

This morning, I am continuing in a sermon series that I am calling “The gospel according to Isaiah” which is taking us through much of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isaiah was what was known as a covenant mediator prophet, people who were called by God to be His spokesperson, to call out the sin of the nation and call them to repent of their sin and return to faithfulness to the covenant that God had made with them at Mt. Sinai, after He had led them out of Egypt. Isaiah prophesied to Judah, the southern part of Israel, from about 740-687 BC. The book of Isaiah can be broken up into two parts. Chapters 1-39 are mainly about God’s judgment of Israel and the surrounding nations for their sins. Chapters 40-66 are mainly about the restoration God will bring to His people once their time of discipline is completed. Earlier in this series, we looked at the three main areas where God through Isaiah was calling the Israelites out for breaking the covenant, areas that we also need God’s exhortation today: Judah’s injustice, their mistreatment of the poor and oppressed, their empty worship, their performative religion, and their idolatry, specifically the ways they were trusting in other nations for their protection and security instead of putting their trust in God.

But in chapter 40, the prophecy shifts from a focus on judgment to a focus on restoration. There are two problems that need to be addressed: the physical slavery, their exile in Babylon that has kept them out of their homeland, and their spiritual sinfulness, which is the reason behind their exile. To address their first issue, their physical exile, God would use a Persian king named Cyrus to restore them back to their homeland. But that wouldn’t solve the deeper issue that landed them in exile in the first place, their sin, their rebellion against God, their injustice, their idolatry, their empty worship. But in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, which we looked at two weeks ago, we hear about someone called the Servant of the Lord and how God will deal with their sin problem through the sacrificial death of this servant.

Isaiah 53:1-6, 9-11 - He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.

What an incredible prophecy and sacrificial gift of love. And so, if you're following the flow of Isaiah, we begin with a long section of judgment against Israel and the surrounding nations for their sins and a warning that Israel will be exiled as discipline for their rebellion. In chapter 40, there is a shift to the hope of restoration, that God has not forgotten them and will restore them to their land. But more importantly than their physical restoration, God will deal with their deeper sin problem that led to their exile, the problem underneath every problem in this world, making a way for not just Israel but the whole world to be made right with Him. And now, after describing in chapter 53 just how He will do that through the death of His servant, the floodgates of promise and hope are opened wide in chapters 54-55:

Isaiah 54:1–10 - “Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,” says the Lord. ² “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. ³ For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. ⁴ “Do not be afraid; **you will not be put to shame**. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband— the Lord Almighty is his name— the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. ⁶ The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit— a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” **says your God**. ⁷ “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. ⁸ In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord your Redeemer. ⁹ “To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to **rebuke you again**. ¹⁰ Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

1) The barren and rejected woman will be loved and given descendants

You are going to hear a lot of imagery in chapters 54-55. In the initial section, God compares His people to a woman who has been deserted by her husband because

of her immorality and is unable to have children. Remember that for a woman to be childless was a terrible humiliation and failure in those days. Israel was barren and deserted, trapped in Babylon, without hope of descendants, ashamed in their abandonment. But God would do what only He could do. **He would forgive their wickedness, their spiritual adultery, and bring them back to Himself** in compassion and kindness, restore their union with Himself, and give them descendants, land, hope and a future.

There are so many allusions to Old Testament stories in these chapters. Think of **Abraham & Sarah**, where Sarah was unable to conceive but was promised by God that she would be the mother of multitudes. There are references to the **tents in the wilderness** wandering on the way to the Promised Land, to **dispossessing nations**, which happened when they entered the Promised Land. There is a reference to **Hosea**, where God would bring back a deserted wife. And there are references to **the flood**, where God poured out his judgment, but followed it up with a promise never to again destroy the earth. All of the stories are pointing to this.

And even though His people are barren, even though they are in exile, even though the future seems hopeless, even though they are dead in trespasses and sins, God tells them to **enlarge the place of their tent**, because they are going to have so many children. Their nation is going to thrive once again.

Why? How can this happen? Because your maker is your husband – the Lord Almighty is his name – the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. He makes reference to his **Hesed**. His lovingkindness. It combines the ideas of love, enduring loyalty, and generosity. Promise-keeping loyalty motivated by deep personal care. He may be angry for a period of time, but love is His unchanging essence.

1 John 4:8–10 - Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:38–39 - For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Like a rebellious and barren woman, ashamed and rejected, we are loved and restored to and given security and descendants by the Hese of our God. And although this is primarily addressed to Israel, the heart of this message is true for all of us today. If you have experienced rejection by men or women, if you have been divorced, or widowed, or have never married, the Lord is the lover of your soul. And if you have never had physical children, in the Lord, you can be a mother or father or multitudes. Remember what Jesus said:

Matthew 12:48–50 - He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

And Paul, who never had children, calls Timothy, Titus, Onesimus, and the Corinthian church his sons in the faith.

Continuing in v. 11:

Isaiah 54:11-17 - “Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise your foundations with lapis lazuli. ¹² I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. ¹³ All your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be their peace. ¹⁴ In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; **it will not come near you.** ¹⁵ If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you. ¹⁶ “See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to wreak havoc; ¹⁷ no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me,” declares the Lord.

2) The afflicted city will be rebuilt in security

In 11-17, the imagery shifts from a barren woman to an afflicted city. Again, this is not really about a physical city, but the city is a metaphor for the people of God.

They were afflicted, lashed by storms, not comforted in their exile. But now they would be rebuilt with precious jewels, with abundance. Their children would belong to the Lord, and they would have peace and stability, endless resources. No weapon formed against them will prosper, for the Lord is with them.

But again, this is not about a physical city. It is about knowing the Lord. The picture of the afflicted and threatened city finding security in the Lord because of the death of the Servant is about becoming whole in Him, being secure in Him no matter what happens in the world. It is not about wealth or political power, but a relationship with God. After all, who cares if you gain the city back if you are still lost in your sins, separated from God?

Matthew 16:26 - What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

In Christ, we can find security, even in the midst of uncertainty and chaos.

Philippians 4:12–13 - I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Romans 8:31–32 - What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Psalms 46:1–3, 7, 10 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging... ⁷ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress... ¹⁰ He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

God will keep their community safe until the servant would come. And we will dwell securely forever with Him. No weapon formed against us will prevail. **Find your peace and security in Him!**

In chapter 55, after describing what has happened, Isaiah lays out the invitation, not just to Israel, but to the whole world:

Isaiah 55:1–5 - “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. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. ⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. ⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.”

3) The poor and thirsty are invited to a free, eternal feast

Come enjoy a feast that you do not have to pay for.

John 4:10–14 - Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” ¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Nothing in this world will satisfy. Seek the Lord and draw upon His Spirit, the water of life! Why labor for what will not save or fill you, when eternal life is offered to you?

Romans 4:4–5 - Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Once again, this is not about physical food or water. The everlasting covenant promised to David, the love of God given through the Messiah, the Son of David, the Hesed of God, is yours, and it is open to the whole world.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 - “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the

hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. ³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Because of the death of the servant for their sins, all of these blessings are available to them, and to us. Come to Him and you will have riches beyond anything this world can offer, and all for free.

So what are we to do? How do we receive these blessings?

Isaiah 55:6-13 - Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. ¹² You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. ¹³ Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.”

4) All who turn from sin to trust in the Lord will be forgiven and receive eternal life

Forsake your ways and thoughts, turn to the Lord, and seek Him. Throughout the New Testament, the call is to repent – turn from sin – and receive the good news, believe the gospel, that Jesus died for your sins.

Mark 1:14–15 - After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Luke 24:45–47 - Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Acts 2:37–39 - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Turn to God today. He will have mercy on you and freely pardon.

John 3:16–18 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 10:9–10 - If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

His word is true, **his ways are higher than ours**. He is absolutely trustworthy and dependable.

Numbers 23:19 - God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Like rain falling on thirsty crops, God’s Word comes down to bring life and blessing.

Because of the death of the servant for their sins, there is peace. Sing! Worship!
Celebrate! Burst into song! Enlarge your tent! Make room for the world! Come to
the feast! The world will celebrate because of the salvation of God's people!