale, the town of Hamelin hires a mysterious stranger to get rid of the town's rats. He walks their streets playing a magic flute, and the rats rush to follow him out of town.

Hamelin refuses to pay, however, since the stranger did the job so easily. The ""pied piper"" warns them that he will get his revenge.

One day he appears again, playing his flute. This time it is the children who follow him out of town and through a door that opens magically into a mountain. The door shuts and no one ever sees the children again.

The mysterious stranger was both attractive and deceptive. Those who heard his flute and responded went to their doom. Today, many such ""pied pipers"" seek to draw people into darkness. Only Jesus Christ shines the light of truth into the hearts of all who come to Him.

As the Servant of the Lord, Christ alone shows us the way to the Father (John 14:6). In these closing verses of Isaiah's third Servant Song, the prophet adds a postscript to the Servant's challenge to His accusers.

The Servant had said that anyone who tried to oppose Him would fall apart like a moth-eaten garment. Isaiah, who had seen the Lord in all of His awesome holiness and glory (Isa. 6:1, 2, 3, 4), understood the fear of the Lord. So he offered his testimony to the truth of the Servant's claims.

The Bible tells us that knowledge begins with the fear of the Lord (Pr 1:7). Here we see the value of that fear, or reverent regard for God. As sinful human beings, we need to obey ""the word of [God's] servant"" (Isa. 50:10).

Obeying His Word is what leads us to salvation. All of us need this salvation in Christ--left to ourselves we would wander in sin's darkness.

It's one thing to realize you're in the dark and look for the light. It's another thing to light your own spiritual fire, trying to find your way out of the darkness by following your own ""flaming torch.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Isn't it great to know that after we trust Christ, His light continues to shine on us along the way?

Isaiah 50:4 - Do you know how to encourage others? - [Rich Cathers](#)

Do you have an eye out to see those who are "weary"? Are you aware of those who need encouragement?

Illustration - Dying Preacher - An old preacher was dying. He sent a message for his banker and his lawyer, both church members, to come to his home. When they arrived, they were ushered up to his bedroom. As they entered the room, the preacher held out his hands and motioned for them to sit on each side of the bed. The preacher grasped their hands, sighed contentedly, smiled, and stared at the ceiling. For a time, no one said anything. Both the banker and lawyer were touched and flattered that the preacher would ask them to be with him during his final moments. They were also puzzled; the preacher had never given them any indication that he particularly liked either of them. They both remembered his many long, uncomfortable sermons about greed, covetousness, and avaricious behavior that made them squirm in their seats. Finally, the banker said, "Preacher, why did you ask us to come?" The old preacher mustered up his strength and then said weakly, "Jesus died between two thieves, and that's how I want to go." Funny story, but the truth is, the preacher wasn't very encouraging.

Isaiah 50:4 The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught. (R.V.).

This is a beautiful image. Morning by morning the Lord God draws near his chosen servant and awakens him, calling him by name, giving him some sweet message, and preparing him for the day's errands, duties, and sufferings.

The tongue of the learner. — The sense of the original is somewhat obscured by the use of the word "learned." It should be "disciple": one that learns through being taught. We must be disciples before we can be apostles, and be taught before we teach. We shall never do our best work for God until we accustom ourselves to receive and take his messages; and there is no such time as the early morning for the lowly posture of sitting at the Master's feet to hear his word.

To him that is weary. — Notice that God's messengers are sent to the weary. There are so many of these in the world that special provision must be made for their sustaining and comfort. God needs a great company of Barnabas's sons of consolation, who having been comforted shall know how to comfort others. No kind of ministry needs such careful preparation as that exercised towards the weary and heavy-laden. To learn how to do this involves some months of lonely suffering.

Wakened to hear. — In softest whispers God draws nigh, uncovering the ear, putting back the locks that might intercept his gentlest accent. Only let us see to it that we are not rebellious, or turn away back. Let not the lowliness of the work, the weary mind, the worry about tiny questions, put us off from this sacred enterprise. And let us not be dissuaded by those who would smite, and pluck out the hair. Neither pride nor fear may deter from this sacred work. - F B Meyer

The Lord God hath opened Mine ear; and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward.—Isa. 50.5.

Here again we hear the voice of the Servant of Jehovah; and in these words we have His response to the call of Jehovah. As we saw in the previous chapter, He is represented from the beginning as conscious of the fact that His service means suffering. This consciousness is yet more definitely marked in this record of His response. It grows in intensity until it culminates in the fifty-third chapter. Here, it is a consciousness of the sufferings which His enemies, these being the enemies of Jehovah, will inflict upon Him. The physical figures are arresting—the smiting, the plucking off of the hair, the shame, and the spitting. The call of Jehovah to His Servant was a call to these experiences; and in regard to this fact he said, "The Lord Jehovah hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward." This statement, "The Lord Jehovah hath opened Mine ear," is very significant. We must not confuse it with another great Messianic word, "Mine ears hast Thou opened" (see Psa 40:6), where the reference is to the willing surrender of the Servant to His Master's service. Here the thought is that of the communication of the secret of the Master to His Servant. To His Servant, Jehovah had made known His secrets; He had revealed to Him, not only the experiences awaiting Him, but the meaning and purpose of them. Thus the following statement, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward," means that between Jehovah and His Servant there was no conflict, but perfect agreement. Therefore this response to the call of Jehovah, involving consent to suffering, was vibrant with confidence in the help of Jehovah.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 51

Friday, December 6, 2002

Isaiah 52:1-15

Therefore my people will know my name. - Isaiah 52:6a

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Isaiah's entire life was spent under the shadow of threatening Assyrian power, and he witnessed the ruin of his nation at their hands. When Isaiah was a young man, all of northern Israel was taken captive (734 b.c.). Thirteen years later Samaria fell, and the rest of Israel was carried away. Then the Assyrians came into Judah and carried away 200,000 captives. When Isaiah was an old man, the Assyrians finally were stopped before the walls of Jerusalem (cf. 2Kings 19:1f).

This passage starts out, "Awake, awake, O Zion." Zion is one of the hills on which Jerusalem stands, so Jerusalem is often referred to as "Zion." Isaiah predicted that Jerusalem wouldn't fall into defiled hands again (Isa 52:1) King Hezekiah repaired the temple and reestablished the services there. He was a king who was dedicated to God and to the spiritual rebirth of the nation.

Often the passages in Isaiah have meanings that extend beyond their immediate context, and that may be the case here, since the total redemption of Jerusalem won't occur until the return of Christ to earth.

In the first verses of this chapter, we see God's promises to restore His people (Isa 52:4, 5, 6). Then, in verse 7 Isaiah tells us the good news: peace and salvation are found in God. The people will be comforted and will burst into "songs of joy" because the Lord "has redeemed Jerusalem" (Isa 52:9).

The last verses of Isaiah 52 introduce the theme that will extend into our discussion tomorrow of Isaiah 53. Again we see God refer to Jesus as "my servant" (Isa 52:13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Repeatedly in Isaiah we have seen Jesus referred to as "the servant."

How is your aptitude for service? Since we are followers of Christ, this is an important question

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 51](#)

Isaiah 51:1. Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

God would build for Himself a palace in heaven of living stones. Where did He get them? Did He go to the quarries of Paros? Hath He brought forth the richest and the purest marble from the quarries of perfection? No, ye saints: look to "the hole of the pit whence ye were digged, and to the rock whence ye were hewn!" Ye were full of sin: so far from being stones that were white with purity, ye were black with defilement, seemingly utterly unfit to be stones in the spiritual temple, which should be the dwelling-place of the Most High. Goldsmiths make exquisite forms from precious material; they fashion the bracelet and the ring from gold: God maketh

His precious things out of base material; and from the black pebbles of the defiling brooks He hath taken up stones, which He hath set in the golden ring of His immutable love, to make them gems to sparkle on His finger forever. He hath not selected the best, but apparently the worst of men to be the monuments of His grace; and, when He would have a choir in heaven, He sent Mercy to earth to find out the dumb, and teach them to sing. SPURGEON.

Isaiah 51:6 - Invest in lasting things. -[Rich Cathers](#)

(Mt 6:19-21) Are you spending your time investing in things that are one day going to burn?

Illustration - There is a part of me that doesn't enjoy jigsaw puzzles. I do enjoy the challenge of putting each piece into its place, and I enjoy seeing the finished product, but the part I don't enjoy is when I have to put the puzzle away. My wife says that having the finished puzzle hog the dining room table for six months is long enough. And then all that great work we've done is destroyed and put away. What are you investing your life in?

Illustration - There is a story about a sailor shipwrecked on one of the South Sea islands. He was seized by the natives, hoisted to their shoulders, carried to the village, and set on a rude throne. Little by little, he learned that it was their custom once each year to make some man a king, king for a year. He liked it until he began to wonder what happened to all the former kings. Soon he discovered that every year when his kingship was ended, the king was banished to an island, where he starved to death. The sailor did not like that, but he was smart and he was king, king for a year. So he put his carpenters to work making boats, his farmers to work transplanting fruit trees to the island, farmers growing crops, masons building houses. So when his kingship was over, he was banished, not to a barren island, but to an island of abundance. What are you doing with your life? Are you ready for the next island?

Isaiah 51:12 I, even I, am He that comforteth you.

It is related that in the great Indian Mutiny, when some hundreds of English ladies with their children were shut up in the Residency at Lucknow, and threatened by an immense crowd of rebels, a leaf of the Bible, stained with blood, and used as a common piece of wrapping, was brought in to them, and proved to contain these words. It reminded them of God their Maker; and bade them fear no more the fury of the oppressor, or the failure of bread, because the Lord God was at hand to neutralize the tumult and fury of their foes.

In the Lord our Maker we have the only antidote for alarm and sorrow. At this time the cross had not been erected with its precious revelation of the love of God; and the prophet quotes two of the greatest proofs of God's might — the miracle of Creation, with its over-arching heavens and deep-laid foundations of the earth; and that of the deliverance from Egypt.

Go out into nature, behold the might of God written on his glorious works, and then say to yourself, This God is my Father; and He would rather sacrifice worlds of matter, than forget or forsake his child. It were easier for Him to destroy all that He has made, and re-create it in a moment of time, than allow one of his weakest children that trusts in Him to be overwhelmed by trouble. Then go forth and stand at the cross, and remember that it was for thee. Surely He who went to so great expenditure to purchase thee from the power of hell, will not let thee perish before the malice of man. Furious men are but the foam of the breaker which your Deliverer will put aside. The sea may roar, but it cannot overwhelm. - F B Meyer

Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord.—Isa. 51.1

These words introduce us to what has been aptly described as "a series of short impassioned oracles, mostly of a lyrical character." They continue to the twelfth verse of the next chapter, and are full of abounding joy and confidence, resulting from the vision of the Servant of Jehovah in perfect fellowship with Jehovah for the accomplishment of His redeeming purpose. First, there are three messages to the elect remnant of souls, who amid abounding apostasy are loyal to the Throne, and love righteousness. These begin, "Hearken to Me" (Isa 57:1); "Attend unto Me" (Isa 51:4); "Hearken unto Me" (Isa 51:7); and call such souls to look to the Rock; to attend to the Law which is salvation; and to know no fear. Then follow three messages, each beginning, "Awake, a-wake." In the first case it is the cry of the nation for Divine interference; and it is answered; "I, even I, am He that comforteth you" (Isa 57:9-16). Then it is the call of Jehovah to His people, recognizing the sufferings resulting from sin, but promising deliverance (Isa 57:17-23). Finally it is the call of Jehovah, specifically answering the call of His people. They had said "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of Jehovah"; He replied, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion"; and again promised redemption (52.1-10). All this is concluded by a poetical description of the return of Jehovah to Zion, full of beauty and power. Thus we have summarized the chapter, necessarily running over into the next, in order that the general impression may be gained of what the prophet saw; all of which would result from the suffering service of the Servant of Jehovah.- G Campbell Morgan

Isaiah 52:1-12; 50:1-52:12

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation. Isaiah 52:7

The life of Josiah Henson was the inspiration for Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin. After 41 years as a slave, Henson escaped in 1830 from Maryland to Canada via the Underground Railroad. He settled in Dresden, Ontario, where he pastored a church and started a school for escaped slaves. Recently, the cabin where he and his wife Nancy lived has been restored and is being developed as a historical tourist site commemorating the African-American fight for freedom. The site includes the house and a small museum.

The Messiah, too, came to set the captives free. "Awake! Awake," cries a watchman. "Prepare and purify yourself for this great day of rejoicing. The slaves will be freed, the prisoners redeemed!" This is not just freedom for freedom's sake, but so that "the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God" (52:10). This is welcome news indeed, or at least it will be to the Israelites in exile. The same God whose wrath will catch them like "antelope in a net" will fall irresistibly on their enemies as well. The same God who had set the slaves free in Egypt will also open the door for them to return to their homeland. The New Testament took the image of "beautiful feet" from Isaiah 52:7 and applied it to the Christian imperative to bear witness to the spiritual good news, the gospel of Christ (Rom. 10:14–15; Eph. 6:15).

The glory here goes to God, not Israel. In fact, the obedient Servant is strongly contrasted with sinful Israel. It's not God who forsook the "marriage," but His people. They failed to write His law on their hearts and were swayed instead by human ways of thinking (51:7). The nation's sins needed to be punished. By contrast, the Servant, even though He'll be persecuted and suffer greatly, does not rebel but obeys perfectly. He knows that God will vindicate Him in the end (50:4–9, the third Servant Song).

APPLY THE WORD Our key verse for today praises those who bring good news and proclaim peace and salvation. Does this description fit you? This means sharing the gospel with others in your life, but it also includes sharing words of peace and encouragement to your family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Many people in our world long to hear a word of good tidings—pray that God will show you an opportunity to be a witness of the hope found in Him.

Isaiah 52:13-15

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Although Comet Hale-Bopp has been in the news a lot this year, on a Sunday in late March it was just one of the attractions in the night sky. In what one report called ""an astronomical triple play,"" the comet made its closest approach to earth while a full moon and a near-total lunar eclipse occurred on the same evening. The only problem were the clouds that hid part of the otherwise amazing show.

People will gather in good viewing places and climb to the roofs of their houses to get a look at an unusual occurrence in the sky. When Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord, returns to earth again, every eye will be on Him. And there will be nothing to draw attention away from His glorious coming.

The fourth and final Servant Song of Isaiah (Isa 52:13-53:12) opens with the declaration that the Servant will one day be ""lifted up and highly exalted"" (v. 13). Jesus spoke of being lifted up at His death on the Cross (Jn. 12:32), and this Song certainly focuses on many of the details of His suffering.

But the reference here is to the Servant's exaltation at God's right hand, not to His suffering. In fact, Isaiah used similar language of exaltation to describe God Himself (Isa. 6:1).

The Servant's exaltation makes a striking contrast to the appalling sight of Jesus' body by the time Pilate's soldiers finished beating and flogging Him. Imagine the weakened and bloodied Jesus, brought out to the crowd and introduced by Pilate with the words, ""Here is your king"" (Jn. 19:14).

Now picture our Lord returning in power and glory! Because of His sacrifice on the Cross, He is able to ""sprinkle"" many people in His role as Priest, cleansing them from their sins.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The exciting thing about Jesus' return is that there is nothing preventing Him from coming today!

This truth is not just theological. It has implications that are as practical as this week's schedule on your desk, in your pocket calendar, or posted on your refrigerator.

Isaiah 52:13-15

My servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. - Isaiah 52:13

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Marcus and Narcissa Whitman became martyrs for the gospel due to a tragic mistake. The young missionary doctor and his wife headed for the American Northwest in 1836 to minister to Native Americans in the Oregon Territory. They worked among the Cayuse tribe until 1847, when an epidemic of measles killed a number of children. The Cayuse mistakenly thought Dr. Whitman had caused the disease, and they murdered both him and his wife.

Many of God's servants have been martyred by people who were blinded by hatred and lack of understanding. Jesus said we should not be surprised when the world persecutes His disciples, because that's the way He Himself was treated (Jn. 15:18, 19, 20, 21). God's Servant-Messiah suffered at the hands of sinners in ways we will never completely understand.

The prophet Isaiah saw a glimpse of Christ's arrest, trial, and suffering. This final section of the "Servant Songs" (52:13-53:12) deals with the Servant's suffering--except for the last verse, which looks forward to His exaltation. Despite Christ's terrible suffering, the end of the story will be glorious.

Yesterday we talked about the Servant's holy character and the total injustice of His mistreatment. This thought is repeated in God's statement, "My servant will act wisely" (Isa 52:13). Jesus always did what His Father wanted Him to do (Jn. 8:29). Our Savior's perfect obedience, even to the cross (Phil. 2:8), is the reason He is "highly exalted" in heaven.

Why were so many people "appalled" or astonished at Jesus? The text suggests that one reason was the terrible physical abuse He underwent during His trials and crucifixion. It's not hard to imagine the crowds in Jerusalem staring in horror at what their leaders and the Romans did to Jesus.

But there could be more to this astonishment. Isaiah says in verse 15 that kings and nations will be speechless when they finally realize the awful mistake they made by putting to death the only one who can provide cleansing for sin. This will happen when the Servant who had no physical beauty (Isa. 53:2) will be revealed in glorious splendor at His second coming.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today is devoted to expressing our love to the special people in our lives.

It's also a perfect day to meditate on the amazing love that caused Jesus Christ to trade the glory of heaven for the pain of the cross. It's even more amazing that He did it for us when we had nothing to offer Him. Love like this deserves our response today. If you have a favorite hymn that expresses your love for the Savior, sing it to Him as a sacrifice of praise.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Philippians 2:5-8

He was ... a man of sorrows ... familiar with suffering. - Isaiah 53:3

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

During World War II, the U.S. Dorchester transport was sailing off the coast of Greenland when it was torpedoed and began to sink. Realizing that there were not enough life preservers, four chaplains, also on board, removed their life jackets and handed them to four soldiers. In horror, the surviving soldiers watched the chaplains, arms linked and voices raised in prayer, drown in the icy waters.

It's hard to grasp such self-sacrifice. The greatest act of self-sacrifice ever known was when the One whose eternal nature we are studying took on the "very nature" of a servant so that He might die in our place (Phil. 2:7,8-note). Understanding our Lord as the Suffering Servant will prepare us to begin our look at His incarnational names tomorrow.

Among Isaiah's numerous messianic prophecies are four remarkable "Servant Songs" (Isa. 42:1, 2, 3, 4; 49:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; 50:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; and 52:13–53:12). We will look only at the last one, but anyone who reads all four will be blessed. Contrary to the political messiah anticipated by many, the Servant Songs suggested a very different Redeemer. Let's look at Isaiah 52:13–53:12 to discover the Servant's mission and how Jesus fulfilled it.

In Isaiah 52:14, we read that the Servant's appearance was disfigured and His form marred. Mark 15:17, 18, 19 describes the terrible beating Jesus received just prior to His crucifixion. Isaiah 53:1, 3 says that the Servant will be rejected; Mark's gospel recounts the horrible insults and mockery Jesus received on the cross (Mk 15:31, 32). Isaiah 53:7, 8 says the Servant will be like a silent lamb led to slaughter. All four gospels affirm Jesus' silence during the sham trial He endured (Matt. 26:63; Mark 15:5; Luke

23:9; John 19:9). Finally, Isaiah 53:12 says that the Servant will bear "the sin of many, and [make] intercession for the transgressors" 2Corinthians 5:21 says that God made "him who had no sin to be sin for us."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most of us don't like being treated like a servant. Oswald Chambers wrote, "Towels and dishes... all the ordinary sordid things of our lives, reveal more quickly than anything what we are made of."

Isaiah 52:7 - Go and Tell Them - Rich Cathers

Illustration - An example of beautiful feet. DO YOU BELIEVE IN EASTER?

Edith Burns was a wonderful Christian who lived in San Antonio, Texas. She was the patient of doctor by the name of Will Phillips. Dr. Phillips was a gentle doctor who saw patients as people. His favorite patient was Edith Burns. One morning he went to his office with a heavy heart and it was because of Edith Burns. When he walked into that waiting room, there sat Edith with her big black Bible in her lap earnestly talking to a young mother sitting beside her. Edith Burns had a habit of introducing herself in this way: "Hello, my name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" Then she would explain the meaning of Easter, and many times people would be saved. Dr. Phillips walked into that office and there he saw the head nurse, Beverly. Beverly had first met Edith when she was taking her blood pressure. Edith began by saying, "My name is Edith Burns. Do you believe in Easter?" Beverly said, "Why yes I do." Edith said, "Well, what do you believe about Easter?" Beverly said, "Well, it's all about egg hunts, going to church, and dressing up." Edith kept pressing her about the real meaning of Easter, and finally led her to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Dr. Phillips said, "Beverly, don't call Edith into the office quite yet. I believe there is another delivery taking place in the waiting room. After being called back in the doctor's office, Edith sat down and when she took a look at the doctor she said, "Dr. Will, why are you so sad? Are you reading your Bible? Are you praying?" Dr. Phillips said gently, "Edith, I'm the doctor and you're the patient." With a heavy heart he said, "Your lab report came back and it says you have cancer, and Edith, you're not going to live very long." Edith said, "Why Will Phillips, shame on you. Why are you so sad? Do you think God makes mistakes? You have just told me I'm going to see my precious Lord Jesus, my husband, and my friends. You have just told me that I am going to celebrate Easter forever, and here you are having difficulty giving me my ticket!" Dr. Phillips thought to himself, "What a magnificent woman this Edith Burns is!" Edith continued coming to Dr. Phillips. Christmas came and the office was closed through January 3rd. On the day the office opened, Edith did not show up. Later that afternoon, Edith called Dr. Phillips and said she would have to be moving her story to the hospital and said, "Will, I'm very near home, so would you make sure that they put women in here next to me in my room who need to know about Easter." Well, they did just that and women began to come in and share that room with Edith. Many women were saved. Everybody on that floor from staff to patients were so excited about Edith, that they started calling her Edith Easter; that is everyone except Phyllis Cross, the head nurse. Phyllis made it plain that she wanted nothing to do with Edith because she was a "religious nut". She had been a nurse in an army hospital. She had seen it all and heard it all. She was the original G.I. Jane. She had been married three times, she was hard, cold, and did everything by the book. One morning the two nurses who were to attend to Edith were sick. Edith had the flu and Phyllis Cross had to go in and give her a shot. When she walked in, Edith had a big smile on her face and said, "Phyllis, God loves you and I love you, and I have been praying for you." Phyllis Cross said, "Well, you can quit praying for me, it won't work. I'm not interested." Edith said, "Well, I will pray and I have asked God not to let me go home until you come into the family." Phyllis Cross said, "Then you will never die because that will never happen," and curtly walked out of the room. Every day Phyllis Cross would walk into the room and Edith would say, "God loves you Phyllis and I love you, and I'm praying for you." One day Phyllis Cross said she was literally drawn to Edith's room like a magnet would draw iron. She sat down on the bed and Edith said, "I'm so glad you have come, because God told me that today is your special day." Phyllis Cross said, "Edith, you have asked everybody here the question, 'Do you believe in Easter?' but you have never asked me." Edith said, "Phyllis, I wanted to many times, but God told me to wait until you asked, and now that you have asked..." Edith Burns took her Bible and shared with Phyllis Cross the Easter Story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Edith said, "Phyllis, do you believe in Easter? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is alive and that He wants to live in your heart?" Phyllis Cross said, "Oh I want to believe that with all of my heart, and I do want Jesus in my life." Right there, Phyllis Cross prayed and invited Jesus Christ into her heart. For the first time Phyllis Cross did not walk out of a hospital room, she was carried out on the wings of angels. Two days later, Phyllis Cross came in and Edith said, "Do you know what day it is?" Phyllis Cross said, "Why Edith, it's Good Friday." Edith said, "Oh, no, for you every day is Easter. Happy Easter Phyllis!" Two days later, on Easter

Sunday, Phyllis Cross came into work, did some of her duties and then went down to the flower shop and got some Easter lilies because she wanted to go up to see Edith and give her some Easter lilies and wish her a Happy Easter. When she walked into Edith's room, Edith was in bed. That big black Bible was on her lap. Her hands were in that Bible. There was a sweet smile on her face. When Phyllis Cross went to pick up Edith's hand, she realized Edith was dead. Her left hand was on John 14: "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Her right hand was on Revelation 21:4, " And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Phyllis Cross took one look at that dead body, and then lifted her face toward heaven, and with tears streaming down here cheeks, said, "Happy Easter, Edith - Happy Easter!" Phyllis Cross left Edith's body, walked out of the room, and over to a table where two student nurses were sitting. She said, "My name is Phyllis Cross. Do you believe in Easter?" It doesn't take much. Just a loving heart.

Illustration - I received this through e-mail yesterday ...

(Pastor's Note: If you're listening to the tape of the message, at this point I read a story about a pastor's wife on board Alaska Airlines Flight 261 who supposedly was heard on the cockpit voice recorder preaching the gospel to the other passengers just before their final dive into the Pacific Ocean in January, 2000. As far as I can tell, this story has turned out to be a possible hoax. There was indeed a pastor's wife, Linda Knight, on board the flight, and her son, Jeff had apparently made a statement that he wouldn't have been surprised if his mom had been preaching in the aisle of the plane as it went down. The supposed testimony of a pilot who had heard the woman preaching on the tapes from the flight recorder are apparently bogus. I deeply regret that I got swallowed up in a hoax and passed it on to you. Please forgive me. I have taken the story out of my notes, though my comments after the story are still appropriate. My notes continue ...)

... what most of us don't realize is that there's not much difference with us. We may not be aware that the plane is going down, and for some, the plane takes a bit longer before it crashes, but the truth is, death is all around us and we're all going to die someday. We're all on the same plane. One of the gals in our church buried her father last week. I did a funeral for another gal's grandfather on Friday and will be doing another funeral on Tuesday. We're all going to die. The question is, will we bring others with us to heaven?

Isaiah 52:11 Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.

The chosen people are at the end of the seventy years' captivity; the time of their deliverance from Babylon has arrived. Their Almighty Deliverer, throwing back the loose sleeve of his robe, to leave his arm free, makes ready for an unusual exercise of power. There will be no need of haste as when the people fled at night from Egypt. They may not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for their Divine Leader would precede them, and his escort would be their rearguard.

This is the summons to us all who may have been in captivity to Babylon in any form. We are to arise and depart, shaking loose the bonds of our captivity. Let us follow the cloudy pillar of God's presence guiding us continually, and let us not be always looking behind, as though dreading the recurrence of past sins and mistakes. They shall not pursue those whom God has delivered; or, if they do, they shall not overtake. It is an unspeakable comfort to those who have sinned to know that the old temptations and forms of bondage are intercepted by the presence of the Eternal God, just as his cloud intercepted Pharaoh's host.

The one matter about which we must be scrupulously careful is our cleanliness. Of old, Cyrus entrusted Ezra with the holy vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. Their custodians needed to be holy. We, too, have to bear the sacred trust of God's holy Name and Gospel. His day, his Book, the doctrines of evangelical truth, his honor, are among the vessels which we are to carry through the world. We, too, must be holy, cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; coming out, and not touching the unclean thing. - F B Meyer

Behold, My Servant shall deal wisely, He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.—Isa. 52.13

With these words we are introduced to the last movement in the presentation of the suffering Servant of Jehovah, a movement, in which the sense of triumph is present through all the amazing unveilings of travail. The short paragraph with which this chapter closes introduces and belongs to the next chapter. It constitutes a pregnant summary of what here is given to detail. Moreover it is a Divine summary of what there, is human observation. These are the words of Jehovah concerning His Servant. While we have stressed only the opening words, a consideration of them involves the whole paragraph. Observe carefully then, that taken as a whole, it is a declaration of the victory and exaltation of His Servant. So it begins; so it ends. At the heart of it all, the fact of suffering is recognized. That recognition is contained in these words: . . . many were astonished at Thee." That is a graphic and awe-inspiring reference to the impression made upon men by the appalling spectacle of Him in the hours of His suffering. It is further emphasized by the words in parenthesis: "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." But now

most carefully observe the full statement. That reference to suffering is introduced by the words "Like as," and these are completed in the "So," which leads on to "shall He sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at Him." Thus then, we behold the Servant of Jehovah from the standpoint of Jehovah. His sufferings are seen. They are beyond compare. But the issue and result of them is commensurately incomparable. "Like as . . . So." To apprehend the glory is to fathom the sufferings. To fathom the sufferings is to apprehend the glory. We are not equal, with our finite intelligence, to do the one or the other, for the sufferings and the glory are infinite. But we can trust, and worship.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 53

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows. Isaiah 53:3

In his epistles, the apostle Paul spoke of a "mystery revealed." To the Romans he wrote about "the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known" (Rom 16:25–26). He explained to the Ephesians: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6; cf. Col. 1:26–27). To the Colossians he put it more simply—"the mystery of God, namely, Christ" (Col. 2:2).

At the heart of the mystery of the gospel lies the mystery of a suffering Redeemer, the paradox of a servant King. And nowhere is this mystery and paradox put more powerfully than in the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah. This poem can be divided into five stanzas of three verses each. The first stanza introduces the Servant or Messiah. To some extent, He's what we would expect—a wise and exalted figure. But in other ways He's a surprise—disfigured and marred. And He's going to "sprinkle" or redeem many nations, not just Israel. An unexpected mystery is being prophesied and revealed here.

The second stanza focuses on the unexpectedness of His being. The Messiah is supposed to be a king, but here He's "a man of sorrows." The third stanza deals with the unexpectedness of His mission. He's supposed to rescue and conquer, bringing justice and peace, but here He's "pierced for our transgressions." He's supposed to be received with praise and acclaim, but here He's misunderstood and wounded.

The fourth stanza goes on to describe the unexpectedness of His fate. He's supposed to be crowned as a king, but here He's "led like a lamb to the slaughter" and "assigned a grave with the wicked," a victim of injustice. The fifth stanza summarizes the purpose of all this: Salvation. The Messiah's redemptive suffering is God's will, and so His death won't be the end. "He will see the light of life" again—that is, He'll be resurrected!

APPLY THE WORD Our prayer is that the prophetic vision and words of Isaiah are thrilling your heart this month. If so, share this joy with others! You could plan a special praise and worship time for your family or small group with hymns and choruses based on texts from Isaiah. You could also choose songs that focus on attributes of God exalted in Isaiah. Even though it's not Easter or Christmas, it's still a great time to get together and listen to a recording of Handel's Messiah as well, paying special attention to the texts from Isaiah.

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 53](#)

Isaiah 53: Notice the paradoxes:—

- Despised, yet accepted and adored.
- Poor, yet rich.
- To die, yet to live.

Isaiah 53:2. In the sight of God, a tender plant; in the sight of man, a root out of a dry ground.

The Rabbis said there must be a double Messiah to fulfil this chapter.- D L Moody

Isaiah 53:5 He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

Two friends are said to come into Vulcan's shop, and to beg a boon of him: it was granted. What was it? that he would either beat them on his anvil, or melt them in his furnace, both into one. But without fiction, here is a far greater love in Christ; for He would be melted in the furnace of wrath, and beaten on the anvil of death, to be made one with us. And to declare the exceeding love, here were not both to be beaten on the anvil, or melted in the furnace; but without us He alone would be beaten on the anvil, He alone melted that we might be spared. THOMAS ADAMS.

Isaiah 53:5 "With his stripes we are healed."

No sprinkling can wash out sin. No confirmation can confer grace. No masses can propitiate God. Your hope must be in Jesus, Jesus smitten, Jesus bruised, Jesus slain, Jesus the substitute for sinners. Whoever believes in him is healed, but all other hopes are a lie from top to bottom.

Do not scourge yourself. "With his stripes we are healed." I beg you, do not think that by some kind of spiritual mortification or terror or horror into which you force yourself you shall be healed. Your healing is in his stripes, not in your own, in his griefs, not in your griefs. I implore you, do not make your repentance into a rival of the stripes of Jesus, for so it would become an antichrist. When your eye is full of tears, look through them to Christ whom you may see, whether your eye be wet or dry. In the Christ on the cross there are five wounds, but you have not to add even another one of your own to them. In him, and in him alone, is all your healing; in him who, from head to foot, becomes a mass of suffering, that you, diseased from head to foot, might from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot be made perfectly whole.— C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 53:6 "All we like sheep have gone astray."

Man is here compared to a beast, for sin brings out the animal part of us, and while holiness allies us to angels, sin degrades us to brutes. We are not likened to one of the more noble and intelligent animals, but to a silly sheep. All sin is folly; all sinners are fools.

Isaiah 53:6 "The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Sin I may compare to the rays of some evil sun. Sin was scattered throughout this world as abundantly as light, and Christ is made to suffer the full effect of the baleful rays which stream from the sun of sin. God as it were holds up a burning glass and concentrates all the scattered rays in a focus upon Christ. That seems to be the thought of the text, "The Lord hath focused upon him the iniquity of us all." That which was scattered abroad everywhere is here brought into terrible concentration.— C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 53:7 "He openeth not his mouth."

In his questioning our Lord Jesus said not a word in self-defense. He knew that it availed not for a lamb to plead with wolves. He was well-aware that whatever he said would be misconstrued and made a fresh source of accusation. What power he thus exerted in remaining silent! Perhaps nothing displays more fully the omnipotence of Christ than this power of self-control.— C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 53:10 "It pleased the LORD to bruise him."

If God were to lay his finger on any one of us, only his finger, we should be struck with sickness, paralysis, and death. Then think of God smiting! God must smite sin wherever he sees it. So when he saw our sin laid on his Son, he smote him with the blows of a cruel One, till beneath that smiting his Son cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).— C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 53:4-12

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. - Isaiah 53:5

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Pang Suk-fong, age 20, had her whole life ahead of her. As she walked down a Hong Kong street one day, no doubt her head was filled with questions and thoughts of the future. But a freak, tragic accident ended her life that very afternoon. A heavy bucket filled with paint fell from the window of a hotel under construction and killed her instantly.

If this young woman had known what was going to happen, what do you think she would have done? Probably walked down a different street, one with no construction hazards. Or if she'd looked up and saw that paint can dropping, she would have jumped out of the way. That's common sense. People have a great desire to preserve their own lives!

Consider, then, our Lord Jesus. He knew He was going to die. He knew He was going to be separated from His Father. He knew He would pay the penalty for the sins of the whole world. But He didn't jump out of the way. He didn't choose a different road. He was totally obedient to the will of His Father.

This had been God's plan of redemption all along, and had been prophesied numerous times in Israel's history. In this month of studying how Christ fulfills the Old Testament sacrifices, we turn now during this Passion Week to His sacrifice: His death and resurrection. He is the sacrificial "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29).

In today's famous "suffering servant" reading, much of Isaiah's language is similarly sacrificial. The Messiah will be like a sacrificial lamb or scapegoat, taking the punishment we deserved. Although He will pay the price for our wrongdoing, we won't understand. We will despise Him and continue to go astray. This prophecy clearly indicates a doctrine of substitutionary atonement (Is. 53:4, 5, 6, 7).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In today's culture, we don't always realize all that Christ's suffering on the cross did for us. He satisfied God's wrath, He brought us peace, He absorbed our guilt, and He freed us from the penalty of death. And this only begins to scratch the surface of His wondrous work on our behalf!

Isaiah 53:1-3

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

A powerful empire-builder once wrote this about Jesus Christ: ""I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires, and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist... Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes men, and His will confounds me. Between Him and whoever else in the world there is no comparison. He is truly a being by Himself.""

It may surprise you to find that these words were uttered by Napoleon Bonaparte, since history does not usually present him in this light. But whether our surprise is valid, the emperor's astonishment at the Person and message of Jesus Christ is perfectly placed. There is no one like the Lord's Servant.

In fact, Napoleon's astonishment at Christ will be shared by the nation of Israel. Someday Israel will, along with many Gentile nations, realize that they badly misunderstood who Jesus was at His first coming. He came as the promised Messiah in fulfillment of prophecy but was rejected.

Speaking for the Jewish remnant who will experience restoration in the Messiah's millennial reign (Isa. 49:8, 9), Isaiah laments the disbelief surrounding the Servant's message. This is all the more regrettable because the Servant's career was a testimony to the power of God. Isa 53:1 in today's text even says that He is the Lord's ""arm""!

Isaiah then cites the reasons Israel failed to esteem the Servant. Jesus' origins did not suggest greatness, although He was a descendant of David (Isa 11:1). Likewise, there was nothing in Jesus' appearance or bearing that would magnetically draw people to Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's reading brings to mind another timeless principle of how God views each of us.

God Himself said, ""Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"" (1Sa 16:7). This refers to Eliab--an attractive man--but one whom God would not choose to be Israel's king.

How we treat others is often based on appearance. Our culture bombards us with media images of people with perfect looks--but we need the wisdom to see people as God sees them.

Isaiah 53:4-6

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

According to a news item from last year, King Hussein of Jordan pardoned a man who had been given a three-year sentence for slandering him. Hussein not only pardoned his critic, but went to the prison personally, took the man by the hand and led him from his cell, then gave him a ride home. The king explained his actions by saying that he could not hold a grudge and that the man's imprisonment was a burden on his soul.

This is an amazing account of a pardon. What prisoner would not be astounded to look up and see the king or the president, reaching out a hand to lead him to freedom? For those who know Jesus Christ this is a wonderful reality, not a daydream or a story off the news wire.

But look at the cost Jesus paid to free us from our sins. Our King did not simply issue a royal decree of pardon. He suffered every stroke of punishment our sins deserved. His body was pierced by the nails in His hands and the spear jabbed in His side. His wounds poured out blood by which the injuries that sin inflicted on us were healed (Isa 53:5).

Yet Isaiah makes it clear that the Servant's suffering was not a cruel accident or a twist of fate. His body and spirit were crushed by the Father, who made His sinless Son to be sin for us so that we might have His righteousness (2Cor. 5:21).

Do you see the tremendous paradox in these verses and others we have studied in the Servant Songs? Isaiah presents the portrait of a Servant who is also a King, an unimpressive and largely unnoticed Person before whom the kings of the earth will someday bow.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Living a life of sin can be as bleak and lonely as being locked up in a dark prison cell. Is there a friend or loved one of yours who is still held in this type of bondage? It is not God's will that anyone be lost (2Pet. 3:9-note). In light of this, you can pray confidently for the Holy Spirit to draw this person to Christ!

Isaiah 53:7-9

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

The ministry of David Brainerd, a missionary to the Indians of New York and New Jersey, has touched countless people for Christ over the past two centuries. And this is despite the fact that he died in 1747 at the age of twenty-nine. After his health began to deteriorate, Brainerd went to live with the great preacher Jonathan Edwards. Brainerd died at the Edwards' home, leaving behind his devotional journals, which Edwards compiled and edited. The resulting work was widely read in America and Great Britain after Brainerd's death and is still available today.

From a human standpoint, we could say that David Brainerd's life was cut dramatically short. But God does not measure life by years only. His Servant was also ""cut off from the land of the living"" (Isa 53:8) at an early age, though He completed the work God gave Him to do.

Today we continue our study of this classic Servant Song. For anyone who knows the story of Jesus, these are familiar words and images, fulfilled in the life and death of our suffering Savior.

We talked earlier this month about Jesus' silence in the face of His accusers. His trials were a mockery, so He refused to dignify the proceedings by trying to defend Himself against the charges. The only time He broke silence was to answer the question of whether He was the Son of God (Mt. 26:62, 63, 64).

The innocence of Jesus was firmly established in prophecy before the occasion of His trials prior to His crucifixion. He was, on the human side, the object of oppression and unjust judgment. He was condemned not for His own crimes, but for the sins of others (Isa 53:8). He was free of any wrong (Isa 53:9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Pastor and Moody Press author Alistair Begg once said that while believers may die early, they never die prematurely. His point is that God's sovereign power is able to preserve us until we have fulfilled His will for us. As someone else has said, this means that you are immortal in the will of God!

Isaiah 53:10-12

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

John Bell received a new heart pacemaker this year at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Mr. Bell had outlived the battery on his old pacemaker, which was put in eleven years ago. The surgery was newsworthy because Mr. Bell is 115 years old and is in good health. The doctor who replaced the pacemaker said he would be delighted to provide Mr. Bell with a new one when he is 125 years old!

Most people enjoy hearing about someone who seems to defy the ravages of aging and who enjoys a long life. The Servant of the Lord will enjoy prolonged life (Isa 53:10) after being ""cut off"" from the living by His death and burial (see vv. 8-9).

Once again, we see how Christ's death and resurrection give full meaning to Isaiah's prophecy. The "offspring" of the Servant are those who believe on Him and become His children (Jn 1:12). Our hope of resurrection and new life would be in vain if Christ were

not raised (1Co 15:16, 17, 18, 19).

In these closing, triumphant verses of Isaiah's Servant Songs, we still read of the Servant's suffering and death--a death of humiliation as He was executed like a common criminal. But by now we have seen a common thread running through these references. Far from being merely tragic or unjust, the Servant's terrible suffering and agonizing death is wonderfully beneficial, securing eternal salvation for all who will believe on Him.

Isa 53:11 is a clear affirmation of Jesus' saving power. The phrase ""His knowledge"" probably means ""by knowledge of Him""--Peter said there is no other name on earth in which salvation can be found except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Over the past few days, our minds have been filled with visions of glory.

Sometimes, though, the benefits of salvation and the joys of heaven can seem remote in light of the broken-down car, leaky roof, or rebellious child we have to deal with today.

Isaiah 53:4-8; John 1:29-34

It was not with perishable things that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. -

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

If you hang out much with the five-and-under crowd, you know that baby lambs are especially popular at the local children's petting zoo. Their gentle bleating, velvety noses, and soft wool make them irresistible. Perhaps this also explains why the song "Mary Had a Little Lamb" has remained in the Top Ten with this same crowd for so long!

This imagery is sometimes hard to reconcile with our understanding of the Exalted Christ, seated in victory at the right hand of the Father. It's often easier for us to understand how we are like sheep than to grasp how He's like a lamb.

On the one hand, the innocence and gentleness of a lamb accords well with our understanding of Jesus, but on the other hand a lamb's dependence and vulnerability seem incompatible with the Risen Christ. A brief survey of the Bible, however, shows just how the powerful image of a lamb deepens our appreciation of Jesus Christ.

You may recall from the Exodus narrative how the Lord commanded each Israelite family to sacrifice a lamb in preparation for the departure from Egypt (Ex 12:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32). The lamb was to be roasted and completely consumed. Some of the blood from the slain lamb, however, was to be put on each family's doorposts so that the destructive plague sent by the Lord would "pass over" its house. In a very dramatic way, the Passover lamb prefigured another sacrificial Lamb whose innocent blood was shed for those who believed in Him.

Isaiah drew upon this sacrificial understanding of a lamb when he wrote about the Suffering Servant. Notice how he described the Servant as One who took on our infirmities and sorrows (Isa 53:4)? Like an innocent lamb led to slaughter (Isa 53:7), He died to pay the price of our sin.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The book of Revelation contains the richest and fullest portrait of the Lamb who was slain and before whom all creation bows down!

Isaiah 53:1-12

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. - John 12:32

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Yesterday we mentioned the divine irony of the Servant being the most highly exalted. Today we see another divine irony: the Cross. What appeared to be a terrible defeat, is really the dramatic victory of God.

It might be tempting for some people to see the crucifixion of Jesus as an accident. How could God let His Son be put to death so cruelly? But Isaiah 53 predicts the suffering of Jesus and gives us a vivid account of His crucifixion, assuring us that the Cross was no surprise or accident for God.

We're looking at this passage during the Christmas season because it is central to why Jesus was born. Isaiah 53 is also one of the most personal chapters--notice how many times the pronouns our, us, and we appear. There is no doubt that the suffering and death of Jesus is related to us and our sinful condition. It is not some event that we can dissect analytically without getting involved.

What is the connection between the Cross and us? Jesus bore our sins, our transgressions and iniquities. And His punishment brought us peace and healing (Isa 53:5, 6). As we read the description of our sin and Jesus' pain, we feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude that He would love us enough to pay this price.

Each one of us has sinned, and Isaiah made it clear that when Christ died on the Cross, He willingly took our place. He died alone with our sins upon Him.

The first nine verses tell of the suffering of the Savior, but the remaining verses tell of His glory. God had foreordained the Cross to accomplish our redemption (Isa 53:10). Jesus not only died, but He rose again from the grave in victory (Isa 53:11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

At first glance, it might be easy to miss the intensely personal words in Isaiah 53. As you reflect on Christ's work for you, read through this chapter of Isaiah again. This time, use pronouns I, my, and mine. Insert your own name where it says "for many."

Isaiah 53:1-6

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. - Isaiah 53:5

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

As George Washington made his way to New York for his presidential inauguration, he was honored with grand celebrations everywhere he went. The nation was in love with its Revolutionary War hero and premiere President. But John Adams Washington's Vice-President, received no such celebration. He told his wife Abigail, "My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived."

Some would say things haven't changed much since 1789. The office of Vice-President is still unglamorous, and its many responsibilities are rarely recognized publicly. Many of the people who have held it are easily overlooked in history, remembered only as the answers to trivia questions.

Some of the most important Christians are servants who escape recognition and praise. By definition, servants do their work away from the spotlight. They rarely draw attention to themselves, and they don't stand out in a crowd.

Jesus perfectly fit the profile of a servant in His first advent. He was born in the most humble circumstances without much public attention. Even the nation's religious leaders, who knew Micah's prophecy concerning Messiah's birth (Matt. 2:5, 6), didn't bother to go to Bethlehem to verify the Magi's report.

Isaiah also prophesied that the Servant would come from such an unlikely place ("dry ground," Isa 53:2) that people would easily overlook Him. Jesus' hometown of Nazareth was so obscure that even one of His disciples was shocked by the idea of Messiah being a Nazarene (Jn. 1:46, see the Feb. 20 study).

The Messiah would not be visually stunning or adorned with splendor. It's true that Jesus often drew large crowds. But the people were drawn mostly by His miracles and the power of His words, and they turned away from Him in His suffering. The prophet's words were fulfilled in Jesus--but His rejection and suffering had a purpose. Our Lord's crushing, humiliating death brought us healing from the deadly disease of sin. God laid this suffering on His Servant for our sake, and the Servant bore it willingly!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Imagine sitting in a prison cell, having been found guilty of a crime, when the message comes that someone else has taken the punishment. You are forgiven, and free to go. That's what Christ has done for us. He's set us free from the imprisonment of sin! And we can offer that message of freedom to people who are still carrying the guilt of their sin. Who can you share the good news with this week?

Isaiah 53:7-12

I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong. - Isaiah 53:12

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Here's a footnote to yesterday's illustration about the inauguration of George Washington. The April 30, 1789 event--the first of its kind--brought this gushing report from a Baltimore newspaper: "Perhaps that day has exhibited what has never happened before in any part of the globe; above three millions of people, scattered over a country of vast extent, of opposite habits and different

manners, all fixing their hopes on the same man, and unanimously voting for him only."

Perhaps that reporter got a little carried away with the excitement of the event. However, his description of Washington's first inauguration gives us a small sense of what it will be like when the Messiah is inaugurated as King of Kings and Lord of Lords at His second coming.

Isaiah closes this Servant Song with a brief reference to Christ's future glory (Isa 53:12). The picture is of a victorious general, taking the spoils of victory from His enemies and dividing them among His own forces.

The people of Israel loved the concept of their Messiah as a conquering warrior and king. Many Israelites in Jesus' day were longing for Messiah to return and crush the hated Roman army that was occupying Palestine.

What so many of the people missed, though, was the fact that Messiah did appear in their time. But He came as a submissive Servant, giving His life as a ransom for sin. Jesus Himself said it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die before entering His glory (Lk. 24:26).

Isaiah saw the same truth, although he probably didn't understand all the details of the prophecies he recorded. That makes the accuracy of Isa 53:7, 8, 9, 10, 11 even more astonishing. Every major detail of Jesus' suffering is present: His silence in the face of His accusers, His death ("cut off") for the sins of others, His burial in a rich man's tomb (Matt. 27:57, 58, 59, 60), and His resurrection ("he will see the light of life," Isa 53:11).

A Savior like Jesus Christ deserves ultimate glory. Someday, the whole world will see the inauguration of His kingdom.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Isaiah 52--53 give us an overwhelming picture of the price Jesus had to pay to satisfy God's judgment against sin. Salvation is God's "indescribable gift" to us (2Cor. 9:15).

One of the best ways we can show our gratitude for this gift is by dealing seriously with sin in our lives. The Bible urges us to confess our sins and enjoy God's cleansing (1Jn. 1:9). Let's neither ignore nor tolerate sins that Jesus paid so dearly to forgive.

Isaiah 53:1-12

We all, like sheep, have gone astray... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. - Isaiah 53:6

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

In a recent issue of Worldwide Challenge magazine, Erik Segalini relates this story from the life of Andrew Murray, the South African pastor and author whose works still have great influence today.

Murray was once riding to the aid of someone who needed him, crossing seventy miles of wolf-infested plain to do so. At one point Murray stopped to let his horse graze, but the animal sensed the presence of wolves and galloped away. Murray was forced to continue the dangerous journey on foot. ""I prayed to God to keep me and walked straight on,"" Murray explained. ""The wolves snapped at me but did not touch me.""

Andrew Murray's experience in the wilds of nineteenth-century South Africa provides a helpful illustration of Jesus Christ's journey on earth. Jesus moved among ""wolves"" as the innocent Lamb of God, withholding His lion-like power. His enemies sought to attack and harm Him. And while they did tear His flesh (Ps 22:13-[note](#)) and hang Him on the cross, they could not keep Him from accomplishing His mission of redemption.

Isaiah 53 is one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Old Testament. It is a panorama of Jesus' life from His incarnation to His death, resurrection, and exaltation by God. Jesus' rejection by the nation of Israel is explained, though not excused, by the fact that He was unremarkable in His physical appearance (Isa 53:2). The Messiah was ""despised and rejected"" rather than receiving the esteem He was due (Isa 53:3).

But this man who was considered to be unimportant by those in power died as a substitute for the sins of the entire human race. All of us had gone astray like sheep, so Jesus became the lamb who willingly subjected Himself to suffering and humiliation to save us.

The prophet also wrote that Jesus would be cut off in the prime of life with no descendants (Isa 53:8). And, even though God's Servant died, Isaiah prophesied that He would again see ""the light of life"" (Isa 53:11) and enjoy exaltation among the great and strong (Isa 53:12)--because He was willing to give His life for the sins of the world.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

""Who has believed our message?""", Isaiah asked (Isa 53:1). This was a lament for the relative few who would believe the prophecy concerning Israel's Messiah. Believing the message about Jesus Christ is still the most important issue anyone could face today. This Easter season is a wonderful time to bring lost friends and family members to the Lord in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to the truth about the Savior who died for them on the cross. Also, pray that God will use you as a witness to those around you this month.

Isaiah 53:3 - Jesus understands pain - [Rich Cathers](#) (see more of his illustrations and applications below)

Some people don't know how to relate. They just have a hard time understanding what you're talking about.

Illustration - I think I have seen a difference in how people treat their waiters or waitresses at a restaurant. It seems to me that generally those who have worked in a restaurant tend to be more considerate and kind to their waiter than those who have never worked in a restaurant. If you've worked as a waiter, you know just how rude and inconsiderate people can be. You identify with your waiter and tend to be more pleasant and leave a bigger tip. If you've ever tried sharing a problem or concern with someone who can't relate to what you're talking about, you know the frustration.

Lesson - Pray. (Heb 4:15-16) Jesus has been there. He knows what pain and sorrow are all about. And He knows how to help too. As we begin to realize that Jesus knows exactly what we're going through, the proper response on our part is to then come to Him in prayer. Don't underestimate the power of prayer. Did you know that there is actual, scientific proof that prayer works?

Illustration - Dr. William Harris published an article in The Archive of Internal Medicine on October 24, 1999 concerning a 50 week study he conducted at Kansas City's Mid-America Heart Institute involving 990 heart patients. In the study, he had a group of people from a wide variety of Christian groups (35% non-denominational, 27% Episcopalian, and the remainder as other Protestant groups or Roman Catholic) who agreed to pray for these patients. Intercessors were given only the first name of patients whom they had never met and told to pray daily for the next 28 days for a "speedy recovery with no complications" and anything else which seemed appropriate to them. Neither the patients nor the attending physicians knew that the prayer was going on. Only Dr. Harris' team and the hospital administration knew the study was being conducted. At the end of the study, the patients who had been prayed for had shown an 11% reduction in their heart assessment scores over those who had not received prayer. Imagine that! That was with the patients not even knowing they were being prayed for!

Isaiah 53:5 - The Gospel [Rich Cathers](#) (see more of his illustrations and applications below)

The Bible says that all of us are sinners. We have all rebelled against God. (Ro 3:23) The Bible says that our sins bring a separation between us and God. (Isa 59:1-2) In order for there to be a restoration of communication between us and God, someone would have to pay the price to remove our sins. This is what Jesus did, dying in our place.

Illustration - Drawbridge Parable. A man had the duty to raise a drawbridge to allow the steamers to pass on the river below and to lower it again for trains to cross over on land. One day, this man's son visited him, desiring to watch his father at work. Quite curious, as most boys are, he peeked into a trapdoor that was always left open so his father could keep an eye on the great machinery that raised and lowered the bridge. Suddenly, the boy lost his footing and tumbled into the gears. As the father tried to reach down and pull him out, he heard the whistle of an approaching train. He knew the train would be full of people and that it would be impossible to stop the fast-moving locomotive, therefore, the bridge must be lowered! A terrible dilemma confronted him: if he saved the people, his son would be crushed in the cogs. Frantically, he tried to free the boy, but to no avail. Finally, the father put his hand to the lever that would start the machinery. He paused and then, with tears he pulled it. The giant gears began to work and the bridge clamped down just in time to save the train. The passengers, not knowing what the father had done, were laughing and making merry; yet the bridgekeeper had chosen to save their lives at the cost of his son's.

Isaiah 53:6 - We so easily want to go our own way. Sometimes it's a little hard to admit.

Illustration - Ranai Carlton ("Kids of the Kingdom") writes, "During one Sunday school lesson, I was trying to teach the children that we all need God's forgiveness. After the story I quizzed one of the girls. "Lisa, when is a time you might need God's forgiveness?" Noticeably perplexed, Lisa was reassured by my son, who whispered, "It's okay, you don't have to tell her." Then he looked me straight in the eye and said, "We don't have to tell you our problems. This isn't the Oprah Winfrey show." The Bible says that all of us are sinful, whether we want to admit it or not. (Ro 3:23) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Illustration - Yehiel Dinur survived the holocaust of World War II. Many years later, he was called upon to testify at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the architects of the holocaust. As he stepped into the courtroom and saw Eichmann, he broke down in uncontrollable sobs. Was Dinur overcome by hatred? Fear? Terrible memories? "No," said Dinur to Mike Wallace of CBS News. "I was afraid about myself. I am—exactly like he is."

Isaiah 53:9 - Handling a harsh boss

Peter makes an application from Isaiah 53. Watch how Isaiah 53 is woven into the things that Peter says in (1 Pet 2:18-25) quoting from Isa 53:9 in 1 Peter 2:22-23 - Peter is telling the employees to learn to obey what their bosses tell them. And he isn't just talking about the nice bosses, but even the harsh ones. God is pleased when we learn to do what is right, even when it means that we endure "grief, suffering wrongfully". Jesus is going to be our example to follow. What would Jesus do? Peter is now going to quote from Isaiah 53 – {22} Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Quoting from Isaiah 53:9. {23} Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: This will be Peter's interpretation of Isaiah 53:9. More in a minute. {24} Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. Peter is making vague references to Isaiah 53:4 (borne our griefs), 53:5 ("wounded for our transgressions ... stripes ...") {25} For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. Again, quoting Isa 53:6. Instead of going astray, we now have a Shepherd to follow, Jesus. vs.23 - Peter gave us three things that demonstrated how Jesus "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" {23} Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

1. Don't return hurt with hurt. Too often we play "tit for tat" when we argue. Someone says something that hurts our feelings and we feel obligated to fire back with something to hurt them just as much.

Illustration - British author and playwright George Bernard Shaw once sent Sir Winston Churchill two tickets to the opening night's performance of one of his plays. Accompanying the tickets was Shaw's terse note, "Bring a friend if you have one." Churchill, also adept at saying a lot in a few words, replied: "I'll wait for the second night if there is one." That's how not to react. (Pr 15:1) A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

2. Don't threaten. Imagine what kinds of things Jesus could have threatened with! "If you guys don't stop spitting on Me, I'll turn you all into worms!" Husbands and wives – please don't threaten each other with divorce or leaving. It doesn't do anything to resolve the problems and only serves to fracture the bond you have between each other.

3. Let God handle it. It's hard to let go of things, wait, and see what God will do. I usually want to take things into my own hands and try to fix them right away.

Isaiah 53:10 Sometimes God's will for our life involves suffering. -[Rich Cathers](#)

Something inside of us wants to scream when we hear this, but it's true. We think that suffering is unusual, but the early church understood this. Paul and Barnabas made this a part of their ministry's message (Acts 14:21-22) Paul wrote to the Philippians that they would suffer (Phil 1:29) Why suffering? Suffering purifies our faith and makes us grow in endurance and strength of character. (James 1:2-4) I think this is a little of what the process called "pruning" is all about. Jesus said, (John 15:1-2NLT) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. {2} He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

Merrill Tenney notes in his commentary:

Viticulture... consists mainly of pruning. In pruning a vine, two principles are generally observed: first, all dead wood must be ruthlessly removed; and second, the live wood must be cut back drastically. Dead wood harbors insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot, to say nothing of being unproductive and unsightly. Live wood must be trimmed back in order to prevent such heavy growth that the life of the vine goes into the wood rather than into fruit. The vineyards in the early spring look like a collection of barren, bleeding stumps; but in the fall they are filled with luxuriant purple grapes. As the farmer wields the pruning knife on his vines, so God cuts dead wood out from among His saints, and often cuts back the living wood so far that His method seems cruel. Nevertheless, from those who have suffered the most there often comes the greatest fruitfulness. -- Merrill C. Tenney, John: The Gospel of Belief (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), pp.227-28

Isaiah 53:6 The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

The Lord did it, because He was the Lord, and He took on Himself the iniquity of us all. "Made to meet" is the marginal reading; as though many confluent streams poured their black substances into one foaming maelstrom which filled the heart of the dying Savior. Well may the apostle Peter recapitulate his work in the matchless, almost monosyllabic sentence, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

This verse begins and ends with all. We are all alike in having "gone astray." We have not all gone in the same direction, nor all to the same extent. We are not equally far from the fold. But we are all away from it. They say that if sheep can stray, they will; and there is no kind of animal more hopeless and helpless than sheep which have got out of the pen. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass its master's crib; the dog and cat will make their way home, but the sheep wanders on in small and ever smaller companies, until it is entrapped in the rocks, or devoured by wolves, or harried to death by dogs. Such were we. Panting, driven, chased, weary; but Jesus sought us, and brought us back to the fold, and gave us a name and place among his own. We are returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

But ah, how can we forget the cost we have been to the Shepherd! See ye not the wounds in his hands and feet? Know ye not that his heart was lacerated and broken by the burden of our sins? "Our own way," that has been the curse of our lives, and the agony of our Shepherd. Would that it might be for ever blocked against us, and that we might be led in his own way for his Name's sake! - F B Meyer

He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.—Isa. 53.11

Is there any single statement in all the Oracles of God which brings to the heart of the child of God quite so profound a sense of perfect joy as this? I think not. We have joy in our forgiveness, and in all the riches of our inheritance in our Lord; we have even greater joy in all the victories of our Lord, in the glories which are His, resulting from His passion. But the joy of knowing that He will be satisfied is still greater. In this great chapter we are introduced to the mystery of the suffering of the Servant of God, in a way which can only make the lips dumb, and bow the soul to the most complete prostration of wonder and amazement. So great is the revelation that pity is impertinent; and sympathy is irreverent. We can only watch, and wonder, and adore, as we see Him; of men, despised and rejected; of God, bruised, and put to grief; in Himself, a Man of sorrows; and acquainted with grief; at last, cut off out of the world of the living, His grave with the wicked. And all this because, "All we like sheep have gone astray . . . and Jehovah hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." With necessary self-abnegation and complete abasement and shame, I am constrained to say: Was it worth while? That is, was man worth it? Am I worth it? The answer is in these words: "He . . . shall be satisfied!" Then I have but one thing to say, and it is this:- G Campbell Morgan

Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

ISAIAH 54

Isaiah 54:1-10

As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. - Isaiah 62:5b

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

A recent study by Rutgers University found that fewer Americans are getting married these days, and that of those who do, fewer than ever say they are "very happy." The national marriage rate has dropped 43 percent over the last four decades, with many couples opting to live together outside marriage.

One of the study's authors believes that popular culture reinforces this trend: "With the breakdown of the family, peer culture, including pop culture, has gotten stronger. Nothing could be more anti-marriage than much of popular culture."

In such times, it's more important than ever that believers have a biblical understanding of marriage. Along these lines, it's instructive to consider today's reading and the biblical metaphor of God as Husband.

In the Old Testament, prophets frequently spoke of God as a husband and Israel as a faithless wife, whoring after idols (see, for example, Jer. 3:8, 9 or Ezek. 16:32, 33, 34). But, even though He had every right to divorce her, God pursued and loved Israel nonetheless.

That's what we find in today's reading. God is Israel's husband (Isa 54:5). His key attributes in this regard are His "everlasting kindness" and "unfailing love" (Isa 54:8, 10). Both qualities translate the important Hebrew word hesed, often used of God's covenant faithfulness. For a moment, God sent Israel away, but He "will call [her] back as if [she] were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit" (v. 6). He is her Redeemer (Isa 54:5, 8).

The context for this passage is God's promise that Israel will one day return from exile and prosper. As we saw yesterday, He exiled the nation as discipline for her sins. However, "His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime" (Ps 30:5-[note](#)). As in the

days of Noah, sin had to be punished, but mercy will ultimately win (Isa 54:9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY As a related topic for additional Bible study, we suggest you take a look at one of the wedding parables of Jesus, such as the one found in Matthew 22:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,14. Here, Christ is portrayed as the Bridegroom or Husband of the Church (cf. Gal 4:27).

Isaiah 54:13 TAUGHT BY THE LORD.

All God's children go to school. The lesson is practical: we learn to obey. Our Lord took kindly to this lesson. He always did the things that pleased the Father. Now is our time of schooling and discipline, for we are learning the highest and best lesson of all: obedience. This brings our Lord close to us. We go to school to Christ and with Christ, thus we feel His qualifications to be our compassionate High Priest.

As swimming is learned only in the water, obedience is learned by doing and by suffering the divine will. Obedience cannot be learned at the university, unless it is at the College of Experience. You must allow the commandment to have its way with you. It will educate you. Who knows what it is to obey God to the fullest? Until you have laid aside your will in the most tender and painful respects, you will not know. To plead with God for the life of a beloved child, to see that dear child die, this is to learn obedience. To go alone and plead with God for the life of a husband or wife, to agonize with Him for the blessing, and then to be compelled to weep at a fresh grave and still be able to say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21), this is to learn obedience.

Our Lord as man was made to know by His suffering what full obedience meant. His was a practical, experimental, personal acquaintance with obedience, and in all this He comes near to us. A Son learning obedience, that is our Lord. May we not therefore walk joyfully with Him in all the rough paths of life? May we not safely lean on the arm of One who knows every inch of the way? - C H Spurgeon - "Beside Still Water"

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 54](#)

Isaiah 54:2 Make room for more. - Rich Cathers

This barren woman isn't told to wait until she gets pregnant. She's told to start remodeling now. Almost a "build it and they will come" mentality.

Will you be ready for our church to grow? Welcoming others.

It's easy to get comfortable with our little groups of friends. It's not a bad thing to have a small group of friends who will love you and support you. But will you be ready to welcome in those who come in the front doors for the first time?

Change is okay. As we continue to grow, we're finding out that we are having to learn new ways of doing things. Things that worked fine five years ago when there were fifty of us don't always seem practical now. Don't be discouraged because things change. It's okay.

Think about your life. Are you ready for God to use you more? Could it be that God would be asking you to "enlarge your tent"? Is your life in a place where you are open to God using you in new ways? It could be possible that sometimes old "tent walls" will have to come down in order to make room for new ones. Learn to find balance in your life so you can run the race and finish!

(Jer 12:5 NIV) "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?

If you think it's tough now, what will you do when God says it's time to try the next level?

Illustration - I remember what it was like when I worked at the Bank of Newport and was involved in ministry at Calvary Chapel Anaheim. I used to wonder how I could ever keep up with all the things I was doing. Then when I was brought on staff at Calvary Anaheim, there was a time when things were kind of easy for me, but after awhile they picked up, and I wondered how I could keep up with it. In a way it was easy to reminisce on those "easy" days of working at the bank! But when we started the church in Fullerton, I began to realize that my days of being on staff at Anaheim were actually quite slow, compared to being a senior pastor at a church, even a very, very small one. And I'm beginning to wonder what life will be like in five more years...

CHOSEN BY GOD FOR THIS LOVE

Isaiah 54:1–10

Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken. Isaiah 54:10

Today, 6.1 million women in the United States have trouble getting pregnant or staying pregnant. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that means nearly 10 percent of all women struggle with infertility. In Old Testament times, the barren wife had few social or cultural protections. Her husband could divorce her for failing to produce children, and she would have no sons or daughters to take care of her in old age. Infertility was viewed as a source of shame.

In today's passage, Isaiah portrays the nation of Israel as a "barren woman" (Isa 54:1). Considering the shame attributed to being barren, the opening commands are unusual: "Sing ... burst into song, shout for joy" ((Isa 54:1). Why should someone who is disgraced shout for joy?

Despite this woman's infertility, the passage contains a promise of great hope. She will not only be able to bear children but also will need to "enlarge" her tent to accommodate all of her descendants ((Isa 54:2-3). What she has experienced as shame and humiliation will be transformed into abundance by a loving God ((Isa 54:4).

God refers to Himself as her "Maker," "husband," and "Redeemer" (Isa 54:5). Each of these roles is protective and intimate. God has chosen her for Himself. He has created her and saved her, elevating her to a place of great honor and worth.

As we study God's love, we must be struck by the awareness that we are the unlikely recipients of this bounty. God loves us. Through Him, we experience both "deep compassion" ((Isa 54:7) and "everlasting kindness" ((Isa 54:8). Isaiah refers to the example of Noah. Although God may be angry at sin, He promises "unfailing love" to His people ((Isa 54:10). The imagery at the end of this passage reinforces that idea. God will love us no matter what, even when the mountains shake and the hills are removed.

APPLY THE WORD What makes you worthy of God's love? If you feel unworthy and unloved, remember that God sees you in a different light. He has promised deep compassion and everlasting kindness. He sees you as no one else does; He is your Creator, Redeemer, and King. His love for you is not dependent on your ability to perform well, and nothing you can do will shake God's love.

Isaiah 54:5 - Fruit comes from a loving Husband.

The key to fruitfulness is a loving relationship with God. It's this loving "husband" relationship that will make Israel become a mother of many children. It doesn't matter what you've done that has brought you shame or disgrace. God wants to have a loving, intimate relationship with you, as a husband is to have with his wife. He's all you need. (Phil 3:3-14)

What are the things that you feel are most important in life? For some of us, they are things that we've already achieved, things that we're proud of. For others, it's the things that we don't have yet, the things that we tell ourselves, "If I just had this, then I'd be happy!". Paul had learned to take all the stuff in the past that held him back and to let go of it.

Illustration - Monkey treats. Monkey trappers in North Africa have a clever method of catching their prey. A number of gourds are filled with nuts (monkey treats) and firmly fastened to a branch of a tree. Each has a hole just large enough for the unwary monkey to stick his forepaw into it. When the hungry animal discovers this, he quickly grasps a handful of nuts, but the hole is too small for him to withdraw his clenched fist. And he doesn't have enough sense to open up his hand and let go in order to escape, so he is easily taken captive. Too often we get these certain things in our lives that we just don't want to let go of. We think that it's these certain "nuts and berries" that really make life worth living. Yet it's these very things that keep us captive. If we'd just let go, we could be free. There's only one thing to hold on to, our loving relationship with Jesus. Can you truly say, "The Lord is my husband"?

Isaiah 54:12 Hang on for the hope of heaven. -[Rich Cathers](#) (see more illustrations by Cathers below).

God's promise, the thing meant to bring comfort to the people in the middle of the storms, was to point them toward the heavenly things.

Don't keep waiting for this life to be better. It may never be better.

For us, some may have financial difficulties, others may have very difficult health problems, others have difficulties at home or in relationships. We can tend to put our hope into these things getting better, which they may. But I wonder if we're putting our hope on the wrong things.

What about the Christians in China, pastors who have been sitting in prison for preaching the gospel? Do they put their hope in being released?

What about the Christians in Northern India who are being persecuted and killed by zealous Hindus? Do they put their hope in being released?

What about the Christians in Sudan, many of whom have been captured and made slaves by the Muslims? Do they put their hope in being released?

I'm not saying all this to dash your hopes of your awful life situation to ever get any better. I'm not trying to say that you shouldn't work hard at changing your situation if you can.

I'm concerned that we don't put our hope in the wrong thing.

Illustration - While campaigning for the presidency in August 1928, Herbert Hoover said, "We are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us. We have not yet reached the goal, but we shall soon be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation." There seemed little reason then for Americans to disagree with this rosy appraisal of the nation's future, and Hoover was elected by a landslide. Less than a year later, however, the stock market crashed, beginning the Great Depression.

They hoped in the wrong thing. Only one hopeful thing is sure. Keep your eyes on heaven. (2 Cor 4:1–5:2) Paul is talking as if he didn't expect his earthly life to get any better, but he saw that the hard times in this present life worked to produce good things for that life on the other side. He looked forward to his new body that he'd receive in heaven.

Illustration - There was knew an old Glasgow professor named MacDonald who, along with a Scottish chaplain, had bailed out of an airplane behind German lines. They were put in a prison camp. A high wire fence separated the Americans from the British, and the Germans made it next to impossible for the two sides to communicate. MacDonald was put in the American barracks and the chaplain was housed with the Brits.

Every day the two men would meet at the fence and exchange a greeting. Unknown to the guards, the Americans had a little homemade radio and were able to get news from the outside, something more precious than food in a prison camp. Every day, MacDonald would take a headline or two to the fence and share it with the chaplain in the ancient Gaelic language, indecipherable to the Germans.

One day, news came over the little radio that the German High Command had surrendered and the war was over. MacDonald took the news to his friend, then stood and watched him disappear into the British barracks. A moment later, a roar of celebration came from the barracks.

Life in that camp was transformed. Men walked around singing and shouting, waving at the guards, even laughing at the dogs. When the German guards finally heard the news three nights later, they fled into the dark, leaving the gates unlocked. The next morning, Brits and Americans walked out as free men. Yet they had truly been set free three days earlier by the news that the war was over. -- Ray Bakke, Chicago, Illinois. Leadership, Vol. 19, no. 2.

We're like those men in the prison camp. The war is over. Jesus has won. We need to simply wait out the remaining days until we experience our complete freedom in heaven.

Isaiah 54:17 - Difficult times don't have to defeat you. -[Rich Cathers](#)

God can help you be victorious, even by going through the fire.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were young men who stood up for what they believed. They refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's idol: (Dan 3:17-18 KJV) As a result, they were thrown into the furnace. God didn't keep them from the furnace, but God stayed with them in the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar's guard told him: (Dan 3:25 KJV) ...Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. The victory God gives is in the attitude we choose to adopt when we go through our difficult times.

Illustration - In the third century, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote to his friend Donatus: "It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians... and I am one of them."

Illustration - An enthusiastic believer in Christ, Dan Richardson, lost his battle with cancer. But his life demonstrated that even though the physical body may be destroyed by disease, the spirit can remain triumphant. This poem was distributed at his memorial service:

Cancer is so limited...

It cannot cripple love,
It cannot shatter hope,
It cannot corrode faith,
It cannot eat away peace,
It cannot destroy confidence,
It cannot kill friendship,
It cannot shut out memories,
It cannot silence courage,
It cannot invade the soul,
It cannot reduce eternal life,
It cannot quench the Spirit,
It cannot lessen the power of the resurrection.
Don't give up the fight.

Isaiah 54:11 O Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.

From his standpoint of vision on the hilltops of glory, He sees the tossings of thy craft. Every billow, every lurch, every rebuff, is discerned and felt by Him. He, too, has sailed through stormy seas, and is acquainted with grief. Not comforted by man, thou shalt be consoled by the Divine Comforter. Cast out by thy lovers, thou shalt be gathered to the bosom of God. When the man born blind was cast out of the synagogue, Jesus found him; and He will find thee.

Deep down in the tossing waves, He will lay thy foundations in fair colors, and will spare no stones, however precious, in the elaboration of thy character. Sapphires, rubies, and carbuncles are very resplendent and beautiful, but they are all the children of fire. You cannot have them unless prepared to pay the cost in blood and tears. These jewels are produced of very ordinary ingredients, which have been subjected to tremendous pressure and terrific heat. When next your heart misgives you amid your fiery trials, remember that God is at work making the rubies and carbuncles of your eternal array. You will be well compensated.

There are destructive agencies around us on all hands — the smith with his coals; the waster with his scythe; the destroyer with his weapon — but they are all beneath the mighty hand of God. They cannot overstep the limits He assigns. When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. He restrains the wrath of his foes, and surrounds him with a munition of rocks.

The blessings of this chapter are not for the Jews only, but for all the servants of the Lord. It is expressly stated that this is their heritage (Isaiah 54:17). - F B Meyer

Sing.—Isa. 54.1

That is the word which arrests us. It is the only fitting word, if indeed "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." It introduces the second movement in the section presenting the Servant of Jehovah as the Prince of Peace. That movement ends with Isa 57. In it we have first, this song of assurance (Isa 54); then the great prophetic appeal resulting from this vision of the Servant of Jehovah (Isa 55); and finally a message dealing with the administration of this Divine triumph (Isa 56 and Isa 57). This song naturally and necessarily celebrates the triumph of the Servant of Jehovah in its bearing on the nation of Israel, personified as a city under the figure of a woman. As we watched the sufferings of that wondrous One, we inevitably thought of wider applications, those which include the Church and humanity; and we have been justified in doing so. But in doing so, let us not fail to appreciate the application to Israel. It is in her redemption and restoration to fellowship with God, as that of a wife to her husband, that "the whole earth" is to be reached. The glowing and glorious description of the City of God, with its foundations, its pinnacles, its gates, all full of beauty, is a description of Jerusalem, as it will be in the Kingdom of Heaven. God has not cast off His earthly people for ever. They will yet see Him Whom they pierced, and mourn because of Him. Out of that mourning, their joys will spring. Through the One Servant of Jehovah, and by His travail and His triumph, shall they become the servants of the Lord, thus fulfilling the Divine purpose. To them the final words of this song belong: "This is the heritage of the servants of Jehovah, and their righteousness which is of Me, saith Jehovah."- G Campbell Morgan

Isaiah 55:1-13; 54:1-56:8

Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. Isaiah 55:3

When Hudson Taylor arrived in Shanghai, China in 1854, the city was under attack from rebels. Chinese regarded Westerners as “foreign devils” and did not allow them into the interior of the country. Taylor had failed to finish medical training, knew no Chinese, and was the first missionary in a new nondenominational society. Undeterred, he studied the language and culture and defied the government by taking the gospel inland. He also adopted Chinese dress and customs so that more people would listen to his message. Before he died, Hudson Taylor had succeeded in spreading the gospel into many unreached areas of China!

“God so loved the world” (John 3:16)—throughout Scripture and history we see God’s global plan of salvation at work. As a result of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, He extends an invitation (Isa 55:1–5) to all who are spiritually hungry to eat the Bread of Life and to all who are spiritually thirsty to drink the Living Water, and through them to be satisfied. They’re a free gift. They’re supremely satisfying, the “richest of fare.” They bring eternal life and show God’s everlasting covenant love.

And so the Servant’s mission brings us back again to God’s covenant relationship with His people: “Your Maker is your husband” (Isa 54:5). The punishment of conquest and exile is temporary, whereas His covenant love is eternal (Isa 54:10). He’s merciful and forgiving, a caring shepherd who gives His people joy and peace. He’s also the divine Sovereign whose word means it’s as good as done (Isa 55:6–13).

After the unexpected Messiah accomplished His unexpected mission, He will also fulfill the more expected purpose of coming in power. This prophetic timeline involves two separate Comings, in between which we’re living. A new Jerusalem is still in the future, a city dominated by justice, righteousness, and intimacy with God. Even now, we’re to be pursuing kingdom values until the King returns (Isa 56:1–8).

APPLY THE WORD Scripture memory helps us hold the rich truths of God’s Word more closely in our minds and hearts. Today, choose one of the four Servant Songs of Isaiah, found in Isaiah 42:1–7; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; and Isa 52:13–53:12. As you work on committing this passage to memory, ask the Holy Spirit to work through the Word and help you meditate on the person and work of the Servant, our Lord and Savior, and the fulfillment of these sublime prophecies.

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon’s Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 55](#)

Isaiah 55:7

- God is angry with the wicked. Isa. 63:9, 10; Ezek 22:21, 22.
- God is unwilling to punish. 2 Peter 3:9; Eze. 33:11; Jonah 4:11.
- God is glad to forgive. Isa. 1:18; 1 John 2:1, 2.
- God rejoices over the forgiven. Luke 15:6, 7, 22, 24; Isa. 62:3, 5.

- D L Moody

Isaiah 55:8. My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

Take a straight stick, and put it into the water, and it will seem crooked. Why? Because we look upon it through two mediums,—air and water. Thus the proceedings of God in His justice, which in themselves are straight, without the least obliquity, seem unto us crooked. That wicked men should prosper, and good men be afflicted; that the Israelites should make the bricks, and the Egyptians dwell in the houses; that servants should ride on horseback, and princes go on foot,—these are things that make the best Christians stagger in their judgments. And why? But because they look upon God’s proceedings through a double medium,—of flesh and spirit; that so all things seem to go cross, though, indeed, they are right enough. And hence it is that God’s proceedings in His justice are not so well discerned; the eyes of man alone being not competent judges thereof.

A child might say to a geographer, “You talk about the earth being round! Look on this great crag; look on that deep dell; look on yonder great mountain, and the valley at its feet, and yet you talk about the earth being round.” The geographer would have an instant answer for the child; his view is comprehensive; he does not look at the surface of the world in mere detail; he does not deal with inches and feet and yards; he sees a larger world than the child has had time to grasp. He explains what he means by the expression, “The earth is a globe,” and justifies his strange statement. And so it is with God’s wonderful dealings with us: there are great rocks and barren deserts, deep, dank, dark pits and defiles, and glens and dells, rugged places that we cannot smooth over at all; and yet when He comes to say to us at the end of the journey, “Now, look back; there is the way that I have brought you,” we

shall be enabled to say, "Thou hast gone before us, and made our way straight." JOSEPH PARKER.

Isaiah 55:8 MY WAYS.

God has not promised to rescue us according to our time schedule. If it appears that your prayers are unanswered, do not dishonor the Lord with unbelief. Waiting in faith is a high form of worship. In some respects, it excels the adoration of the shining ones above. God delivers His servants in ways that exercise their faith. He would not have them lacking in faith, for faith is the wealth of the heavenly life. He desires that the trial of faith continues until faith grows strong and comes to full assurance. The Sycamore fig never ripens into sweetness unless it is bruised; the same is true of faith. Tested believer, God will bring you through, but do not expect Him to bring you through in the way that human reason suggests, for that would not develop your faith:

God works in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.
He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.
You fearful saints, fresh courage take: the clouds you
so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him
for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.
Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.

God has a way of His own. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the LORD" (Is. 55:8). "Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God" (Job 37:14). Obey Him, and that will be far more in accord with your position as a finite creature than the vain attempt to map out a course for your Creator. Obey Him and rest assured, for He will not be late in providing. - C H Spurgeon "Beside Still Water"

Isaiah 55:9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

You will notice that in the placid waters of a lake everything which is highest in reality is lowest in the reflection. The higher the trees, the lower their image. That is the picture of this world; what is highest in this world is lowest in the other, and what is highest in that world is lowest in this. Gold is on top here; they pave the streets with it there. To serve is looked upon as ignoble here; there those that serve reign, and the last are first. Any girl is willing to fling away paste diamonds for the real stones; when a man understands what God can be to the soul, he loses his taste for things he used to care for most. F. B. MEYER.

Isaiah 55:6-13

All the trees of the field will clap their hands. - Isaiah 55:12

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

In the sermon "The Garden of Graces," seventeenth century English preacher Thomas Hooker compares the heart to a garden. This garden produces offensive weeds as well as wholesome herbs that send up sweet fragrance to God. The rain that waters this garden is God's Word, for Hooker notes that in Scripture "God's Word is often compared to Rain or Dew." When the Word falls on the heart, it cools its heat, quenches its thirst, cleans the air, softens its hardened earth, and causes things to grow.

In Isaiah, God's Word is also likened to rainfall that nourishes the earth. Rain does not fall without effect but acts and alters the environment. It produces the harvest that yields seed, the origin of sustenance, and also bread, its end product. So too, God's Word spoken into the world causes active fruitful change (Isa 55:11)--"seeds" and "bread" of a spiritual kind.

The harvest is recorded in Isa 55:11,12. Isaiah speaks here of the release of Israel from the Babylonian captivity. God's promise to free them, God says, is the beginning of a chain reaction. While, like rain, it doesn't instantly produce bread (results), it does start a process that will.

God's promise to Israel is not simply release from slavery, but jubilant freedom. God declares they will "go out with joy and be led forth in peace." What's more, the whole earth will rejoice with them as they resume their God-given place in it. This celebration prefigures the joy of creation at the ultimate release of all God's people.

In contrast to the Israelites' exodus from Egypt through the desert, this future return is associated with lush vegetation. Trees in the

desert, as we have seen, are a sign of God's grace, providing shade and water.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If your heart is a garden, what is growing there? Is it lush or barren? Ripe with herbs and fruit or weedy? Is it in need of a little rainfall? Thomas Hooker ends his sermon with the following prayer: "O great God of all, and sweet Father of thy chosen, pour upon us thy holy dews of grace: make our souls to stand thick with sanctified herbs; that we may receive thy blessing. That honoring thee in the day of Grace, we may be honored by thee in the day of Glory. Grant this for thy loved Son, and our loving Savior, Jesus Christ his sake. Amen."

Isaiah 55:6-9

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. - Isaiah 55:1

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

If you were to hit the streets of your area and take a poll, it might take you a while to find any people who could say they have never prayed--even once--in their lives. Prayer is typically a universal human response to fear, trouble, or pain. As the old saying goes, ""There are no atheists in foxholes.”

But the world's concept of prayer often falls far short of biblical truth. A lot of people pray the way they shop.

When shoppers want an item in a store, they simply take it off the shelf, lay it on the counter, and give their money to the clerk. There is no discussion of the shopper's character or relationship to the store owner. All that matters is the purchaser's desire to have his or her request granted. One person's money is as good as another's.

People pray in times of need because they believe prayer has power. And they're right--except that the unbeliever overlooks the fact that to God, prayer is a family matter.

A person who does not know God cannot merely run into His presence and demand something. Similarly, the neighbor kids can't burst through your front door tonight and ask that you feed them supper and give them lunch money for tomorrow. They are not your children. There is no relationship in place to warrant that kind of request.

There is one prayer, though, that any non-Christian can pray with confidence. The prophet Isaiah issued a powerful invitation for unbelievers to come to the Lord for salvation while the door is still open.

Does this limitation on access to God contradict what we studied yesterday? No, Isaiah was writing in a context of salvation and God's judgment. The Bible is consistent in warning lost people that, although God is always ready to receive them in repentance and salvation, His patience will one day run out (2Pet. 3:9, 10-note).

However, look at the richness of God's invitation to the sinner: mercy and free pardon. Only He could conceive a plan like this to forgive and bless the very people who rebelled against Him; His thoughts and ways are infinitely higher than ours.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Every Today reader has a standing invitation to receive Christ as Savior, because salvation is too important to take for granted.

Today we want to restate the invitation. Romans 3:23-note states the problem: all have sinned. Romans 6:23-note gives the penalty of sin: eternal separation from God, but also the promise of eternal life in Christ. Romans 5:8-note says that Christ died for us, and Romans 10:9, 10-note urges the unbeliever to call on God for salvation. If Isaiah's invitation has your name on it, please don't refuse to respond to it!

Isaiah 55:1-9

Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. - Isaiah 55:7b

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

When told to go and preach in Nineveh, the capital city of Israel's enemy, Assyria, Jonah refused. In fact, he ran in the opposite direction, willfully disobeying God's command. God caught up with him, of course, and the prophet ended up in the belly of a great fish.

From there, he repented and cried out to God, "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry... To the roots of the mountains I sank down. But you brought my life up from the

pit, O Lord my God... Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9).

Jonah knew the key truth found in today's reading: God always answers the one who repents (Isa 55:7). There is no uncertainty--God doesn't sometimes answer, sometimes not. When a sinner repents, God answers, guaranteed. It doesn't matter how bad the sin is, and His forgiveness doesn't depend upon the "correct" phrasing of the confession. It doesn't matter how old the sin is or how many times it's been done.

All that matters is repentance. To repent means to be honest with God and to turn from your sin. To be honest with God is to reveal to Him exactly what you've done--no hiding, no rationalizing. To turn from your sin is to renounce it and recommit yourself to a righteous life (cf. Pr 28:13).

In today's reading, Isaiah spoke in a specific historical context to the Jewish exiles, but also in a general theological context about God's salvation. Because sinners turn to God, and because God pours out His lovingkindness on them, the nations will see His glory. Repentance and forgiveness will be a worldwide witness, a promise ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This week, have you found yourself saying, "Yes, I trust that God is forgiving, but ... "? Do you think you've crossed a line, and God will never take you back?

Isaiah 55:1-11

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. - Isaiah 55:6

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

As the wife of Adoniram Judson, one of America's first missionaries, Ann Judson shared her husband's devotion to Christ and his passion for the lost. The Judsons arrived in Burma in 1812 and spent their lives sharing Christ with the Burmese people.

Ann revealed her heart when she said, ""Might I be the means of converting a single soul, it would be worth spending all my days to accomplish." Though Ann's days were short--she died in Burma at age 36--God used her and Adoniram in mighty ways.

Ann and Adoniram Judson were able to offer the people of Burma the gift of salvation because of a faithful God who is calling all nations to Himself. The invitation of Isaiah 55 is issued specifically to the Gentiles, the people outside of Israel who are urged to come to ""the Holy One of Israel"" and be saved.

The wonderful logic of salvation is expressed in Isa 55:1, 2. Why should people spend their lives on that which leaves them empty and unsatisfied, when God offers a place at His banquet table to anyone who turns to Him in faith? This is an offer we can give to anyone with joy and conviction.

God's desire is to save; and His salvation, the new covenant under which we live, is an everlasting promise (Isa 55:3). But while God's guarantee of salvation is eternal, the opportunity for salvation is not (Isa 55:6, 7).

This is one reason for the sense of passion and urgency that characterizes the ministry of the gospel. God has an abundance of mercy and pardon for every sinner who seeks Him, but the day will come when sinners will no longer find God to be a God of mercy and salvation, but a God of judgment.

Some people who hear the plan of salvation think it is too good to be true. They wonder how it can be that when we give God our sin and hopelessness, He gives us eternal life and the riches of heaven. Who would have conceived such a plan? Only the God whose thoughts and ways are infinitely higher than ours!

Nobody has a better offer than God's offer of salvation. Let's not keep it to ourselves.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you have a salvation plan available by which you can open your Bible and guide another person through the basics of the gospel?

One effective method is the ""Romans Road,"" which we have used many times in Today. If you don't have these verses written down somewhere, we encourage you to do so today. The outline, from the Book of Romans, is simple: Ro 3:23-note, the reality of sin; Ro 6:23-note, the result of sin; Ro 5:8-note, Christ's payment for sin on the cross; Ro 10:9-note, the need to believe in Christ; and Ro 10:13-note, God's assurance of salvation to those who call on Him.

Isaiah 55:2 Real satisfaction. - [Rich Cathers](#) - see more of his devotionals below.

Seriously, this is all about how we spend so much on things that just don't satisfy us.

The prophet Jeremiah gave a similar warning. In ancient Jerusalem, there were two main sources for water. One was to get water from springs, known as a "fountains of living water". The second way was to cut a large basin out of the solid rock and collect rain water in it. These basins were called cisterns. But sometimes a cistern might be cut out of solid rock only to find that there were cracks in it, and it wouldn't hold water. Jeremiah said: (Jer 2:13 KJV) For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Illustration - America is said to have the highest per capita boredom of any spot on earth! We know that because we have the greatest number of artificial amusements of any country. People have become so empty that they can't even entertain themselves. They have to pay other people to amuse them, to make them laugh, to try to make them feel warm and happy and comfortable for a few minutes, to try to lose that awful, frightening, hollow feeling; that terrible, dreaded feeling of being lost and alone.-- Billy Graham

When you really connect with Jesus, you will find that He totally satisfies.Jesus said so in John 7:37-38.

Isaiah 55:2 - [Rich Cathers](#)

God is asking us why we take our money and spend it on things that really don't satisfy.

Eating food that doesn't really satisfy is a lot like being on a diet. I want you to know that I have done much research on the subject of diets.

Illustration - Important Notes on Dieting (by Lewis G.)

1. If you eat something, but no one else sees you eat it, it has no calories.
2. When drinking a diet soda while eating a candy bar, the calories in the candy bar are canceled by the diet soda.
3. When you eat with someone else, calories don't count as long as you don't eat more than they do.
4. Cookie pieces contain no calories. The process of breaking the cookie causes calorie leakage.
5. Late-night snacks have no calories. The refrigerator light is not strong enough for the calories to see their way into the calorie counter.

Isaiah 55:7 "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts."

But thoughts are free," says some unthinking person. "I shall never be hanged for my thoughts."

No, perhaps not, but have you never heard that old saying, "A man may not be hanged for his thoughts, but he may be damned for his thoughts"? In thought is often the very essence of sin. A deed might in itself be colorless, but the motive for doing it—the thought at the back of it—puts the venom and virus and guilt into the deed.—

Isaiah 55:7 "He will abundantly pardon."

You have abundant sin, fatally abundant! But here is abundant pardon. You mourn your abundant hardness of heart. Yes, but abundant pardon will dissolve the stone. How abundant that pardon is the Lord does not tell, but certainly it is superabundant.— C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 55:8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts."

God's thoughts are love, pity, tenderness; ours are forgetfulness, ingratitude, and hard-heartedness. He is tender of our comfort, but we are not tender of his honor. He considers our interests, but we think not of his glory. He watches over our safety, but we are not watchful to keep his statutes. He loads us with benefits, but we only load him with our sins. He has given us all that we have, but we bring him cold thanks in return.— C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 55:11 "My word ... shall not return unto me void."

My first student, Mr. Medhurst, went out to preach on Tower Hill, Sunday after Sunday. He was not then my student, but one of the young men in the church. He came to me and said, "I have been out preaching now for several months on Tower Hill, and I have not seen one conversion."

I said to him, rather sharply, "Do you expect God is going to bless you every time you choose to open your mouth?"

He answered, "Oh, no, sir! I do not expect him to do that."

"Then," I replied, "that is why you do not get a blessing." We ought to expect a blessing." God has said, "My word shall not return unto

me void," and it will not. We ought to look for a harvest.— C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 55:9 - God wants to forgive you. - [Rich Cathers](#)

But you need to do your part.

Your part is to "seek", "call", "forsake", and "return". God's part is to forgive. The Bible says, (1 John 1:9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The idea of "confessing" our sins is to admit that we've done wrong. It involves exactly these same things: seeking, calling, forsaking, returning. If we confess our sins, God is faithful, we can count on Him to forgive us. God is also "just" because He doesn't let us off without the sins being paid for. God knows that you can't pay for your sins, so He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on a cross and pay for the penalty for your sins.

Illustration - One time the great evangelist D. L. Moody visited a prison called "The Tombs" to preach to the inmates. After he had finished speaking, Moody talked with a number of men in their cells. He asked each prisoner this question, "What brought you here?" Again and again he received replies like this: "I don't deserve to be here." "I was framed." "I was falsely accused." "I was given an unfair trial." Not one inmate would admit he was guilty. Finally, Moody found a man with his face buried in his hands, weeping. "And what's wrong, my friend?" he inquired. The prisoner responded, "My sins are more than I can bear." Relieved to find at least one man who would recognize his guilt and his need of forgiveness, the evangelist exclaimed, "Thank God for that!" Moody then had the joy of pointing him to a saving knowledge of Christ—a knowledge that released him from his shackles of sin. God wants to forgive you. (Ps 32:1-6)

Isaiah 55:9 - Don't worry about trying to figure God out. - [Rich Cathers](#)

You won't be able to.

Illustration - On Wednesday night we were looking at the birth of Jesus and looking at how odd it must have seemed to the angels to watch the King of all Creation being born in a animal's feeding trough because there wasn't any room for them even in an inn. And after having been jostled for a seventy mile donkey ride from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And then being sent to declare this incredible birth, not to heads of state, but to lowly shepherds. Does this make any sense? It may not have made sense to Joseph and Mary, but for people like us, I'm certainly glad that from the very beginning, Jesus was accessible to common, lowly people, like me. I am sure glad that God cares for people like me.

Illustration - Another interesting story in the Bible is that of Joseph. I'm sure that during Joseph's life, he must have wondered what was going on when his brothers sold him into slavery, or when his master's wife falsely accused him of trying to rape her, or even as he labored in prison, why it seemed that everybody forgot about him. Yet when we get to the end of the story, we see that Joseph had learned that God was working through his difficult circumstances. As Joseph was eventually elevated to being second in all Egypt, and then God used Joseph to end up rescuing his entire family from the destruction of a famine, he could say, (Ge 50:2) You too may have had some difficult things happen to you in your life, and you can't figure out why God allowed them to happen. Be careful about trying to figure them all out with your limited human understanding. There is a place of rest we can get to when we get to the point where we can say, "You're God, and You know what You're doing." Paul writes, (Ro 12:1-2) (that) When you give yourself completely to God and you don't allow yourself to be shaped by the world, but you allow your mind to be renewed, you will begin to see that God's will for your life is good, acceptable, and perfect.

Isaiah 55:3 - Soul fatness comes from paying attention to the Lord. - [Rich Cathers](#)

Illustration: There is a story about two people who wanted to immigrate to America. They scraped up all their money to buy two tickets on an ocean liner headed for New York. With their last bit of money, they were able to buy enough bread and cheese to live on for the two week journey across the ocean. For the first couple of days, the bread and cheese were okay. But by the tenth day, the bread was getting pretty hard and the cheese was starting to mold. Every day they would take walks out on the deck and wander by the dining room where they would watch the other passengers lining up and the huge buffet tables filled with all sorts of incredible foods. Finally, they approached one of the cabin stewards and begged if there was any way they could perhaps work to earn enough to buy maybe one meal up in the dining room. But to their surprise, they found out that all their meals were paid for with the price of their tickets. If they had paid attention when they bought their tickets, they could have spent the entire trip in the dining room feasting on roast beef instead of cheese and crackers. Is your relationship with Jesus a feast, or just cheese and crackers? Where do you find out about the feast? Listen to the Lord. Where can you best hear the Lord? By getting into His Word and then doing what it says.

Isaiah 55:5 - Being an attractive witness for Jesus. - [Rich Cathers](#)

Has God been doing such a work in your life that when people see you, they "run" to you? Or are they trying to "run" from you? Are

you a person that "attracts" others to Jesus. It can only happen if you are letting Jesus to continue to work on you, making you less like the world and more like Him. If you're no different than anyone else in the world, why would they want to be like you? Sometimes the attractive things come through difficult times. See Ro 5:3-5 and Heb 12:11. These attractive qualities of patience, experience (or "proven character"), hope, peace, and righteousness come as we learn and work through difficult times.

Illustration- Last year at the Men's Retreat, Bob, one of the brothers from Moreno Valley was sharing with me how he had come to know the Lord. He works as a fireman paramedic in Anaheim. One of the other firefighters was a Christian. And Bob watched him. He watched as Bob didn't do all the kinds of bad things that the other firemen did in their spare time. He watched as the other firemen made fun of this guy. He watched as this guy never said a bad thing about anyone else in return. He wanted to be like this guy. And this guy led him to the Lord. Sometimes the attractive things come from taking a bath. It's through being washed in the water of God's Word. (Eph 5:25-28) The purpose of the passage is to teach men how to love and care for their wives, and how their wives will grow to be more beautiful as the husbands learn to love them like Jesus loves us. But one of the lessons here is that Jesus is in the process of making us, the church, more and more beautiful by washing us in His Word. We don't always have to go through difficult times to grow in the Lord. I think God prefers that we grow and change by simply learning to read and obey the things that are found in the Scriptures.

Isaiah 55:13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree; and instead of the briar the myrtle.

Here are the substitutions of grace. It would have been much to root up the thorn, and to cut up the briar, so that the soil should be rid of weeds; but God does more. He substitutes fir-trees for thorns, and myrtles for briars; and He does this for his Name's sake, and as a sign for evermore.

He will do this in your character. — There are thorns and briars there; you must confess it to your cost. Now, do not be satisfied with their extermination, but seek that God should substitute their opposites; so that the site of some old evil maybe commemorated by the growth of some fair grace. Where the thorn of cynicism and sarcasm grew, there the graceful and sprightly fir of forbearance; where the briar of malice and envy, there the sensitive delicate myrtle of charity. This is the triumph of grace in the believer's heart. He will do this in your home. — You have a thorn in that husband, or a briar in that child. Once you used to look for relief in death. You almost questioned whether you might not hasten yourself out of such terrible and perpetual suffering. It seemed as though you were being scourged with thorns. But God will do much better than this. He is able to transform those trying dispositions. That husband will become your evergreen fir-tree: that child your myrtle.

He will do this in your trials. — There are briars besetting every path that call for earnest care. Many beside Paul have thorns in the flesh. But His grace is sufficient to change our biggest curse into our greatest blessing. Look for this. Ask God to transform the conditions of your life which have cost you excruciating anguish, into sources of benediction. - F B Meyer

Behold, I have given Him for a Witness to the peoples, a Leader and Commander to the peoples.—Isa. 55.4

After the song celebrating the triumph of the Servant of Jehovah resulting from His travail, comes this perfect oracle of appeal. So perfect is it that every evangelist has felt its power, and used it in his sacred work. Opening with a description of life, as thirsty, hungry, unsatisfied, and so not life in the true sense at all; it closes with a picture of life in the midst of the garden of rest and fruitfulness. At its centre are the words which reveal the way from the one condition of life to the other. Man is to seek Jehovah; to forsake his way, and his thought, and to return to Jehovah, Whose thoughts are not man's thoughts, nor His ways man's ways; for the Divine ways and thoughts for man are high as the heavens, while man's ways and thoughts for himself are earth-bound. If man will so return, Jehovah will have mercy and will abundantly pardon. But upon what grounds is such a declaration made? The answer is in these words. To Whom is reference made in the proclamation? "Behold I have given Him for a witness?" Certainly not to David. Here we see the continuity of thought running through the section. The reference is to the One Whom we have seen as the Servant of Jehovah proceeding through Travail to Triumph. By the way of that travail in which "the chastisement of our ace was upon Him," it is possible for Jehovah to have mercy and to abundantly pardon. He then is the one and only Leader and Commander to the peoples; and He is that by virtue of His Cross.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 56

Isaiah 56:5 - Single for the Lord. - [Rich Cathers](#) (see other illustrations below)

In 1 Cor 7:32-34 Paul was encouraging single people to consider staying single. A single person has more time on their hands. They don't have to spend time doing things that are necessary to keep a relationship healthy. They can dedicate all their time to serving the Lord. Warning: Don't make your life's goal that of finding a spouse. Make your life's goal to serve the Lord. (Mt 6:33) If God wants you to have a spouse, He will give you one. Let Adam be your example. If God thinks that it is not good for you to be alone,

then one day you'll just wake up with a spouse at your side. Or something like that. J

Illustration - For me, I had a time in my life where I came to the conclusion where I thought, "Women, who needs them?" A couple of my friends also came to the same conclusion about the same time, and we formed a chapter of the "BTTR" club (Bachelors 'Til The Rapture). Between the four of us, one of us ran the College Group, one ran the High School Group, together we put on weekly concerts, ran a door-to-door witnessing ministry, went witnessing on campus, three of us went to seminary, and all four of us have been in some sort of pastoral ministry.

As single guys, we were able to do all kinds of things because we had lots of time to spend on serving the Lord. Also, we were all married within three years. I was the last. For me, I became so busy serving the Lord that I didn't have time to go hunting for a woman. In fact, after two years, I discovered that she had been right there at the church all along, right under my nose! It was like Adam, waking up and there she was. We dated for a year, were engaged for a year, and then married. Next Saturday will be our 22nd Anniversary.

Isaiah 56:10 - Integrity brings authority.- [Rich Cathers](#)

As we're going to see, these leaders lacked integrity in their lives.

As a result, no one would listen to them if they would ever speak up for the truth.

Illustration - An example of this can be seen in the life of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Lot and Abraham had both grown rich and prosperous, and eventually had to split their flocks up and separate from each other because the land couldn't sustain them living together. Lot chose to live down by the Jordan River, where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were. As you follow Lot's life, you see him go from where he "pitched his tent toward Sodom (Gen. 13:12), then he lived "in Sodom" (Gen. 14:12), to eventually coming to the place where he was even considered a leader in Sodom (Gen. 19:1,9). As a result of Lot becoming quite comfortable and compromising in a wicked place, when it came time to listen to the angels' warning and leave Sodom, Lot was told to warn his family as well. (Gen 19:14 NLT) So Lot rushed out to tell his daughters' fiancees, "Quick, get out of the city! The LORD is going to destroy it." But the young men thought he was only joking. Because Lot had lived a life of compromise, his words carried no authority.

Isaiah 56:7 House of prayer .- [Rich Cathers](#)

Technically, this is talking about the temple in Jerusalem. But it can also apply to us as well. Paul calls the church gathered together a "temple" (1Cor. 3:16), and he also calls the body of each believer a "temple" (1Cor. 6:19).

Illustration - TABLE FOR TWO by Kirsten Burgess

He sits by himself at a table for two. The uniformed waiter returns to his side and asks, "Would you like to go ahead and order, sir?" The man has, after all, been waiting since seven o'clock—almost half an hour. "No, thank you," the man smiles. "I'll wait for her a while longer. How about some more coffee?"

"Certainly, sir."

The man sits, his clear blue eyes gazing straight through the flowered centerpiece. He fingers his napkin, allowing the sounds of light chatter, tinkling silverware, and mellow music to fill his mind. He is dressed in sport coat and tie. His dark brown hair is neatly combed, but one stray lock insists on dropping to his forehead. The scent of his cologne adds to his clean cut image. He is dressed up enough to make a companion feel important, respected, loved. Yet he is not so formal as to make one uncomfortable. It seems that he has taken every precaution to make others feel at ease with him.

Still, he sits alone.

The waiter returns to fill the man's coffee cup. "Is there anything else I can get for you, sir?" "No, thank you."

The waiter remains standing at the table. Something tugs at his curiosity. "I don't mean to pry, but..." His voice trails off. This line of conversation could jeopardize his tip.

"Go ahead," the man encourages. His is strong, yet sensitive, inviting conversation.

"Why do you bother waiting for her?" the waiter finally blurts out. This man has been at the restaurant other evenings, always patiently alone.

Says the man quietly, "Because she needs me."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, no offense, but assuming that she needs you, she sure isn't acting much like it. She's stood you up three times just this week."

The man winces, and looks down at the table. "Yes, I know."

"Then why do you still come here and wait?"

"Cassie said that she would be here."

"She's said that before," the waiter protests. "I wouldn't put up with it. Why do you?"

Now the man looks up, smiles at the waiter, and says simply, "Because I love her."

The waiter walks away, wondering how one could love a girl who stands him up three times a week. The man must be crazy, he decides. Across the room, he turns to look at the man again. The man slowly pours cream into his coffee. He twirls his spoon between his fingers a few times before stirring sweetener into his cup. After staring for a moment into the liquid, the man brings the cup to his mouth and sips, silently watching those around him. He doesn't look crazy, the waiter admits. Maybe the girl has qualities that I don't know about. Or maybe the man's love is stronger than most. The waiter shakes himself out of his musings to take an order from a party of five.

The man watches the waiter, wonders if he's ever been stood up. The man has, many times. But he still can't get used to it. Each time, it hurts. He's looked forward to this evening all day. He has many things, exciting things, to tell Cassie. But, more importantly, he wants to hear Cassie's voice. He wants her to tell him all about her day, her triumphs, her defeats....anything, really. He has tried so many times to show Cassie how much he loves her. He'd just like to know that she cares for him, too. He sips sporadically at the coffee, and loses himself in thought, knowing that Cassie is late, but still hoping that she will arrive.

The clock says nine-thirty when the waiter returns to the man's table. "Is there anything I can get for you?"

The still empty chair stabs at the man. "No, I think that will be all for tonight. May I have the check please?"

"Yes, sir."

When the waiter leaves, the man picks up the check. He pulls out his wallet and signs. He has enough money to have given Cassie a feast. But he takes out only enough to pay for his five cups of coffee and the tip. Why do you do this, Cassie, his mind cries as he gets up from the table.

"Good-bye," the waiter says, as the man walks towards the door.

"Good night. Thank you for your service."

"You're welcome, sir," says the waiter softly, for he sees the hurt in the man's eyes that his smile doesn't hide.

The man passes a laughing young couple on his way out, and his eyes glisten as he thinks of the good time he and Cassie could have had. He stops at the front and makes reservations for tomorrow. Maybe Cassie will be able to make it, he thinks.

"Seven o'clock tomorrow for party of two?" the hostess confirms.

"That's right," the man replies.

"Do you think she'll come"" asks the hostess. She doesn't mean to be rude, but she has watched the man many times alone at his table for two.

"Someday, yes. And I will be waiting for her." The man buttons his overcoat and walks out of the restaurant, alone. His shoulders are hunched, but through the windows the hostess can only guess whether they are hunched against the wind or against the man's hurt.

As the man turns toward home, Cassie turns into bed. She is tired after an evening out with friends. As she reaches toward her night stand to set the alarm, she sees the note that she scribbled to herself last night. '7:00,' it says. 'Spend some time in prayer.' Darn, she thinks. She forgot again. She feels a twinge of guilt, but quickly pushes it aside. She needed that time with her friends. And now she needs her sleep. She can pray tomorrow night. Jesus will forgive her.

And she's sure He doesn't mind.

Isaiah 56:7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountains.

Who are these favored souls? Ah, it is a miracle of grace and comfort to find that they were once, like ourselves, Gentiles after the flesh, separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, dug from the same hole of the pit to which we have belonged! And if they were lifted to such holy nearness to God — if this be indeed a true picture of God's dealings with Gentiles, then let us take heart, and ask that not one of these good things should fail in our own experience.

But mark the conditions, as detailed in Isaiah 56:6. We must be joined to the Lord in an indissoluble covenant; we must minister to Him in daily holy service as his priests; we must love his Name; we must diligently serve Him; we must abide in the Sabbath-keeping of the inner rest of the heart; and we must hold fast by his covenant. These are indispensable conditions to test the caliber and quality of the souls who are admitted to his inner presence. You must conform to them if you would be among those whom God brings in.

To what does God call such souls? To mountains of vision, whence they look out on eternal landscapes, and stand above the taint of this world, its smoke and dust. To joy: He makes them joyful in his house of prayer, for all true prayer has in it the seeds of everlasting joy. To that acceptance which fills the soul with calm and hallowed delight. Such things are within our reach; not too great or high for our feet to attain, because God will bring us in. He gathereth the outcasts; He collects his flock when straying, and leads them up to the dewy pastures of the mountain lawns. - F B Meyer

Thus saith the Lord: Keep ye judgment, and do righteousness; for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.—Isa. 56:1

This and the following chapter constitute one message, with which the section presenting the Servant of Jehovah as the Prince of Peace closes. These words give us the key to the message. It is the word of Jehovah to men in view of the salvation and the righteousness which result from the work of the Servant of Jehovah. The salvation of Jehovah is always in order to righteousness; and His righteousness can only be revealed through His salvation. To the men for whom this prophecy was spoken or written, the coming of salvation and the revelation of righteousness were associated with the appearing of the Servant of Jehovah. That was always near in the purpose of God, though on account of the persistent failure of His people, centuries elapsed before He came. But He did come, and fulfilled the prophecy as to His travail to the letter. The completion of the work will come when He appears a second time without sin unto salvation. In the purpose of God that salvation is near, and that revelation of righteousness; but it is still postponed through the failure of His people. To them this final message appeals as it alternates between comfort for the loyal-hearted, and denunciation of the false and disloyal. In this chapter there is first comfort for all those who in any measure have suffered loss for love of the name of the Lord; and then stern denunciations of those watchmen who fail to fulfil their true function, and give themselves to the false excitements of strong drink. In such a time the call of Jehovah to those who love His name and wait for His appearing is ever that they keep justice and do righteousness.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 57

Isaiah 57:15. The high and lofty One ... inhabiteth eternity.

Eternity hath neither beginning nor end. Time hath both. Eternity comprehends in itself all years, all ages, all periods of ages, and differs from time as the sea and the rivers; the sea never changes place, and is always one water, but the rivers glide along and are swallowed up in the sea; so is time by eternity. CHARNOCK.

Isaiah 57:6 - Our sinful ways are yucky. - [Rich Cathers](#)

Illustration - A man set out to do some ice-fishing on a frozen lake. Carefully having carrying his gear to a favorite spot, he proceeded to carve out a hole on the ice to drop his line, and settled into his mission. As he was waiting for the fish to bite, he noticed a young boy waddling onto the ice with a fishing pole, with a determined look on his face. The man smiled at the kid's tenacity, but after a while, his expression turned to surprise as the boy kept pulling fish after fish out of the lake. After about an hour, the man slipped and滑 across the ice to the boy and said to him, "Young man, I've been here for a while and haven't caught anything, yet I see that you keep catching fish one after another. Do you mind if I ask what your secret is?" The young boy mumbled, "Mm mm mm mm mm mmmm!" "What did you say?" asked the puzzled man. "Mm mm mm mm mm mmmm!" "I'm sorry, son, I can't understand you," the man replied. The boy spit into his hand and said, "Mister, you gotta keep your worms warm!" You may figure that the things you're doing are pretty great because you're "catching fish", but to God, our sinful ways are totally gross.

Isaiah 57:10 - The strength of false hope - [Rich Cathers](#)

Hope, or anticipation, in almost anything, can keep you moving.

Illustration - I remember hearing about tests done with laboratory wharf rats. These are the rats that live under the piers along the waterfront. One group of rats was placed in a large container of water, in the dark, with no place to stand on, they had to keep swimming. They all drowned within fifteen minutes. The second group was placed in a similar container, yet every ten minutes the lab technician would open the container, take the rats out, stroke them a few seconds, and put them back in the water. They didn't have time to rest, they just got a little encouragement. These rats went on swimming for over 12 hours (or something like that...).

What I'm curious about is how the experiment ended. I wonder if they just kept up the routine until the rats all drowned.

If that was the case, the rats had hope, but they had hope in the wrong thing. They had hope in something that wouldn't help them.

"Hope" can be placed in the wrong thing.

These people kept telling themselves there was hope, they kept "psyching" themselves up.

People and things will let you down. If you are trusting in a friend to pull you through a tough time, expect that there will be times when you'll be disappointed. Jesus will never let you down.

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

Isaiah 57

Isaiah 57:19 I create the fruit of the lips.

Our words should be like fruit. Fruit is the final cause and reason of a tree's culture; and is it not to bear fruit that we have been redeemed and cultivated with infinite solicitude? Fruit reveals the nature of its parent tree; and is there anything that more quickly shows what we are than our talk? "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Fruit, when it is ripe, is sweet to the taste; but beneath these luscious qualities there is always the ultimate design of securing the propagation of the tree through its seed; so beneath the wit, or laughter, or strong common-sense of our words, there should be the aim of sowing in others the words of eternal life.

How often, when we get into conversation with comparative strangers or our friends, we are at a loss to turn it into the right channels. Then, let us lift our thoughts to God, and say, Create in me now the right word, which shall refresh and help those whom I address. The answer will always be one of peace. "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near." Let our lips ever ring with the silver notes of PEACE, Peace; PEACE, Peace.

Still more in prayer we may claim that God should create the petitions which our lips offer. You feel that you cannot pray as you would. Now, put away the straining and striving which have robbed your quiet times of their blessedness. Kneel before God in the utter stillness of your spirit, and ask Him to create supplications, intercessions, and worship, on your lips. Dare to believe that He is doing this, and be assured that the most broken utterances, which He has created and given, are sweeter to Him than the most ornate ritual. - F B Meyer

There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.—Isa. 57.21

We stressed words similar to these before. They concluded the first section of this great prophecy, that dealing with the Purpose of Peace. In doing so we pointed out in conclusion that the statement had a double value; first, that it reveals the reason why we lack peace to-day; and secondly, that it suggests the only conditions upon which peace can ever come to men. Now we come to the end of the second section, in the process of which, we have seen the Prince of Peace, the Servant of Jehovah, Who through the Travail passes to the Triumph of establishing peace. This section closes, as we have said, with a message to men in view of the nearness of salvation and righteousness. In the part of that message contained in this chapter we again have the two notes we found in the last. First, fierce denunciation of an apostate community which had given itself to all evil practices in its forgetfulness of God. Then a message of consolation for those of contrite and humble spirit, who are loyal to Him. Then the whole movement ends with this central statement. It is to be observed that there is a difference. In the first occasion the title of God was Jehovah; here it is God, that is, Elohim. To those who observe the use of Divine names and titles this is suggestive. In the section dealing with the purpose of peace the affirmation is made by Jehovah, that is the title of grace. In the section dealing with the Prince of Peace the affirmation is made by Elohim, that is the name of absolute might. God in grace purposes peace. When He makes it possible through His suffering Servant, His Might insists on the terms. If in spite of all the travail of the suffering One, men persist in wickedness, then there is no peace for them, even by the way of that travail.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 58

Isaiah 58:11. The Lord shall guide thee continually.

The bells of Westminster Abbey chime hourly a sweet, simple melody. The words allied to the tune are these:

All through this hour,
Lord, be my guide,
And through Thy power
No foot shall slide.

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 58](#)

Isaiah 58

This is what the Lord says: "Maintain justice and do what is right." - Isaiah 56:1a

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist, once gave a lecture on medical health and answered questions from the audience. Someone asked, "What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?" Most people thought he would say "Go see a psychiatrist immediately," but he didn't. To their astonishment, Dr. Menninger replied, "Lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, find somebody in need, and help that person."

Dr. Menniger had a firm grasp on the fact that helping others is, oftentimes, the best way to help oneself. And in today's passage Isaiah gave a similar message to the people of Israel: if you want to be blessed by God, be a blessing to others. This is true worship.

Isaiah responded to the renewed observances of fasting and the Sabbath in today's reading. Unfortunately, these observances did not accompany true humility and the prophet was used to voice God's rebuke. Isaiah 58:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 address the people's frustration that God does not hear them despite their fasting. But Isaiah finds two problems: their fasting is insincere (Isa 58:3) and it is not accompanied by any regard for the needy (Isa 58:6). The people were relying on religious formalism to gain them God's attention, when what God truly desires is justice lived out in every sphere of life. "Your fasting end in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high ... Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" (Isa 58:4, 6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - It's the middle of the week--Wednesday. But let's look forward to the coming weekend. In the spirit of today's scripture reading, think how you can be a blessing to others during your days-off. How can you help your neighbor in a way you've never done before? You can donate your time at a local food pantry or crisis pregnancy center. Look into what opportunities exist in your community and make it a group event by involving your family or friends.

TRUE FASTING

Read Isaiah 58

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke? Isaiah 58:6

We start the next section of our study, God's People and Food, with a look at fasting in the Old Testament. As you might remember from our discussions of feasts in Leviticus 23, the Day of Atonement was the only festival that mandated fasting. All other instances of fasting in the Old Testament are voluntary and most often happened in times of deep distress. David wept and fasted for his dying child (2Sa 12:6-8); the Jews fasted when their lives were threatened by Haman (Esther 4:3, 16); Nineveh fasted when Jonah pronounced judgment on them (Jonah 3:6-10). In both the Old and New Testaments, fasting is an outward expression of an inward state of seeking God's will. Fasting might involve petitioning God for a desired outcome, but primarily fasting is a posture of submission.

You can understand Isaiah's frustration in the first few verses of today's reading as he mimics the entitled attitudes of those who

purport to fast faithfully: “‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have not noticed?’”(Isaiah 58:3). The prophet points out that even as they fast, these “faithful” exploit their workers. “You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high” (Isaiah 58:4).

Fasting involves more than abstaining from food; it’s about making God’s priorities our priorities. God values justice and loving community far more than ritual religious displays that seek attention (Isaiah 58:6).

John Cassian, an early Christian, wrote this about fasting: “Let us not believe that an external fast from visible food alone can possibly be sufficient for perfection of heart and purity of body unless with it there has also been united a fast of the soul.”

APPLY THE WORD John Cassian continues, “For the soul also has its foods that are harmful. Slander is its food and indeed one that is very dear to it. A burst of anger also supplies it with miserable food for an hour and destroys it as well with its deadly savor.” Pray about fasting in your life—possibly restricting food for a time in order to focus on the Lord, but also to “fast” from soul foods like slander and anger.

Isaiah 58:6-9; Isaiah 56:9-58:14

I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite ... in spirit. Isaiah 57:15

Sandra Corbett penned the words to a powerful modern worship chorus: “I worship You, Almighty God; / There is none like You. / I worship You, O Prince of Peace; / That is what I want to do. / I give you praise for You are my righteousness. / I worship You, Almighty God; / There is none like You.”

Worship is the focus of today’s reading. Through all Isaiah prophesied, including the Servant Songs, he was calling Israel back to genuine worship of the one true God. He condemned false worshipers (Isa 56:9–57:13), including many of the nation’s leaders, who had earned their descriptions as blind watchmen and selfish shepherds. They had led the people into covenant unfaithfulness by worshiping idols, including adopting the detestable pagan practices of sexual immorality and child sacrifice as part of “worship.” Their faith was misplaced, and God would expose and judge their rebelliousness.

True worshipers, by contrast, are righteous and humble and walk closely with God (Isa 57:14–58:14). He alone is worthy of worship and a strong refuge for His people. He dwells with the contrite and lowly in spirit, a fact that amounts to an invitation to the Israelites to humble themselves and repent of their sin. God’s anger was just, but they could take comfort in seeing His larger purposes of healing, restoration, and comfort.

If they were not sure where to begin in turning from their idolatry, chapter 58 is a guide on how to repent. Facing up to the reality of sin is the first step, but the Israelites were acting as if everything were in good shape (Isa 58:1–3). They needed to realize that doing the forms of worship while at the same time living unworshipfully was and is useless. God sees the heart, and that is the measure of a true worshiper.

For such people: “The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs ... You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (Isa 58:11).

APPLY THE WORD Today’s shorter alternate reading alludes to the nature and purpose of true fasting. Especially if you are unfamiliar with this biblical practice, it might be helpful to study what Scripture has to say about it. Here are some questions to think about: What are the biblical goals and guidelines for fasting? What are some dangers to avoid in fasting? When is fasting worship and when is it not? Additional passages to check out include Matthew 4:1–11 and 6:16–18, as well as Acts 13:1–3.

Isaiah 58:1-7 - Fasting- [Rich Cathers](#) (the following illustrations are from Cathers)

Introduction - Three sons left home, went out on their own and prospered. Getting back together, they discussed the gifts they were able to give their elderly mother. The first said, “I built a big house for our mother.” The second said, “I sent her a Mercedes with a driver.” The third smiled and said, “I’ve got you both beat. You remember how mom enjoyed reading the Bible? And you know she can’t see very well. So I sent her a remarkable parrot that recites the entire Bible. It took elders in the church 12 years to teach him. He’s one of a kind. Mama just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot recites it.” Soon thereafter, mom sent out her letters of thanks: “Milton,” she wrote one son, “The house you built is so huge. I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house.” “Gerald,” she wrote to another, “I am too old to travel. I stay most of the time at home, so I rarely use the Mercedes. And the driver is so rude!” “Dearest Donald,” she wrote to her third son, “You have the good sense to know what your mother likes. The chicken was delicious.” Today we’re going to look at something that was meant by God to be a valuable gift, but something that has been greatly abused. We’re going to look at God’s ideas about fasting.

Isaiah 58:5 - False Spirituality

It is possible for a person to put on a display of spirituality that on the outside looks pretty impressive. It may be a person that prays eloquently, knows Bible verses, even teaches Sunday School and helps out with the Harvest Crusade. But it can all be done for the wrong reasons. The result is that people are beaten up instead of built up. Jesus warned of the Pharisees in (Mt 23:2-4). If your knees are bowed but your heart isn't, people are going to be hurt.

Illustration - Olga and Sven had been fighting all their married life until Olga one day said, "Sven, we been fightin' and fightin' these many years I think we should pray about this together." When they knelt down to pray, Olga interrupted Sven before he had three words spoken. "Dear God, Sven and I have been fightin' and fightin' these many years. It is time that one of us should go to Heaven... Then I can go live with my mother."

Isaiah 58:7 - Denying yourself to give to others

Do you deny yourself just for the sake of denying yourself? Or do you turn it into an opportunity to serve others?

Illustration - A wife became quite concerned over her husband's declining health. His color was very pale and lifeless and he had a terrible lack of energy for even the simplest of tasks. After much prodding and cajoling, she persuaded him to go to the doctor to find out what his problem might be. The doctor examined him carefully and ran a full battery of tests to determine the exact natures of the man's illness. After evaluating the test results, he called the woman into his office to give his prognosis. "Your husband is suffering from a rare form of anemia. Without proper treatment, he could be dead in a matter of just a few weeks," he informed the very anxious wife. He went on to say, "However it can be successfully treated with the right care and diet. With the proper course of treatment, I am happy to report that you can expect full recovery." The wife was very relieved and asked what kind of action was necessary. The doctor gave his prescription, "You will need to get up every morning and fix a complete breakfast of pancakes, eggs, bacon, etc. Make sure that he has a home-cooked lunch each afternoon of fresh-baked bread and home-made soup. For dinner prepare a meal of fresh salad, old-fashioned meat and potatoes, fresh vegetables and perhaps home-made pie or cake for dessert. Because his immune system is so compromised, you will need to keep the house scrupulously clean. It will also be important to keep his stress level very low, so avoid any kind of confrontation or argument." The wife emerged from the doctor's office and with tears rolling down her cheeks, she faced her husband. The husband took one look at his wife and said very seriously, "The news is bad isn't it? What did the doctor say?" With a choked voice, the sobbing wife told her beloved husband, "The doctor says, you're gonna die."

Isaiah 58:8 Move forward. - [Rich Cathers](#) (the following illustrations are from Cathers)

Correct fasting is all about moving ahead.

It's not just about looking back and mourning over sins, but when there is mourning involved, it's about putting the past behind and moving ahead.(Phil 3:13-14)

Illustration - One morning a couple of cowpunchers went out on the range to bring in a wild steer from the mountains. They took along with them one of those shaggy little gray donkeys—a burro. Now a big three-year old steer that's been running loose in the timber is a tough customer to handle. Nevertheless, these cowboys had a technique for handling this steer. They got a rope on the steer and then they tied him neck and neck, right up close, to the burro and let them go.

At first, the burro had a bad time. The steer threw him all over the place. He banged him against trees, rocks, into bushes. Time after time they both went down. But there was one great difference between the burro and the steer. The burro had an idea. He wanted to go home. And no matter how often the steer threw him every time the burro got to his feet he took a step nearer the corral. This went on and on. After about a week, the burro showed up at the corral. He had with him the tamest and sorriest-looking steer you ever saw.

The thought of this little burro, being overpowered and abused can encourage us when we find ourselves struggling with difficult problems or people in our lives. We often feel tied, "right up close". If we could only have some slack! But our God had a purpose in tying us to our problems. He knows that our faith will enable us to hang in there. No matter how often we are thrown, our stubborn Christian attitude will enable us to get to our feet and take a step nearer to God's solution! We may be abused and hurt. But just think of the tremendous outcome—that we might eventually stand before the throne of our Savior, tied to that special person who has now been brought to Christ! Maybe God's techniques make sense after all! Be like that little burro. Keep heading home. Fasting helps you move forward.

Isaiah 58:14 - An elective course

Illustration - Once upon a time, a king ordered a three-day fast throughout the kingdom. Anyone caught eating was to be smitten seven times with a rod. Anyone caught assisting another in breaking the fast would be shackled to a ball and chain. After two days, one nobleman, a count, decided he couldn't hold out. So he ordered three servants to prepare a meal. Word leaked to the royal

palace that the count and countess were breaking the fast. The king and queen were furious, and rushed to the count's home, bursting in just as dessert was being served. The king growled in a sarcastic voice, "Is the count full?" "Yes," declared the queen, pointing to the five offenders and ordering their punishment. "Ball three and strike two!" -- "Strange World," Campus Life, Vol. 53, no. 6.

In actuality, the practice of "fasting" isn't one that we are commanded to do. It's not a "required course" as a Christian. But it's an elective course that I think we ought to consider. And considering the benefits if we should pass the course, I think we ought to consider it pretty strongly.

Isaiah 58:11 The Lord shall guide thee continually; and thou shalt be like a watered garden

These are only a handful of the cluster of promises with which this chapter abounds. Let us ponder them; they are full of comfort. To be guided continually; to be satisfied when all the world around is athirst; to be fair and attractive to those who see us from day to day; to be as fountains of comfort and joy to the dry and weary land in which we are called to live — are not such blessings good to seek and keep? But there are certain conditions that must be fulfilled. Before we break the seal and appropriate the money within, we must be sure that our name is on the envelope, and that we are intended by the designation.

First, we must undo. If we have injured others by word or act, or if we are still doing so, we must retrace our steps, and so far as possible undo the wrong (Isaiah 58:6).

Next, we must remember the Lord's words in Matthew 25, and be willing to minister deeds of helpful sympathy to the bodies and souls of men, as though we were doing them to Him (Isaiah 58:7).

Lastly, we must ever remember to maintain within our hearts the spirit of Sabbath calm and peace. Not fussy, nor anxious, nor fretful and impetuous; but refraining our foot from our own paths and our hand from our own devices; refusing to find our own pleasure, and do our own works. It is only when we are fully resolved to act thus, allowing God to originate all our plans, and to work in us for their accomplishment, that we enter on our heritage of blessedness, or are brought into the enjoyment of the continual guidance and blessing of which we have spoken. Then God will delight in us, and we in Him. - F B Meyer

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins.—Isa. 58.1

This chapter and the next constitute, if not one message, certainly one movement. With them the last section of this prophetic unveiling begins. In the first, the burden was that of Jehovah's purpose of peace. In the second, the supreme teaching is found, that namely of the presentation of the Servant of Jehovah, the Prince of Peace, through Whom the purpose of Jehovah is to be realized. Now the prophetic word was influenced by prevailing conditions; and it showed what the program of peace must be, in view of these conditions. In the words of this first verse, this movement opens with the prophet's recitation of the words which had commanded him to say what he was about to say. He was charged to declare to the people of God, their transgressions and their sins. They were sternly rebuked for observing the ritual of religion, while failing entirely to produce its true results. In the name of Jehovah the prophet repudiated the value of an attitude and activity of humility and lowliness before God, when in their dealings with their fellow-men, there was an absence of justice and of compassion. Thus sharply were those people recalled from the consideration of the purpose and grace of Jehovah, to the fact of their immediate unworthiness; and were warned that for them the way, and the only way, into the realization of the blessings which He would provide, was that of turning from their wickedness, and so vitalizing their religious observances. It is a principle we do well to ponder. The operations of the Divine grace are never in conflict with the requirements of the Divine holiness. - G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 59

Isaiah 59:1. If our water-supply runs short, I do not conclude that the river or lake has run dry, but that our pipes are out of order. - D L Moody

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[Isaiah 59](#)

Isaiah 59:2 OUR FATHER'S FACE - Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.

At a rehearsal for a Sabbath-school entertainment, some time since, a little girl, five years old, was placed upon the platform to

recite a short poem. She commenced very bravely, but her eyes wandered all round the church, gathering more and more of disappointment in her face. Soon the lips began to quiver, and the little form shook with sobs. Her father stepped from behind a pillar, from whence he had been watching her, and taking her in his arms, said, "Why, darling, what is the matter? I thought my little girl knew the verses so well." "So I do, papa; but I couldn't see you. Let me stand where I can look right into your face, and then I won't be afraid." Is it not so with our heavenly Father's children? We stand too often where we cannot look into His face. Darling sins and our pride, like pillars, rise up between us and God, and disappointment and tears are ours, until, casting these behind us, we stand in the light of the Father's face. - D L Moody

Isaiah 59:12 - You know you're guilty. - [Rich Cathers](#)

You really don't need anyone to tell you you're guilty, do you?

Illustration - After a two-week criminal trial in a very high profile bank robbery case, the judge turns to the jury foreman and asks, "Has the jury reached a verdict in this case?" "Yes, we have, your honor," The foreman responded. "Would you please pass it to me," The judge declared, as he motioned for the bailiff to retrieve the verdict slip from the foreman and deliver it to him. After the judge reads the verdict himself, he delivers the verdict slip back to his bailiff to be returned to the foreman and instructs the foreman, "Please read your verdict to the court." "We find the defendant Not Guilty of all four counts of bank robbery," stated the foreman. The family and friends of the defendant jump for joy at the verdict and hug each other as they shout expressions of divine gratitude. The man's attorney turns to his client and asks, "So, what do you think about that?" The defendant, with a bewildered look on his face, turns to his attorney and asks, "Well, does that mean I can keep the money, or do I have to give it back?" We may be able to convince others we're not guilty, but inside we know we are.

Isaiah 59:1 "The LORD'S hand is not shortened ... neither his ear heavy."

Your accusation against God may be turned against you. You thought that God's hand was shortened, that it could not save. But it is your hand that is shortened, for you have not laid hold on Christ. You said that God's ear was heavy. No, no, no; it is your ear that is heavy. You have not heard what God the Lord has been saying to you; you have not been obedient to the heavenly message. All the mischief lies with yourself, not with God. And at the last, if you are not saved, the blame will not rest on the Savior, but on yourself.—C H Spurgeon

Isaiah 59:21 My Spirit ... and my words ... shall not depart.

This is a very precious promise, especially to God's ministers and to all who are using their voice and lips in his holy service. These may claim its fulfillment up to the hilt; and it is no doubt due to some pious ancestor having claimed these words that there is so often a godly succession of ministers in one family bearing the same honored name.

But these words are often quoted promiscuously and carelessly. Notice there are two traits of character distinctly noted and specified.

We must receive the Holy Spirit, and we must utter the words which He puts into our lips. They are one, because when the Holy Spirit fills the soul the lips are touched as with a live coal from off the altar. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak." Oh, bend your head low beneath the anointing of the great High Priest. Let Him breathe on you, and say, Receive the Holy Spirit; and then go out to be a witness for Him. Thou shalt be taught in the same hour what and how.

It is a marvelous thing that God should enter into covenant with man to keep on blessing his seed for his Word's sake. Yet He does so. He keeps his blessings for thousands of them that love Him and keep his commandments, whilst He punishes only to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Long after you have gone, if only you have earnestly done God's work in the world, He will be gracious to your children and your children's children. Not only, as the poet said, "in a dead man's face" comes out the likeness to one of his ancestors, but in the faces and lives of living men we may trace the influence of their godly forefathers. - F B Meyer

Isaiah 59:1 - Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear.

If in this chapter we have a second discourse, the theme is the same as in the previous one, with a different application. There, these people were brought sharply face to face with their sins. Here, the truth involved in that message is stated plainly, namely, that these sins are pre-venting the fulfilment of the Divine purpose. In these opening words a statement is made which was probably intended to correct a false view of the delay in the realization of the declared purpose. It is conceivable that there were those who were declaring that Jehovah was either powerless to deliver them, or indifferent to their sorrows. The prophet declared that neither thing was true. His hand was not shortened; His ear was not heavy. Observe what immediately follows. "But," said the prophet—and beyond the "but," he uttered words which placed the blame on them. Note the short, sharp sentences, and the personal element—"Your iniquities...your sins ...your hands ... your fingers ... your lips . . . your tongue." To them he said—describing the attitude of

the people as he vehemently denounced it—"The way of peace they know not." That is constantly the answer to those who charge God with inability, or indifference. When men say: Why does not God act? the reply is that His inaction is due to man's failure. Nevertheless, the last note is still that of confidence. When things are at their worst, and no man is found, then Jehovah arrays Himself as a warrior, and proceeds to accomplish His purpose.- G Campbell Morgan

Isaiah 65:1 - I am found of them that sought me not.

If the Lord is thus found by those that seek him not, how much more surely will he be found by those who seek him! If he saved Saul who hated him, much more will he listen to him who cries, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." If he called careless, curious Zacchaeus, much more will he speak to you, my anxious, earnest hearers, who are saying, "Oh, that he would speak to me!"—C H Spurgeon

ISAIAH 60

Isaiah 60:20 The Lord shall be thine everlasting light.

God is Light. God is a Sun. Paul says: "God hath shined in our hearts to give the light." What light? "The light of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Just as the sun shines its beautiful, life giving light on and into our earth, so God shines into our hearts the light of His glory, of His love, in Christ His Son. Our heart is meant to have that light filling and gladdening it all the day. It can have it, because God is our sun, and it is written, "Thy sun shall no more go down forever." God's love shines on us without ceasing. -- ANDREW MURRAY.

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[Isaiah 60](#)

Isaiah 60:16 - God wants you to know - from [Rich Cathers](#)

God wants you to know that He is your Savior. (1 John 5:9-13) Many people go through life wondering and hoping that they are saved. Many people are plagued with doubts that they will one day make it to heaven. God doesn't want you wondering. He wants you to know. It all boils down to this. Eternal life is found in Jesus. It is your sins that will keep you from heaven. Only Jesus has paid the price that will take care of your sins. If you have asked Jesus to pay for you, if you have asked Jesus into your life, then you have eternal life. It's no longer a matter of whether you've been good enough. It's a matter of whether Jesus is good enough. It's a matter of whether you are trusting in Jesus to pay for your sins.

Illustration - Believe me, the life of grace is no dead level; it is not a marsh country, a vast flat. There are mountains, and there are valleys. There are tribes of Christians who live in the lowlands, like the poor Swiss of Valais, who live between the lofty ranges of mountains in the midst of the smoke (miasma), where the air is stagnant and fever has its lair and the human frame grows languid and enfeebled. Such dwellers in the lowlands of unbelief are forever doubting, fearing, troubled about their interest in Christ, and tossed to and fro; but there are other believers, who, by God's grace, have climbed the mountain of full assurance and near communion. Their place is with the eagle (in his eyrie), high aloft; they are like the strong mountaineer who has trodden the virgin snow, who has breathed the fresh, free air of the Alpine regions, and therefore his sinews are braced, and his limbs are vigorous. These are they who do great exploits, being mighty men, men of renown.-- Charles Haddon Spurgeon, The Quotable Spurgeon, (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, Inc, 1990)

For some of you, you've struggled for too long, wondering if you're really a Christian or not. You don't have to struggle any longer. You can settle the matter today. Today you can make a decision to turn from your sins and turn to Jesus. Today you can decide to trust in Jesus to pay for your sins. All of your sins. Past, present, even future. You can choose today to open your heart to Jesus, and He will come into your life. You can choose today to KNOW that you are saved.

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine; for thy light is come.

For long the night had brooded on Mount Zion, and the beautiful city had sat in the dust desolate and afflicted; but at last the watchers see the sky brightening into the splendor of dawn, and the cry goes forth that the day is at hand, calling her to arise and shine.

Whenever the glory of the Lord rises upon thee, be sure to reflect it. Arise, shine! Arise, to catch as much of it as possible. Shine, that others may catch as much as possible also. Behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, in long and loving fellowship, till you

reflect it in full-orbed glory; and as you reflect it you will be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Lord the Spirit. Arise to the highest pinnacle of the mountain to catch the dawn, and then begin to shine with a glory that never shone on sea or shore.

Sometimes Christians seek release from their positions in business or social life, on the plea that they are so uncongenial and ungodly. Yet these are the very circumstances under which Zion is bidden to arise and shine. The darker the staircase, the more need of the candle. Because darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people, there is the more need for her towers to gleam with light. The Lord has given us the light of his countenance that we may flash it forward. In loneliness and solitude let us still shine for Jesus, like the stone-white steeple of a church, smitten by a search-light in the night. - F B Meyer

"Yet not in solitude! if Christ anear me
Waketh Him workers for the great employ!
Oh, not in solitude! — if souls that hear me
Catch from my joyance the surprise of joy."

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.—Isa. 60.1

This is the first of three chapters which constitute one movement, which thrills and throbs with joy in the certainty of the accomplishment of God's purposes of peace, through the Servant of Jehovah. This chapter is addressed to the nation, as she is revealed in "The City of Jehovah, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (see Isa 60:14). This opening call was addressed; not to Jerusalem as she was in the time when the prophecy was uttered; not to Jerusalem as she has ever been in her history even to the present time; but to Jerusalem as she will be, when she is established in righteousness and beauty, through the travail and triumph of the Servant of Jehovah. Then the city will be the centre of the world's light, for then the glory of Jehovah will rest upon her, and will radiate throughout the world. In that day affairs will be as this great message describes them, Nations will come to the light, and Kings to the brightness. The children of the city, long scattered, will be gathered. The peoples of the world will come, not grudgingly, but gladly, bringing their gifts with them, and pouring their wealth into this city of God. This is the city which Abraham saw and sought. This is the city concerning which John declared the nations shall walk in the light of it, and shall bring their glory and honour into it. It has never yet been built. All this is either only wild dreaming—and very beautiful at that—or it is Divine prediction, and must yet come to pass. As to which, there can be no question. Every word of it will be fulfilled for the blessing of all the world.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 61

Isaiah 61:1-3

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. - Isaiah 61:3b

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

In ancient Canaanite religion, trees symbolized fertility. Fertility rituals often took place under sacred trees, symbolizing participation in the earth's life. These rituals were believed to bring better harvests, more children, and increased vitality. But as we see from Isaiah 1 and 61, this misplaced worship brought death instead of life.

In the next four studies we'll see that Scripture uses trees to symbolize Israel. In Isaiah 1, Israel is rebuked for putting its delight in "sacred oaks" and special gardens, places devoted to pagan sacrifices and fertility rituals. Instead of trusting its Creator for fullness of life, Israel trusted His creatures. The result? Lifelessness and spiritual drought. "You will be like an oak with fading leaves," the Lord says, "a garden without water" (Isa 1:30). Delight in anything apart from the Life Giver eventually leads to spiritual barrenness.

Isaiah 61 speaks of the restoration of the faithful in Israel after the Exile. In a series of opposing poetic images, this passage prophesies how the Lord will exchange Israel's barrenness for new life. Instead of ashes, there will be beauty; instead of mourning, gladness; instead of despair, praise (Isa 61:3). The final line of this verse, which is easy to miss, recalls the image of Isaiah 1-- instead of dying idolatrous oaks, "they will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."

By returning to its Maker, Israel will thrive. In the same way, by recognizing that we are the work of God's hands (Isa. 60:21) and that creating life is His work, not ours, we grow. Because we worship Him, we will image Him; we will display His splendor.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY St. Augustine once said, "What we love we shall grow to resemble." Where is your heart directed today? Toward a "sacred oak" of your own making or toward the Maker of oaks?

[Isaiah 61](#)

Isaiah 61

The oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Isaiah 61:3

"Mommy, my truck broke!" Little children instinctively run to their parents to have them fix the broken things in their lives. But as they grow older, they learn that Mommy can't fix everything. She can't make that girl you have your eye on like you back. She can't prevent the emotional scars that result from your being excluded from a social circle. She can't protect you from all the consequences of your foolish choices. She can't heal you from a life-threatening disease.

No other person can put everything right in our lives. But we know the God who will one day make all things right. Today and tomorrow we'll get a glimpse of how God will finally restore our world, with its broken bodies and fractured relationships, and transform our mourning into joy.

This passage comes at the end of the book of Isaiah, an extended prophecy of the coming judgment on Judah. But destruction was not the end of Judah's story—it was a painful step along the journey, but the final destination was freedom and the Lord's favor. The ruined cities would be rebuilt (Isaiah 61:4). The land would again be fertile and productive (Isaiah 61:5, 11). Their descendants would have a future in this place promised by God (Isaiah 61:9).

In addition to the restoration of the land, God promises restored joy and a relationship with Him (Isaiah 61:6–7). This relationship is summed up in Isaiah 61:10: "I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness." What a great comfort—someday our sovereign God will not only change our circumstances but also fill our hearts with delight in Him.

APPLY THE WORD What situations in your life do you long for God to change? Even though we might not see how God does it—and we might not even see when God does it—He promises that one day, He will fix all brokenness. While we wait, we have the comfort of knowing that God will keep His promise to bring full restoration.

Isaiah 61:1-11; Isaiah 59-61

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. Isaiah 60:1

Slavery still exists in some parts of the world—Niger, for example. One human rights group estimates the number of slaves there at 43,000. In 2003, the country amended its law to penalize slave-owners with prison time. One chieftain offered to free his 7,000 slaves rather than face punishment. But the government felt embarrassed to admit that slavery actually existed, so it declared that it didn't, cancelled the manumission ceremony, and the slaves weren't freed after all.

Throughout his book, Isaiah proclaimed that repentance and God's forgiveness would set Israel free from sin. He knew the nation wouldn't listen during his lifetime, so he looked forward in time to a better day. Though then the nation followed "gods" as insubstantial as cobwebs (Isa 59:6), there would come a glorious day when sin would be acknowledged, the Lord would balance the scales of justice, and righteousness and integrity would once again characterize His people. That day would be like dawn breaking into the darkness (Isa 60:1–3). Some of this was fulfilled in Israel's return from exile in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, including the rebuilding of Jerusalem. But other descriptions are still in the future, such as the reign of peace and prosperity and God being the "everlasting light" of His people (Isa 60:20).

These layers of fulfillment were indicated by Christ in Luke 4:16–21. Jesus quoted the messianic announcement that opens Isaiah 61, but stopped after verse 2a. The Messiah was all about justice, freedom, holiness, and redemption, but these purposes and qualities would be manifested differently in His first advent than in His second. The gospel came with His Incarnation, but the kingdom won't come in power until He returns. That day will see the glorious "wedding" of God and His people, a day of celebration and consummation toward which all of history is moving. On that day we shall all be "oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor" (Isa 61:3).

APPLY THE WORD

One recurring theme in Isaiah is how seriously God takes sin. Our culture tends to rationalize and even joke about sin. We can lose our desire to be free from sin when we are making excuses and jokes about it instead of seeking God's perspective. Today, prayerfully consider to what extent popular culture has influenced your attitude toward holiness. Perhaps you need to replace some of your viewing, listening, or reading habits. Resolve to act as the Spirit leads you, so that you are making no allowance for sin to

flourish.

Isaiah 61:1-11; Luke 4:14-22

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. - Isaiah 61:1

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus quoted the words of Isaiah 61:1, 2 as He read from the scroll to the people in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. Jesus ended His reading with the words, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isa. 61:2).

With all eyes fastened on Jesus, He rolled up the scroll and said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). In His hometown synagogue Jesus proclaimed Himself as the One who would bring this to pass.

When Isaiah originally wrote these words, his people faced desolation at the hand of Babylon. Therefore, Isaiah was probably referring to Christ's first coming to earth. This passage speaks of the second coming of Christ as well as the first, and the two are only separated by a little and in verse 2. Today, however, we realize the time between the two is at least two thousand years.

Let's look at the first and second comings of Christ as tall mountains, and the time between as a valley where we presently stand. We can look back at the first mountain to the birth, death on the cross, and resurrection of Christ, but we can't see the top of the second mountain. When Jesus comes again, He will put down the rebellion here on earth with righteous wrath, and it won't be a pretty scene.

Yet immediately following the day of vengeance, Jesus will "comfort all who mourn" (Isa 61:2). Those who mourn over their sin and are obedient to Him will be comforted with a "crown of beauty," "oil of gladness," and a "garment of praise" (Isa 61:3).

As Isaiah 61 continues, we see how thoroughly God restores what is broken (Isa 61:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). We also see how we should respond: "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness" (Isa 61:10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Isaiah 61:10 reminds us to rejoice in our salvation. One way to do that is to share the joy of salvation with others.

Isaiah 61:1-11; Luke 4:16-21

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. - Isaiah 61:1

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

There wasn't a person in the synagogue at Nazareth that Sabbath who knew what was going to happen when Jesus appeared (Lk. 4:16). They knew who He was, or so they thought. Judging by the people's violent reaction to Jesus, there must have been some latent jealousy and hostility toward the Lord in His hometown.

Jesus read from the Scriptures and addressed the worshipers. He was given the scroll of Isaiah, and He unrolled it to Isaiah 61, reading to the midpoint of verse 2 and then handing the scroll back to the synagogue attendant (Isa 61:17, 18, 19, 20, 21).

Jesus concluded His reading with the proclamation of "the year of the LORD's favor." When Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah and Savior, he introduced the favor of God into the world.

Jesus was precise in His reading because of the message He had for Israel: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21). Jesus' words impressed the worshipers in Nazareth, but they couldn't see Him as more than the son of Mary and Joseph. Their growing resentment, and the attempt to kill Jesus (Lk 4:28, 29, 30), became an object lesson of the nation's disbelief.

Isaiah had prophesied Christ's rejection at the hands of Israel (Isa. 53:3), but there is no hint of this in chapter 61. In fact, most of the chapter is devoted to the benefits that Messiah's reign will bring to God's chosen people.

These Messianic benefits will bring an end to suffering, especially that of Israel during the Tribulation. Those who have believed in Him will trade mourning and despair for joy and praise. Israel will have a definite ministry in the kingdom, as the light to the nations that God had always intended her to be (Isa. 61:5, 6).

Together, all believers will appear at the kingdom reception as Christ's bride (Isa. 61:10). This will be a time of great rejoicing in the reign of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The people of Nazareth weren't really ready to hear from God, even though they were in the middle of a worship service. That ought to tell us that spiritual sensitivity is more a matter of the heart than of location. Last Sunday we encouraged you to begin each day's study by praying for a willing spirit and a listening ear. Today let's take it a step further. If the Holy Spirit wanted to speak to you about something today, or this weekend, how much competition would He have for your attention?

Isaiah 61:3b

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. - Isaiah 61:3b

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL In ancient Canaanite religion, trees symbolized fertility. Fertility rituals often took place under sacred trees, symbolizing participation in the earth's life. These rituals were believed to bring better harvests, more children, and increased vitality. But as we see from Isaiah 1 and 61, this misplaced worship brought death instead of life. In the next four studies we'll see that Scripture uses trees to symbolize Israel. In Isaiah 1, Israel is rebuked for putting its delight in "sacred oaks" and special gardens, places devoted to pagan sacrifices and fertility rituals. Instead of trusting its Creator for fullness of life, Israel trusted His creatures. The result? Lifelessness and spiritual drought. "You will be like an oak with fading leaves," the Lord says, "a garden without water" (v. 30). Delight in anything apart from the Life Giver eventually leads to spiritual barrenness.

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TODAY ALONG THE WAY

St. Augustine once said, "What we love we shall grow to resemble." Where is your heart directed today? Toward a "sacred oak" of your own making or toward the Maker of oaks?

The following illustrations are from [Rich Cathers](#):

Isaiah 61:1 - Ministry requires anointing.

When Jesus was baptized by John, Jesus had prayed and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove upon Jesus (Luke 2:21-22). If you keep following the story, you see Jesus being tested in the wilderness for 40 days, then going back to Nazareth to start His ministry. He starts by going to the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21), reading Isaiah 61:1-2, and then announcing that the prophecy had been fulfilled that day. He had been anointed. He was now beginning His ministry.

Taste Test. The topic of the "Holy Spirit" is one that makes many people uncomfortable. Many of us know what it's like to see some pretty yucky things happening, all supposedly being led by the Holy Spirit. We've said to ourselves, "If that's the Holy Spirit, then I don't want any!" You've tasted of the wrong thing. It wasn't the Holy Spirit. Come and see what the Holy Spirit really tastes like. The Holy Spirit produces "fruit". Come and take a taste and see if you like it.

Illustration - The other day at lunch my wife took some nectarines, cut them up, and put them on a plate in the center of the kitchen table. Two of my boys knew how good nectarines were, and they didn't have any trouble snatching up all the pieces of the delicious fruit. One of my sons was a little reluctant. He wasn't sure he liked the looks of the fruit. We found ourselves trying anything we could just to get him to taste and see how good it was. (Gal 5:22-23) Taste the real thing. You need the Holy Spirit in your life.

How? I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit came upon Him (Luke 3:21-22). The empowering of the Holy Spirit is often tied to prayer. Prayer is a large part of learning to walk under God's anointing.

That great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, writes to young pastors in *Lectures to My Students* (pgs.49-50), about the benefits of spending time alone with God in prayer,

"One bright benison which private prayer brings down upon the ministry is an indescribable and inimitable something, better understood than named; it is a dew from the Lord, a divine presence which you will recognize at once when I say it is "an unction from the holy One." What is it? I wonder how long we might beat our brains before we could plainly put into words what is meant by preaching with unction; yet he who preaches knows its presence, and he who hears soon detects its absence ...Every one knows what the

freshness of the morning is when orient pearls abound on every blade of grass, but who can describe it, much less produce it of itself? Such is the mystery of spiritual anointing; we know, but we cannot tell to others what it is."

Spurgeon then goes on to say,

"Unction is a thing which you cannot manufacture, and its counterfeits are worse than worthless; yet it is in itself priceless, and beyond measure needful if you would edify believers and bring sinners to Jesus. To the secret pleader with God this secret is committed; upon him rests the dew of the Lord, about him is the perfume which makes glad the heart. If the anointing which we bear come not from the Lord of hosts we are deceivers, and since only in prayer can we obtain it, let us continue instant, constant, fervent in supplication. Let your fleece lie on the threshing-floor of supplication till it is wet with the dew of heaven. Go not to minister in the temple till you have washed in the laver. Think not to be a messenger of grace to others till you have seen the God of grace for yourselves, and had the word from his mouth."

Isaiah 61:1 - Forgiving others

The concept of "forgiveness" is the idea of releasing a person from debt.

Illustration - If you find yourself owing a bank \$20,000, and you've lost your job, and you have no way to repay, you might be able to plead with the lender to "forgive" part of your debt. They would rather get at least \$5,000 from you than get nothing at all. And so they might "forgive" you of \$15,000. Maybe. When someone does something to hurt you, they "owe" you. They ought to pay you something in return for damaging you. When you "forgive" a person, you release them from their debt. You are saying to them, "You no longer owe me".

Sometimes I'll be counseling with someone and they'll be telling me about something hurtful that has happened in their life. They'll be careful to tell me that they've forgiven the other person, but the way they describe it all to me, it's clear that they think the other person still owes them. They don't usually like this, but I'll tell them that it doesn't sound like they've really forgiven the other person. Telling the other person that you've forgiven them doesn't make it so. Forgiveness means that you stop calling their bank to see if the check is good. Forgiveness means that you don't send the Terminator to collect. Forgiveness means that you let it go.

Isaiah 61:3 - God's restoration.

God brings glory or "beauty" to Himself by changing our lives. God looks good when He changes our lives (Mt 5:16).

Lesson - God's restoration. Though this is talking about what God will do for the Jews in Jerusalem when Jesus comes back, there's a sense in which He does it for us now.(Luke 15:11-24)

Illustration - Ernest Hemingway wrote a story about a father and his teenage son. In the story, the relationship had become somewhat strained, and the teenage son ran away from home. His father began a journey in search of that rebellious son. Finally, in Madrid, Spain, in a last desperate attempt to find the boy, the father put an ad in the local newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, Meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." The next day, in front of the newspaper office, eight hundred Pacos showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness. They were all seeking the love of their father.-- George Munzing, "Living a Life of Integrity," Preaching Today, Tape No. 32. It's time to come home to the Father.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.

We can never disassociate those words from that memorable scene at the Jordan, when, after the Lord's baptism, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, rested upon Him. Forty days of fierce temptation could not deprive Him of that holy anointing; and He came to Galilee, stood up in the synagogue of Nazareth, and announced the anointing He had received.

If the Master needed it, how much more do we! If He did not attempt to bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, or the opening of the prison to the bound; if He would not preach, or comfort, or communicate joy, until that memorable unction had been imparted — how absurd it is for us to attempt similar works without this anointing!

What a marvelous forecast is here of the mission of Christ through his Church to the world during the present age. She is sent to take up and pass on this blessed ministry. What a true forecast also of the needs of mankind! It is as though the Holy Spirit desired to reveal the salient characteristics of the great sad world, that it would be full of the broken-hearted, of captives, prisoners, and mourners, needing Divine assistance and ministration. Man is so fallen and helpless that he needs the entire Trinity: The Lord God, the Father; Me, the Son; and The Spirit, the Holy Ghost.

When Jesus quoted these words He stopped at the comma in the second verse, which stood therefore for at least nineteen hundred years which intervene between the proclamation of the year of mercy and of the day of vengeance. The time for repentance is lengthening out, since God desires not the sinner's death, but that he should turn and live. - F B Meyer

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me.—Isa. 61.1

In this great chapter we hear again the voice of the Servant of Jehovah. Of that there can be no question in the light of the use made of the words by our Lord Himself. Again the subject is that of the city of God, and the people of God as fulfilling the Divine purpose. It is impossible for us to read these words save in the light of our Lord's employment of them. He closed the Roll, from which He read in the synagogue, at the words, "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." That is, He broke off His reading in the midst of a statement, ending at the point where our punctuators have supplied a comma. The next phrase is, "And the day of vengeance of our God." He did not read that, because He had not then come to proclaim that day of vengeance. In the "acceptable year of the Lord," there have already been nearly two thousand human earthly years. How many more there will be the Lord alone knows. That it will be succeeded by "the day of vengeance" is certain; and that the Servant of Jehovah will also proclaim that day is equally certain. All the rest of this chapter is still prediction. Beyond the day of Jehovah's vengeance, and as the result of it there will come comfort for mourning Zion, and her complete restoration to prosperity, peace and power. For the accomplishment of all these things of the Divine program, the Servant of Jehovah is anointed with the Spirit of Jehovah. When He came, He came by the overshadowing of the Spirit; in the power of the Spirit, He gave His teaching and did His works; through the Spirit He offered Himself in death. The acceptable year is the period in which the Spirit interprets the Servant of Jehovah. That same Spirit will be the fire of the day of vengeance, and the Comforter of the mourners.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 62

Isaiah 62:2. "By a new name":—

- Saints, because of their holiness.
- Believers, because of their faith.
- Brethren, because of their love.
- Disciples, because of their knowledge.
- Christians, because of their head.

-- D L Moody

All the illustrations below are from [Rich Cathers](#)

Isaiah 62:1 - God isn't finished with you. -

Sometimes I have a hard time finishing something once I've started it. I once replaced an exhaust fan in our bathroom, but accidentally left a hole in the ceiling when I did it. It took me well over five years to get that hole fixed. I've got projects all over the place that I've started, but I don't always get around to finishing things. God isn't like that. He plans on finishing the work He's done in you. (Phil 1:6 KJV) Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Illustration - Have you ever watched a show on TV that really draws you in, the story is intense, and you wonder how the show will end, when you see the words "To Be Continued..." ? You feel kind of let down, wishing you could see how the story ended. But you tuned in the following week to see how the story did end. Sometimes we hit spots in our lives where it looks as if things are going to end on a really bad note. Hold on. God isn't finished. He will finish.

Isaiah 62:4 - He turns desolation into delight. - [Rich Cathers](#)

God would be taking this city of Jerusalem and changing it from a place of desolation, of disappointment, into a place of His delight.

We all know what it's like to have someone be REALLY disappointed in you. Have you ever received a Performance Review like this?

Illustration - QUOTES TAKEN FROM "ACTUAL" EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PAPERS

- "Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig."
- "Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap."
- "He would be out of his depth in a parking lot puddle."
- "This employee should go far, and the sooner he starts, the better."
- "Got a full 6-pack, but lacks the plastic thing to hold it all together."

- “He would argue with a sign post.”
- “When his IQ reaches 50, he should sell.”
- “If you gave him a penny for his thoughts, you’d receive change.”
- “If you stand close enough to him, you can hear the ocean.”
- “The wheel is turning, but the hamster is dead.”

Though you may FEEL like God thinks about you like this, the truth is that you are His delight!!! How could it be that God could take someone “forsaken” like me, and make me His delight? It happened at the cross, where Jesus took all the bad things in my life and cleared them away by dying in my place. (Isa 53:4-5)

Isaiah 62:12 We are becoming saints.

Though we already are called “holy” by the Lord, because of what He did for us on the cross, we are also on a journey to becoming more and more “holy”. (1 Th 4:1-4) Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. {2} For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. {3} For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: {4} That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; (1 Th 4:7) God wants us to be more like Him and less like the world. Part of this process involves learning to be “crucified” with Christ. It’s learning to die to my selfish desires.

Illustration - There are three marks of one who is crucified. One, he is facing in only one direction. Two, he can never turn back. And three, he no longer has any plans of his own. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

Illustration - Are we prepared for what sanctification will do? It will cost an intense narrowing of all our interests on earth and an immense broadening of our interest in God. Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

Let God take you through the process of being more “holy”, just as he did with a sea captain named John Newton.

Illustration - John Newton (1725-1807) John Newton was nurtured by a devoted Christian mother who dreamed that her only son would become a preacher. But she died when John was a child, and he followed his sea-captain father to a sailor’s life. John didn’t care for the discipline of the Royal Navy: he deserted ship, was flogged, and eventually was discharged. He then headed for regions where he could “sin freely,” and ended up on the western coast of Africa, working for a slave trader who mistreated him. Newton’s life during that period bore the appearance of a Prodigal Son’s: “a wretched looking man toiling in a plantation of lemon trees in the Island of Plaintains—clothes had become rags, no shelter and begging for unhealthy roots to feed his hunger.” After more than a year of such treatment, he managed to escape from the island, in 1747. The following year his ship was battered by a severe storm. Newton had read The Imitation of Christ, and during the life-threatening voyage he became a Christian. Ironically, Newton then served as captain of a slave ship for six years. He gradually came to abhor slavery and later crusaded against it. Newton became greatly influenced by George Whitefield and the Wesleys. He married his long-time sweetheart and began studying for the ministry and preaching in whatever vacant building he could procure. Known as the “old converted sea captain,” he attracted large audiences. He was ordained within the Anglican Church, and in 1764 he took a church in Olney. Newton felt dissatisfied with the hymns of the traditional song books. He began writing his own, many autobiographical in nature, including “Amazing Grace!” In his old age, it was suggested that Newton retire because of bad health and failing memory. He replied, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!”-- “The Golden Age of Hymns,” Christian History, no. 31.

Isaiah 62:1 For Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest. (See also Isaiah 62:6–7, R.V.).

We have here the unresting Christ. Day and night He pleads for the city that crucified Him; and it is in answer to his supplications that she will one day arise from her ruins. Is it not also true that He ever lives to intercede for us, praying when we are silent, watching when we sleep? His prayer rises for his people night and day. Perhaps they would not pray for themselves, if his intercessions did not incite. Certainly his sifted Simons would drift beyond hope, if He did not pray for them. Every sinner has been prayed for to the end of time by Him who said, “Father, forgive;” and every saint, by Him who promised to pray the Father that He would give another Comforter, the Holy Ghost. The prayers of Jesus hover over the world like the dove over the weltering chaos of creation.

Next we have the unresting watchmen (Isaiah 62:6). Christ’s intercession must be supplemented by ours — whether for the restoration of the Jews, or the up-building of the Church, or the salvation of individuals. There must be oneness of prayer between the Intercessor before the Throne, and his remembrancers on earth; and there will be, if the Holy Ghost is allowed to exercise his chosen ministry of making intercession with us on behalf of the saints according to the will of God.

Lastly, there is the unresting God (Isaiah 62:7). He, too, has no rest. The rest of God is crowded with thought and care for his own. The image of Buddha presents the conception of an impassive deity whose one aim is to rid himself of all that might trouble his

repose. In our God, on the other hand, together with the perfect serenity and satisfaction of his nature, there are the eternal tides of desire and gracious help. - F B Meyer

And they shall call them The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord; and thou shalt be called Sought out, A city not forsaken.—Isa. 62:12.

This chapter completes the movement celebrating the result in human affairs of the work of the Servant of Jehovah. Still, the city is in view, and that even more definitely than before. Nevertheless, the existing conditions were clearly in the prophet's mind. First, he declared his determination to continue his ministry towards that consummation; but there was no question as to the issue in his mind (Isa 62:5). Then, the watchers on the walls were charged to take no rest from their holy vocation of prayer, as Jehovah's remembrancers; but again the issue was not in doubt, for Jehovah was committed by oath to accomplish His purpose (Isa 62:6-9). Finally, the call was uttered to prepare the way back for the returning exiles; but that they were coming was certain, for Jehovah's proclamation had gone out to the end of the earth (Isa 62:10-11). Thus the sense of responsibility, and assurance, ran through the oracle. All closes with these words, descriptive of the nation and the city, when the purpose of Jehovah is fulfilled. The nation shall be known as "The holy people; the redeemed of Jehovah." The issue and victory is the holiness of the people; the way of realization is that of the redeeming activity of Jehovah. The city shall be called "sought out," a name descriptive of her attractiveness. This is an arresting word. It means that there is a beauty in holiness which the nations of the world will recognize. When they at last see a really Holy City, they will name it "Sought out." True beauty is always the outcome of holiness and is always attractive.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 63

Isaiah 63:7-16

You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. Isaiah 63:16

In his years in the monastery, Martin Luther was gripped by fear of an angry God who could never be pleased. Desperately seeking forgiveness from this distant, wrathful God, Luther confessed his sins three times a day, for as much as six hours at a time, afraid to miss the smallest sin. Moved to the depths of despair, Luther once declared: "Love God? I hated him!" For young Luther, thinking of God brought only fear and anxiety.

Luther understood something about the seriousness of sin and the need for forgiveness, but at that time his picture of God was only half complete, and for that reason, utterly debilitating. While Scripture teaches us about the problem of sin before a high and holy God, the fullest portrayal of the God of the Bible entails His love and forgiveness, His intimacy and grace. Scripture repeatedly depicts God as our parent, using both fatherly and motherly images to express His relationship with us.

Today's passage in Isaiah summarizes well this theme of God as parent. Speaking to Israel, then beleaguered by oppression under foreign rule, God declared His fatherhood to His people. He began by reminding them of "the many good things he has done ... according to his compassion and many kindnesses" (Isaiah 63:7). Then, in a brief retelling of Israel's story, God reminded them of how His parenting was expressed in His salvation (Isaiah 63:8b), in His sharing in their distress (Isaiah 63:9a), in His love, mercy, and redemption (Isaiah 63:9b), in His lifting them up and carrying them (Isaiah 63:9c), and finally in His disciplining them in their rebellion and disobedience (Isaiah 63:10-14).

Near the end of the chapter, Isaiah cries out a final reminder of Israel's relationship with their God: He is their Father and Redeemer; this is how He is known (Isaiah 63:16). Lest we forget this aspect of God's character, this month's study will focus on Scripture's presentation of God, not as a distant, angry deity, but as our intimate and loving parent. Watch for themes from today's passage in the coming days.

APPLY THE WORD Many of us wrestle with feeling that God is a distant, impersonal, even angry deity. Others of us agree that this is an unbiblical view of God, but still struggle to experience the intimacy and love of our personal God. Take time today to pray that this month you will experience a renewed intimacy with God as your loving, merciful, saving Father, and that your life will demonstrate that reality to a world in desperate need of such love.

Isaiah 63:9 IN HIS LOVE AND PITY.

Jesus Christ is with you in your misery. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego never realized the presence of the Son of God so blessedly until they were thrown alive into Nebuchadnezzar's burning furnace (Dan. 3:20). There, His presence was so manifest that

even the heathen king exclaimed, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan 3:25).

Many children do not receive special love while they are healthy, but when illness comes their mother's love concentrates on them. The Lord says to you who need comfort, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted" (Is. 66:13).

It was to His ancient people that God gave this gracious promise, "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" (Is. 63:9). He still tenderly and lovingly deals with His tested and afflicted people. This thought should make you forget your poverty and misery.

Be of good courage weary pilgrim, for the years are flying fast and trials and troubles are flying just as fast. This world is, to the believer, like a country inn, where there are so many comings and goings that one cannot rest. Never mind. You are tarrying here only for one short night, and then you will be up and away to your eternal home. - C H Spurgeon in "Beside Still Water"

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

Isaiah 63

Isaiah 63:3 - God's anger isn't like our anger. - [Rich Cathers](#)

I think one of the difficult things to understand about God's anger, or wrath, is the confusion we can make with our own anger. When God gets angry, it's ALWAYS for the right reasons. (Ro 1:18-19, Ro 2:5) It is possible to have anger and not sin. (Eph 4:26) But the problem we have is that often our "wrath" is mixed in with other things that are not right, and so we are told to put anger away from us. (Eph 4:31) Notice all the other things that get mixed into our "wrath". Our anger can go beyond what is proper. Simeon and Levi received a curse from their father Jacob because their anger went too far. When their sister Dinah was raped (Gen. 34), they killed all the men of an entire city in revenge. (Ge 49:5-7) James tells us that man's kind of anger does not produce things that are pleasing to God. (James 1:19-20) Sometimes our anger just makes us look foolish.

Illustration - During the final days at Denver's old Stapleton airport, a crowded United flight was cancelled. A single agent was rebooking a long line of inconvenienced travelers. Suddenly an angry passenger pushed his way to the desk. He slapped his ticket down on the counter and said, "I HAVE to be on this flight and it has to be first class." The agent replied, "I'm sorry, sir. I'll be happy to try to help you, but I've got to help these folks first, and I'm sure we'll be able to work something out." The passenger was unimpressed. He asked loudly, so that the passengers behind him could hear, "Do you have any idea who I am?" Without hesitating, the gate agent smiled and grabbed her public address microphone. "May I have your attention please?" she began, her voice bellowing throughout the terminal. "We have a passenger here at the gate WHO DOES NOT KNOW WHO HE IS. If anyone can help him find his identity, please come to the gate." With the folks behind him in line laughing hysterically, the man glared at the United agent, gritted his teeth and retreated as the people in the terminal applauded loudly. Although the flight was cancelled and people were late, they were no longer angry at United Airlines. (Pr 14:29NLT)

Isaiah 63:14 The Spirit of the Lord caused them to rest. (R.V.).

It is the noonday glare in Palestine. The sun's rays like spears of flame are striking down upon the parched sand-wastes, and all the land burns like a furnace. Away yonder is a sequestered glen, where mosses line the margins of streamlets and pools, and rich pasture keeps green in the shadow of the hills. Thither the cattle descend at noon. As the shadows creep down the mountain-sides they follow them, and presently the herd browses on the succulent herbage or reclines beneath the shadows of the spreading trees, while the brooks purr past clear and cool. Similarly Isaiah says God brought his people through the wilderness, leading them as a horse that might not stumble, and finally conducted them into the rest of Canaan.

But how fit an emblem is suggested of our Father's dealings with us. The scorching sun of temptation shines around us. The glare of publicity, the fever of money-making, the strife of tongues, torment the children of men. But for God's beloved ones there is a secret place by Him, a green and verdant nook, watered by the river of God. Over its portals these words are written: "I will give you rest." When once we learn to trust our Fathers unfailing love, we are caused to rest. Notice that forcible expression: the Spirit of the Lord caused them to rest. Here is anew thought of the omnipotence of love. It can so reveal itself that it almost compels rest. Cause us to lie down, O Lord, we pray Thee! Job speaks of Him as giving quietness: and then who can make trouble? Seek quietness as his gift! Lo! there is a place by Him, in the mountain-shadowed valley of his care, where disquieted souls are at peace. Seek it! - F B Meyer

Who is this? ... Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel?—Isa. 63:1-2.

The section of the prophecy contained in this and the two following chapters, is a very remarkable one. We need to seek its natural parts and ignore the chapter divisions, if we are to apprehend its significance. In it there are three movements. First, the prophet's

vision of a great Warrior returning from conflict (Isa 63:1-6). Then a prayer, offered out of the midst of desolation (Isa 63:7-64). Then the answer of Jehovah to that prayer (Isa 63:65). Here we stress the questions of the prophet, because they fix our attention upon the vision which he saw. It was a vision of One returning from Edom, with garments dyed from Bozrah; of One glorious in apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength. Seeing this One, the prophet asked, "Who is this?" The answer was immediate and clear: "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." This gave rise to the second question—Why were the garments red? What was the conflict from which the Warrior was returning? The answer was full and final. This vision has been interpreted as of Jehovah. In certain senses that is true. But it was the vision of the Servant of Jehovah, as the Instrument of Jehovah's act. It was a vision of Him in His first activity beyond that of pro-claiming "The year of Jehovah's favour" (see Isa 61:2). The next phase in His work is that of proclaiming "The day of vengeance of our God" (see again Isa 61:2). Now, the Warrior is proclaiming that day as accomplished: "The day of vengeance was in My heart" (see Isa 63:4). The prophet sees Him returning from the accomplishment of that purpose. He has trodden the winepress, so compelling the evil fruit of all godlessness to express itself. This is a persistent method of the Divine government of the world; and it will have its final expression and victory in Armageddon—which is not yet.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 64

Isaiah 64:1-12; Isaiah 62-64

They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted. Isaiah 62:12

Words from Isaiah inspired the famous "Battle Hymn of the Republic": "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, / He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; / He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible, swift sword; / His truth is marching on ... We can almost hear the trumpet sound, the Lord's return is near; / There are still so many people lost, His message they must hear; / Father, give us one more moment, one more day, just one more year— / With God we're marching on."

The imagery that opens this song comes from Isaiah 63, in which God appears as a mighty Warrior to fulfill His promises of justice and judgment on the nations (Isaiah 63:1–6). This doesn't sound like the meek and gentle "doormat" stereotypes of God that some have constructed—it's important for us to remember that when sinners drink the cup of God's wrath, they're getting what they deserve. God's grace and mercy are real and powerful, but it is also true that His holy nature cannot tolerate sin.

Also in today's reading, the kingdom of God's future glory is exuberantly described. Jerusalem will be a reborn city with a "new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow" (Isaiah 62:2). Her righteousness will shine forth to all nations for the glory of God, and she "will be a crown of splendor in [his] hand" (Isaiah 62:3). Once again we find joyous wedding imagery, with the Lord as the groom and His people as the bride (Isaiah 62:4–5). No matter what lies ahead—and Isaiah knew it was conquest and exile—the covenant relationship will prevail in the end. The ultimate reality is truly wondrous: "O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8).

APPLY THE WORD Though we might not be physically carried away into exile, we all go through periods of life that feel like conquest. It's important to remember during these times that God is not defeated and His purposes cannot be thwarted. We have His promise of a glorious future. If you find yourself struggling through a difficult time, read Revelation 21–22 and rejoice that the trials of this life are not the end of the story. Our God reigns, and He is preparing a place for us for eternity!

C H SPURGEON Spurgeon's Expositions often have a devotional flavor so be sure to check out what he writes on...

[Isaiah 64](#)

Isaiah 64:6. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

Day by day, are you busy, and even painstaking, in the attempt to weave and work out a righteousness of your own. Leave that loom! Your vows and promises are gossamer threads; ever snapping in your hands and breaking at each throw of the shuttle. The "fine linen" that robes the saints, the only raiment meet for thy soul and approved of God, was woven on the cross; and dyed there, with color more enduring than Tyrian purple, in the blood of the Son of God.GUTHRIE.

Isaiah 64:6 - Without Him, the best we have is worthless. - All of the illustrations below from [Rich Cathers](#)

I'm not sure we're totally convinced of this. I think that sometimes we have this idea that we, in our own strength, have a lot to offer

to God.

Illustration - I heard Jon Courson talk about our own efforts. Suppose one day I go to visit the Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, and I sit there staring at it and get to thinking, "Gee, old Mona sure looks sad. I think she needs a little cheering up!" So I get out my Crayola Water Color paint set, get a cup of water from the drinking fountain, and begin to paint a smile on Mona's face. What a horrible thought! To think that I in my own artless skills could add to the face painted by Da Vinci! Yet sometimes we think that perhaps we have a little bit to offer to God.

Illustration - Suppose you come over to my house and you join me and my boys in playing a rousing game of "Star Wars Monopoly". Well, we find out that you are probably the best Monopoly player in the world and you totally clean us out. We are so awed at your skills that we ask you to take home your play money as a reward. So off you go on your way home with 20,000 Star Wars Credits in your pocket. You are feeling a little rich, so you decide to stop at Target and go on a shopping spree. You load up your little red cart with all kinds of cool things and head for the checkout register. As the cashier tells you that your bill comes to \$5,000, you smile and say, "No problem", and begin to count out Star War Credits. Will you get out the door with your merchandise? No way!!! In the same way, the best that we think we can offer to God in this life is actually worthless in the reality of heaven.

Isaiah 64:7 - Who do you blame?

These people will find that there is no one to blame for their situation other than their own selves.

Illustration - When David had committed his horrible sin of adultery with Bathsheba, and then tried to hide it by committing murder and having Bathsheba's husband killed, he was confronted by Nathan the prophet. After telling David a story about a rich man taking advantage over a poor man, he turned to David and said, "You are the man". How did David respond? Did he blame his parents for raising him in a "dysfunctional" household? Did he blame Saul for having caused him such distress in his youth that he now lacked self-control? Did he blame Bathsheba for taking a bath on the rooftop for him to see? No. He said, "I have sinned". Look carefully in the mirror. Don't pass the blame on to someone else.

Isaiah 64:8 - Let Him mold you.

The picture of a potter and His clay has several principles with it, but the main one is that of the Potter having the ability to make from the clay whatever He wants.

Jer 18:6 O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay [is] in the potter's hand, so [are] ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

Are you willing to let God do whatever He wants in your life? God isn't just any old potter. He's the Master Potter. Would you entrust your paintbrush and canvas to Leonardo Da Vinci if he walked into your art studio? Let God take your life and do what He wants. He only makes masterpieces.

Illustration - The Touch of the Master's Hand

Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while.

To auction off the old violin, but he held it up with a smile.

"What am I bid for the old violin? Who'll start the bidding for me?

One dollar. One. Who'll make it two? Two dollars. Who'll make it three?"

Going for three ... but no,

From a room far back, a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow.

Wiping the dust from the old violin, and tightening up its strings,

He played a melody pure and sweet, as sweet as an angel sings.

The auctioneer, with a voice that was quiet and low,

Said, "What am I bid for the old violin?" as he held it up with the bow.

"One thousand, one, who'll make it two? Two thousand, who'll make it three?

Three thousand once, three thousand twice, going and gone" said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried, "We don't quite understand

What changed its worth." Quick came the reply, "The touch of the Master's hand."

Many a man, with life out of tune, battered and torn by sin,
Is auctioned off to a thoughtless crowd, much like that old violin.
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine, a game, and he travels on.
He's going once, he's going twice, he's going ... he's almost gone.
Then the Master comes, and the thoughtless crowd can never quite understand.
The worth of a soul and the miracle that's wrought by the touch of the Master's hand.
~Author Unknown

Isaiah 64:9 - Forgiveness forever

This is not just the hopeful prayer of some poor, disillusioned crazy person.

Illustration - Holding A Grudge - One day a visitor leaned on the old fence around a farm, while he watched an old farmer plowing with a mule. After a while, the visitor said, "I don't like to tell you how to run your business, but you would not have to work so hard if you would just say, "gee" and "haw" to that mule instead of just tugging on those lines. The old farmer stopped and pulled a big handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face. Then he said, "Reckon you're right, but this animal kicked me five years ago and I ain't spoke to him since." For some of us, this is our kind of experience with forgiveness. We've hurt someone and we haven't spoken with them since. In other words, there hasn't been forgiveness.

God's forgiveness is real. He wants to have things fixed with you.

We can actually receive forgiveness that lasts forever. The Bible says,

(Psa 103:12 KJV) As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.
(Jer 31:34b KJV) ...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

How do we receive this kind of forgiveness?

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It all starts when I'm willing to admit that I've sinned. When I'm willing to turn from my sins and turn towards God.

Isaiah 64:5 Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.

Even when visiting judgment upon the unrighteous, God remembers mercy for his people. He meets them as daily Helper and as eternal Savior. But He always comes towards them down one pathway; and if we would encounter Him, we must tread it. It is the path of waiting expectancy (Isaiah 64:4); of rejoicing obedience; of holy remembrance. In these paths He meets us most graciously, working for us, and revealing things which from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, nor seen.

This meeting of his servants has ever been one of the ways of God. It was his daily habit to meet Adam in the dewy glades of Paradise, and talk with him. As Melchizedek of old met Abraham after a great conflict, so Christ comes upon his people after many a hard duty and severe contest with evil, and ministers heavenly refreshment. As He met Mary at the sepulchre, and Peter in the garden, and the two that walked to Emmaus, and the disciples in the grey dawn by the lake, so He meets us still.

To be thus met by God is a glad Christian experience. At morning prayer it gives strength and joy for the entire day; at eventide it is an inestimable consolation and encouragement. Often Christ will encounter us when treading some lowly path of daily duty, and or ever we are aware, we shall be called up into his chariot. Those whom He meets He will accompany in the way; those whom He accompanies He will succour and sustain.

It is very consoling to be told that in these ways of our dear Lord there is continuance (Isaiah 64:5). He is not spasmodic nor changeable. On and on for evermore, without the shadow of turning He will meet and bless us. - F B Meyer

Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence.— Isa. 64.1

These words occur at the heart of the prayer (Isa 63.7- Isa 64.12), in which the prophet ,expresses before Jehovah his sense of the desolation of the nation and the city, and cries for a Divine interference. It follows naturally the vision of the Warrior. It is as though the prophet agrees with the necessity for just such action; and prays that it may take place. This cry is the highwater mark of the great utterance. This, as the prophet understood it, was the real prayer of the nation. All that preceded this cry, and all that followed it, gave urgency and interpretation to it. The prayer opened with praise for the past lovingkindnesses of the Lord (Isa 63.7-9). That is

always the ground of confidence in an appeal to Jehovah :

"His love in times past, forbids us to to think
He'll leave us at last in trouble to sink."

Then there followed an acknowledgement of rebellion, and of the discipline following it, and the deliverance. Through-out this confession there ran the notes of assurance that the relationship, if disturbed, was not destroyed (Isa 63:10-19). Then this cry was uttered; and it continues to the end of the third verse. Immediately the prayer became a meditation on the wonder of God's ways; a new confession of unworthiness; and an appeal to the Father-heart of Jehovah, in view of the desolate condition of the city (Isa 64:4-12). How often, in hours of desolation, are men of faith constrained thus to cry out for the intervention of God in might and majesty. Let them ever do so in the spirit of this prayer of the prophet; remembering past mercies; depending upon God's faith-fulness; confessing sin; acknowledging the righteousness of discipline; and appealing to the heart of the Father.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 65

Isaiah 65:17-25

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. - Isaiah 65:17

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

If you walk around the main Chicago campus of Moody Bible Institute, you'll soon notice our blue recycling bins. Our students and staff use them conscientiously, depositing various recyclables on a regular basis.

Has someone finished drinking a can of soda pop or a bottle of juice? There are blue bins for aluminum and glass. Is a staff member finished with a memo or a report? There's a blue bin for paper. What about all the cardboard boxes at Moody Press? They, too, are baled up and sent to a recycling plant.

We recycle from a desire to be good stewards of creation, and know that through recycling we honor the Creator. In faith, we understand that all He created is good (Ge 1:31; 1Ti 4:4, 5), and wait eagerly for the new creation He has promised: "We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2Pe 3:13-note).

Concluding this month's study, we want to encourage you with a quick look at this new creation, today in the Old Testament and tomorrow in the New. We won't be trying to sort out a timeline of what happens when, just pulling back the curtain and seeing what's there.

In the totally new order of things (Isa 65:17) described in today's reading (cf. Ps. 102:25-note, Ps 102:26-note; Isa. 11:6, 7, 8, 9), there will be no sorrow or weeping (Isa 65:19). Nothing that could cause them pain will be there--for example, there will be no deaths (Isa 65:20).

People will live peacefully, tending fruitful farms (Isa 65:21). (This is an image of an ideal life, not necessarily everyone's literal vocation.) Injustice and oppression will not exist (Isa 65:22; contrast Deut. 28:30, 31, 32, 33). In short, the inhabitants of this new earth will be a "people blessed by the Lord" (Isa 65:23).

Israel thought only of returning from exile, but God had greater things in mind than what they had prayed for (Isa 65:24). He loves His people, and does not need to be begged.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Recycling can show love for the Creator and faith in the new creation He has promised. Does your family recycle newspapers, glass, aluminum cans, and other items? Why not join Moody Bible Institute in its commitment to creation stewardship?

Isaiah 65:17-25; Isaiah 65-66

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah 65:17

The theme throughout our Today in the Word devotions in 2007 is "We've Come This Far By Faith." The prophecies of Isaiah have given us a panoramic picture of the story of faith and of God's salvation plan for history. This includes His compassionate judgment on Israel's faithlessness, the special commissioning of His Servant to bring redemption, and the breathtaking glory of His coming kingdom. Our journey through Isaiah's prophecies has included judgment and mercy, idolatry and worship, despair and hope. What

can we take away from today's final reading? Joy in the destination of faith's journey!

We're headed for a new heavens and a new earth. Things that characterize life in this fallen world will be no more, including pain, grief, infant mortality, the trials of old age, economic hardship, and violence. Instead, God's kingdom will be a place of peace, safety, prosperity, eternal life, and close fellowship with Him (Isaiah 65:17–25).

But the truth is that the destination of faith's journey is not so much a place as a Person, God Himself. When Paul spoke of pressing on toward the prize, he had in mind Christ Himself (Phil. 3:12–14). In the same way, Isaiah exalted the Lord as the unsurpassed sovereign Creator of all, who, while being a scourging fire to His foes, is at the same time a tender mother to His children (Isaiah 66:13). As God's people, we need to respond in humility, reverence, and absolute faith. What God has promised, will certainly take place—it's a done deal. In the meantime, we follow in the footsteps of our Savior and make His glory known among the nations.

God's covenant relationship with His people is first and foremost about His unfailing love. Though people may be obstinate and disobedient, a remnant will be saved, and through them, a Servant Messiah has brought and will bring hope and healing to the nations.

APPLY THE WORD As we conclude our “whirlwind tour” of Isaiah, spend some extra time reviewing the themes and doctrines in this important book and thinking about your favorite verse or passage. You might want to memorize it, or put it on a notecard to review regularly. Most important, pray that your study will help you know and love God more deeply as you see His character revealed in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 65:24; John 15:1-8

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. - Revelation 3:20-[note](#)

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

Sometimes cartoons contain a wealth of theology. Consider a Family Circus cartoon in which a father overhears his son's evening prayers: “Listen to this, God, here's an offer you can't refuse.” Although we may chuckle at its candor, this cartoon pinpoints a common misconception about prayer—namely, prayer is about getting God to do something for us.

At its core, however, prayer is not about getting something but about entering into the presence of Someone. Bob Benson and Michael W. Benson, a father-son team who coauthored *Disciplines for the Inner Life*, wrote, “Prayer is the movement of God to humanity and humanity to God, the act of meeting.” This view of prayer changes our perspective and opens the door to deep communion with our Heavenly Father, who is eager for such a relationship. Consider today's verse from Isaiah: “... before they call, I will answer, and while they are still speaking, I will hear.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The format for this month will be a bit different. Although we will look at many Bible passages and Christian thinkers' views on prayer, the feel will be more “hands-on” as we explore various approaches to prayer.

Each day will open with a short prayer drawn from the church's rich treasury of written prayers. Following a discussion on a particular aspect of prayer will be an extended application designed to enrich your prayer life, often including another written prayer example.

Although some approaches may be unfamiliar to you, it is our hope that these suggestions will deepen your relationship with God. If, however, a particular approach to prayer seems unnatural, pray as God leads you. It is our sincere hope that this “workshop” will bless and encourage you, while fortifying a practice of continual prayer to the Father.

As a prelude to our study, take a few minutes to consider (in writing if possible) the following questions: how do you define prayer? In light of John 15:5, how important do you think prayer is? What is your biggest obstacle to praying? How important is it to pray the “right” words? List three things that you would like to change in your prayer life.

Isaiah 65:12 - Don't say “no” to God. Answer when He calls.

Illustration - At home, I have a “Caller I.D.” viewer on my desk. If a person has Caller I.D. on their phone, I can tell who it is when they call, before I pick up the phone. Sometimes I like to surprise the caller by calling them by name before they say a word. Sometimes I don't answer a phone call on purpose, because I don't want to talk to “Wilber's Carpet Cleaning Service”. Sometimes, when I'm trying to study, I won't answer the phone at all, no matter who calls, well almost. If it's my wife, I'll answer right away, as soon as I see her phone number. Sometimes an important person calls, but I tell myself I'm not going to answer it because I need to

finish studying, and then as they begin to leave a message on our message machine about something very important, I'll break down and pick up the phone. But then again, sometimes I'll be bad and not answer it as I think to myself, "I'll just pretend not to be home". Suppose you were sitting at your desk and as the phone begins to ring, the Caller I.D. flashes "God's Throne"? Would you pick up the phone right away? Would you wait to see what kind of message God was going to leave on your phone machine before picking up the call? Or would you just pretend not to be home?

Don't say "no" to God's call. Of course, I'm not talking about an actual, physical phone call, but there will be times when you will know that God is making a "call" on you. It may even be this morning while we're studying. - [Rich Cathers](#)

Isaiah 65:13 - Serve or be served?

We see here a contrast between God's "servants" and these rebellious people, those who want to "be served". God takes care of His servants. Servants eat, drink, and rejoice. They experience God's abundance. When you decide to follow the Lord as a willing "servant", you're going to find fulfillment. You're going to find joy.

Illustration - Idle Christians are often unhappy Christians I have met with many a spiritual dyspeptic always full of doubts and fears. Is there a young man here full of doubts and fears who has lost the light he once possessed, and the joy he once had? Dear brother, get to work. In cold weather the best way to be warm is not to get before a fire, but to work. Exercise gives a healthy glow, even amidst the frost. 'I am doing something,' says one. Yes, with one hand; use the other hand. 'Perhaps I should have too many irons in the fire,' says one. You cannot have too many. Put them all in, and blow the fire with all the bellows you can get. I do not believe any Christian man works too hard, and, as a rule, if those who kill themselves in Christ's service were buried in a cemetery by themselves, it would be a long while before it would get filled. Work hard for Christ. It makes happy those who are in heaven to serve God day and night, and it will make you happy on earth. Do all you can." - Charles Spurgeon, The Bliss of the Glorified as quoted by [Rich Cathers](#)

Isaiah 65:19 - I Will Rejoice

How do you think God will be greeting you when you arrive in heaven? Will He say, "Oh, it's you ...", or will He say, "Alright!!!! You're here!!!" Heaven will be a wonderful place.

Illustration - One day a cat dies of natural causes and goes to Heaven and meets the Lord Himself. The Lord says to the cat, "If there is any way I can make your stay in Heaven more comfortable, please let me know." The cat thinks for a moment and says, "Lord, all my life I have lived with a poor family and had to sleep on a hard wooden floor." The Lord stops the cat and says, "Say no more," and a wonderful fluffy pillow appears. A few days later 6 mice are killed in a tragic farming accident and go to Heaven. Again, the Lord is there to greet them with the same offer. The mice answer, "All of our lives we have been chased. We have had to run from cats, dogs, and even women with brooms. We are tired of running. Do you think we could have roller skates so we don't have to run any more?" The Lord says, "Say no more," and fits each mouse with a beautiful pair of roller skates. About a week later the Lord stops by to see the cat and finds him snoozing on the pillow. The Lord gently wakes the cat and asks him, "How are things since you have been here?" The cat stretches and yawns and replies, "It is wonderful here. Better than I could have ever expected. And those Meals on Wheels you have been sending by far are the best!!!! [Rich Cathers](#)

Isaiah 65: Before they call, I will answer

Illustration - A five-year-old said grace at family dinner one night. "Dear God, thank you for these pancakes..." When he concluded, his parents asked him why he thanked God for pancakes when they were having chicken. He smiled and said, "I thought I'd see if He was paying attention tonight."

Illustration - Johnny had been misbehaving and was sent to his room. After a while he emerged and informed his mother that he had thought it over and then said a prayer. "Fine," said the pleased mother. "If you ask God to help you not misbehave, He will help you." "Oh, I didn't ask Him to help me not misbehave," said Johnny. "I asked Him to help you put up with me."

Isaiah 65:17 Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.

The heavens and earth that are now were not produced in their present shape in a day; but through long periods, which are chronicled in the strata of the earth, God was at work building them up. So beneath the scaffolding of history and human affairs it may be that the Creator is already at work laying the foundations of the new era which shall soon be unveiled. But the creation of the new is much more difficult than of the old, because there is so much undoing to be done. Amid the crash of empire, the rock of revolutions, the blood, and tears, and anguish of the present, God is making room for and preparing the new heavens and earth in which dwelleth righteousness.

Just think of these exquisite words! — “Never remembered, nor come to mind!” Our bitter sorrows transmuted into such exquisite blessedness that for very joy of heart we shall have no room for remembering what seemed once intolerable. We shall not recall the nights of pain, the years of enforced inactivity, the failures, the partings, the bereavements. The betrothed will forget the long years of waiting. We turn to the Book of Revelation for further particulars, and there learn that the blessed future can only be explained in negatives. What heaven will really be is as yet hidden, that the surprise may be the greater; but it is certain that each of the elements of present distress will be eliminated. No more sorrow, pain, death, curse, tears, or separating sea. Christ will make, is making, all things new; and, best of all, He is making us new to enjoy them.

Oh, blessed condition, in which God will not remember our sins, and we shall not remember the former things, of pain, and sorrow, and death! - F B Meyer

I am inquired of by them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not.—Isa. 65.1

In this chapter we have the prophet's interpretation of the Divine answer to the prayer of the people. These sentences are introductory, exclamatory, inclusive. They recognized first the prayer of the people in the words: "I am inquired of ..." They declared secondly the response of Jehovah in the words: "I am found." In each case attention was called to the failure of the people. They had not asked for Jehovah. Out of trouble they were doing so; but their trouble was due to their failure to ask. They had not sought Jehovah. That is why they had not realized His presence. Directly they sought, He was found of them. Then the whole prophetic interpretation of this answer moved forward on the line of these introductory words. In the first movement (Isa 65:1-7), the resolute refusal of the people to respond to the Divine call was declared; and the relation of that wickedness to their sufferings was made plain. They had not asked for Jehovah; they had not sought Him; He had sought them; but they had refused, and turned to all evil things. Hence their desolation. Then the Divine answer to the prayer became the promise of restoration; and it moved forward to a description of the peace and prosperity yet to come to Jerusalem and the people of God through the accomplishment of His purpose. Throughout the movement the principle of discrimination is evident. Those that still forsake Jehovah are destined to retribution. Even in the established order of peace and prosperity, if there be a sinner, he shall be accursed. Thus in this section, from the vision of the Warrior to that of the established Kingdom, this even justice is manifest. God, determined upon mercy, never sacrifices holiness. So will it be to the end. The final triumph of compassion will be a victory for righteousness.- G Campbell Morgan

ISAIAH 66

Isaiah 66:1-2 Psalm 24:7-10;

TODAY IN THE WORD DEVOTIONAL

""The largest land empire the world has ever seen"" is the way one writer describes the vast area across Asia that was conquered by the Mongol hordes of the early thirteenth century. Riding out of their homeland, these huge armies swept east and south to conquer everything in their path. They were led by a remarkable ruler who was given the title Genghis Khan, which means ""universal ruler."""

Every earthly empire, it seems, tries to extend its borders as far as warfare, diplomacy or economics will permit. And every empire seeks to elevate its leaders by giving them exalted titles that suggest absolute power and authority.

But there is only one all-encompassing throne, and only one universal Ruler. ""The Lord Almighty--He is the King of glory"" declares the psalmist (Ps. 24:10-note). One of the most important truths we need to know about heaven is that above all else, heaven is the exalted place from which God rules over His creation.

The Bible does not give us an exact location for heaven. But biblical language makes it clear that by any standard of measurement, heaven is far above the earth. That truth is clearly evident in the incredible word-picture God gives us in Isaiah 66.

To the Lord the earth is a ""footstool,"" a place, speaking metaphorically, on which to prop His feet. This imagery doesn't suggest that God is indifferent or callous toward earth and its inhabitants, as if He were an inattentive monarch. Instead, the picture is one of rulership and majesty.

In fact, as we will see next Sunday, God is anything but an uninvolved ruler. He inhabits heaven's throne not only as King, but also as Judge. God is ever watchful over His subjects, both those who are in rebellion against Him and those who obey Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The fact that heaven is God's throne as well as our future home should comfort us when things seem out of control. When you have a need or a worry, who better to bring it to than the King of heaven? In Philippians 4:6-note, Paul urges us to bring our requests to

God in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Isaiah 66:9 Be patient, God isn't finished yet.

(Phil 1:6 NLT) And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.

God will finish what He starts.

It's hard when we want so much for the things that God will begin to promise us.

For some, we long to be delivered from certain sins that we struggle against.

For others, God has put a calling for particular ministry on your heart and it's easy to get anxious for all the pieces to fall into place.

Illustration - I remember sensing God's call to be a pastor when I was eighteen years old, at a summer camp for high schoolers. My pastor encouraged me to not just expect to jump straight into ministry, but to take time to be prepared. So I went through college, went through seminary, and served as a youth pastor in the church. But when I thought I should be hired into full time ministry, I wasn't. Instead I ended up getting a job as a "teller-trainee" at a bank. Hardly the place for someone with my education and my calling to the ministry! I remember one day being so frustrated at wanting to serve the Lord, yet here I was being wasted as a stupid bank teller. And to top it all off, I was asked to go sweep the bank parking lot because someone had found broken glass there. I remember grumbling as I pushed the broom about what waste it all was.

Last week I had the urge to work help a little bit with the work that's being done in the planters outside the building. After I had done a little work and started to clean up, I went and got a push broom to sweep the mess I had made in the parking lot when it hit me. I had to laugh. It wasn't all a waste. Hey, I was a professional parking lot sweeper! I was qualified for what I was doing!!!

Actually, the REAL lesson was not about sweeping parking lots, but learning to be a servant. I think I learned a little bit as a bank teller, but boy do I have a lot more to learn!

Don't be quick to dismiss what seems like a long wait or detours along the way. Nothing is a mistake. God's at work in you. -[Rich Cathers](#)

Isaiah 66:18 - God sees and knows.

The other day one of my sons was asking me about lie-detector tests. He wanted to know how they worked. I told him what little I knew about them, and told him that they weren't fool proof. There are people that are naturally nervous and anxious and can appear to be lying when they're not. There are also people who are so good at lying that they can fool a lie detector.

Illustration - Police in Radnor, Pennsylvania, interrogated a suspect by placing a metal colander on his head and connecting it with wires to a photocopy machine. The message "He's lying" was placed in the copier, and police pressed the copy button each time they thought the suspect wasn't telling the truth. Believing the "lie detector" was working, the suspect confessed.

You may be a person who can fool a real lie detector machine, but you'll never be able to fool God. He doesn't need a lie detector. He knows what you're thinking. Everything you're thinking.

Illustration - A 4-year-old boy who was asked to return thanks before Thanksgiving dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food. He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the Cool Whip. Then he paused, and everyone waited—and waited. After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, "If I thank God for the broccoli, won't he know that I'm lying?"

Yes. He will. - [Rich Cathers](#)

Isaiah 66:23 - Get used to worship.

I think some people don't quite "get" what worship is all about. I've had people refer to it as the "song service". As if it's just about "singing songs". "Worship" is all about drawing near to God. It's all about giving Him love and adoration. It's about giving Him the praise and honor that He deserves.

Illustration - I personally have a hard time imagining how a marriage could possibly survive where there wasn't a great love

cultivated between husband and wife. I was blessed to grow up in a family where my mom and dad loved each other, and still do, fifty years later. My wife and I work hard to keep our love fervent and strong. We sometimes look at each other and wonder if people who have been married for twenty-two years are supposed to love each other and enjoy each other as much as we do.

God desires that His relationship with His people be just like a good marriage. There ought to be closeness. There ought to be sharing between husband and wife. And that's part of what takes place during worship. It's not just a "song service", it's a time for you to draw near to the lover of your soul. It's a time to pour out your heart to Him. It's a time to express your love to Him.

Perhaps you're not married. Do you know what it is to be loved by a good father or mother? Perhaps you know what it's like to be loved by a close friend? God wants you to know Him up close and personal. - [Rich Cathers](#)

Isaiah 66:13 As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.

There is the mother nature as well as that of the father in God. We are familiar with the thought of the Divine Fatherhood; let us not forget the Divine Motherhood. All the soft, gentle touches of mother's hand, unlike any other hands; all the tender pleading, yearning affection; all the utter selflessness, that never wrecks what it expends for the objects of its solicitude, are equally in God. But as men get mad with drink and sin, and refuse the sweet mother-love which would gather them, until worn-out and weary they come back to it wrecked and forlorn, so we have drifted from God's mother-heart, getting to ourselves pain and loss, and missing its exquisite solace. Fools that we are!

Come back to it, children! Like wayward runaway babes, at the end of the long summer's day, who, shamefaced and sorrowful, with their torn clothes and grimy faces, hardly dare present themselves to those tender eyes, and yet have no alternative, and know that they may count on the most tender reception. So come back to Him. He will receive, forgive, cleanse, comfort.

A mother's comfort! Estimate it at its full. Remember how your mother comforted you, as a little child; as a man at the death of your young wife; as a maiden when love had disappointed. How much more God! May we not then address to God's tender heart those most exquisite words:—

"Neither love me for

Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,
Since one might well forget to weep who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby;
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on through love's eternity."

- F B Meyer

Isaiah 66:5-13

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you. Isaiah 66:13

Imagine a child at a playground, suddenly surrounded by bullies who terrorize the young boy. After seeing her son being pushed, bruised, and thrown to the ground, the child's mother rescues her son from his oppressors. Taking her crying son into her arms, she tenderly caresses and comforts him. Although still full of sad recollections of his abuse, the child slowly finds peace and comfort in his mother's arms of gentle love.

The southern kingdom of Judah knew the hardship and pain of an oppressive enemy. Because of their own sins and disobedience, they had been taken into exile. They lost their homes, their land, and sometimes even their family members. They were in a foreign place, under harsh rule. Judgment had come. All looked bleak. But out of this picture of despair comes a word of hope and comfort.

For those who fear Him, God promises restoration and renewal which will come suddenly (Isaiah 66:7–9). Jerusalem and its temple will be rebuilt; a new nation will arise. This new Jerusalem is then likened to a mother who satisfies and comforts her young. God's new people will "drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance" (Isaiah 66:11); they will "nurse and be carried on her arm and dangled on her knees" (Isaiah 66:12). But then, surprisingly, the mother metaphor switches to God Himself: "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). Thus, the cause of rejoicing, comfort, and satisfaction for God's people is none other than God Himself. Like a mother who embraces her bruised and injured children, so God, like a mother, embraces us in all of our pain and suffering in this world and promises comfort and restoration.

Although we live in a fallen and broken world, God provides us with a word of hope. Like a protective parent to His children, God promises to come to us, embrace us, and bring us that comforting, tender love of a mother. We are not left to mourn or suffer alone. There is one who knows our suffering and does not turn a blind eye.

APPLY THE WORD Although the biblical metaphors of God as Father outnumber those of God as mother, it is important for us to recognize this aspect of God's character and care for us as His children. No matter what our pain, suffering, or burden might be,

Scripture tells us that God's care for us is as tender and loving as a mother's care for her children. Come before our God today with all of life's pain and brokenness and find comfort and joy in our tender God.

Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My Throne, and the earth is My footstool.—Isa. 66.1

This is the keynote of this last message of this great prophecy. The message is of the nature of an epilogue, in that it catches up, and carries out, the great ideas, or principles, of the government of God, as they apply to all the coming ages. Jehovah is omnipresent; that is the meaning of these first words. There can be no escape from Him. No temple made with hands can contain Him. From that standpoint He judges and discriminates between the false and the true, between the ignoble and the noble, between the corrupt and the pure. Therefore Jerusalem will at last be saved, and will realize its true function for the sake of those of humble and contrite spirit who tremble at the word of Jehovah. Therefore all evil and polluted souls, notwithstanding all their craft and boastings, will be overcome, cast down, and destroyed. The new heavens and the new earth, which Jehovah will make, and which will still be respectively His throne, His footstool, will realize life, around Jehovah, as moon by moon, and Sabbath after Sabbath, they worship before Him. Then the things of evil will only be known, as they are still seen wrapped in the consuming fire, and held in abhorrence by all flesh. Thus the prophecy ends on a note of dread and suggestive solemnity, in which the wrath of Jehovah is seen. Let it be remembered that the fire of this wrath proceeds against those things of evil which have brought all the desolations and sufferings of men. Its fierceness is the fierceness of Love against all that destroys; and it is because love makes no terms with evil that at last there is the restitution of all things.- G Campbell Morgan

Part 1 - Devotionals from Today in the Word - Isaiah 1 - 44

Sermons by Rob Morgan on...

- [Isaiah 9 The Lands that Long in Darkness Lay](#)
- [Isaiah 9 Jesus: Prince of Peace](#)
- [Isaiah 38:17 Sickness Into Wholeness \(2 Chronicles 29\)](#)
- [Isaiah 38:17 Depression Into Happiness](#)
- [Isaiah 42 Think of the Millions Who Never Have Heard](#)
- [Isaiah 53:5-6 Peace](#)
- [Isaiah 53 Jesus: Man of Sorrows](#)
- [Isaiah 61 Jesus: Lord of All](#)

Isaiah 9

The Lands that Long in Darkness Lay

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the days of Midian.

For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, will be used for burning and fuel of fire.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulders. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:1-7).

During this Advent season, I'm devoting several sermons to the rediscovery of forgotten Christmas Carols. The entrance of the Almighty God into our world of wickedness and woe was a never-to-be forgotten and a never-to-be repeated event. It literally split

human history in two. So it isn't surprising that in the history of our Christian hymnology there should be many beautiful hymns devoted to this subject. But gradually most of them have been lost or forgotten, and we're left with only a handful that we regularly sing, and even those are in danger of being forced out by all the secular songs of the season. So I'd like for us—at least this one year—to rediscover some of the great old forgotten carols of Christmas.

The one we're going to be looking today came from the pen of the same man who gave us "Joy to the World." He is the Father of English Hymnody—Isaac Watts. I don't have time to tell you his remarkable story, how he came to begin writing hymns at the age of 19; but I do want to tell you that he became a noted pastor in London and that he was a diligent and devoted student of the Scripture. His hymns came directly from his study of the Bible. And the wonderful hymn that we've sang this morning—"The Lands that Long in Darkness Lay"—is simply Watts' paraphrase of a wonderful prophecy about the coming of Messiah, found in Isaiah 9, our Scripture reading this morning:

The lands that long in darkness lay
Now have beheld a heav'nly light;
Nations that sat in death's cold shade
Are blessed with beams divinely bright.

The virgin's promised Son is born,
Behold th'expected Child appear:
What shall His names or titles be?
"The Wonderful, the Counselor."

This infant is the mighty God,
Come to be suckled and adored;
Th'eternal Father, Prince of Peace,
The Son of David, and his Lord.

The government of earth and seas
Upon His shoulders shall be laid;
His wide dominions still increase,
And honors to His Name be paid.

Jesus, the holy Child, shall sit
High on His father David's throne;
Shall crush His foes beneath His feet,
And reign to ages yet unknown.

Some of the verses and phrases in Isaiah 9 are probably familiar to you, especially the ones about a Child being born and a Son being given, about His name being called Wonderful Counselor, etc. We quote those verses a lot during the Christmas season, and they even appear on some of our Christmas cards. But we almost never understand them in the wider context of this passage in Isaiah. So today I'd like for you to take your No-Doze, keep your Bibles open, and let's do a real study of this wonderful passage. We have to begin with a little history. I'm sorry about that, but there's no way around it.

In Genesis 12, God chose a man named Abram or Abraham and set him aside to be the grand patriarch of an entire nation, a very special nation, the nation from which and through whom a mighty Redeemer would come to the earth. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was the father of Jacob, and Jacob had twelve sons. These twelve sons had families, and soon there were twelve clans or tribes known as the Children of Jacob or the Children of Israel (Israel being Jacob's other name). These twelve clans went down to Egypt during a terrible time of famine, and there they grew in numbers. Moses led these twelve tribes out of Egypt and Joshua led them into the Promised Land—back to the land God had promised their forefather Abraham. And so we had twelve large families—tribes—occupying the Promised Land. These twelve different tribes—named for the twelve sons of Jacob or Israel—

claimed different portions of the land.

Down in the South, the areas around Jerusalem and Bethlehem were possessed by the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Up in the North, near the Sea of Galilee, those areas came under the possession of the other ten tribes—especially the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Under the first three kings—Saul, David, and Solomon—there was one unified nation composed of these twelve tribes and divided up into these twelve different regions. But after the death of Solomon, a rupture occurred, similar to what happened in our own nation prior to the Civil War as the Southern States began seceding from the Union. The ten northern tribes split off from the two southern tribes. The Northern tribes became known as the nation of Israel. The two southern tribes became known as the nation of Judah.

The southern nation of Judah remained committed to the worship of the Lord their God; but the Northern Kingdom—the nation of Israel—turned away from the Lord and began worshipping a golden calf. They became increasingly evil and corrupt, and one day they made an alliance with the evil nation of Syria, the purpose of which was to unite their two armies and to attack the Southern Kingdom of Judah. That brings us to our passage in Isaiah 7:

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Razin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it.

In other words, as I said, the Northern Kingdom of Israel joined forces with the pagan and evil Syrians and their armies marched down to overthrow the Southern Kingdom of Judah and its capital city of Jerusalem.

Verse 2: And it was told to the house of David, saying, “Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom of Israel).” So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.”

In other words, when word of this axis of evil reached Jerusalem, the people were terrified. They were no match for the combined forces of Israel and Syria. Well, the Lord spoke to the prophet Isaiah who lived in Jerusalem, and he had a message for old King Ahaz. Verse 3:

Then the Lord said to Isaiah, “Go out now and meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Hashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field, and say to him: ‘Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands...’”

I love the way this is put in the NIV, and I have these words underlined in my Bible because they really speak to me: “Be careful, keep calm, and don’t be afraid.”

In the passage that follows, the Lord assured Ahaz and his little nation of Judah that the efforts of their enemies will fail. Not only that, but Isaiah went on to make a remarkable prophecy. He predicted that within sixty-five years, the Northern Kingdom of Israel would be destroyed, wiped off the face of the earth. God determined to judge Israel for her idolatry, and He was going to raise up a mighty empire—the Assyrians—to defeat and destroy her. Look at the middle of verse 8: Within sixty-five years Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom) will be broken so that it will not be a people.

At the time, that seemed impossible. Ephraim was a great nation and a significant power in that part of the world. But, in fact, it happened just as God had foretold.

The rest of this chapter and all of chapter 8 is an amplification of this coming day of destruction. The last part of chapter 8 is Isaiah’s personal reaction to this terrible news that ten of the twelve tribes of his people would be wiped out.

Look at the way chapter 8 ends: Then they (the Northern Kingdom of Israel or Ephraim) will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness.

And so it happened that within just a few years the mighty Assyrian Empire descended like a night of terror on Palestine, destroyed the Northern Kingdom, and exiled the survivors to distant and forlorn places.

Now this is real history, but it is also symbolic. It’s a picture of what has happened to the entire human race. This is a picture of what has happened to us—to you and to me. Just like Israel, God made us and claimed us as His very own. But we have all turned away from Him. We have all served other gods. We have all descended into idolatry. And what happens when we turn away from God? Darkness descends over our lives. Gloom descends on our hearts. We see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish, and we are driven into darkness.

I had someone come to see me recently and I could tell that there were great spiritual problems in his life just by looking at his facial expression and into his eyes. Through the years, I’ve gotten so I can sometimes almost read someone’s soul by looking at their eyes

and at their expressions. I remember several years ago, I was in an amusement park at the beach on a summer's evening. It was very crowded, and for some reason I decided to try to read faces that evening. That was my hobby for the night. I studied the faces of all the people who passed by. Many of the people were laughing and smiling, but their smiles were superficial and there was hollowness to their expressions as though the fleeting excitement of a moment was just a quick and momentary fix to a deeper and all-pervasive emptiness.

One of the loveliest stars ever to grace Hollywood was Audrey Hepburn, who starred in such classics as "Roman Holiday" and "My Fair Lady." Later in her life, she became the spokeswoman for UNICEF and worked on behalf of hungry and needy children around the world. This week, CNN interviewed her son who has just written a biography of her life. He said that despite her glamour and fame, his mother suffered from lifelong sadness. He said that she contracted a form of "dank sadness that you can never truly shake."

Kierkegaard once put it this way: "Even in what men consider most beautiful, most attractive: a charming young girl in whom everything breathes harmony, peace, and joy—even there despair is hiding."

Well, this is what happened to that beautiful land in the north of Israel known as the Galilee, and as a result it seemed to be ruined, beyond redemption.

Now, I've had the pleasure of being in Israel several times and I love the Galilee region best of all. It's bounded on the West by the beautiful coastline of the Mediterranean. To the South is the vast valley of Jezreel, the breadbasket of Israel, otherwise known as the Valley of Armageddon. To the North are the heights of Mt. Hermon. And to the East are the Golan Heights and the Syrian Border. This square of real estate is called the Galilee, a word that literally means "district" or "circuit."

But by the time Jesus was born, it was regarded with disdain and disparagement by the proper, pure-blooded Jews of Judah and Jerusalem. It had been ruined by sin and inhabited by strangers. There were pockets of Jews in the Galilee, but there were also pockets of Gentiles. There were Jewish cities there, but there were also Gentile cities. It was a compromised region. In some places, there had been intermingling of the two. And so the Jews of the South didn't have very much respect for the North. These northern areas, these people were the ones who had fallen into idolatry. These were the ones who had been swept away. They were the ones who had intermingled with the Gentiles.

So the proper Jewish leaders down in Jerusalem didn't dream that the Messiah would ever come from Galilee. Galilee was too sinful. Galilee was too compromised. Galilee was past redemption.

Do you remember what Nathaniel said in John 1 when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth, a man claiming to be the Messiah, was from Nazareth? He said, "Can anything good come from that area."

And look at what we see in John 7 at the Feast of Tabernacles:

On that last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood up and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water...." Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said: "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scriptures said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him...

Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?" The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this man!" Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them: ""Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" Then answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee."

But they were wrong. They had forgotten what Isaiah had said. Back in Isaiah 9, having just told us of the sin and evil and destruction and judgment that would befall Galilee, having just told us that the people would—see how it puts it in the last verse of Isaiah 8—"see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness." Having told us all that, now he launches into this glorious chapter 9:

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, a light has shined.

Isaiah is saying that in this broken, sinful, devastated, shamed land of gloom and shadows and death, into this sinful and judged area of the Northern Kingdom, a great light is going to arise. God is going to raise up someone to dispel the darkness and to banish the gloom and the shadows. In the next verse, he tell us that this coming one will bring joy back to Galilee. Verse 3:

You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before you according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

Verse 4 tells us that defeat is going to be replaced with victory, and bondage with freedom:

For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the days of Midian. For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, will be used for burning and fuel of fire.

In other words, this Coming One will bring peace. He will dispel the gloom, banish the darkness, release from bondage, and bring peace. Who is this one who will emerge from Galilee to do these things? Verse 6 tells us:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace, there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Now, of course, all this is given for a reason, for all of us are citizens of Galilee in a spiritual sense. All of us were made for God, but we have turned away, we have turned aside, we have descended into idolatry, and as a result darkness and death and gloom have descended on our lives and on our world. We appear to be beyond redemption.

But the Messiah emerged from the despised and disparaged land of Galilee for a reason—to show us that He came to redeem the unredeemable, so that we who have walked in darkness may see a great light. If He can restore the light and freedom and joy and life to Galilee after centuries of sin and ruin and judgment, think what He can do with you and me.

I wonder if you're living in the Galilee of Gloom. I wonder if you need Him to come into your heart with everlasting light and life. I invite you to come to Jesus today. For the people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. On those who have dwelt in the valley of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. For unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9

Jesus: Prince of Peace

Much of the news on television and in the papers this week had to do with the terrible Christmas shopping massacre in Omaha, Nebraska, where a 19-year-old man named Robert Hawkins entered a popular shopping mall and started shooting. He killed eight people plus himself, and he injured five others. Just before he started shooting, the young man called his landlord and said that he was sorry for what he was about to do, and that all his life he had been nothing but garbage and that he would be famous. The landlord told reporters that the shooter has a young man who reminded her of a lost puppy that nobody wanted.

And that young man is representative of millions of people today who are lost and lonely and confused and abandoned. We hear about the ones that "snap" and go on a shooting rampage, but so many other people are looking for peace of mind and peace in their hearts.

But let me show you the other side of this equation. This week there was an exclusive lifestyle magazine released a survey of what the super-rich are doing for Christmas, what they are buying, and how much they are spending.

The magazine listed some of the gifts being given by various super-rich people. They included a custom-made, jewel-encrusted saddle for a pony, a \$30,000 designer dress for a four-year-old, and a \$200,000 restored classic Camero.

Sixty percent of the elite affluent will be traveling by private jet during the holidays, and 28% will use their jet for private shopping. More than a third will give "jet cards" to their family and friends as Christmas gifts. These cards start at \$40,000 for 10 hours of flight time.

On average, the super rich will spend \$152,400 a person on jewelry this year, \$39,300 on electronics, and \$31,000 on wines and spirits. They will also spend on average per person over \$10,000 on gifts and services to their pets.

Now I have a thesis about all this. I believe that the deeply disturbed young man in Omaha and the super-rich super spenders at the opposite end of the social and economic spectrum have something in common. They are suffering from a void and vacuum in their souls; they have an inner emptiness that can only be satisfied by the peace and the joy of Jesus Christ.

The great French physicist Blaise Pascal said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person which cannot be satisfied by any created thing, but by God alone made known through Jesus Christ." Perhaps somewhere in this room is someone whose heart is strangely empty and this message is especially for you.

And that brings us to our Scripture reading today. Would you turn with me please to Isaiah, chapter 9. This was written 700 years before the birth of Christ, yet it is a prophecy that describes Him perfectly:

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future He will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoiced before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

This is such a rich and detailed prediction about the coming Messiah that we could take weeks to study it; but for our purposes today, I'd like to point out seven prophecies about Jesus in these verses.

1. The Messiah Would Have a Ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1)

The first is that the Messiah, when He came, would have a ministry in Galilee. Look at verse 1: Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who are in distress. In the past He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali...

What is the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali? These are the two tribes that possessed the area on the western shores of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus was raised and where He began His ministry. These are the gentle hillsides and lakeshore where Jesus headquartered His work. In the days of Isaiah, these were lands of the Northern Kingdom, and they were the first to suffer the invasion of the Empire of Assyria. The Jewish people there were slaughtered and driven away, and it became an area mixed with Gentiles. As a result, many in our Lord's day disdained it. But Isaiah said that the Lord wasn't finished with Galilee. The people walking in darkness there would see a great light, and upon those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light would dawn.

When we lead tours of Israel, everyone always loves the Galilee. Very often, we land in Tel Aviv at David Ben Gurion International Airport and spend the night somewhere nearby on the Mediterranean coast. The next day, we drive up the coast to the ruins of Caesarea, and to Mt. Carmel where Elijah contested the prophets of Baal. Then we cut eastward and drive through the towns of Nazareth and Cana of Galilee, and then we cut over the crest of a hill and there, like a scene from a master artist, is the Sea of Galilee, a harp-shaped lake nestled in the hills with the Golan Heights rising majestically as a backdrop. And when you see those little towns and those hills, it is not hard to believe that Almighty God designed this little bit of the world as a home and as a teaching environment for His Son. And Isaiah predicted it seven centuries in advance.

2. That He Would Bring Light to the World (Isaiah 9:2)

Second, Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would bring light to the world. Look at verse 2: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

In Matthew chapter 4, this passage is quoted word-for-word as applying to Jesus when He moved into the city of Capernaum. When Jesus came to earth there was an explosion of light. I can't read these words without remembering that when He came, the skies overhead were illumined by a wondrous star, and when He began to teach He called Himself the "Light of the World." And when He rose from the dead, it was at the moment of sunrise. And when we get to heaven, we'll find no need for a lamp or light, for the Lamb is its light.

Jesus brings intellectual light, for He logically explains to us who God is and what God is like, which is the very basis of all knowledge. He brings spiritual light, for His presence banishes the darkness of sin and shame and guilt. He brings emotional light, for His presence cheers His people. He brings everlasting light because He gives eternal life.

3. That He Would Be a Joy-Bringer (Isaiah 9:3)

The third prediction is that the Messiah would be a Joy-Bringer. Look at verse 3: You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before You as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

Isaiah wrote this to a remnant of people who were small in number and living in refugee camps in Babylon, but there is a prediction that the Jewish nation would be once again enlarged and established. And when Jesus was born, Israel was once again full of Jewish people and the Lord Jesus would bring joy to the world.

I want to read a quotation to you. I have one wife and three daughters, and sometimes these four women send e-mails to each other, and I usually am never included in that list. But somehow I did get hold of an e-mail that Katrina wrote to the three girls a year-and-a-half ago, and I stuck in my files for such a time as this. Here's what my wife said in her e-mail to our girls:

"I'm so bursting with joy today I can hardly stand it. I've had my shower and came out for my breakfast, put my last dryer load in the dryer, and will get to my Quiet Time before (the therapist) comes. I've had the sweetest fellowship with the Lord, and decided if I'm depressed or sad or overcome or discouraged or hateful or self-absorbed, it's all part of the devil's lie somewhere in there. He preys upon our emotions and reasonings and has a heyday. So don't believe him today! He's defeated and acting like he isn't. Love, Mom."

It reminds me of the old song that says, "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart to stay."

4. That He Would Be the Victory-Giver (Isaiah 9:4-5)

Fourth, Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be the victory-giver. Verses 4 and 5 say: For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

All of these prophecies have implications for the future, and as we will see in a moment some of them are pointing toward our Lord's return in glory at the Second Coming. Isaiah was looking beyond our Lord's first coming to His second coming and the establishing of His kingdom. Instead of a small number, the Jewish people would be a mighty nation. Instead of oppression, they would have joy. Instead of defeat and exile, the Lord will rule and reign over the earth from Mount Zion. Isaiah is full of this message; it's one of his great themes. For example, look at chapter 11:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

This is talking about the Messiah, the Son of David, son of Jesse.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—and He will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what He sees with His eyes or decide by what He hears with His ears; but with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth; with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be His belt and faithfulness the sash around His waist.

Now, if we had time, I'd turn over to Revelation 19 and read about the moment of Christ's return and show you how similar these passages are. There are three moments of victory that mean everything to me. One is in the past—when Jesus conquered death and rose victorious from the tomb. One is in the present—for Jesus gives me victory day by day over temptation and sin and sadness. One is in the future—when Jesus will rule and reign as the King of Kings over all of time and eternity. He is our victory-giver.

5. That He Would Come as a Child (Isaiah 9:6a)

The fifth prediction is that the Messiah would enter this world as a child. Verse 6 says: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And those words make up what is arguably the best definition of Christmas that has ever been written. What is Christmas? It is this: Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.

6. That He Would Claim the Throne of David (Isaiah 9:6b, 7)

But immediately we're told that this is no ordinary child and no ordinary son. The sixth prediction is that this Child and this Son would claim the throne of David as His own: And the government will be on His shoulders... And verse 7: Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

Jesus is the great fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. I want you to turn with me in the Bible, and I want to show you how the New Testament opens and closes. It opens in Matthew, chapter 1, verse 1: A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David....

And the last chapter is the 22nd chapter of the book of Revelation. Look at verse 16: I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.

Jesus Christ is the completion and the fulfillment of the Davidic line, as predicted throughout the Old Testament and especially here in Isaiah 9.

7. That He Would Have a Four-Fold Name (Isaiah 9:6)

Finally, we're told that the Messiah would have a four-fold name. Verse 6 says, And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

He is the Wonderful Counselor. The word "wonderful" could mean exceptional or distinguished, and the word counselor has to do with the wisdom of His words to us.

He is the Mighty God, possessing all the attributes and prerogatives of absolute deity. Jesus is God Himself.

He is the Everlasting Father. He is one with the Father and is the Father of eternal salvation.

He is the Prince of Peace who will usher in a millennium of peace at the end of time, and an eternity of peace in the New Heavens and the New Earth, and who gives daily peace to our own hearts as we trust Him and His promises.

One commentary that I consulted said that the Hebrew word here meant that He was the Tranquilizer. And later Isaiah would explain how this works in our lives, when he said "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because He trustest in Thee" (Isaiah 26:3).

This week I read about a swimmer named Rodrigo Gonzales who was a fantastic athlete but he was having trouble breaking through the ranks to win any medals. He had been an All-American swimmer at UCLA, but his performance had plateaued in his junior year. He had actually made it to Olympic competition, but had never finished better than fifteenth in international competition. He wanted to enter the Pan American games, but he was frustrated and discouraged, and he began to think he was too old to improve his time. He was only 21, but some swimmers peak in their late teens; and Rodrigo was ready to give up.

But a sports psychologist named Kenneth Baum began to work with him. The first couple of sessions didn't go very well, but gradually he began to understand that the barriers that he faced in swimming were primarily barriers in his mind. His negative attitude had become like an anchor around his waist. But he began to add some new features to his preparation—and one was mental imaging. He started to visualize what it would feel like to swim faster, and he saw himself skimming through the water with the grace of a dolphin and the aggressiveness of a shark. He became so skilled in his mental exercises that he could see every stroke of his hands and feel every breath of his respiration as he approached the finish line.

Before long he began to out swim his competitors who were years younger than he was, and that year he won the bronze medal in the Pan American Games because he had learned how to focus his mind. (Kenneth Baum, *The Mental Edge* (New York: A Perigee Book published by The Berkley Publishing Group, 1999), 22-24.)

Well, Isaiah told us that God would keep us in perfect peace if our minds were focused on Him. And for me that means that sometimes I have to retreat into reality. When I'm troubled or worried or anxious, I just get alone with the Lord. I focus my thoughts on Him. I search His Word for a fresh promise to meet my need. I write out a prayer to Him and give it all to Him. I remind myself that there's a sense in which I died and my life is hidden with Christ in God. I remember the Lord's own words in John 14: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you—not as the world gives unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Let me give you a little definition of peace. It's an acronym. PEACE means:

Ø Practicing and

Ø Enjoying the

Ø Attitude of

Ø Christ

Ø Every day

Many years ago there fell into my hands a little book by Anna Talbott McPherson entitled *They Dared to be Different*. In this book she tells a story about the great Gospel singer, Ira Sankey. I do not know if this story is true or not, and I have not found it confirmed elsewhere. But as she tells it, Ira Sankey was traveling by steamboat up the Delaware River on Christmas Eve of 1875. The sky was clear, the stars were out, and the air was balmy. Many of the passengers were gathered on deck, and someone recognized Mr. Sankey and asked him to sing something to them. He agreed to do so, but he paused and whispered a prayer to heaven for the choice

of the song. Then he began singing in a clear voice that rang out over the quiet waters of the Delaware: "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead us, Much We Need Thy Tender Care."

When the song was over, a rough-looking man came up to him and said, "Mr. Sankey, did you ever serve in the Union Army?"

"Why, yes," said Sankey, "in the spring of 1860."

"Do you remember doing picket duty on a bright moonlight night?"

"I remember some bright, moonlight nights," said Sankey.

"So do I," said the man, "but I was serving in the Confederate Army. When I saw you standing at your post on that particular night, I thought to myself, That fellow will never get away from here alive. I raised my musket and took aim. I was standing in the shadow completely concealed while the full light of the moon was falling on you. At that instant, just as a moment ago, you raised your eyes to heaven and began to sing.... I took my finger off the trigger... The song you sang then was the song you sang just now. I heard the words perfectly.... These words stirred up many memories in my heart. I began to think of my childhood and my God-fearing mother. She had sung that song to me many, many times.... When you had finished your song it was impossible for me to take aim at you again...."

And Ira Sankey threw his arms around the man and shared with him on that Christmas Eve the story of the Christ of Christmas, the Prince of Peace, and the man confessed his sins and acknowledged Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. (Anna Talbott McPherson, *They Dared to Be Different* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 22-24.)

This Christmas I want to invite you to do the same. Give your life to Him. For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders. And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace

Isaiah 38:17

Sickness Into Wholeness (2 Chronicles 29)

I've been reading an interesting biography of former President Ronald Reagan. Whatever people thought of his policies, they could not help but admire his sunny, optimistic perspective on life. With him it was always morning-in-America and win-one-for-the-gipper. It was this resilience and cheerfulness that helped him through the assassination attempt and that sparked such powerful forces in the world that the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Where did his optimistic spirit come from? According to Peggy Noonan, in her biography, *When Character Was King*, it came from his mother and from his mother's Bible.

Mrs. Nell Christian Reagan "was a Christian from the evangelical school and pretty much her whole life was bringing the good news to people who hadn't heard it or maybe hadn't listened hard enough." She had absorbed that old classic book, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, by Hannah Whitall Smith, the theme of which is that God will let little befall you that will not be to the ultimate benefit of your soul.[1]

Whatever happens to God's children will be used for good in their lives. That was her unshakable philosophy.

Noonan gives an example: After Ronald Reagan graduated from a Christian college in Northern Illinois, he started looking for a job; but this was during the Great Depression and jobs were hard to find. He hitchhiked to Chicago, but had no luck. Coming back home, he heard that Montgomery Ward was opening a big store in his hometown of Dixon, Illinois. They were looking for someone to run the sports department, and Reagan, twenty-two, thought he was the perfect candidate. He was a well-known swimmer and lifeguard, and had been a football star in college. They were willing to pay \$12.50 a week, and that's what he needed to help his family. He applied for the job; another local sports star got the job, and Reagan was crushed. He told his mother of his disappointment.

She had a talk with him about it and told him that all things were part of God's plan, even the most disheartening setbacks. If something went wrong, we shouldn't grow discouraged or feel down in the dumps. We should trust God with it and keep going. Later on, she told him, something good would happen and you'd find yourself thinking, "If I hadn't had that problem back then, then this better thing wouldn't have happened to me."

Reagan believed it, wrote Peggy Noonan. He believed every word of it. After all, it came from his mother and from his mother's Bible. And sure enough. About that time, a local radio station hired him for seventy-five dollars a week to broadcast sports, and soon his name was known throughout the Midwest. It was the first step on a path that was to lead him into broadcasting, movies, politics, and eventually would take him all the way to the White House.

What if Reagan had been hired at Montgomery-Ward? What if his desires had been granted? The world would never have heard his name. But because of a heartbreaking disappointment—a lost job opportunity during the Great Depression—he went on to change American history.

Well, there's another statesman who learned a similar lesson. His name was Hezekiah, King of Judah, and I'd like to show you one sentence he wrote which fits perfectly the theme of our current series of sermons. It is found in Isaiah 38:17:

Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.

Here's the way it's put in other translations:

- Ø Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness—NKJV
- Ø It was for my own good that I had such troubles—NCV
- Ø See, this great bitterness was for my own peace—Berkley
- Ø Surely it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness—NRSV
- Ø It was for my own good that I had such a hard time—CEV
- Ø Yes—I see it all—it was good for me to undergo this bitterness—TLV

Who was Hezekiah? What was he talking about? What bitterness and anguish did he suffer? What can we take away from his life to help our own hearts in times of bitterness and anguish?

Hezekiah is one of the greatest kings of antiquity. His story is so important it is given to us three times in the Bible. Once in 2 Kings, once in 2 Chronicles, and once in the middle of the book of the prophet Isaiah.

He was twenty-five years when he became king, and from the very beginning he sought to bring spiritual revival to the nation of Judah. In the very first month of the first year of his reign, he launched repairs on the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, which had become neglected and run-down. Look at 2 Chronicles 29:

In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites, assembled them in the square on the east side and said: "Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the Lord, the God of your fathers. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary. Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the Lord our God and forsook him. They turned their faces away from the Lord's dwelling place and turned their backs on him. They also shut the doors of the portico and put out the lamps. They did not burn incense or present any burnt offerings at the sanctuary to the God of Israel. Therefore, the anger of the Lord has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; he has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn, as you can see with your own eyes. This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity. Now I intend to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and burn incense (2 Chronicles 29:3-11, NIV).

I don't have time to read the whole story of how the worship of the Lord was reactivated, but just look at the last verse of the chapter, 2 Chronicles 29:35b-36, NIV: So the service of the temple of the Lord was reestablished. Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly.

Hezekiah went on to re-institute the Feast of the Passover, and there was great spiritual momentum in ancient Judah. There was a revival. There was a quickening of the religious life of the nation, and the people of Israel turned back toward the goodness and the grace of God. We long for such a revival in our own country today. I've read about the great revivals in the past, and these great revivals have molded and shaped American history. Not far from here, just to the northeast is Lexington, Kentucky. Outside Lexington is the little community of Cain Ridge. One day near the year of 1800, a preacher came to Cain Ridge to pastor a set of three frontier Presbyterian churches. His fiery preaching started a revival in that local area, and as the churches planned their annual Communion service they decided to invite other local Presbyterian and Methodist churches to participate. The revival spread, and in their enthusiasm the people decided to plan a larger Communion service for the whole area the following summer. To their utter amazement, hundreds of people came, then thousands of people. For seven days, thousands of people descended on Cain Ridge, and one preacher after another began taking to the stage to preach the Gospel. No one knows how many people attended the Cain Ridge Camp Meeting, but estimates range from ten thousand to twenty-five thousand. Hundreds if not thousands were converted, and it started a revival that spread throughout the nation and changed the culture of America.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a revival like that in our own day; and that's just what was happening in the days of Hezekiah. The nation had been in spiritual decline for a long time, and Hezekiah's own father, King Ahaz, had been among the worst. The nation of Judah had sunk into the cesspool of idolatry and immorality. Now under the preaching of the prophet Isaiah and the leadership of

King Hezekiah, a vast spiritual revival was underway.

And then, right in the middle of everything, when he was at the prime of his powers, at the peak of his manhood, and the pinnacle of his usefulness, Hezekiah was struck from nowhere by twin disasters. One was a military disaster and the other was a medical disaster.

I want to show you something that I had never seen before in his story. Both disasters struck Hezekiah when he was thirty-nine years old. In other words, these two blows came in the same year. The first involved the invading armies of King Sennacherib of Assyria. Look at the way Isaiah 36 begins:

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.

If Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five and he had been on the throne fourteen years, he would be how old? Thirty-nine.

Now move ahead two chapters and notice how Isaiah 38 begins: In those days... In what days—in those very days of invasion and national trauma.

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."

Last year, I had a fairly routine medical procedure as a preventative against cancer. As I drove to the doctor's office, I thought to myself, "What if today I learn that I have an advanced malignancy with only a few months to live? What if I learn that I have a terminal illness?"

Well, I didn't; but it was a sobering thought, and I felt a certain level of fear about it. I remember my friend, Jonathan Thigpen, who was my age, telling me about the time he sat down in the doctor's office and was told that he had a terrible, terminal illness known as Lou Gehrig's disease, from which he eventually died. These were the feelings that Hezekiah had.

Now, just for the sake of establishing a chronology, let me jump ahead of the story and disclose that in the end, God did provide Hezekiah with healing and with an additional fifteen years of life. We know from other passages that Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned for twenty-nine years. Twenty-five plus twenty-nine equals fifty-four. Hezekiah died when he was fifty-four years old. Now if he was fifty-four when he died, and if his life had been extended by fifteen years in answer to prayer, how old was he when this sickness struck him? Fifty-four minus fifteen is thirty-nine.

In his thirty-ninth year, Hezekiah was hit by this one-two punch. At the very same time, he faced the greatest challenge in his professional life and the greatest challenge in his personal life. As king, he was facing a mortal enemy invading his land, and as a man, he was facing his own mortality.

I think there is something very important for us to notice here. Sometimes problems come in twos and threes. Just as we're reeling from one tragedy or difficult, we face another. We even have an entire set of terms to describe it. We talk about...

- Ø The one-two punch
- Ø The double whammy
- Ø The double-edged sword
- Ø Double trouble
- Ø Double, double toil and trouble
- Ø Fighting on two fronts
- Ø Waiting for the other shoe to drop.
- Ø Going down for the third time
- Ø Or, as a recent movie put it—a series of unfortunate events

As I prepared this message, I couldn't help thinking about the story of Phyllis Rutledge. Some years ago, I read her story. Her husband, Howard Rutledge, was a pilot in Vietnam, and on November 28, 1965, as she returned home from church she saw the Navy Chaplain approaching her house. Her legs buckled under her and someone helped her to a seat. Her husband's plane had been shot down over Vietnam, and Howard was missing in action. Not long afterward, her mother suffered a stroke and died. The next year as Phyllis vacationed at the beach with her children, trying to maintain some normalcy and sanity, her fifteen-year-old son, John, was diving into the water and struck his head on a rock under the water. A stranger saved him from drowning and an

ambulance rushed him to the hospital, but there was little the surgeons could do. John was paralyzed from the neck down.

Or I think of the e-mail message I got this week regarding my friend, missionary Janice Banks. Last month her husband was killed in a car wreck, and this week her mother passed away.

Why is this? Why do problems come in doubles and triples? There are two answers to that question.

First, when we have problems in multiples, they are very likely to represent strategic attacks by the devil. Whenever we suddenly encounter a string of problems or distresses, we can very often rightly sense the lurking hand of the devil. Satan has something to do with it. That's one of the lessons from the early chapters of the book of Job, when Satan arranged for successive waves of tragedy to hit Job, one after another, in an intense effort to destroy his faith. These are Satan's cluster bombs.

It was like the German Luftwaffe bombing London during World War II, wave after wave after wave. Whenever I find a series of unfortunate events occurring in my life, one after the other, almost in timed precision, I consider the possibility that this is a sustained, strategic Satanic attack.

Second, when we find ourselves under assault, these things not only represent the attacks of the devil, but they also represent the lessons of the Lord.

When we become Christians, we become disciples of the Lord Jesus; and the word "disciple" means "learner." Jesus wants to teach us His richest and deepest lessons, but we are unstable pupils. One moment we're hot and the next we're cold. One moment we're full of faith and the next moment we're overcome with anxiety. One moment we're obedient and the next moment we've fallen into sin. I recently found a fascinating poem about this. It was written by John Newton, the London pastor who is best known for having written the great hymn, "Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound."

He wrote many poems and hymns, but one of the most interesting and autobiographical and honest was entitled "Conflicting Feelings." It said:

Strange and mysterious is my life.
What opposites I feel within!
A stable peace, a constant strife;
The rule of grace, the power of sin:
Too often I am captive led,
Yet daily triumph in my Head,
I prize the privilege of prayer,
But oh! what backwardness to pray!
Though on the Lord I cast my care,
I feel its burden every day;
I seek His will in all I do,
Yet find my own is working too,
I call the promises my own,
And prize them more than mines of gold;
Yet though their sweetness I have known,
They leave me unimpressed and cold
One hour upon the truth I feed,
The next I know not what I read,
While on my Savior I rely,
I know my foes shall lose their aim,
And therefore dare their power defy,
Assured of conquest through His Name,

But soon my confidence is slain,
And all my fears return again,
Thus different powers within me strive,
And grace and sin by turns prevail;
I grieve, rejoice, decline, revive,
And victory hangs in doubtful scale:
But Jesus has His promise passed,
That grace shall overcome at last,

Well, the Lord intends to stabilize and strengthen and develop us—and that is one of the reasons He allows trials and troubles to come. They are His tools in conforming us into the image of Christ.

Going back to the example of Job, the multiple trials and tragedies that Job endured were sent by the devil but allowed by the Lord. Satan wanted to use these things to tear down Job's faith, but the Lord used them to build up Job's faith and to make him twice the man that he was before.

The same is true with Hezekiah. Later, after the crises had passed, Hezekiah looked back on that awful thirty-ninth year of his life and he said: "It was for my peace. It was for my benefit. These things happened for my good. It seemed awful at the time, but it has all worked for good. It was for my benefit that I was afflicted." God uses these things to teach us the deepest lessons of His love and power.

Now, in what way did Hezekiah benefit from a foreign invasion and from a terminal disease? What lesson did God intend to teach?

The great overriding lesson is this: In quietness and confidence is our strength. Let's go back to the Assyrian invasion and look at two very interesting questions, hurled out as challenges by the Assyrian Field Commander to Hezekiah. Look at Isaiah 36:

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field, Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to him. The field commander said to them, 'Tell Hezekiah, this is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says..."

Now, notice this. With his very first words, the field commander of Sennacherib unwittingly cut to the very heart of the spiritual purposes of God in allowing this problem and peril to come upon His people. These words were uttered by the pagan, satanic emissary of a foreign godless power, yet they go right to the core of our spiritual lives.

This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have strategy and military strength—but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?

On what are you basing your confidence? On whom are you depending?

Now, Hezekiah did not face this crisis alone. He had a very powerful friend named Isaiah, and what did Isaiah advise? I'll give you one sentence:

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. (Isaiah 30:15, NKJV)

And what did Hezekiah tell his people, the trembling nation of Judah. We have the answer in 2 Chronicles 32:6-8:

He (Hezekiah) appointed military officers over the people and assembled them before him in the square at the city gate and encouraged them with these words: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said.

I wonder if Hezekiah didn't go back and read the words of his great, great, great, great grandfather, King David, who had written this in Psalm 27:

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident... I am still confident in this: I

will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait on the Lord.

Jeremiah 17:7 wrote, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Hebrews 10:35 says: "Do not throw away your confidence."

Hebrews 13:6 says that we can say with confidence: The Lord is my helper!

1 John 5:14 says: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us."

Deuteronomy 31:6 says: "Be determined and confident. Do not be afraid of them. Your God, the Lord himself, will be with you. He will not fail you or abandon you" (Good News Translation).

The Psalmist said, "My heart is confident in you, O God; no wonder I can sing your praises (Psalm 57:7, New Living Translation).

Confidence is simply another word for faith in the presence, the power, and the promises of God. Over the past several years, I've begun to slowly realize that God values faith and confidence above all else in our hearts. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." That is, without quietness and confidence in our hearts during times of trouble, it is impossible to please God. In fact, the Lord allows trials and troubles to come into our lives just in order to exercise and build up this essential quality of confidence and quietness in our souls.

Faith is the quietness and confidence that God is in control of all the circumstances of my life. Faith is the inner quietness and confidence that characterizes the child of God during trouble and tribulation. Faith is the absence of excessive anger or anxiety in the face of adversity. Faith is resting in Jesus Christ and in His Word, like the old song that says:

Jesus, I am resting, resting,

In the joy of what Thou art;

I am finding out the greatness

Of Thy loving heart.

King Hezekiah was living a charmed life, a life of revival and blessing, until his thirty-ninth year when the roof caved in. His land was invaded by the enemy, and his body was invaded by disease. Both came at the same time in a simultaneous attack. Sometimes that happens to us. But multiple problems and perils often represent an attack by Satan, and God can use these things to deepen our faith, establish our confidence, and to so bless us that in coming days we will say:

Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.

For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

[1] Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Viking, 2001), p. 20

Isaiah 38:17

Depression Into Happiness

Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. Isaiah 38:17

This week I heard a man speak who told of his past. It was a sordid story of abuse, dysfunction, and heartache. Today he's the president of a seminary and a leading evangelical thinker, and in the talk I heard, he praised God for his past. All the elements of my story, he said, have worked out for God's glory. Every chapter has been touched and redeemed—and the same is true for all God's children. He takes all our worst moments and turns them into blessings for ourselves and for others.

That's the theme of our current series of studies here at , and today I want to return to the text I used last week from the life of Hezekiah. It is found in Isaiah 38:17: Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish (NIV).

Hezekiah was an ancient king in Judah whose story is so important it's given to us three times in the Bible: Once in 2 Kings, once in 2 Chronicles, and once in the middle of the book of the prophet Isaiah.

He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and from the beginning he sought to revive the spiritual life of the nation of Judah. In the first month of the first year of his reign, he launched a revival that continued for fourteen years. Then Hezekiah celebrated his thirty-ninth birthday, and his world started collapsing around him.

His empire was invaded and occupied by the dreaded armies of Assyria, the most powerful military force the world had ever seen to that point. And at the same time, Hezekiah contracted an illness which rapidly worsened and became terminal. Isaiah the prophet told him to put his affairs in order because he was going to kick the bucket.

Thirty-nine was a very bad year in the palace of Judah. At the very moment Hezekiah faced the greatest challenge in his professional life, he was stuck by greatest challenge in his personal life. As king, he was facing a mortal enemy invading his land; simultaneously, as a man, he was facing his own mortality. Sometimes problems come in twos and threes; and when that happens we can sometimes see the hand of Satan trying to demoralize, defeat, and destroy us.

In Hezekiah's case, he did not succeed. In fact, he later went so far as to say, "Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish."

Many times I've observed a three-step downward path in the spiritual vitality of Christians. First, we become careless. We slack off. Our spiritual disciplines become sporadic, we become too busy, we get distracted, we fudge on our prayer and Bible study time, we skip church. That leads to the second step: we become callused. Whereas at first, we felt a nagging sense of guilt, that begins to fade away and we begin to lose our sense of responsibility. That leads to the third step. We become cursed. I don't mean that we're cursed to hell, just that our spiritual life becomes blighted and it withers up. God uses trials and troubles and tribulations to interrupt this downward process and to keep us climbing upward.

Just this week it dawned on me that Christians are reverse-flashlights. If you turn on a flashlight and make your way along a darkened pathway, the flashlight gradually becomes weaker and weaker until the battery completely dies. Christians, however, become brighter and brighter the further we go and the longer we live. Proverbs 4:18 says, "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (NIV).

God allows suffering and stress to come into our lives to keep us going upward and to keep us growing stronger. God allowed Hezekiah to absorb these two blows during his thirty-nine year for reasons that would later be to the king's benefit, would keep him growing and going. What benefits did Hezekiah receive? A careful study of his life gives us several practical lessons for ourselves.

Prayer Really Works

The first lesson is: Prayer really works. Hezekiah met both his challenges head-on with the anti-aircraft missiles of prayer. In Isaiah 36, enemy forces flooded the land like water from a broken dam, and only Jerusalem was left as a small island in the deluge. The Assyrian field commander demanded terms of surrender.

"When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord. He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. They told him, 'This is what Hezekiah says: This is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of the field commander whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the Lord your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives.'"

Therefore pray! Underline those two words in Isaiah 37:4, for they represent our greatest strategy in the face of overwhelming difficulty: Therefore pray!

Hezekiah then received another, more insistent communication from Sennacherib, this time by letter. It was a hostile, threatening letter warning of doom and disaster if Judah tried to resist the Assyrian forces.

Have you ever received a letter, a bill, an e-mail, a summons, a medical report, or any other kind of bad news? From the example of Hezekiah, we learn one of the most powerful prayer techniques in the entire Bible.

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord....

We can often do this physically, and we can always do it figuratively. Try taking those unpaid bills to your bedside, getting down on your knees, and spreading them out before the Lord. Take that newspaper headline that worries you, go to your altar wherever that is, and spread it out before the Lord. Take that missionary letter and do the same. Take a picture of your loved one about whom you are so concerned. Take the map showing the location of your loved one in the armed forces. Take your medical report, your credit rating, your child's report card, or the critical letter you received. Spread them out before the Lord as a way of entrusting it to Him.

The Bible says, "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall" (Psalm 55:22, NIV). Peter wrote, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you" (2 Peter 5:7, NIV).

Sometimes when I have no physical item to spread before the Lord, I've written out my prayer, then, kneeling down, I've laid the papers out before the Lord and read them to Him. Or I've simply spread my prayer lists before the Lord.

This is a powerful and effective procedure, recommended to us by God through the example of Hezekiah. He spread the letter out before the Lord and he prayed:

O Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

Since this proved to be one of the most effective prayers ever uttered in Scripture, resulting in the routing of the most powerful army the world had ever seen, we should take a moment to see what we can learn from it.

Notice that Hezekiah didn't focus on his mess but on his Master. He began by reminding himself of the infinite attributes of His God. He began as Jesus did in the Lord's prayer when He taught us to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed by Thy Name." He said, "O Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth."

It actually took Hezekiah a little while to get around to the disaster itself. Often in a crisis, I just plunge into praying about my problem. Lord, help! Oh, Lord, alas and alack! What are we going to do? Look at this mess! Look at this danger! Can you not see I'm in great pain!

Hezekiah opened his prayer by concentrating on the person and power of God Himself. After all, God already knew about the problem, but He wanted to use the problem to teach Hezekiah more about Himself. It's impossible to pray the "prayer of faith" unless our prayers are based and centered upon the greatness of the one who said, "All authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth." Don't become so distracted on your crisis that you disregard your Christ.

Then, he carefully stated the problem and asked for help. He prayed earnestly for deliverance. He prayed specifically. He prayed realistically. He prayed intelligently. He prayed clearly. He reminded God of His promises to Judah. And he recorded his request (or at least someone did), for we have it inscribed on the pages of Scripture.

Hezekiah closed his prayer by asking that whatever happened God would be glorified, so that all the kingdoms of earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God.

The result of this kind of praying?

"Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: 'This is what the Lord , the God of Israel, says: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word the Lord has spoken against him...'"

Notice those words... because you have prayed to me.

God unfailingly responds to sincere, earnest, specific prayer offered in the name of Christ and designed for His glory. That kind of prayer changes things. It alters circumstances. Though it may seem to have no immediate results, tremendous forces are unleashed in heaven and on earth that eventually cause all things to work together for good. Promises are claimed. Lives are changed. Circumstances are corrected. Situations are tweaked. Strength is imparted. Grace is bestowed. History is put right. Answers are given, though they may take a while to arrive at their intended destination.

In Hezekiah's case, the angels of heaven were mobilized, the heavenly host was dispatched, and one of the most unusual battles in military history took place. The angel of the Lord killed 186,000 Assyrian soldiers, and Sennacherib returned to his capital, his tail between his legs, and was assassinated in the temple of his pagan god by his own sons. The world's most powerful military machine was no match for one man on his knees with his problem spread out before the Lord.

Now, what of Hezekiah's other crisis? Look at the story:

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord...

Again the Lord was moved by Hezekiah's earnest prayer, and He sent this word: "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life." And He confirmed the answer with an unusual miracle. He caused the shadow running down the staircase to reverse itself by ten steps, signaling that God has the power to do whatever He has promised.

The Bible teaches that prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective (James 5:16). Hymnist Fanny Crosby said, "All must have their sorrows and disappointments, but we must never forget that Jesus will answer our prayers if for our good, and answer them so much more fully and completely than we have dared to dream."^[1]

In other words, prayer really works. Now, if you actually believed that, would it make a difference in your daily schedule? In your attitude? In your life?

One of the most encouraging biographies I've ever read is that of Charles Fuller (1887-1968), a Los Angeles native who graduated from Biola University and became the pastor of Calvary Church in Los Angeles.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Fuller became involved in buying and selling orange groves in Southern California, and the enterprise was very successful, especially when oil was found on one of the groves.

The Great Depression struck America in October, 1929, and by 1931, some of Fuller's financial deals were beginning to go awry. He found himself unable to meet his personal financial obligations, and his fledgling radio broadcast was far from paying for itself. At the same time, his son fell ill to persistent and prolonged attacks of bronchitis. Charles, a noted pastor, faced the humiliation of having his home auctioned out from under him to pay his mounting debts. His wife recorded in her journal, "No money to meet bills... It is almost more than Charles can bear. He is so depressed, so burdened that he says he can stand no more."

But things grew worse. Their son's illness grew worse and he developed pneumonia, hovering near the grave. On January 8, 1932, as Charles was at the lawyer's office trying to stave off disaster, his wife called to say that Dannie, age six, was in critical condition and had grown so weak that a pulse beat was no longer discernable.

Somehow Dannie pulled through, but the stress and strain of their multiple problems so exhausted Charles that when he stood in the pulpit of Calvary Church each Sunday he wondered whether he could last through the sermon.

So great was their extremity that the Fullers had to use Mrs. Grace Fuller's inheritance which her father had carefully set aside, year after year, and left to her. It was suddenly used up and gone, and it left her embittered and angry.

Then she had to have extensive surgery.

At about the same time Calvary Church decided it wanted a new pastor, and Charles felt that he should resign. The morning after his final sermon, the nation's economic depression deepened. President Roosevelt closed all the banks.

Five days later, Long Beach suffered a severe earthquake which killed 115 people and caused millions upon millions of dollars of damage. About the same time, one of Charles Fuller's business partner's declared bankruptcy, and Charles incurred additional debt.

One morning in August, 1933, Mrs. Fuller felt she could bear the stress and strain no longer. When Charles left home to go into Los Angeles and plot his next moves to remain solvent, she went into her study and in desperation started reading one of Charles Haddon Spurgeon's sermons on prayer. He had preached it in London over seventy years before, and the text was Jeremiah 33:3: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (KJV).

She later said: "When I called upon God in desperation in August, 1933, he answered me by directing me unmistakably to the library shelf on which this book stood and to this sermon. It brought great comfort and enabled me to trust God and to await the unfolding of His plans for us."

Daniel Fuller later wrote, "She said that God lifted her burden so remarkably that morning that when my father returned exhausted from another day of negotiations in a lawyer's office, she was able to tell him, "Never mind how black things look now. God has assured me that He has great and mighty things in store for us for the future—things which we can't even imagine now."

So it happened. Charles Fuller began preaching on the radio in 1937. He helped pioneer radio evangelism, and his Old Fashioned Gospel Hour on the Mutual Broadcasting System (and later on CBS radio) was heard live from Long Beach every Saturday night on over six hundred stations. He became one of the most respected evangelists of his time, and he later went on to help found Fuller Seminary which is named in his honor.

In one of his first broadcasts, Dr. Fuller said:

I pass on to you a little of the comfort wherewith Mrs. Fuller and I have been comforted. We have come to know God in a new way because of the trials we have been going through these past three years. We have known what it is to have much sickness;

financial losses; to have those turn against us and seek to hurt us who we thought were true friends; to have our only child brought down to death's door on two occasions, and to have gone before the microphone, after sleepless nights, so burdened and cast down I do not know whether I could preach—whether when I opened my mouth the words would come. Excuse these personal references, friends, I mention them only briefly as a testimony because I want to tell you that after going through all this and much more, Mrs. Fuller and I know that God is able—that His promises are true. We never could have known the sweetness of trusting God had we not come to the place where we ourselves could do nothing. We never could have known how precious it is to rest on (God's Word), and having committed all to Him and waiting to see Him work, if we had not been sorely tested.[2]

What a wonderful promise: Call to me and I will show you great and mighty things which you do not know. That doesn't mean that God is going to do exactly what we wish, as we wish, when we wish, how we wish. His ways are mysterious and marvelous, and He answers in His own way and in His own time; nevertheless prayer moves His hand, touches His heart, and changes this world.

Problems Are Really Opportunities

Second, Hezekiah teaches us that problems are really opportunities. Mother Theresa once instructed her associates to refrain from using the word "problem" in her presence. Instead, she told them to use the word "gift." She understood that every problem is an occasion to seek God's solution and thus to improve our lives and our world a bit at a time.

Occasionally when I've faced a crisis and I haven't handled it too well and I've been the verge of emotional meltdown, my wife Katrina has taken a different course: "What a great opportunity to trust God!" she tells me. I think that's what she would have said to Hezekiah in the face of his mounting difficulties.

This week I attended a meeting with Ed Dobson, a Grand Rapids pastor whom I deeply admire. Four years ago, Ed was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease. At the conference he spoke candidly of the deep, dark struggles that raged in his soul and he described his feelings by saying it was like descending into the gloom and doom of the tomb of Lazarus. But he also told us this: "The book of Hebrews says, 'God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" When I would sink into despair I would repeat those words over and over until they began to take hold of me."

I can't fully empathize with his disease, but I do understand Ed's approach. Sometimes in difficulty, I've had to find a promise and concentrate all my mental energies on that promise until it began to turn my fear into faith.

The Psalmist said, "My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands are my delight" (Psalm 119:50, 143).

Hezekiah experienced this, too, and not only for himself; he led his entire nation in this exercise:

He appointed military officers over the people and assembled them before him in the square at the city gate and encouraged them with these words: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said.

If Judah gained confidence from Hezekiah, where did Hezekiah find it? Perhaps from his spiritual advisor, the prophet Isaiah, who said, In quietness and confidence shall be your strength (Isaiah 30:15, NKJV).

Jeremiah 17:7 wrote, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Faith is trusting God even when He doesn't answer our prayers as we'd hoped. It rests in the confidence that His plan for us is best even if, at the time, we can't see how it could be so. As we grow in Christ, we also come to understand that Faith is seeking God's will through His Word and prayer, then waiting before Him with sanctified insistence until our needs are granted.

Pride is Really Harmful

The third benefit of anguish is learning that pride is really harmful. Hezekiah was a great man who became king while young and led his nation in restoring the worship of almighty God. He was a politician, but also a preacher. He was royalty, but he was also a revivalist. Yet he wasn't a perfect man. The Bible tells us that a deeply-ingrained thread of wickedness wound through his heart. He was afflicted with pride. The writer of Second Chronicles states it plainly: "Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the Lord's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah repented of the pride in his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the Lord's wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah" (2 Chronicles 32:25-26, NIV).

But look at what Hezekiah prayed after he had been delivered from Assyria and healed of his illness: "He has spoken to me, and He himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish" (Isaiah 38:15-17, NIV).

God allows trials in order to show us that we do not have sufficient resources within ourselves to solve every problem or right every wrong. We have to turn to him and surrender those things into His hands and let Him have His way. Peter drew a connection between having a humble heart and being able to cast our cares on the Lord:

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

Notice the proximity of those two commands to one another. Humble yourselves... Cast all your anxiety on Him. Left to ourselves, we usually make things worse. Whatever our trial, whatever our trouble, we can come humbly to the Lord and say, "Look what a mess this is, and without Your help I'll only make it worse. I surrender it to You. Do as You see best. I yield my rights and relinquish my demands. Not my will, but Yours be done.

That gives God all the room He needs to work His mysteries and His miracles in your life and mine.

Praise is Really Uplifting

A fourth benefit of going through anguish is this—it teaches us that praise is really uplifting. Hezekiah learned through this experience to praise God in a way he had never before discovered. He said, "The Lord will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of our God."

I recently heard a man say something I'd never thought about before. He said that prayer is a very powerful force on this earth, but praise is an even greater force. Why? Because when we pray, we are asking God for what we want; when we praise Him, we are giving God what He wants. Returning home, I checked my concordance. The word praise occurs 307 times in the Bible, and the word prayer occurs 135 times. I'm not sure we can actually compare the value of praise versus prayer, or even that there's always a lot of difference; but I do know it is impossible to overestimate the uplifting power of praise and thanksgiving.

The Pieces Really Do Fit Together in the End

Hezekiah survived his thirty-ninth year, and he had fifteen more years during which he could look back over that one terrible year and see how God used it all for good and converted his anguish into alleluias. Turning to Matthew's Gospel, we find that Hezekiah in the lineage of the Messiah. He was a link in the chain of promise, and God proved Himself faithful.

Even when the haze of battle doesn't clear when you think it should or the healing doesn't occur as you want it too, still, God can turn it to gain.

In 1939, William Sangster assumed leadership of Westminster Central Hall, a Methodist church near London's Westminster Abbey. During his first worship service he announced to his stunned congregation that Britain and Germany were officially at war. He quickly converted the church basement into an air raid shelter, and for 1,688 nights Sangster ministered to the various needs of all kinds of people. At the same time, he somehow managed to write, to preach gripping sermons, to earn a Ph.D., and to lead hundreds to Christ. He became known as Wesley's successor in London and was esteemed as the most beloved British preacher of his era.

Sometime after the war, Sangster was diagnosed with progressive muscular atrophy. For three years, he slowly died, becoming progressively more paralyzed, finally able to move only two fingers. But his attitude didn't falter, for when first learning of his illness, Sangster made four rules for himself. Many people have rules for living. Sangster composed four rules for dying: "I will never complain. I will keep the home bright. I will count my blessings. I will try to turn it to gain."

He did all those things. And thus the work of God was displayed in his life, and in his death.

God is able to turn it to gain. Jesus said, using the prophetic words of Hezekiah's spiritual advisor, Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me... He has sent me...to bestow on them the crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

He turns all things to gain, and works all things to good.

[1] Fanny Crosby in Fanny Crosby by Bernard Ruffin (Pilgrim Press), p. 222.

2 Daniel P. Fuller, The Story of Charles E. Fuller: Give the Winds a Mighty Voice (Waco, Texas: Word Books,

Isaiah 42

Think of the Millions Who Never Have Heard

It's our custom, every autumn, to devote two Sundays to making sure we're staying true to our commitments regarding global outreach and international missions. Sometimes we have a missionary speaker, and sometimes I use this Sunday as an opportunity to preach from one of the great missionary texts of the Bible. For several months, I had planned to bring a missionary message from 2 Timothy 2:2 and had even developed the outline and basic substance of the message. In my personal devotions, this week, however, as I'll explain in a moment, I was deeply impressed with another passage that spoke so personally to me that I felt God would have me change courses, and so today I'd like to ask you to turn with me to an unusual passage of predictive prophecy regarding the coming Messiah as we have it given to us in Isaiah 42.

"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law."

"Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it; "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

When I was a student at Columbia International University, we used to have regular days in which normal classes were suspended and the day was devoted to prayer. We called them simply "Prayer Days." On one of those occasions, I was given a wonderful little booklet by Lorne Sanny of the Navigators entitled, "How To Spend a Day in Prayer." This doesn't mean that you literally stay on your knees for twelve solid hours, but that you devote the day to praise and Bible study and prayer and meditation and, in general, just to focusing on the Lord and being with Him.

For many years following my graduation from college, I continued that practice from time to time, but in recent years it has become crowded out of my schedule. This week, I decided to renew the practice and I took a couple of days off without telling anyone except Katrina where I was. I desperately wanted to be out of cell phone range, but when I saw that I wasn't, I studied my phone very carefully and found a previously unused button called "Off."

And in my Bible reading I came to Isaiah 42. Now, this passage is all about Jesus Christ. Isaiah lived seven hundred years before Christ, and yet the Lord Jesus was the great theme of His writing and ministry. Some people have called Isaiah the fifth Gospel because of His extensive prophetic passages dealing with the coming Messiah. This chapter, Isaiah 42, is among them. And as I read this passage, it seemed that the Lord showed me four things He wants me to do with Jesus. I don't think it was a message for me only; I think this is for all of us. So let me share these four privileges with you.

We Should Be Delighted with Jesus

Look at the way the chapter begins: "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My elect One in whom my soul delights!"

God the Father is speaking here. Isaiah is recording the words spoken to him by God the Father, and God the Father is telling us about God the Son. He is telling us to behold the Son. Now we don't use the word "behold" very much any more. What do we say instead? We say, "Hey, look at that!" One day last year, Jerry Carraway and I were coming back from lunch, and as we approached the church, I saw Air Force One buzzing over our church building. President Bush had been in town, and he was just leaving. I didn't say to Jerry, "Jerry, behold! The president's plane!" I said, "Hey, Jerry, look at that!" God the Father says here, "Hey, look at this! My Servant, My Elect One, My Chosen One—the Messiah. Look at this One in whom My soul delights."

Later, at His baptism and again at the transfiguration, the Father would say something similar, "Behold My Son in whom I am well pleased."

Now it seems to me that if God the Father tells us that His soul delights in Jesus, our souls should delight in Jesus, too! The Psalmist said, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). On that basis, we can say,

"Delight yourself in the Lord Jesus, and He will give you the desires of your heart."

Just imagine how delightful the forty days after our Lord's resurrection were. Someday I want to preach a series of messages on the Post-Resurrection appearances of Christ. He appeared to Mary in the garden. He appeared to Peter. He appeared to the two travelers who were walking to the village of Emmaus, and they said, "How our hearts burned with us." He appeared to the ten disciples in the upper room. He appeared to the ten disciples, plus Thomas, a week later. He appeared on the shores of Galilee in the morning mist. He appeared on the mountain where He issued His Great Commission. He would just come and go, appearing and disappearing at will, delighting the disciples with His glorified presence.

J. Sidlow Baxter says that during this time Jesus was appearing and disappearing so as to wean the disciples away from depending on His physical presence, and helping them become aware of His constantly abiding spiritual presence through the Holy Spirit.

The resurrected Jesus is here right now, in this very room, on this very platform. He goes with us everywhere we go, and He abides with us wherever we are. Of all the people on earth, we should be able to say:

Who can cheer the heart like Jesus, by His presence all divine?

True and tender, pure and precious, O how blest to call Him mine!

All that thrills my soul is Jesus; He is more than life to me.

And the fairest of ten thousand in my blessed Lord I see.

We Should Confide in Jesus

Second, we should confide in Jesus. We should trust Him and rely on Him and depend on His tender ways. Look at the way Isaiah continues:

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him...

This is a prediction that God would anoint Jesus Christ, His Elect One, with the Holy Spirit. The very term "Messiah" means "The Anointed One." This prediction was fulfilled at the baptism of Christ when the Holy Spirit descended on Him with a special endowment for His earthly ministry. Here is one of those rare places in which we have the entire Trinity crammed into one single verse. God the Father promises God the Spirit to God the Son.

He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

What does this mean? Isaiah is here giving us the progression of our Lord's earthly ministry. He would be baptized and anointed with the Holy Spirit, and He would engage in a phase of ministry which would be localized and quiet. It would occur in the hidden valleys of Galilee and would only progressively become known to the world. He wouldn't begin His ministry by shouting His message to the world but by whispering His love to the people of Galilee.

How do I know this is the correct way to interpret these verses? Look with me at Matthew 12:15ff.

But when Jesus knew it (that news of Him was getting out, causing the Pharisees to plot against Him), he withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. Yet He warned them not to make Him known [not yet at least], that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying [and now we have our passage today, Isaiah 42, quoted]: "Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom my soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory; and in His name Gentiles will trust."

But what do we make of the bruised reed and the smoking flax? Well, this is one of the most comforting and encouraging pictures in the Bible. Isaiah gives us two pictures of ourselves.

First, we are scrawny sticks. A bruised reed is literally a weak stick of wood. Here is a man who needs a walking cane, but this stick of wood is too weak. In Isaiah 36, Isaiah warns his people not to depend on a military alliance with Egypt. The army of Egypt, Isaiah says, is a bruised reed. If you lean on it, it will break and you will fall. So what do you do with a stick of wood that is too weak to be used for a walking cane? You break it up and use it for firewood.

Second, we are not only scrawny sticks, we are smoldering wicks. The term here is "smoking flax." That is referring to a wick in a lamp which doesn't give much light. The oil is low and the wick is charred and there's only a little red glow. Only a wisp of smoke.

The Lord is saying that sometimes we are so weak we can't support any weight and our flame is so low we can't provide any light. All in all, we're sometimes pretty pathetic. But Jesus will not break us like firewood. He will not extinguish us. He designs to

strengthen us and to fan us into flame. And He will use our lives to impact this world. Keep reading: "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench. He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth."

In other words, Jesus is not discouraged. He is going to fulfill His purpose for this earth, and, by implication, He is going to fulfill His purpose in you and me. He who has begun a good work in us will carry it on to completion.

He isn't discouraged by our problems. He isn't discouraged by our failures. His decrees are overriding and overruling. He is determined to work His will in the lives of His children, and our job is to trust Him, to confide in Him. He wants us equip us to be His world-changers. And that brings us to our third responsibility...

We Ought To Proclaim Jesus

Our Lord's great desire is to take the people who are thrilled with Him and who are trusting Him, and to turn them into His missionaries to the Lord. I was ever so stuck with the last part of verse 4: And the coastlines shall wait for His law. The nations are waiting for His message. As I prepared for this message, I found an old poem by Eliza Hewitt which was devoted to this theme. It said:

Think of the millions who never have heard
One precious promise from God's holy Word;
Think of the lives marred and darkened by sin,
Tell them the story that brings light within.
Bear the good tidings all over the world,
Let the bright banner of love be unfurled,
Wherever sorrow and sin shall be found,
There let the news of salvation resound.
Oh, what a song shall in Heaven be sung!
By every nation and kindred and tongue;
Some may be there through our efforts and prayer,
Joy everlasting together we'll share.

(Eliza E. Hewitt, 1896)

That first line has remained lodged in my thinking: Think of the millions who never have heard. But here's the startling thing about it. When Eliza Hewitt wrote this poem in the 1800s, the world's population had just clicked over the one billion mark for the first time in human history.

It took all of recorded history for the world to produce its first billion inhabitants, which occurred in the 1800s. Today over six billion people inhabit this planet, and the net population increases by two people every second. We're living amid a human time bomb, with demographers expecting world population to peak at over eleven billion sometime mid-century.

China is the most populous nation in the world, with 1.3 billion souls. India has over a billion. There's a dramatic drop to the next most populous nation—the United States with nearly 300 million. The most surprising nation in the world is Nigeria. It is the fastest growing country in the world and is expected to boom from 12 million to 53 million over the next several years.

Sociologists see those figures and say, "What a lot of mouths to feed!" Christians are also concerned about feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, tending the sick, and educating the illiterate. We've a greater challenge than any previous generation along those lines. But we also see the ballooning population and say, "What a lot of souls to evangelize!" Global outreach opportunities have never been greater, and more people will enter the Kingdom of God during our generation than during any preceding era in the entire history of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth.

That's where you and I come. We have three responsibilities.

First, we have missionaries to send. Here at , we have thirteen families or individuals engaged in cross-cultural ministries. Eleven of these depend on our financial gifts for their support. Every time I put a dollar in the offering plate, a dime of it goes toward our broader ministries, and in addition to that—over and beyond our regular tithes—my wife and I give on a monthly basis to missions. Twice a month, we give an amount designed to TDF missionaries, and it is split evenly between our eleven mission families. So if

you ask me what I was doing last week, I could truthfully answer, "On Monday, I was developing a health-based evangelism program in the Ivory Coast. On Tuesday, I was working with church musicians in Japan. On Wednesday, I was building a church in Brazil. On Thursday, I was overseeing our ministries in Europe, Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. On Friday, I was laboring in a suburb of Spain.

You say, "How on earth could you do all that? Do you have a private jet?" No, I'm doing all those things every time I put my tithes and offerings in the offering plate at . I'm praying for God to raise up a new little multitude of ministers and missionaries for us to send forth. I want our church to become known as one of the greatest sending churches in the United States of America, for the coastlines of the world are awaiting His message.

Second, we have prayers to pray. After ten years of discouraging ministry among the Lisu tribes of China, missionary J. O. Fraser saw a tremendous harvest of souls which is going on to this day. He credited the victory to his mother's little prayer group back in England.

The third thing is this: we have friends to win. We must seek ways of sharing the Gospel with our friends and relatives, and with the nationals and internationals that populate our streets and cities. I believe God wants to use us as domino Christians. I think He wants us to be part of a chain reaction that brings great multitudes to Himself. You might invite someone to church who will, sooner or later, come and hear the Gospel and be saved. Perhaps they'll invite someone else. Perhaps that person will win someone else to the Lord. Perhaps that someone else will be called as a missionary. Perhaps they will have a single convert overseas to whom God will give a great ministry which will bring thousands into the kingdom. How wonderful to think that we are links in that chain of evangelism.

We Should Anticipate what Jesus is Going to Do

Forth, we ought to anticipate what Jesus is going to do. Look at the way this passage continues:

Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it; "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

This is a passage of grandeur. It is a very sacred text, for we are eavesdropping here on a conversation that took place within the Trinity as God the Father made certain promises and pledges to God the Son. We have to understand it in that context if we are to interpret it rightly. Let's just walk through it with that in mind.

Thus says God the Lord (Jehovah) who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it:

This is quite a preamble. Jehovah has done three incredible things. He has created the heavens and spread His stars throughout the vast universe. He has created the earth and every particle it contains. He has made life itself and given human beings breath. This is our God who is about to make a promise to His Son.

I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness. In rightness. In other words, it was the right thing, the righteous thing, to do. I have asked you to do something incredibly difficult, but...

I will hold Your hand. God the Father is telling God the Son that He would hold His hand.

I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people. The word "covenant" means "contract" or "agreement." Jesus is God's contract with the human race. The Lord has entered into an agreement with humanity, and Jesus Christ is His pact or treaty, signed, sealed, and delivered.

You will be... a light to the Gentiles (that is, all the nations of the world), to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

He will be a Healer and a Liberator. And God will be glorified, for He is telling us all this seven hundred years before the Messiah's birth.

I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I will tell them.

The summarizing truth to all this is that God has promised to use Jesus Christ to do great things on this earth, and Jesus Christ has

promised to use His church to finish the work. You and I are that church, and we can expect great things from God. We have been chosen to live at a critical time in human history.

About two billion people on this world today identify themselves as Christians, though many of those are Christian in name only.

There are approximately 1.2 billion Muslims, and Islam is purported to be the fastest growing religion on earth. This is due to two factors. One is the high birth rate in Islamic nations, and the other is their fierce evangelizing zeal, fueled by the oil money that's pouring into the Arab states in the Middle East.

CNN World News recently reported, "Islam is... the (world's) fastest-growing religion. In the United States, for example, nearly 80 percent of the more than 1,200 mosques have been built in the past 12 years. Some scholars see an emerging Muslim renaissance as Islam takes root in many traditionally Christian communities."¹

One Muslim leader proclaimed: "We aim to establish Allah's religion in its entirety, in every soul and upon every inch of this earth, in every home, institution, and society."²

I believe that Islam may represent the most satanic force in the world today.

At the same time, there are now nearly a billion people who claim no religion at all.³ This is a new development in human history. Increasing segments of humanity are casting away any and all concern about God. The number of secular or nonreligious people grew from about three million in 1900 to nearly a billion in 2000. According to Bryant L. Meyers, "Being nonreligious or atheist is a largely 20th century phenomenon."

At the same time, persecution against Christians is widespread and underreported. The Anglican Journal of Canada recently claimed that persecution is occurring in 183 nations of the world, the worst violators being Saudi Arabia, North Korea, and Laos. One hundred thousand Christians are reportedly being held at this very moment in North Korean labor camps.⁴

The encouraging news, however, is the phenomenal growth of the church, especially in the Southern Hemisphere. "The center of gravity of the Christian church has moved to the South, where more than 50% of today's Christians and 70% of today's evangelicals live," writes Bryant L. Myers in his excellent little book, Exploring World Mission. "Latin America is the largest continent of Christians.... Africa has the fastest-growing church."⁵

I believe God wants our church to be on the cutting edge of what He is going to do, and as I've often said before, our greatest and most far-reaching ministries may well be the ones out of our earshot and beyond our vision, but just on the other side of yonder horizon—over there in Europe, in Africa, in Asia, in the bubbling caldron of this world's humanity—we have thirteen families hard at work. And more on the way.

Our job is to think of the millions who never have heard, and to devise ways of telling them. We must be delighted with Jesus. We must confide in Jesus. We must proclaim Jesus and anticipate what He is going to do...

Attempting great things for God,

And expecting great things from God.

[1] <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9704/14/egypt.islam/>

2 Ibrahim, Abdul-Maajid, and Darbaalah, In Pursuit of Allah's Pleasure (London: Al-Firdous, 1997), p. 55

3 Bryant L. Myers, Exploring World Mission (Monrovia, CA: World Vision Resources, 2003), p. 24.

4 <http://anglicanjournal.com/130/08/world06.html>

5 Bryant L. Myers, Exploring World Mission (Monrovia, CA: World Vision Resources, 2003), p. 10.

Isaiah 53:5-6

Peace

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Next Sunday is Easter, the greatest day on the church calendar, commemorating the greatest day in the history of the world. We're going to begin a new series of messages next week on wonderful Bible verses about praise, and the first one has to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This would be a great verse to memorize this week. It's 1 Peter 3:1: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

I'll be preaching from that verse next week, and it'll be the first of four Bible verses on the subject of praise that we want to learn, study, and memorize.

Today we're concluding our study of ten Bible verses having to do with peace and assurance. Everyone on earth ought to know these verses by heart. We began with two verses that talk about the peace that comes from having assurance of our salvation.

- 1 John 5:11-12 says: And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.
- John 14:1-3 & 6 say: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am... Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
- John 14:27 says: Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
- Isaiah 26:3 says: You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast (stayed on Thee), because He trusts in You.

And today, on this Palm Sunday, we're coming to the very heart and soul of the peace of God and to one of the greatest passages in the entire Bible. It's the verses we read a few moments ago from Isaiah 53.

Now, Isaiah has been called the "Fifth Gospel." One of the themes that runs like a golden ribbon through the 66 chapters of the book of Isaiah is the coming Messiah, the great King-Redeemer, the Suffering Servant, who will bring hope to the world and who is indeed be the world's only ultimate hope. As you read through the book of Isaiah, you keep running into very plain and direct and detailed passages about this coming Messiah. But the most poignant is here in Isaiah 53 (and when I say Isaiah 53, I'm including the last few verses of Isaiah 52, which really should be included).

Today I'd like to say show you three aspects of Isaiah 53.

This Passage is Prophetic

We See Proof of Our Lord's Identity

First, Isaiah 53 is clearly prophetic. We see proof of our Lord's identity here.

The book of Isaiah dates to about 700 years before Christ. Even liberal scholars who postulate a post-exilic date for Isaiah (or for parts of Isaiah), which I believe is totally unwarranted, admit that the book of Isaiah was finished in its totality well before the time of Christ. There is no way in scholarship or in history that Isaiah 53 was written during or after the time of Christ. There is no doubt that these words were recorded long before Jesus Christ was born. And, in fact, I believe that the best scholarship dates them a full seven centuries before Jesus was born.

Imagine how you would feel right now if I tried to predict in detail an event that would happen 700 years in the future. It would be in the realm of extreme science fiction. And yet here we have one of many passages in the Old Testament that describes our Lord Jesus in great detail. There are hundreds of such passages in the Old Testament; this is not the only one. I've said many times that if I did not have the Gospels or the New Testament, I could still preach about every aspect of the birth, the personality, the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, the exaltation, and the redemptive purpose of Jesus Christ. I could preach all that with incredible detail from Old Testament texts that were written hundreds of years before His birth.

Jesus said, "Search the Scriptures (the Old Testament) because it testifies about Me."

I cannot tell you tomorrow whether the stock market will be up or down. I can't tell you who the next president will be. I cannot tell you what the world is going to be like twenty-five years from now. And yet the prophet Isaiah gives us a perfect pen-portrait of Jesus Christ 700 years before our Lord was born in the little town of Bethlehem.

Isaiah 53 gives us, hundreds of years in advance, many specific facts about the last day of our Lord's life. Isaiah tells us that...

1. The Messiah will be an ancestor of David, springing up from the dry root of the Davidic dynasty (compare Isaiah 53:2 with Isaiah 11:1)
2. He will be known as the Servant of Jehovah God
3. He will demonstrate the power of God
4. He will demonstrate the wisdom of God
5. He will be truthful in His character
6. He will be nonviolent in His cause
7. He will be noticed by kings and will confound them
8. He will not be majestic in appearance but humble
9. He will be rejected
10. He will be despised
11. He will be oppressed and afflicted
12. He will be a Man of Sorrows
13. He will be familiar with suffering
14. He will not explain Himself during His trial
15. He will not defend Himself before rulers
16. He will die and be cut off from the land of the living
17. His death will be divinely appointed
18. His death will involve scourging
19. His death will involve piercing
20. His death will involve bruising
21. He will be crushed
22. He will die with thieves, between transgressors
23. His death will be punishing
24. His death will be appalling
25. His death will involve disfigurement
26. People will hide their faces in horror and disgust
27. His body would be marred beyond recognition
28. He will be buried in the donated grave of a wealthy man
29. Then there will be a prolonging of His days
30. After His suffering He will return to life to see the light of life
31. He will be satisfied and fulfilled at the moment of resurrection
32. He will see the results of His work
33. His death will be seen as a guilt offering for sin
34. He will sprinkle many nations with blood
35. He will bear the iniquity of the human race
36. He will take up our infirmities of humanity
37. He will impart healing and peace to the world
38. The will of God will prosper in His hand

39. Many will be justified
40. He will be raised up and lifted up and exalted
41. He will be reckoned great

Now, how did Isaiah know centuries before Christ that a Messiah would come who would be spotless in His character, who would come to bring peace and redemption to the world, who would be rejected and despised, who would die a horrible death that involves being whipped and nailed and disfigurement, who would die between thieves and be buried in the borrowed grave of a rich man, who would rise again, and who by His death and resurrection would redeem the world.

How did Isaiah know that?

It wasn't Isaiah. It was God. We have to remember that the Old Testament isn't full of prophecy by accident. It is filled with prophecy by design. God, being God, is omniscient. Being omniscient, He knows the future as thoroughly as He knows the past. Knowing the future, He can reveal it and write it down for us. And the reason is to demonstrate for us the truthfulness of His book.

No one can predict the future. And so if God predicts in detail those things that are going to happen in the future, and if He predicts them specifically and perfectly, then it attests to the truthfulness of this Book.

In his book, *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel says the prophetic evidence regarding Christ in the Old Testament is analogous to fingerprints and establishes to an astonishing degree of certainty that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. He said that these many prophecies formed "a figurative fingerprint that only the Anointed One would be able to match."^[i]

Strobel goes on to interview a man named Louis S. Lapidés, a Jewish man who grew up in a conservative Jewish synagogue in Newark, New Jersey. He attended Hebrew school and was well-versed in Judaism. Occasionally he'd be around some buddies who were Roman Catholic, and he noticed the paintings and crucifixes with Jesus wearing the crown of thorns and nailed to the cross, but he gave little thought to it.

During his teenage years, Lapidés grew skeptical, and his faith had little personal reality for him. During his college years, he mainly hung out at coffee houses in Greenwich Village in New York, and then he was drafted and sent to Vietnam. He came back smoking marijuana and interested in Buddhism. Then he grew depressed and started experimenting with hallucinogenic drugs. Moving to California, he earnestly sought to find meaning in life in Buddhism and Hinduism and Scientology and even Satanism, but none of it made any sense to him.

Then in 1969, Lapidés' curiosity prompted him to visit an evangelist who preached on Sunset Strip alongside an eight-foot cross. He became embroiled in an argument or discussion with some Christians there on the street, and the evangelist challenged him to investigate the Old Testament predictions about the Messiah and to compare them to the person of Jesus Christ.

Someone offered a Bible, and he took it. But he was determined not to read the New Testament, only the Old Testament. Pretty soon he was reading the Old Testament every day and seeing one prophecy after another related to the Messiah. He couldn't believe the specificity and detailed information about who the Messiah would be and what he would do.

And then Louis Lapidés came to Isaiah 53 and he was stopped cold, dead in his tracks. "With clarity and specificity in a haunting prediction wrapped up in exquisite poetry, here was the picture of a Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of Israel and the world—all written more than seven hundred years before Jesus walked the earth." Instantly Lapidés saw that this advance portrait was remarkably fulfilled to the smallest detail in the passion of Jesus Christ. He recalled the Roman Catholic paintings he had seen of Jesus being scourged and pierced with thorns and nails.

"As the Jews in the Old Testament had sought to atone for their sins through a system of animal sacrifices, here was Jesus, the ultimate sacrificial Lamb of God, who paid for sin once and for all."

It was such a stunning passage that Lapidés could only come to one conclusion—that it was a fraud. He believed that Christians must have re-written this portion of Isaiah and twisted Isaiah's words to make them conform to the experience of Jesus. He asked his stepmother to send him a Jewish Bible, and to his astonishment it was all there—every sentence, every word, every prediction.

He went on through the rest of the Old Testament, finding passage after passage predicting every aspect of the Messiah's birth, His lineage, His character, His life, His death, His resurrection, His redemptive purposes.

Finally, Lapidés decided to open the New Testament and read just the first page. But he couldn't put it down, and he saw how the Gospel writers kept pointing out how Jesus had fulfilled biblical prophecy over and over and over again.

Intellectually Lapidés had to admit that Jesus was undoubtedly the Messiah; but it was simply an intellectual acknowledgement.

Lapides realized that if he were to accept Jesus into his life, he'd have to make some significant changes. He'd have to deal with the drugs, the sex, the lifestyle he was living. But that is exactly what he did shortly afterward; and today he's a pastor in Sherman Oaks, California.[ii]

His story is not unique. Several years ago, I read a book in which many Jewish Christians gave their testimonies. I was amazed at how many of them came to the Lord Jesus Christ because of Isaiah 53. They just could not refute the evidence of fulfilled Messianic prophecy. So this passage is prophetic. We see proof here of our Lord's identity.

This Passage is Progressive

We See the Phases of His Passion

Second, it is progressive. We see here the phases of His life and redemptive work. Isaiah 53 divides our Lord's life up like chapters in a book. The last paragraph of chapter 52 is a sort of prologue, introduction, or summary.

1. His Birth and Early Years (Isaiah 53:1-2a)

Chapter 53 begins with an account of the birth and early years of Jesus: Who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground.

This is referring to our Lord's ancestry. I want to show you a parallel text that occurs earlier in the book of Isaiah, in chapter 11: A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse (Jesse was the father of King David), from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him....

In other words, the dynasty of King David will appear to have been chopped down to the ground, but a shoot will spring up from the roots. And that's exactly what happened. The Jewish monarchy appeared to have been destroyed. After the death of the last Old Testament king of Judah, Zedekiah, there had not been a descendant of David on the throne of Israel, and none was expected. When Jesus was born, the evil King Herod had been placed by the Roman Emperor over the house of Israel. But when we open the book of Matthew and read the first words of the New Testament, we're told that Jesus Christ was a descendant of Abraham and of David. He was of the house and lineage of David.

And His birth is one of the tenderest stories in human history, one that we celebrate every Christmas with scenes of mangers and sheep and cattle and shepherd boys and a baby's soft cry.

2. His Appearance (Isaiah 53:2b)

But now, Isaiah goes on to tell us something of the physical appearance of Jesus. It was ordinary. Isaiah 53:2 goes on to say: He had no form or comeliness, and when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

In other words, He appeared to be an ordinary man. He didn't look like a Roman Emperor or come with glorious regalia. In appearance, He was remarkably commonplace. Now, for Isaiah to make a prediction about the coming King of Israel, the coming Messiah, the coming Deliverer of the world, that is a remarkable detail. It isn't what we would have expected, but it exactly what happened.

3. His Rejection by Men (Isaiah 53:3)

And then we come to something else we wouldn't have expected Isaiah to say about the coming Messiah. He would be rejected. Verse 3 says: He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4. His Being Forsaken by God (Isaiah 53:4)

Isaiah then goes on with astounding news about this coming Messiah. He would not only be rejected by Men, but He would be forsaken by God; and it would be because He was bearing our sins. Look at verse 4: Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5. His Scourging (Isaiah 53:5-6)

Verse 5 goes on to describe His scourging: But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

6. His Silence (Isaiah 53:7)

Isaiah goes on to say that the Messiah would not only be rejected and scourged; He would stand before His persecutors and be

strangely silent. He would not defend Himself. Look at verse 7: He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

7. His Imprisonment and Death (Isaiah 53:8)

Verse 8 speaks of His being led from prison to death: He was taken from prison and from judgment (the mock trials and kangaroo courts that He faced), and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. What does it mean to be cut off from the land of the living? It means that He died.

8. His Burial (Isaiah 53:9)

Verse 9 goes on to tell us that the Messiah, having been rejected and tried and slain, would be buried in the tomb of a rich benefactor, which is exactly what happened. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. We know from the Gospel accounts that the ethics and honesty and purity and wonder of His ministry had deeply impressed two rich men—Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Normally crucifixion victims were tossed in refuge piles or thrown in some kind of dump or mass grave; it was a part of the shame of crucifixion. But Nicodemus mustered his courage and asked the Roman officials for permission to bury the body of Jesus, and Joseph of Arimathea donated his own grave to the cause.

9. His Resurrection (Isaiah 53:10a)

Jesus didn't need the grave for very long; it was a very short rental. Verses 10-11 tell us that following His death He would return to life, have His life supernaturally prolonged see the results of His redemptive work, see it prosper as He continues it, and be satisfied with all that is accomplished. The verses say: Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days.

After His eyes are closed in death, they will open in life. He will see again. His life will be prolonged. It will be resurrected and prolonged into eternity. He will see the unfolding of His work and be satisfied.

10. His On-Going Work (Isaiah 53:10b-11)

After His resurrection, the Messiah will have an on-going work through which millions of people will find redemption and eternal life: The pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

11. His Exaltation (Isaiah 53:12)

And finally, verse 12 tells us that the Messiah would be exalted forever: Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

It is absolutely remarkable that Isaiah would set forth these predictions about the coming Jewish Messiah 700 years in advance of the birth of Jesus Christ. He tells us about our Lord's birth, His appearance, His rejection by both men and God, His scourging, His silence during His trials, His imprisonment and brutal death, His burial, His resurrection, His on-going work of redemption, and His exaltation.

How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.

Who has believed our report and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender shoot and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to His own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

This Passage is Purposeful

We See Plan of His Redemption

The third aspect of this passage that demands our attention is this. Isaiah 53 is not only prophetic and progressive, it is purposeful. We see the purpose behind our Lord's suffering. We see His plan of redemption.

Dr. Tim LaHaye is best known as the author of the popular "Left Behind" novels about the Great Tribulation, but he's written a number of other books, too, including one entitled The Power of the Cross. As he researched material for that book, he tried an interesting experiment. Whenever he was traveling or out and about, he would look for people who were wearing a crucifix or a cross and ask them about it. If he were being helped, for example, by a clerk in the store who was wearing a cross around her neck, he would ask her, "Why are you wearing that cross? What does it mean to you?"

He questioned over 100 people and no one seemed to take offense at the questions, but he received some very interesting answers. One woman was wearing a beautiful golden cross around her neck, and when asked she explained, "My boyfriend gave it to me for Christmas, and I love him very much. I wear it because it reminds me of him."

A clerk at a computer store told him, "I wear it everywhere because it brings me good luck."

There was one man in an airport waiting area dressed in athletic clothes and he wore a huge silver cross around his neck. LaHaye asked him why, and he said, "My grandmother gave it to me for Christmas, and I am going to visit her this weekend. I knew she would expect me to wear it." When asked what it meant to him, he said, "Absolutely nothing."

A flight attendant who wore a cross around her neck told LaHaye, "I wear this cross to remind me to be patient with some of the difficult people I meet. Most people are real easy to work with, but every now and then I get an unreasonable person, and I use the cross to remind me that, as a Christians, I should love them and be kind to them. After all, God loves me. It means that I am a Christian, I have put my faith in what Jesus did on that cross, and I expect to thank Him personally in heaven someday."^[iii]

The cross is at the crossroads of every book and chapter and verse in the Bible, and we can clearly see that emphasis here in Isaiah 53. This passage is not only prophetic and progressive, it is purposeful and personal. The great emphasis that reverberates through every single verse is redemption. Why was Jesus born? Why did He come from the root and stock of David? Why did He grow up as an ordinary-looking man? Why did He suffer rejection, arrest, scourging, and crucifixion?

Look at the prologue – Isaiah 52:15: So shall He sprinkle many nations. Sprinkling was a word that was associated with the Levitical priesthood. The priests would catch the blood of the sacrifices in a basin and sprinkle it on the altar and even on the people before the altar as a token of the forgiveness being given by the God of the covenant.

And look at Isaiah 53:4: Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...

Isaiah 53:5: He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:6: The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:8: For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

Isaiah 53:10 says that His soul was an offering for sin.

Isaiah 53:11 says that by His suffering He will justify many and bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:12 says that He bore the sin of many and made intercession for transgressors.

Perhaps the most amazing truth in all of the Word of God involves the necessity of the atonement. Because everyone in the entire world has sinned against God, everyone in all the world is separated from God. And sin requires a penalty, a punishment. As remarkable as it seems, the Bible teaches that there was no other way for God to save us and forgive us than for He Himself to become a man and die for our sins. He did not have to do anything at all, of course, but His love for us propelled Him to do it.

Remember what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will"? (Matthew 26:39).

Evidently it wasn't possible. There was no other way.

Jesus said something similar on the very day that He rose again. He said to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus: O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? (Luke 24:25-26).

The book of Hebrews said: He had to be made like His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:23).

Dr. David Jeremiah, in one of his sermons, told of a huge church building that stood in Germany prior to World War II. It was the center of the community and had been for many years. But during the war, in three days and nights of saturation bombings, the

church building was obliterated. Even the trees in the churchyard were blown away and everything was leveled.

When the war ended, the people who lived in that community came creeping out of their hovels and hiding places, and they immediately began to rebuild their house of worship. They were unable to rebuild the church with all its original splendor, but they managed to get a building up where they could worship.

Well, as it happened in this congregation was an eccentric genius from the Rhineland who had great skills at sculpture and woodcarving. He took the wood from the trees that had been blown down, and he carved figures of the twelve apostles and then he carved a huge figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

But when his work was unveiled, people gasped. They were shocked to see what had been done to the figure of Christ. Shrapnel protruded from his shoulder. Steel was visible in his side. His kneecap was broken with the fragments of some part of one of the bombs that had fallen. The carving of Christ contained all the elements of war and hurt, pain and shrapnel, all of it embedded in the Savior.

It was to remind them that Jesus was not a cheap Savior, and that salvation was not cheap. He was a Savior who had paid dearly in His love for them. It was a lesson on the cost of redemption.[iv]

Man of Sorrows, what a Name / for the Son of God who came / guilty sinners to reclaim / Hallelujah! What a Savior!

For He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to His own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53

Jesus: Man of Sorrows

This year, the Christmas season and the political season has become intertwined as it never has before in American history. The primaries and the caucuses are coming so early this year that all eyes are on Iowa and New Hampshire and South Carolina. But as I've watched it all, I've thought of something that Lyndon Johnson once said: "The biographies of our Presidents are the stories of fallible men doing the best they can." (Quoted in Our Country's Presidents by Frank Freidel (Washington: National Geographic Society, 1981), 7.)

That's true, not just of presidents, but of most of us. We are all fallible people doing the best we can. But there's one person who is different, and that is Jesus Christ. He was an infallible person—a perfect man—who did what no one else could do. And the Bible is the story of His doing it. You can turn anywhere in the Bible and find Jesus there. For example, in the book of Acts, chapter 8, Philip was down on the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza, and he ran into the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Secretary of the Treasury for Ethiopia. This man was reading from the Old Testament, from the book of Isaiah, chapter 53, and he asked Philip, "Who is the prophet Isaiah talking about here?" And Philip began with that Scripture—written over 700 years earlier—and preached to him Jesus Christ.

Well, that's the chapter in Isaiah that I'd like for us to read today. It's one of the best-known texts in the Bible, and it is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament more frequently than any other Old Testament chapter—over 40 times in all.

I confess that I have seldom preached from this passage, because it is so holy and so profound and so amazing that I hardly know what to do with it except to read it. Today I'm going to read it to you, and then preach a sermon with 47 points. I think that's a record for me. Usually I have one or two or three points, or sometimes four or five. I have had ten or twelve points before, but I don't think I've ever been in the 40s. But if you have your Bibles with you, turn to Isaiah 53.

It's been called the Mount Everest of Messianic Prophecy. The passage really begins with Isaiah 52:13 and goes through Isaiah 53:12:

See, my servant will act wisely; He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at Him—His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—so He will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of Him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,

and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hid their faces He was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away, yet who of His generation protested? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was punished.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, and though the Lord makes His life an offering for sin, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand.

After He has suffered, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge My righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great, and He will divide the spoils with the strong, because He poured out His life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Forty-Seven Predictions

This is a passage that the Jewish Rabbis cannot explain. They originally understood it to be a Messianic passage, but they finally began interpreting it as a description of the sufferings of the nation of Israel, but the words don't fit that interpretation, so it is all perplexity to them. It only makes sense when you study it in terms of Jesus Christ. There are 47 specific predictions here regarding the Savior. You can make a list of them if you'd like, or you can just follow along in the text because I want to point each one out very briefly as we go verse by verse:

1. When the Messiah comes, He will come as God's Servant. In verse 13, the Lord says to us: See, My Servant will act wisely. Philippians 2 tells us that though Jesus was in very nature God and equal to God, yet He made Himself as nothing and came in the form of a servant. Jesus said, "I always do those things that please Him." He said, "I have come to do My Father's will."
2. He will act wisely. See, My Servant will act wisely. This cannot always be said about you or me. We want to be wise and to act wisely, but sometimes we don't. But Colossians 2 tells us that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Being God, He is omniscient, and being omniscient, He is all-wise and He always acts wisely.
3. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted – Isaiah 52:13. This refers to His ascension and ultimate glory. Philippians 2 says, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name." No one ever descended into the humble depths that Christ experienced, and no one will ever be exalted as He is to the highest place in heaven or earth.
4. Many would be appalled (this word could mean astonished or awestruck) at Him – Isaiah 52:14. This is a remarkable prediction to make about the coming Redeemer-Messiah, yet that is exactly what happened.
5. His appearance was disfigured beyond that of any man & His form marred beyond human likeness – Isaiah 52:14. If you saw the movie, "The Passion of the Christ," you have an idea as to what this verse is talking about. What Jesus endured was disfiguring; it was the kind of torture that turns a human body into something almost unrecognizable.
6. He will sprinkle many nations-Isaiah 52:15. This word "sprinkle" refers to the ceremonial cleansing rituals of the High Priest as prescribed in the Law of Moses. The High Priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial victim on someone or something needing to be sanctified or made holy, and that sprinkled blood would purify that object in God's sight. Now here Isaiah said that the Messiah, when He comes, would sprinkle many people from many nations with His blood.
7. Kings will shut their mouths because of Him – Isaiah 52:15. This refers to the fact that no earthly power can withstand Him. It also describes the reaction of world rulers when He comes again. Remember that Isaiah

does not clearly distinguish between our Lord's first coming and His second coming. The next prediction alludes to this, too. The book of Revelation describes the astonished, horrified reaction of world rulers when the Great Tribulation is unleashed and when Jesus comes again.

8. They will see and understand what they were not told – Isaiah 52:15. When he comes again, the rulers and the people of this world will suddenly see and understand what a mistake and miscalculation they have made.

9. His will be a message of faith – Isaiah 53:1. Isaiah said, “Who has believed our report?” The Gospel is a report—a set of facts—to be believed, although at the time few among the Jewish people would believe. The Gospel of John opens by saying, “He came unto His own and His own received Him not; but to as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God.”

10. He will be the revelation of the Lord's power (arm) – Isaiah 53:1. Isaiah said, “To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed.” The word “arm” meant “power” and “authority.” In Jesus Christ, the power and authority of God Almighty was revealed to this world. His last words in Matthew's Gospel were, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.”

11. He will grow up like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground – Isaiah 53:2. From earlier passages in Isaiah, we realize that this is an indication of His lineage from the house and line of David. The Messianic Jews sometimes refer to Jesus as Messiah ben David—Messiah, Son of David.

12. He would have no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. In other words, He would not appear as royalty. He wouldn't come as a superhero or a movie star or a charismatic political leader. He would appear on earth as an ordinary man.

13. He would be despised – Isaiah 53:3. This Hebrew word implies disdain and scorn. Now, what would be the likelihood of the greatest of all the Hebrew prophets writing an extended passage on the coming Messiah who would become King of Israel, who would save His people, who would restore the David monarchy, and who would return the Jewish people and, indeed, the whole world to God—what would be the likelihood of Isaiah predicting that He would be despised, disdained, and scorned when He came? And yet that is exactly what happened.

14. He would be rejected – Isaiah 53:3.

15. He would be a man of sorrows & familiar with suffering – Isaiah 53:3. “Man of Sorrows, what a name / for the Son of God who came, / ruined sinners to reclaim. / Hallelujah, what a Savior.”

16. He would be so despised that people would hide their faces from Him – Isaiah 53:3. There were many people who averted their eyes from the cross of Jesus. It was too graphic and degrading and dehumanizing and shameful. Even His own followers fled.

17. He would be held in low esteem – Isaiah 53:3: We esteemed Him not. He was not considered an important person by the religious or political leaders of His day.

18. He would take up our pain & bear our sorrows – Isaiah 53:4. With verse four, Isaiah begins to tell us that the suffering of this Man of Sorrows is purposeful. It has meaning. He was bearing the pain and sorrows for all the world. Somehow on the cross, Jesus Christ was taking our pain and bearing our sorrows.

19. We would consider Him punished & stricken & afflicted by God – Isaiah 53:4. What a strange prediction to make! This Messiah would come to save the world, but He would be disdained by His people and punished and stricken and afflicted by God Himself!

20. He would be pierced for our transgressions – Isaiah 53:5. This one phrase is the entire Bible summed up in one sentence: But He was pierced for our transgressions. The death of Jesus Christ was essentially a death by piercing. The jagged ends of the scourge pierced His back. The crown of thorns pierced His head. The nails pierced His hands and feet. His side was pierced by the soldier's lance. And every wound was for our transgressions.

21. He would be crushed for our iniquities – Isaiah 53:5. This is parallelism, but the word “crush” is an even stronger word than “pierce.” It means to press or squeeze with enough force to deform, destroy, or shatter—and that's what happened to our Lord.

22. He would be punished that we might have peace – Isaiah 53:5: The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. Earlier, in Isaiah 9, the prophet had described the Messiah as the Prince of Peace. But now, in chapter 53, he tells us how the Messiah will secure for us the peace we need—it was by bearing the

punishment for our sins.

23. He would be wounded (stripes) that we might be healed – Isaiah 53:5: By His stripes we are healed. Everyone of us needs healing. We need for our past to be healed. We need spiritual and emotional healing. We need physical healing, either in this life or in eternity as God chooses. Jesus Christ purchased this healing for us at the moment of His scourging and by His crucifixion.

24. Our iniquities would be laid on Him, for we have all gone astray like sheep – Isaiah 53:6: All we like sheep have gone astray... and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Here is another verse that aptly summarizes the message of the entire Bible.

25. He would be oppressed and afflicted – Isaiah 53:7. Isaiah is repeating His emphasis about the Messiah's suffering because He wants it to soak into our hearts. But now he's going to add another detail:

26. He would bear it silently – Isaiah 53:7: He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. In this connection, we have prediction #27:

27. He would be the personification of the Passover lamb - Isaiah 53:7: He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. This harkens all the way back to the Garden of Eden, when God provided the skins of animals as a covering for the guilt of Adam and Eve. It goes all the way back to Exodus 12, when the Lord directed the Israelites to slay the Passover Lamb for the atonement of sin. It goes all the way back to the Levitical Priesthood and to the Old Testament sacrificial system. Isaiah is telling us here that the Passover Lamb is simply an advance preview for Jesus who would be led to the cross like the Passover Lamb to the altar of slaughter.

28. He would not open His mouth – Isaiah 53:7: As a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. Do you remember how bemused were Pontius Pilate and King Herod and the Jewish Sanhedrin when Jesus would not speak up in His own defense?

29. He would be taken away in an act of oppression and judgment – Isaiah 53:8

30. His own people (generation) would not protest His treatment – Isaiah 53:8

31. He would be cut off from the land of the living – Isaiah 53:8

32. He would be punished for the transgression of God's people – Isaiah 53:8

33. He would be assigned a grave with the wicked - Isaiah 53:9

34. He would be buried in a rich person's tomb – Isaiah 53:9. Now, this, too, is a remarkable prediction. The Messiah—the Super-Savior of Israel—would die an ignoble and horrible death, a death so horrendous that people would avert their eyes. But then he would be buried in a fabulous tomb belonging to a rich man. We know that the corpses of crucifixion victims were typically pried from the cross and thrown in the ditch to be eaten by dogs. Yet when Jesus died, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea, risked his own life and reputation by offering his own sepulcher for the body of Jesus. Jesus did borrow it, but He gave it back three days later!

35. He would be killed despite the fact He was nonviolent and perfectly honest – Isaiah 53:9.

36. It would be the Lord's plan to crush Him and cause Him to suffer – Isaiah 53:10. None of this would happen by accident. It wasn't a good plan that went awry. The events that unfolded that Passion Week had been designed by God Himself and planned from before the foundation of the world.

37. The Lord would make His life an offering for sin – Isaiah 53:10. But now, having expatiated verse after verse about the Messiah's sorrow and suffering and sacrificial death on our behalf, Isaiah is ready to tell us something else, something that will happen after these series of events.

38. Afterward, Messiah will see His offspring & prolong His days – Isaiah 53:10. That is, He will be resurrected to live forever.

39. The will of the Lord would prosper in His hands – Isaiah 53:10. He will rise from the dead with a purpose and plan to fulfill the will of God.

40. After He has suffered, He will see the light of life & be satisfied – Isaiah 53:11. Think Easter Sunday. This is a prediction of Easter.

41. He will be righteous – Isaiah 53:11.

42. He will justify many, bearing their iniquities – Isaiah 53:11: After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.

43. He will be great and strong. He will be exalted on high – Isaiah 53:12: Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great, and He will divide the spoils with the strong.

44. He poured out His life unto death – Isaiah 53:12

45. He was numbered with transgressors – Isaiah 53:12. Do you remember how our Lord was crucified between two thieves? One rejected Him and one accepted Him, representing the great division there is in all of humanity. Jesus is in the middle, and all of humanity is divided between those who receive Him and those who don't.

46. He will bear the sins of many – Isaiah 53:12

47. He will make intercession for transgressors – Isaiah 53:12. And the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us.

All of this foretold 750 years before it happened by the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. And now, it has all come down to this time and this place and this moment. This might well be the last presentation of the Gospel you will ever hear. This might be the last warning you will ever receive. Today I want to invite you to meet the Man of Sorrows who died and rose again for the sins of the world. Will you repent of your sins and place your faith in Him as best as you know how?

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have each turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 55

Jesus Water of Life

This week, there was a newspaper report about one of the most urgent issues of our day—what Katie Holmes is getting Tom Cruise for Christmas. According to several reports, she went shopping this week at Neiman Marcus in Beverly Hills, and the first stop was the dining room where she ordered a \$300 lunch. Then she wiped her mouth and powdered her nose and went to the jewelry department where she bought Tom a \$30,000 rose-gold Cartier wristwatch, and a \$5000 Armani suit, and a pair of Gucci snakeskin sneakers that cost \$9000. She went to the outerwear department where she bought a \$9,000 overcoat and six V-neck sweaters in various colors for a paltry \$1,350 each. None of this was very secret, so presumably by now Tom knows what's under the tree.

But here's the question—what would we spend our money for what doesn't satisfy us? Why spend our labor on what is not bread?

The famous writer, F. Scott Fitzgerald, once said: "The very rich are different from you and me." Well, God bless them, it's their money. But I've been thinking about this word exclusive. I don't know if you've ever been in a very exclusive hotel or store, but I don't feel at all comfortable there. I remember once in Paris I ambled into the Ritz Hotel and into Cartier's, both as I recall in one day. I've never had so many people looking down their noses at me at once in my life, and in the case of Cartier's I was certainly none too welcome.

The very word "exclusive" means that certain people are "excluded"—people, for example, who aren't multi-millionaires. But the Gospel is not exclusive and Jesus is not exclusive and the blessings of God are not exclusive. No one is excluded from the free offer of eternal life. Everyone is welcome in the lobby of the Lord's grace. And if you don't have much money, it doesn't matter.

That's what Isaiah 55 says. This is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible, and I'd like for us to read the whole chapter, beginning with verse 1:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for He has endowed you with splendor.

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your

thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

You will go out with joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of a thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be the Lord's renown for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.

COME (Isaiah 55:1-5)

There are three stanzas and divisions to this chapter, and we can sum it all up in three words. The first word is Come, which summarizes verses 1-6. Notice that the word come occurs four times just in verse 1: Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

This was our Lord's word, too. It occurs 385 times in the Gospels. Jesus said: Come, follow Me.... Come unto Me all you who are weary and burdened... Let the little children come unto Me.... Come and see....

And here in Isaiah 55, the Lord is addressing this passage in particular to the thirsty: Come, all you who are thirsty.... Thirst is a metaphor for spiritual need. Remember how the Psalmist said, "As a deer thirsts for springs of water, so my soul longs after God"? Jesus began His ministry by saying, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." He told the people of His own day that He was the water of life. Whoever came to Him and drank from Him would never thirst.

The Lord is simply saying here, "If you have a spiritual longing, if you want something deeper in your life, if you are thirsty on the inside, all you have to do is to come to Christ."

The very last invitation in the Bible is in Revelation 22: The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

I read this week about an Italian-American evangelist named John Carrara who was greatly used to bring multitudes of people to Christ. Being of Italian descent, he had grown up in a Roman Catholic family and he was familiar with the rituals and sacraments of the church, but somehow those things didn't really satisfy something deep within him. When he was a teenager in Fairview, New Jersey, a school buddy invited him one day to church, and that evening John's attention was drawn to a verse of Scripture inscribed over the baptistery.

Nothing the preacher said that night impressed him, but John couldn't get away from a phrase from that verse over the baptistery. It struck him like a bolt from the blue. The verse was John 3:16, and the phrase was: ...shall not perish!... shall not perish!... shall not perish!

John Carrara returned to church the following Wednesday night and there in the pew he gave his heart without reservation to Jesus Christ. When his dad heard the news, he beat him so badly that John's shoulder was dislocated, but nothing could pound the joy from John's heart. He went on to become a greatly used evangelist throughout the 20th century.

The message of Christmas is the message of God. He so loved this world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

When you come to Christ, it simply means that you come just as you are by simple faith and say, "Lord Jesus, I am thirsty for You. I believe that You died and rose again for me, and as best I know how, I repent of my sins and receive You as my Lord and Savior."

Notice how Jesus is described in this passage. We've been saying during these Sundays that Isaiah is the Fifth Gospel because of the amount of prophetic information about the Messiah. Well, here we have it in verses 3-4: Give ear and come to Me; hear Me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made Him (David, and by extension, the house or line or lineage or dynasty of David, which culminates in King Jesus, the Son of David)... I have made Him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that you do not know will hasten to you."

This has implications for the coming great Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ that Isaiah talks so much about and that is also described in the book of Revelation, but there are implications for us, too. We have a message about Jesus, Son of David, and that message is for all the nations for He is Lord over all the earth.

SEEK (Isaiah 55:6-11)

Now the second section of this chapter can be summed up with the word Seek. Look at verse 6: Seek the Lord while He may be

found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon.

One of the biggest frustrations of my ministry, especially my two early years of pastoring in the mountains, was how many people would procrastinate getting saved. I would go up and down the mountain roads, knocking on doors, trying to talk to people about their souls. These were people who, if you asked them, believed in God. They were not atheists. They weren't even agnostics. Some of them probably really did believe that Jesus died and rose again. But they weren't ready to become His followers. "Well, I know I need to get right with the Lord," they would say, "and one of these days I'm going to do it." Maybe one or two of them did, but that was nearly 30 years ago and some of these people are dead; and if I had to guess, I'd say that most of them went to a Christ-less hell. I've never heard people procrastinate like some of those mountain people among whom I grew up.

But the Bible says, Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on Him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon.

And then Isaiah adds a wonderful parenthesis. He says that we should do this because God sees things more clearly than we do. He is wiser than we are.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

But now we're going to be given an image, a word-picture, of the efficacious power of the Scripture. It's like the rain that falls and the snow. It descends from above. It comes from the heavens. God's thoughts, His Word, is as far above us as the sky is above the earth, but it descends down, it falls into our lives like rain coming down from above, like snow flakes falling to the earth. And God's thoughts and God's words that come down from above irrigate and water and refresh our hearts. And just as a sudden rainstorm causes the grass to turn green and the earth to revive, so the thoughts and the Word of God bring refreshment and revival and life to our hearts.

So is My Word that goes forth from my mouth; it will not return to me void, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Just as God sends rain from above to water the earth, so He sends His message from above to revive and transform your heart. That's why we need to come to Him and drink. That's why we need to seek Him while He may be found. Let the wicked forsake His way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and the Lord will have mercy on him and He will abundantly pardon.

GO (Isaiah 55:12-13)

And that leads to the third word: Go. We will go out with joy. The last stanza of this chapter says, You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into singing before you.

According to etymologists, the word enthusiasm has a Christian origin. When people in the early church came to Christ, they were filled with a joy, zeal, and power they'd never before known. Since no one term described all these things, they put together the Greek words for "in"—en—and "God"—Theos, creating the term en-theos-ism: enthusiasm.

When I read these verses in Isaiah, I sense enthusiasm: You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into singing before you, and all the trees of the hills will clap their hands.

A year or so ago, I bought a book in the bookstore about some of the strange and weird characters that have shown up from time to time in American history. And one chapter was devoted to a woman named Henrietta Robinson. Her parents called her Hetty for short. Their names were Edward and Abby Robinson, and they both came from wealthy families and they had both inherited a fortune. Their marriage had merged these two fortunes, and the couple was one of the wealthiest in the United States. They talked about money all the time. Dinner conversations focused exclusively on financial matters.

Edward Robinson was very wealthy and very frugal. He was just the opposite of Katie Holmes, because he would not spend a penny unless it was absolutely necessary. Edward once refused someone who offered him a very fine cigar because he was afraid that in smoking it he would develop a taste for more expensive cigars and lose his taste for the cheap brands that he smoked. The Robinsons ate leftovers and tried to spend as little as possible.

Well, eventually they had this little girl whom they named Henrietta, or Hetty, and from childhood she was taught the value of money and the importance of frugality. She learned to read the financial papers by age six, and by age eight she was managing her own savings account. Instead of playing with dolls like other girls, Hetty learned the arts of investing and negotiating. When she was thirteen, she became the family bookkeeper.

When she was twenty-one, she inherited seven and a half million dollars, and when her parents died, she inherited a vast estate,

rumored to be at least one hundred million dollars. This was at the end of the Civil War, so in today's terms it would put her among the very wealthiest people in the world. She was an uncanny businesswoman and had a remarkable knack for making shrewd investments, and she became the first woman in American history to make a substantial impact on Wall Street.

When she was 33, she married an unlucky man named Edward Henry Green, who was himself wealthy. But within a year, Hetty had seized control of his business and booted him out of the house.

Hetty loved making money, but she didn't like spending it, and so she bought second-hand clothes, ate in the cheapest restaurants, and tried not to live anywhere long enough to pay property taxes. She never turned on the heat or used hot water. She rode in an old carriage, and mostly ate 15-cent pies that she bought on the streets.

Hetty was so frugal that when her dress became soiled, she'd only wash the part that was dirty in order to make the garment last longer. She only wore shabby clothes that she found in second-hand stores, never ate three-course meals or slept in a comfortable bed. She lived like someone in poverty.

But she was a well-known figure on Wall Street where, every afternoon, she showed up at New York's Chemical and National Bank, dressed shabbily and with unkempt hair. There every afternoon in the vault, she would count her cash and dividends while munching on a baked onion.

She was so surly and unpleasant and miserly—and always dressed in a shabby old black dress she'd found at a secondhand shop—that she was dubbed the "Witch of Wall Street."

In her old age, she began to suffer from a bad hernia, but refused to have an operation because it cost \$150. She suffered a series of strokes, and became convinced that people were plotting to kill her. She got into a terrible argument with the cook of a longtime friend, suffered a seizure, and died. At the time of her death, she was the richest woman in the world. But she never enjoyed a single cent. She just locked herself in the vault and counted and counted and counted.

Jesus said what does it profit us if we gain the whole world and lose our own soul.

You can be as rich as Katie Holmes and spend your money on a \$300 lunch and a \$30,000 wristwatch, or you can be as rich as Hetty Green and live like a pauper; but why spend our money on that which is not bread and our labor on what does not satisfy?

Come to the waters, seek the Lord while He may be found, and you will go out with joy and be led for in peace, and the mountains and the hills will burst into singing, and the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Isaiah 61

Jesus: Lord of All

Charles Lamb, the British poet and essayist, once said that New Year's Day was every man's birthday. We're all a year old older on New Year's Day; God has allowed us to see a new year; and we all have a new start in our lives.

Lord willing, we have a new stretch of 365 days—or actually 366 because this coming year is a Leap Year. But nevertheless, we're going to begin a series of messages next Sunday, Lord willing, entitled 365, from the book of James, chapter 1 and 2. The book of James is the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament book of Proverbs. It's a pithy book of practical instruction about wise living. It tells us how to be better people and to live better lives 365 days a year. So I hope you'll invite someone to come with you next week as we begin another year of Sundays at .

Now today we're finishing our December studies into some of the incredible Messianic passages in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah has been called the Fifth Gospel because of how much prophetic information it contains about the Lord Jesus Christ. Though written 700 years before Jesus, it describes in incredible detail so very much about His birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection. One day I'd like to preach a series of sermons listing every Messianic prediction in the book of Isaiah, but for this December mini-series, we've only had time to look at five passages:

- Ø Isaiah 7 tells us the Messiah would be born of a virgin
- Ø Isaiah 9 that that He would establish His ministry in Galilee and fulfill the verse that says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders."
- Ø Isaiah 53 gives us 47 specific predictions about our Lord's death and resurrection and tells us He will be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Ø Isaiah 55 records the Messiah's great invitation: Come, everyone who is thirsty. Come to the waters."

Ø And today, I'd like for us to end this series by reading Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor.

Now, we can't read this passage without turning to a passage in the New Testament and reading it again. Turn with me to the Gospel of Luke. In chapters 1 and 2, we have the nativity narratives. These two chapters tell us about the birth of Christ. Chapter 2 ends with Jesus growing up in the town of Nazareth, and then we come to chapter 3. John the Baptist begins his ministry of calling people to repentance and preparing the way for the Messiah. Luke 3:21 says:

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased." Now Jesus Himself was about thirty years old when He began His ministry....

And then we have the genealogy of Jesus listed, and that makes up the last half of Luke 3.

In Luke 4, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from His baptism at the Jordan River and retreated to the desert areas where He was tempted by the devil. And then in the middle of Luke 4, He returned to Nazareth to begin His ministry, and we have His first sermon in His own hometown. Look at Luke 4:14ff:

Jesus returned to the Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised Him. He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written:

The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the day of the Lord's favor."

Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He began saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Now there are two things about this that I want you to notice.

Christ's Application of the Text

The first is our Lord's application of His text. He applied it to Himself and identified Himself as the Anointed One. This is an area of truth into which we cannot plunge very deeply because our minds are not capable of fully understanding it. It reminds me of my cousin who passed away last week in a suburb of Boston. He was absolutely brilliant. He graduated from the University of Tennessee when I was three years old, and several years later got his master's degree and then his doctorate in nuclear science. I remember when he came home with his doctoral degree. He and my dad and I went out in a boat on the lake, and we were talking about the fact that now Dean was a doctor. In my childlike way, I asked him if that meant he could take care of me if I got sick, and he smiled and said that he wasn't that kind of doctor. But over the years as I visited with Dean, I would ask him about his work and about what he was doing. And he always told me, and I never understood a word that he said. In fact, no one in my family ever knew what Dean did for a living. He'd tell us, but it was so complex and arcane that we couldn't understand it.

Well, just think of the depth and the complexities of the person of Christ. He was fully God and fully man in one person, and the virgin birth of Christ was that process by which the eternal God also became a sinless human being.

Ø Jesus had a human body. We read of Him growing tired and hungry and thirsty.

Ø Jesus had a human mind. Luke 2 tells us that as He grew up He increased in wisdom.

Ø Jesus had a human soul and a full range of human emotions, and we read of times when He was troubled in spirit.

Here in Nazareth, He had grown up and lived among the people for the best part of thirty years, and not one person among His neighbors or brothers realized that He was the eternal God living among them. They saw Him as an ordinary man, the carpenter's son. And yet, He was God, veiled in human flesh. And sometimes when we see Him in the Bible, His human nature is on display—such as when He fell asleep in the storm at sea. And other times His divine nature is on display—such as when He awoke and

rebuked the winds and the waves and calmed the storm with a few simple words from His mouth.

In the storm tossed boat on Galilee, He slept like a tired man, but awoke to calm the sea like the Son of God. By the well of Samaria, He hungered and thirsted like a human being, but converted a city like God Himself. At the tomb of Lazarus, He wept like a grieving friend, and then raised the dead like the mighty God. On the cross of Jesus Christ He died like a common thief, and three days later He defeated death as the Sovereign God.

We can never understand the complexities of the two-fold nature of Christ any more than we can understand the unfathomable mysteries of the Trinity, but we can make some observations. And one of those observations is that Jesus prosecuted His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. He didn't so much operate in His own intrinsic divine power as God the Son—but in the power of God the Spirit.

When He left His home and carpentry business in Nazareth, He went to the Jordan River and at His baptism the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, and Jesus was endowed with special power, and He came back to Nazareth and read from Isaiah 61, and said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor... Today this Scripture is fulfilled in Your hearing."

The very words Messiah and Christ mean "Anointed One."

In the Old Testament, certain offices or ministries were ordained through anointing. Aaron was anointed as the High Priest of Israel when Moses poured holy oil over him, representing the Holy Spirit who was coming upon Him to empower him for His ministry.

David was anointed king of Israel when Samuel poured oil over his head, emblematic of the Holy Spirit who was coming upon him to equip him for the task.

Likewise, Elijah anointed Elisha as a prophet to Israel by pouring oil over his head.

And all of it was pointing to the coming Messiah—the Anointed One—who would be endowed with power by the Holy Spirit as the great and coming Prophet, Priest, and King.

His Interruption of the Text

So Jesus used this passage in Isaiah 61 as His own text when asked to preach in His own hometown, and He applied it to Himself. But the second thing to notice is His interruption of the text. He deliberately and knowingly stopped reading in the middle of a sentence. Now only did He not finish the paragraph, He didn't even finish the sentence. He abruptly stopped and left off the last part of the prophecy. Look again at Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The word "favor" there means grace. Jesus came and He was anointed as a Preacher of Grace, of forgiveness, of Good News, of freedom, of hope.

But now, let's go back to the original passage in Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...

That's where our Lord stopped right in the middle of a sentence, but the passage goes on to say:

...and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor...

When He read from this passage in the synagogue in Nazareth, He ended His reading right in the middle of the sentence because He was reading the part having to do with His first coming.

He was telling us that His mission is divided into two parts. In His first coming, He did the things mentioned in verse 1-2a, and at His second coming, He will do the things mentioned in verses 2b-3. He came the first time with a message of grace, but when He comes again it will be as the Judge of all the earth. It will be a day of vengeance. And He will come to Israel according to Zechariah 12-14, and He will set up His Millennial Kingdom according to Revelation 20, and He will comfort Israel following the horrors of the Great Tribulation.

... to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

Now, we can make application of these words to our own lives, certainly, in the here and now. How often the Lord gives me the oil of gladness and the garment of praise instead of depression and despair. There's a sense in which the Lord gives these things to us now; but the specific interpretation and application of these promises is to the nation of Israel during the Millennium.

Verse 4 goes on to say that after the Great Tribulation when Jesus comes again, the battered nation of Israel will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities, and they will be called priests of the Lord... They will feed on the wealth of nations, and instead of shame they will receive a double portion.

In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.

And that's why we're watching the Middle East today. The reestablishment of the Nation of Israel after nearly 2000 years of non-existence is the miracle of the ages and in my view the trigger for the unfolding of the events of the Last Days.

Do you realize there are approximately 14 millions Jews in the world today? That is not a very large number. There are cities in the world with more people than that. Tokyo, Japan, has a population of 28 million, which is exactly twice the number of Jewish people there are in the entire world. The city of Shanghai, China, has a population of about 14 million, so if you took all the Jews in the whole world and placed them on one city, it would be about the size of Shanghai. Over 6 million of these Jews live in the United States, but over 5 million of them now live in Israel, and according to some Israeli sources, Israel's Jewish population actually exceeded that of the U.S. last year, which, if true, would make Israel the homeland to the largest Jewish community in the world.

And yet these 14 million Jews are the key to history and the trigger point of biblical prophecy. Isn't it interesting that virtually every major political and military story on the front pages of our newspapers has a direct thread leading back to the existence of the nation of Israel – even the shocking news this week of the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who was murdered in a country torn apart by Islamic extremists and surging pockets of Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

What is Al Qaeda and the Taliban but radical Islamic groups dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel and to anyone who supports and befriends Israel. And if they can wrestle control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, there isn't a person on earth who will be safe.

The next great event on the prophetic calendar is the rapture of the church at the trumpet call of God, then the Great Tribulation when Israel will be in the cross-hairs of the armies of the world and of the antichrist. Then the plagues and devastations described in the book of Revelation, then the Second Coming of our Lord, His Millennial Reign, the Great White Throne Judgment, and then the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Jesus came the first time according to prophetic utterance, and He fulfilled the first half of Isaiah 61:1-3, and one day soon He'll come again to complete the passage. And that'll be the day!

I'd like to end this message and another year of pulpit ministry by sharing with you a portion of an old sermon by Lon Woodrum. Rev. Woodrum was one of the old-time preachers of yesteryear who had an eloquence all their own. Speaking with a gravelly voice, Woodrum once waxed eloquent on our Lord's return, and since I can't say it as well as he can, I'll let him close out this sermon. Rev. Woodrum said that for many years, he didn't preach on the subject of the Second Coming because he didn't sufficiently understand it. There were so many views. But he finally realized that the main point of it was unmistakable. As surely as He came the first time, so He will come again.

As surely as He came once, He will come again.

He came the first time in humiliation. Next time He'll come in exaltation. The first time He came He had nowhere to lay His blessed head; the next time He comes He'll have a mansion to give away. The first time He came He was judged by men, but the next time He comes He'll be the judge of men.

The first time He came He was the carpenter's son, the next time He comes He'll be King of kings and the Lord of lords. The first time He came He was crowned with thorns; the next time He comes He'll wear more crowns than all the kings of the world that ever were.

And when He came the first time, He died like a common thief; when He comes the second time death itself will die.

But as surely as He came once, He will come again, and, ah, that will the day! That will be the day!

When Abraham rends the rocks of Machpelah, and Jeremiah comes from his pallet on the Nile, and Daniel from the red ruins of

Shushan, Paul from the catacombs of Rome, Martin Luther from the sands of Saxony, and Wesley from his little English graveyard. Judson from his oceanic sepulcher... that will be the day when the tombstones fall and they rise like ascending skyrockets to meet their Lord.

That will be the day when they come in with hosannas on the right hand and hallelujahs on the left hand, and sin under Him, and the devil behind Him, and angels all around Him and God in Him. That will be the day.

That will be the day when we who have served Him will lay aside our armor, come up from the arena of battle, and surrender our swords to our Liege Lord. That will be the day when He shall say, "Come blessed of my Father and Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you."

That, ladies and gentleman, will be the day