



Catalog No. 830

Isaiah 6:1-8

First Message

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THE BIRTH OF A PROPHET: A HOLY BURNING

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Today I'd like to take you on a journey to a very special place. If you will come, I promise you will never be the same.

I have a passion for travel. If I could write my own airline ticket, I would go to the Swiss Alps. The majesty of those snow-capped peaks seems to draw me closer to God. This love of travel took root in my heart about twenty years ago when I studied in Florence, Italy, for a time. With three-day weekends every week, we had many opportunities to travel about Europe. On my first weekend there, several of my fellow-students suggested we visit Rome. I reminded them that we were just a few hours away from the Swiss Alps, but no one bought my idea. So on Friday night I took a train, alone, from Florence, and arrived at Zermatt, Switzerland, at the foot of the Matterhorn, the following morning. I skied on a treeless glacier for two days, with the majestic Matterhorn as a backdrop. The woman who owned the pension where I stayed told me that her late husband had been a guide for the Matterhorn, and suggested I return during climbing season in the summer to scale the mountain. I thought about her words later that year, and decided that I would go back to Zermatt the following summer to climb the Matterhorn.

On July 9th, 1970, I returned to the pension around 3 o'clock in the afternoon and announced to her, "Here I am!" She replied, "Oh, we have no time to spare. We must go right now!" We rented my climbing equipment, and before I knew it I found myself alone on a chair lift, heading up the first stage of the mountain. A breathtaking view of the Matterhorn lay before me. Then my eye caught a glimpse of a graveyard below where the bodies of those whom the mountain had conquered lie buried. My excitement quickly changed to fear. I later learned that in the week following my climb, four others would be added to that list.

When I got off the chair lift, there was still a three-hour hike to the base hut where I would spend the night. This was at 12,000 feet, and already I was feeling altitude sickness. I managed to hide my queasy stomach symptoms as I met the other climbers. Our guide told us we were fortunate to be climbing on what they expected would be a cloudless day. This was a rare window of opportunity, the first in 88 days, to climb the mountain on a clear day. One of the other climbers, who came from Riverside here in California, told me he had been in training for the climb, and had scaled several peaks in the days just before our climb. I must have looked a bit concerned, because the guide told me there was a halfway hut where I could stay if I decided I couldn't go on. My initial excitement began to turn to fear. As I lay down to sleep, already exhausted and expecting a 3 a.m. call to climb the Matterhorn, I began to wonder if I was acting presumptuously.

The Scriptures tell us that God lives in a heavenly temple on a cloud-covered mountain. Many have acted presumptuously and tried ascend the mountain only to perish when they came face-to-face with the weight of God's unbearable holiness. But occasionally, God in his grace opens a small window of opportunity so that an individual may ascend that mountain and stand in his presence. Every prophet in the history of Israel had that opportunity. That is why these men were so different from others. They had seen God in his majesty and glory,

and the experience so changed their hearts that their speech was filled with luminosity and power to bring forth the kingdom of God in the hearts of men. Having taken the journey, ascended the mountain, and seen the living God, they were irrevocably changed.

Did you know that the experience of the prophets of old is to be the experience of every saint? The book of Acts says that with the gift of the Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost, all Christians in some sense are prophets (Acts 2:17). Will you ascend the mountain with me? Today, more than ever, we need prophets, men and women who have seen God and who speak and act differently. We need them in our church, our neighborhoods, our workplace, our nation.

When we undertake this journey, we will find that it has four stages. Our text, Isaiah 6:1-8, begins by giving the context and the date of the prophet's vision:

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord... (NASB)

Judah had known no king like Uzziah since the time of Solomon. He became king at the age of 16, and reigned for 52 years (792-740 BC). Unlike the wicked kings in the north, Uzziah, according to 2 Chronicles 26:4-5, "did right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father Amaziah had done. And he continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him." Uzziah's kingdom prospered in two ways. Politically, Judah saw great expansion during this man's reign. He had an elite army of over 300,000 troops, commanded by 2,600 military officers. His army was equipped with the best technology and was highly mobile. Again, Chronicles tells us, "Moreover, Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows and sling stones. And in Jerusalem he made engines of war [like our missile sites] invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners, for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones" (2 Chr 26:14-15).

Whenever Uzziah fought, Scripture says, "God helped him." In the west, he conquered the Philistine cities, broke down their chief defenses and built up his own cities in the conquered areas. To the east, Ammon came under his control and paid him tribute. To the south, he conquered the Edomites. His greatest achievement, perhaps, was the rebuilding of the city of Elath. With political expansion came economic prosperity. In the Negev, he built forts to secure the water supply. He brought Arabian trade by the sea coast, secured the mineral wealth of the Rift Valley, and developed agriculture in the Judean hills. Jerusalem was heavily fortified and enjoyed a great period of peace. Second Chronicles says of King Uzziah, "Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped...until he was strong" (26:15).

Until... When Uzziah became strong, then he became proud: "But when he became strong, his heart was so lifted up that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chr 26:16). Puffed up in his pride and arrogance, Uzziah thought he could enter into the presence of God and take God's holy fire unto himself. He was challenged by the priest Azariah and eighty others for dishon-

oring the Lord. Uzziah became angry in the midst of his worship, says Chronicles. Here is what happened next: “Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead...And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord” (2 Chr 26:19-21). Leprosy was the only legacy left by the great King Uzziah. He had acted presumptuously by daring to presume on the holiness of God. His son Jotham learned by his father’s example. Scripture says of him, “He did not enter into the house of the Lord.” Jotham in turn was succeeded by his wicked son Ahaz. It was the end of an age. Gone was the era of prosperity and peace. A time of war and ruin followed. Israel went to war with Syria, and later, Assyria attacked the kingdom and almost brought about the annihilation of Israel as a nation.

There we have the context of the vision of Isaiah. When our dreams fall apart, when all human hope fades, that is when we get a vision of heaven. “In the year of King Uzziah’s death...mine eyes have seen THE King!” says Isaiah. In the midst of despair we are especially ripe for a revelation from heaven.

Let us look then at the vision which Isaiah had.

I. Consumed by the glory of God (6:1-4)

A. A vision of the glory of God (6:1b)

The prophet says,

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

Where is Isaiah? He is not where King Uzziah was, which was in the earthly temple. Isaiah is transported to the heavenly mountain, into the heavenly temple. He is probably standing outside the Holy Place, and the veil shielding the Holy of Holies is parted, thus permitting him to see, not the Ark, which was a symbol of God’s throne, but a real throne upon which is seated the Holy God. Isaiah is as close to God as a man can get, a place filled with the raw edge of terror where humanity dare not tread.

And what does he see? If you were to have a vision of God today, what do you think you would see? Isaiah sees two things. First, God’s sovereignty. God is seated high, lofty and exalted. While earth’s throne is vacated, with tumult and despair on every hand, the immortal one is seated, undisturbed and untouched by earth’s changes. Then Isaiah sees God’s glory. The train of God’s robe fills the temple. There is no room here for man’s glory. No one dares wear a Super Bowl ring, no one displays his honors in the temple of God. “The train of his robe suffocates every human pretension” (Bruce Waltke).

When we reached the summit of the Matterhorn at eight o’clock in the morning, we were greeted with a 360-degree view of the majestic Alps. Below lay the foothills and valleys of Switzerland. Every human care we had down at the foot of the mountain quickly faded; such earthly concerns cannot make their way up to the summit. Everything was quiet and still. Southward lay the great glacier, with all of its massive weight and glory pushing its way down the valley. The point is, the glacier was making its presence, its weight, its glory, known down in the valley below. Isn’t that the vision of God that we need today? We may be at war soon in the Middle East. Closer to home, the University of California has suffered two terrible tragedies, death through fire and gunshot, in the past few weeks. Closer still to home, your business may be failing, your marriage may be falling apart. You might have had a week like I just had, where anxiety and a sense of inadequacy almost paralyzed me. That is when we need to see the Lord, seated in his temple, undisturbed and untouched by the turbulent circumstances of earth.

Next, Isaiah has a vision of the glory of the Lord’s servants, the seraphim.

B. A vision of the glory of his servants (6:2-4)

Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.” And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

The seraphim represent the first incarnation of life next to the throne of God. Their six wings represent the number of man, and I think they depict the righteous character we are to display when we are in right relationship to God. We can see this in the very essence of these beings. The word seraphim means “fiery” (see Exod 3:1-6; 13:21; 19:18; Lev 10:1-2; Num 11:1-2; 1 Kgs 18:24). There is a burning holiness about them that purifies and consumes everything that is impure. Fire translates mass into energy; these beings possess a burning holiness for God.

Second, we see that their character is one of humility. First, toward God: “with two [wings] he covered his face.” Just as the human eye has respect for the sun, and dares not look at it, the seraphim dare not look upon the glory of God. And second, toward themselves: “with two he covered his feet.” The seraphim demonstrated a conscious humility, a modesty toward their own creatureliness. Our culture is dominated by sports. We are taught to gloat in victory—to spike the ball, to taunt the opposition. At the YMCA where I exercise, the whole place is covered with wall to wall mirrors to help us gloat in our creatureliness (some of us, at least). But not so the seraphim. They demonstrate a conscious humility.

Next, we see that the function of the seraphim is to serve and to praise God. They are all wings and voice, perfectly ready to praise and to serve. “With two [wings] he flew”: these beings are ready in an instant to obey the divine will of God. They are always and instantly available. And with their voice they praise God in an antiphonal chorus of praise. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”

“Lord of Hosts” refers to the commander of all the armies of nature, of angels and nations. The fact that they repeat the word “holy” three times suggests the strongest superlative in Hebrew. God alone is holy. Do not give the title to anyone else. This chorus so moved Isaiah that 26 times in his prophecy he uses the title for God, “The Holy One of Israel.” “Holiness” in Hebrew thought always refers to ethics. It is not referring to ritual purity, but to ethical behavior. To oppress the helpless was to profane God’s holy name (Jer 34:16); likewise, to make use of a prostitute profaned the name of God. God is very different and distinct from us, not only in essence but in character. He is unique, set apart. “Awesome” is a descriptive word which we hear used a lot today, but we should never use that word to describe anyone or anything but God. He alone is holy, he alone is awesome.

So the seraphim glory in God’s transcendence.

They also glory in his immanence: “The whole earth is full of His glory.” Not only is the whole temple filled with God’s glory, the seraphim have the eye of faith to see that his glory is in the whole earth. Right at that point in history there was political chaos and human disillusionment in Israel. War was about to break out, idolatry was rampant in the land, yet the seraphim sang, “The whole earth is full of His glory.” And as they sang these words back and forth, “the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.”

If their antiphonal chorus shook the foundations of the heavenly temple, what shall it do when it comes to earth?

This is how we are to be in our humanity. We are to be a humble people, ready to serve the living God, spreading his power by praising him in our speech and song. This is the way we are to lay hold of God's power.

We had an example of this in our church this past summer. Earlier this year, the Lord put it upon the hearts of two of our members, Earle and Jolyn Canty, to adopt a child from one of the many orphanages in Romania. They decided to go to that country by faith to see if they could rescue one child. Before he left, Earle told me he had never felt more inadequate. We prayed that the God who had parted the Red Sea would part the sea of administration, corruption and evil and give them success in Romania. Just before they left, they heard sung here in church the hymn, "Our God is an Awesome God, He reigns from heaven above." This is the song that Earle sang to himself every time an obstacle came in his path while he was in Romania. And there were many obstacles—from riots in Bucharest, trying to find the mothers of the children, dealing with threats against the life of one mother, being hassled and finally delivered from a corrupt lawyer, AIDS testing, fingerprinting, visas, FBI clearances, etc. The process usually takes two or three months, and thousands of dollars, but Earle and Jolyn returned with little Samuel Mihi after two weeks in Romania. God had parted the Red Sea and given them a son.

The first step in the birth of a prophet is to be consumed by the glory of God.

II. Broken by one's own depravity (6:5)

A. The cry of despair

Having seen the sovereignty of God, his mighty rule over creation, the nations and the angels, having seen his transcendence and yet his immanence, Isaiah is suddenly and brutally made aware of himself.

**Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."**

"Woe" was the word used by the prophets when they pronounced judgment to someone. This is not referring to some temporary setback. Isaiah is admitting that he is totally undone. This is the same reaction the apostle Peter had when he said to Jesus on one occasion, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8).

B. The depth of despair

The word "ruined" is a stronger Hebrew word than the word describing what happened to Uzziah, who was "cut off" from the house of the Lord, smitten with leprosy because of his presumptive arrogance. Isaiah's words, "I am a man of unclean lips," penetrate right to the heart. He was in utter despair, and the whole nation was in the same condition. There was nothing of eternal value inherent in themselves. All their self-righteousness had to be abandoned.

Despair is what confronts our modern existentialists when they finally come to terms with what they say is the meaninglessness of life. This is why many of them take their own lives. But Isaiah's condition is sadder still. He sees that there is meaning, perfection, righteousness and holiness, but he has no part in it. That is a cause for even deeper despair. We are hearing this cry of despair all over this valley today. This is quite a change from the days when everyone seemed to be enjoying the fast-paced, materialistic lifestyle of this area. We have buried our past, but, like toxic waste, parts of it are now beginning to seep to the surface. We have become enslaved to patterns that have gone

on for years and years, and people are beginning to grieve as a result. Christians need to capitalize on this because it is biblical to grieve, as Isaiah did, over sin. Modern religions, of course, don't teach this. The New Age movement says men and women are divine beings. But the Scripture teaches that only God dwells in ethical purity. When we are confronted with his burning holiness, we realize we have no part in him. If we were to see him, we too would cry out, with Isaiah, "Woe is me!"

This is how I have felt on several occasions in the past few years when I have come face to face with seraphim like one of our missionaries, Eli Fangidae, in Timor, Indonesia. This man has a burning passion for holiness that is simple and pure. Once when I stood next to the founder of the Christian group we visit in Romania, I felt the same emotion Isaiah felt. When I hear these people singing the hymns which this man wrote, I feel like dust on the scales. I return home to find that my identity now is that I am a parent of a teenager! I used to be a pastor to teenagers and their parents, and my advice to parents was, "Hang in there; you'll survive all this." But now I find myself becoming the stereotypical parent of a teenager—over-reacting, too harsh, critical, and negative. This is especially troubling to me after I have just had fellowship with these wonderful saints.

This is how Isaiah felt when he saw the Lord, the King of kings. There may be some here today who have never wept over their own sin, but you cannot be a prophet until you do so. The problem with the church in America is that many people are seeking to be prophets, but they are self-righteous. Though their criticism of the nation—that we are a people of unclean lips, and that we have abandoned what we once held to be absolutes—is on target, their combative, self-righteous spirit produces not ministry, but backlash.

Isaiah, on the other hand, had no place for such self-righteousness. His vision of the glory of God revealed to him insight into own depravity. The chasm between God and man was too great to cross; no human endeavor can construct a means to make that journey. There is no hope for those who remain separated from God; they will be crushed into non-existence by his holiness.

But suddenly, God in his grace acts in behalf of Isaiah.

III. Cleansed by the Spirit of God (6:6-7)

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs. And he touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is atoned for."

A. God bridges the chasm

Isaiah is neither seeking nor expecting a pardon, but a seraphim flies to him, and he is touched by God. Instead of destroying him, leaving him in despair, God comes to him and changes him by his holy fire, that he might dwell where God is. God doesn't reveal himself to us to destroy us, but to redeem us.

B. The Spirit of God brings cleansing

"This burning coal is the symbol both of the purification of blood and the fire of the Spirit that enabled Isaiah to speak with luminosity and explosiveness" (Bruce Waltke). Unlike Uzziah, who grasped God's holy fire, bypassing the work of the priest, God sends a burning coal from his altar to cleanse Isaiah. Instead of destroying him as it did Uzziah, the fiery coal purifies him. The difference lay in how these men got to the mountaintop. Uzziah presumptuously sought to do this for himself, but Isaiah, seeing the holiness of God, immediately recognized his need for someone else to do this for him.

In the same way the Holy Spirit takes the work of the altar of the cross (God's holy fire) and imparts it to our lives. This is entirely a work of grace. God views this as atonement. It is covered, so he doesn't see our sin, and we are able to stand in his presence. Our iniquity is taken away. Thus it is not merely forgiveness, but an entire change in our being that is in question here. Our internal life is changed so that God may dwell with us.

It is apparent in Scripture that what God did for Isaiah he intended to do for all of Israel. This was fulfilled at Pentecost, when following the cross and the resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all the disciples. Tongues as of fire appeared over their heads, moving the apostle Peter to quote the words of the prophet Joel, "My Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh, and you will all prophesy." When we are born spiritually into this holy nation, the Holy Spirit takes the work that was done at the altar of God's burning righteousness and touches our hearts, affecting our speech, making us all prophets. It is no accident that the Greek word for "saint" in the New Testament is derived from the same root as the word for "holiness." A saint is not someone who is special, but rather one who has been touched, by grace, by the burning holiness of God, and is set apart unto ethical purity.

Living in the city as we do so saps our spiritual life that we sometimes wonder if we ever will experience heavenly sensations. We wonder if the clouds will ever clear so that we can behold the mountain and have a sense of God's burning holiness.

One man did. Richard Rolle, writing in 1343, described this experience as the "Fire of Love." Here is what he wrote,

The time I first felt my heart begin to warm—I have been amazed more than I am able to say. I felt it truly, not simply in my imagination, but just as though my heart was burning with a physical fire. I marvelled, you may be sure, at how this burning in my soul leapt up, and at its unanticipated comfort. It was so vivid an experience that often I put my hand against my chest just to see if I could feel any cause for the heat outwardly! But once I knew that it was purely a matter of inward, spiritual nature, and that the burning sensation was not from carnal love or concupiscence, I realized it had to be a gift from my Creator. Accordingly I was glad, and melted with a desire for a greater experience of love, especially on account of the inflow of the sweetest pleasure and spiritual delight with which that spiritual flame comforted my mind. Before this comforting warmth came to me, shedding its sense of devotion within, I frankly believed that no such experience could come in our present state of exile, for truly it enflames the soul just as if a real fire were burning there.¹

Isaiah had a vision of the holiness of God. This gave him insight into his own depravity, and bore testimony to him that the chasm between them was too great to cross. But then, just as his despair was most profound, God in his grace took a burning coal from his holy fire to cleanse him.

In gratitude for his cleansing, Isaiah dedicates himself to a life of service.

IV. Available to serve the Living God (6:8)

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

A. Able to hear the voice of God

For the first time in our text, God speaks. Man cannot hear that voice until he has first seen God, been plunged into despair, and then been touched by his cleansing. Then, as never before, one is able to hear the word of God. How many times have we heard the testimony of people who say they had never heard (with spiritual understanding) the word of God before, and then suddenly it was opened to them for the first time. Having thus been cleansed, Isaiah is now able to hear voice of God.

B. Available to serve the Living God

Then Isaiah is taken to the court, where he hears God's angels and sees God's administration being carried out. God asks, "Who will go for us?" It's interesting that Isaiah is not named here. He is neither addressed nor coerced, yet he responds, "*Hineni!* Here am I. Send me." Notice, he is neither directly addressed nor coerced. "Having believed with certainly that he was about to be crushed into non-existence by the very holiness of God, and having then received an unsought for, and unmerited, complete cleansing, what else would he rather do than hurl himself into God's service?" (John Oswalt). There was a burning in his soul that would not be quenched, and thus he leaps at the opportunity to serve God. If you are serving the Lord out of a sense of duty, or if you feel coerced to do so, go back down the mountain; that is not the biblical model for Christian service.

That is the birth of a prophet. It begins with death, which opens the door to vision, which leads to despair, which opens the door to cleansing, and cleansing opens the door to recognizing the possibility of service, and that leading to an offering of the entire self without reservation.

Now as we come to the Lord's Table, I ask you to consider where are you in your spiritual journey? As you recognize your position, ask the Lord Jesus to feed you at that point. Some of you may be like Uz-ziah. You have been coming to church for years, but you have been acting presumptuously, taking God's holy fire unto yourself without benefit of the priesthood. You have become a leper inside. Others of you are anxious. You need to see this vision of God in his glory, exalted on high, ruling in his sovereignty. Others of you may never have wept about your sin. You need to grieve. Others of you have never experienced cleansing in your heart. You need God's touch of grace, then you will freely serve, as Charles Wesley wrote,

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

Still the small inward voice I hear
That whispers all my sins forgiven;
Still the atoning blood is near
That quenched the wrath of hostile heaven.
I feel the life his wounds impart;
I feel the Saviour in my heart.

1. Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love* (ca. 1343), in *The Law of Love: English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif* (ed. David Lyle Jeffrey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 183-184.



Catalog No. 831

Isaiah 6:9-13

Second Message

Brian Morgan

October 7, 1990

THE REBIRTH OF A NATION: A CONSUMING FIRE

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

I never thought I would find myself being thankful for owning a television set, but last week I finally discovered a program worth watching. I am referring to the dramatic television documentary of our American Civil War. The film editor did a marvelous job of scanning with the camera thousands of original photographs of battle scenes, while at the same time different voices read personal accounts from the letters and diaries of the participants. Thus we could see with the *eye* and hear with the *ear* the tragic and heroic stories from both perspectives, North and South.

I found my heart moved by this presentation of the fiery rampage that devastated our nation. By means of photographs, voice and sound, we “saw” General Pickett’s suicidal charge through open cornfields in his attempt to take Cemetery Ridge. Three thousand men died there in just a few minutes of action. And at Gettysburg, 58,000 men, more than a quarter of the number of our troops now stationed in the Persian Gulf, died in battle. Sherman’s march from Atlanta to the sea was presented. His army cut a swath of destruction, sometimes as wide as 60 miles, through the Georgia landscape. By the end of the war the death toll had reached 630,000. The land lay ravaged and desolate.

To what purpose? we might ask. Our Declaration of Independence, written almost 100 years before the Civil War, holds that we are one nation, under God, and that we believe all men are created equal, with certain inalienable rights. Yet it took the consuming fire of a civil war to put those ideals into law and practice. By the end of the carnage we were truly one nation and all were free. One of the concluding scenes showed the reunion at Gettysburg, 50 years after the end of the war. On July 1, 1913, veterans from both sides came together at Cemetery Ridge and clasped hands over a stone wall in a demonstration of unity. What a price had been paid to accomplish the rebirth of our nation!

As high as that cost was, however, it seems small when compared to the cost of the rebirth of another land, the nation of Israel. This is the theme we will look at this morning from the book of Isaiah—the cost of God’s fiery judgment in the rebirth of Israel.

Last week we looked at the birth of Isaiah as a prophet (6:1-8). In the year of the death of King Uzziah (740 BC) (the king a leper for presuming on God’s holiness), Isaiah had a vision of God in his temple. Uzziah had become strong, and had extended the boundaries of the nation. But he arrogantly entered into the Holy Place, bypassing the priesthood, and took the holy fire unto himself. In that year, Isaiah had the privilege of being transported to that high and holy mountain, the temple of God. There he saw past the Holy Place into the real Holy of Holies where God is seated on his throne. Isaiah was consumed with the holiness and the sovereignty of God. As he viewed this awesome scene he despaired of his own depravity, but God in grace touched his lips with a burning coal. The holy fire cleansed him, and in gratitude Isaiah responded by making himself available to God as his prophet.

Today therefore we will look at the commissioning of God’s prophet, the man who will speak God’s word to Israel. Israel was born as a nation at Mt. Sinai around 1400 BC. She was born with the highest of ideals. The Scripture depicts God as the husband in this relationship and Israel as his bride. God declares his love for Israel, an affection that was demonstrated in his rescuing the Jews from bondage in Egypt. By his grace he had made them a free people. In return, God asked Israel to love him with her whole heart and strength, and to love her neighbor as herself. Therein lay the whole law of God. This covenant between God and his holy people was sealed at Mt. Sinai.

But 700 years later, at the time this prophecy was written, except for a few bright moments, Israel’s history was an appalling account of idolatry, immorality, and social oppression. Some of the prophets even referred to the nation as a prostitute. What word shall the prophet speak to a people

like this? Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant, it is God’s desire to restore both the nation and the covenant. But the disease of sin had so poisoned the relationship that God cannot restore the marriage in the same way as formerly. Instead, he first had to unleash his holy fire of destruction; only then could he create something new and transcendent. The nation would be reborn, but this time through fire. As we look at this passage illustrating the rebirth of Israel we can see that at times this same procedure must be followed in the rebirth in Christ of the calloused of heart.

I. The nation is hardened (6:9-10)

And He said, “Go, and tell this people:
‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.
Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull,
And their eyes dim,
Lest they see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts,
And repent and be healed.’”

A. The reason for hardening: No longer “My people”

The first aspect of God’s judgment as it is revealed in this text is apparent in the way the Lord refers to Israel. There is a significant change here. No longer does he call them “My people,” he refers to them instead as “this people.” Israel has played the prostitute so long that God no longer refers to them as his people. God, the wronged party in this marriage, must be the one who publicly announces that a divorce has occurred, even as Israel hypocritically acts as if everything is well in the marriage. But God calls a spade a spade, and refuses to cover up the problem.

I counseled a married woman once who was living with an abusive, alcoholic husband who had many adulterous affairs. He kept returning to his wife, wanting to keep up the appearance of a marriage while continuing in sin. She knew that the Bible says that God hates divorce, but I pointed out to her that God publicly said his people had divorced him, and this was what she too had to do with her husband to make him face up to the consequences of his actions. He had already divorced her, and she as the wronged party needed to make that public in order to demonstrate that her husband’s heart had been hardened for a long time. The wronged party often suffers blame for this proper action, yet it is the right thing to do.

Yes, God hates divorce, but here he makes the pronouncement that his people have forsaken him, and thus exposes what had been going on for 700 years.

Next, God gives the nation over to a paradoxical judgment.

B. The manifestation of hardening: Paradoxical behavior (6:9-10a)

And He said, “Go, and tell this people:
‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.
Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull,
And their eyes dim...’”

The first manifestation of judgment occurs silently. A casual observer could not tell that anything had gone wrong. But the people of Israel would exhibit paradoxical behavior. There would be an intensity of learning on their part, but they would have no spiritual perception. Our eyes and ears enable us to learn spiritual truth. Our eyes see the salvation acts, and our ears hear the prophetic word, enabling the heart to become spiritually perceptive and thus see the glory of the God who is behind the acts of salvation and the prophetic word. Here God says to Israel that he will continue with

his acts of salvation, and continue sending the prophetic word. And God was faithful to his word. Following this word he sent the greatest prophets in history—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel—all of whom faithfully gave forth the prophetic word. Even after the gift of prophecy ended, 400 years before the birth of Christ, some of the most gifted writing in the history of Israel was accomplished.

One of the great acts of salvation in the history of the nation occurred when Hezekiah prayed to the God of Abraham on the occasion when Sennacherib's armies surrounded Jerusalem. In one night the angel of the Lord killed 180,000 Syrians, the mightiest army on the face of the earth. An outside observer would conclude that God was not judging, but saving Israel. Judgment, however, is not manifested from the outside, but from within. This is where sin first takes root—within.

The reason behind this paradoxical behavior, this intensity of learning but no perception, is that the faculties necessary to discernment, the eye and the ear, had become dysfunctional. This is God's method of judgment—he shuts the eye so that we cannot see the significance of his acts of salvation, and he shuts the ear so that we cannot hear the prophetic word that is still going forth. The heart becomes dull and heavy.

This past summer I played golf with my 82-year-old father and discovered that he has become hard of hearing, but he is too proud to admit it, and refuses to wear a hearing aid. To all outward appearances it seemed we were having a great conversation as we drove around the golf course, but there were two different conversations going on, and they never seemed to cross paths. This is similar to what happened to Israel when God began judging the nation. Their eyes became dim to acts of salvation, and their ears became dull to the prophetic word.

After this, their hearts became “insensitive”; they became dull and complacent. The fat heart “speaks of a slow, languid, self-oriented set of responses, incapable of decisive, self-sacrificial action” (John Oswalt). Why do you think Jesus healed a blind man and opened the ears of a deaf mute? Those were not arbitrary miracles. The men in question were healed as a visual aid to Israel to help them see that they had become blind, deaf, and dull of heart. Jesus came to cause the rebirth of the nation so that could see, hear, and love God. This is why he performed his miracles.

The reason for this judgment is given in verse 10:

C. To prevent premature healing (6:10b)

“Lest they see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts,
And turn and be healed.”

It seems rather cruel that God would harden the hearts of his people to prevent their healing, but we must ask what kind of healing God had in mind. Israel had for 700 years been a stiff-necked, idolatrous people. It would not be enough for the nation to suddenly wake up to her sinful condition and ask to restate her marriage vows. What would be the point in going back to Mt. Sinai and saying to God, “You have saved us. We love you, and from now on we will serve you”? This was what they had said in the book of Joshua—“We can do it. We love you.” But their disease had so infected them that anything but a deep and penetrating judgment would not suffice.

People with addictive habits who are never faced with the consequences of their actions often make resolutions to change, feeling that they can effect change in their habits. But their feelings are not in accord with the reality of the consequences of their sin. Adulterers at times want to renew their commitment to marriage, to turn over a new leaf, without being made to face the consequences of their actions. If they are allowed to do this, soon their resolve breaks down and they return to their ways. They are healed in intention but not in reality.

My wife's sister seemed to become addicted to many wrongful things after her parents went through a divorce. She attempted suicide several times; she spent her inheritance on cocaine. From the time she was 11 until the time of her death at 31, someone always bailed her out and she didn't have to face the consequences of her actions. She kept promising herself and others that she would change, but it was not until she became infected with AIDS that she turned around and underwent real healing when she gave her life over to Christ shortly before her death.

This is the first step in the rebirth process—a blatant announcement by God of the naked truth. An inoperable cancer was affecting this nation of Israel, and it had been present since its inception. The only solution was to

let the disease run its full course. There is something much more important than healing. This first stage of God's wrath is a painful thing!

There are people sitting here who have hardened their hearts to truth although they sit here week after week listening to God's word. Continued exposure to the light only makes them harder. If you go out in the early dawn and fail to adjust your eyes to the early light, and shut them instead, you dare not open them later in the full light of the sun lest you be blinded. So you keep them shut, and the increasing light serves merely to harden you against the brightness.

Now we come to the second stage of God's judgment.

II. The nation is disassembled! (6:11)

Then I said, “Lord, how long?”

And He answered,

“Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant,
Houses are without people,
And the land is utterly desolate.”

Isaiah's response, “How long? O Lord!” demonstrates his grief and horror, his longing for the mercy of God. The Lord's reply, basically, is, “Until I dismantle the whole nation.” But this hardness will allow God to enact the curses of the covenant, and give the people the full consequences of the divorce.

A. The seed is destroyed

God's promise to Abraham was twofold: Abraham would have a seed that would be a blessing to all nations, and secondly, that seed would have a land, and through that land God would mediate his life spiritually to the people. That is what makes a nation: a seed and a land coming together. But here is what God declared would be the result if they broke the covenant and disobeyed him,

“But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be fruit of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.” (Deut 28:15-16, 18)

B. The land is desolate

Thus, here in verse 11 God is declaring that he is now going to put in motion the curse of Deuteronomy 28. The covenant had been broken, so God was going to destroy the seed and devastate the land. The word for desolation conveys the thought that the destruction is so appalling that anyone observing it is rendered speechless.

The instruments God used to accomplish this were two pagan peoples, the Assyrians and Babylonians. The Assyrians were the most wicked people on the face of the earth. Before this time, most battles were merely border skirmishes, fought by local inhabitants who left their pastures or farms for awhile to engage in battle with their neighbors. But the Assyrians had dreams of taking over the whole world. To help accomplish this, they came up with the idea of using mercenaries. They took the best men of a conquered people and deported them to other lands to fight on their behalf. By means of this mixing of populations the Assyrians ensured that loyalties and populations were divided. (The Romanian dictator, Ceaucescu, used the same strategy. He adopted orphans from several countries and trained them as young men for his dreaded Securitate, the secret police. These men remained loyal to him to the end because they had no other loyalties.)

The Assyrians were the ones who first came up with these ideas to conquer the world. When King Hezekiah discerned that the Assyrians would attack Israel, however, instead of taking Isaiah's words to heart, he raised the defense budget and sought to fortify the country. He even imported chariots from Egypt, in defiance of Deuteronomy 17, for the great chariot city of Lachish. But all to no avail. Hezekiah failed to heed Isaiah's warning. The Annals of Sennacherib, the commander of the Assyrians, tells the terrible story:

As for Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of we-stamper (earth-ramps), and battering-rams brought (thus) near (the walls) combined with the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small beyond counting, and con-

sidered (them) booty. Himself (Hezekiah) I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to make it impossible to go out from the city gate.

The surrender of Lachish became the subject of a palace relief in Assyria. That relief still exists today, and it is on view in the British Museum in London where it occupies an entire room. Can there be any doubt that God was serious in his intentions? He has immortalized his judgment, and the visible signs of that may be seen yet today, 2,700 years after the surrender of Lachish.

So the first step in God's judgment was to harden the hearts of the nation of Israel; secondly, he allowed both the seed and the land to be dismantled. Now we come to the third aspect.

III. The nation is abandoned! (6:12)

The Lord has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

A. The seed is uprooted

Again, God is carrying out the curse of Deuteronomy 28, where he said, "The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who shall have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young... And it shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the Lord your God has given you... Then you shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven for multitude, because you did not obey the Lord your God." (Deut 28:49-50, 52, 62)

B. The land is abandoned

Israel will have to suffer abandonment and loneliness for 70 years. Sometimes we need to feel abandoned and lonely before we are ready to hear the word of God concerning grace. Why did God take the Jews back to Babylon when he dismantled the nation? He could have taken them to Egypt, to the Hittite kingdom or elsewhere. It is because God first called Abram in Ur of the Chaldees—in Babylon! What God is saying in this decision to exile the nation to Babylon is, "Go back where you came from. After 1,400 years under the covenant which we established you still have made no spiritual progress. That is why I am reversing your history and sending you back where you came from." God must sometimes do this with us, too.

To feel the weight of this abandonment, put yourself in the place of an exiled Jew in Babylon as you hear the following account.

Remembering Babylon: An Exile's Perspective

I remember the hunger and thirst, the despair and the pain. I can still see the blood and hear the screaming as the soldiers struck with their swords. Zedekiah, that arrogant fool—who was he to think that rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar would be successful. And then they set fire to Jerusalem, its walls torn to the ground. And then I watched as the Temple of Solomon was destroyed, burned to nothing. The glory of the house of the Lord was no more. My heart died, knowing that, as surely as the Babylonians had conquered Judah, so the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died.

Thirty years I have lived in Mesopotamia. Much has happened since then. But I still remember the day Nebuchadnezzar's army came to destroy Jerusalem.

I was a young man when Nebuchadnezzar came, the son of a leading citizen. Many of us, my friends and their families, were imprisoned, taken before the Babylonian king at Riblah. I watched as many of my friends were killed there, executed. I, though, was spared. I thought for a moment that I might be allowed to return to Jerusalem, but no. Soon I was taken, captive, to the land of the Babylonians.

I do not remember how long we walked. But I remembered the day we reached Babylon. We were on a large plain, marching south. The first thing I saw looked like a painted mountain, gleaming in the sky above a great city. As we drew near, I saw that it was not a mountain, but a building. It looked like seven boxes, each smaller than the last. They were stacked upon one another; like seven-steps reaching towards heaven—I now know that the Babylonians called it a ziggurat.

As we approached, we encountered a fortified wall. It was there to protect the city, but it was not the great walls that loomed ahead. Just inside this first wall was the Summer Palace, set along the Euphrates River. I learned later

that the Euphrates ran through the entire city. As we marched further south, there was another palace, decorated with lions formed from enameled brick. Across from it was what appeared to be a soldiers' camp.

We entered the city by crossing a ramp that spanned a moat filled with water, and marching through the Ishtar Gate. This gate allowed passage through the two main walls which protected Babylon from intruders. Both were made from brick, and I knew that no intruder could penetrate their thickness. The outer wall was 11 feet thick, and was surrounded by a moat filled with water. The inner wall was even more imposing than the first, being some 21 feet thick. Every 65 feet along its span, there was a tower rising 30 to 60 feet high; around the city there must have been nearly 100 towers. This wall was wide enough for four chariots to ride its length abreast, being over 20 feet wide.

From the outside, the gate itself appeared to have an arched entry some 15 feet wide and 30 feet high. On each side were great brick towers faced with blue tiles. The towers were decorated with bulls and dragons. I knew these were symbols of the Babylonian gods: My spirit sank as I recalled the Lord's Temple burning, and the Babylonian soldiers' hurtful chant, "Yahweh is dead, Yahweh is dead". These animals were brilliantly colored, and set in relief. Entering between the towers I found myself in a gate room. On one side was a large dais on which sat a statue of a Babylonian god. My head hung with even greater despair.

Once through the first gate room—and thus the outer wall—I saw a larger pair of towers perched before and above the great inner wall. Like the first towers, these were blue. They, however, did not have any animals.

Between these towers one entered a 100-foot long gate room. And then I was in the City proper. I was stunned by the grandeur of Babylon. I had known the glory of Solomon's temple, but nothing prepared me for what I saw before me.

I was now on the "Sacred Way", a special processional path which connected the Ishtar Gate with the major temples. It was paved with asphalt-covered bricks. I looked at my feet: On the bricks I read the words "Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, paved this road with mountain stone for the procession of Marduk, my lord. May Marduk my lord grant me eternal life". "May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob destroy these stones, this nation and this detestable dragon", I thought contemptuously. Then I remembered the flames over the Holy of Holies, and despair descended once again. At the top of the road were flat pieces of rock cut from limestone. On either side of this road were walls made from brightly colored tiles. On them were perched 120 enameled lions. I heard much later that the Babylonians had built this special road so that their gods might walk between their temples without muddying their feet.

We were marched down this road. Immediately to my left was the temple for the goddess Ninmakh. This is a city filled with temples, fifty or more. On the right was Nebuchadnezzar's palace. Wherever I looked color blazed: blue, white, yellow. The palace had three major units, each surrounding a square court. The one nearest the street contained the official reception rooms for the king. It was made of yellow brick. Some of its floors were white, while others were made from beautifully-patterned sandstone. Giant stone lions guarded the entrance.

Next to the palace, and a part of its compound, were the gardens that Nebuchadnezzar had built for his queen. It was built as a series of circular colonnades, one built on top of another. Many have rumored that the king had built the gardens because the queen had longed for the hillsides of her home. The topmost terrace was covered with rich soil, many feet deep. Deep-rooted trees, bushes and plants of many kinds were planted here. The queen and her maids were housed 75 feet higher than the surrounding city, and could walk unveiled, shielded by their perch from the view of the common people.

As we walked down the street, we saw one-story, flat-roofed houses made of brick. These were the private residences. Though there were no windows in the walls facing the street, I looked through some doorways into them. Their facades were faced with enameled tiles in brilliant blue, yellow or white. Many were decorated with figures of animals. We stopped once, and I looked closely at the bricks. On most of them I read the words "I am Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon."

We reached the ziggurat. It was on the right side of the "processional way," 600 yards from the main palace. It stood in the middle of a large courtyard and rose some 280 feet. Surrounding it were buildings which were used as storehouses. At its top was a massive table of solid gold, and an ornate bed. I

have been told that each night a woman slept in the bed, a prostitute waiting the pleasure of their abominable idols. From the roof, one could look out over the vast city of Babylon, stretching beyond the walls.

Next to the ziggurat complex was a gigantic temple dedicated to Marduk, the god of Babylon. The main gate to this temple was in the eastern wall. Inside was an inner court. At the other end of this inner court was the main temple. The roof was covered with gold and silver, the walls with gold. Along one wall was the large golden image of Marduk.

It was here that my heart shattered. I wept bitter tears born of confusion and despair: God had forsaken His people...no, they said that He had been destroyed by Marduk this golden beast...but the prophets had warned us that though God would remain alive, we would be cut off...I had no answer; all I knew was that the sweetness of life, all the promises and blessings of the living God, everything had been taken away, and I stood before the image of a foreign idol in a foreign land. I sought solace from God, but there was none...and there I stood, without hope.

Eventually, we Jews were settled together in southern Mesopotamia, south of Babylon. To my surprise, we were not mixed with the people of the land, but were kept in our own community. Although I never have felt free, my life is not as bad as I had imagined it would be when I left Judah. Life has been nothing like the stories I remember about my nation's time in Egypt. I have built a house, and for many years have tended my fields. The sale of my crops have given me more than enough to have a comfortable life.

We Jews still have our elders, priests and prophets: The Babylonians did not stop us from maintaining our old institutions. We corresponded with friends who did remain in the land. Some of our number have been favored with employment by the king. This is especially true of those captives skilled as craftsmen and artisans. Others have established prosperous businesses.

Thirty years have passed since that first day, and I still taste often the bitterness of those tears. I yearn for my homeland. And I have remembered the words of the prophets. They spoke of impending doom; we were foolish to ignore them. But the same Word of the Lord also foretold a coming day of salvation, a day of comfort, a day when Messiah would save his people from this punishment, just as Moses led Israel from Egypt.

My eyes have dimmed, but my heart still yearns: Would that God—Who has not died, but is alive—would that He fulfill His promises soon. Hear my cry, O Lord!¹

Here is how the prophet Jeremiah described the captivity:

**“The Lord has accomplished His wrath,
He has poured out His fierce anger;
And He has kindled a fire in Zion
Which has consumed its foundations.” (Lam 4:11)**

God's wrath hardened his people, and it dismantled and abandoned the nation.

There is hope, however, as the concluding verses reveal.

IV. A remnant returns: A hope for rebirth (6:13a)

“Yet there will be a tenth portion in it,”

A. The definition of the remnant

A remnant will return. There is still hope for the rebirth of the nation. Bruce Waltke comments, “Remnant is that portion of Abraham's seed that God preserved through the vicissitudes of history, from whom Jesus Christ came, and so the medium from whom the kingdom of God comes.”

B. Three implications of the remnant

There are three theological implications to the fact that this remnant remains. First, only a remnant will survive: judgment is severe. God enacts the curses of Deuteronomy, exactly to the letter, upon his people. But, second, the remnant is supernaturally preserved by grace: mercy is unmerited. God cuts short his wrath because of his loyal love. When the Civil War ended and the survivors returned to their homes, they were greeted with great joy and thankfulness because they had survived the holocaust. Anyone surviving this judgment by God in 500 BC would have the same response—amazement and thankfulness for the mercy of God. Although they did not deserve any better treatment than the multitudes of dead, by God's grace they had become part of the surviving remnant. The remnant in Babylon survived be-

cause God had made an oath to Abraham. His loyal love was greater than his wrath. Thirdly, the existence of a remnant demonstrates that there is a promise of a future: there is more to come. God has a future for his people. Isaiah will develop this theme later in the book.

God is a consuming fire, but his grace is deeper still. Let every man be faithless, but he remains faithful because he cannot deny himself.

Finally, even the remnant is burned.

V. The remnant is burned: The Holy Seed is born (6:13b)

“And it will again be subject to burning,

Like a terebinth or an oak

Whose stump remains when it is felled.

The holy seed is its stump.”

At the conclusion of the Civil War documentary, a black woman historian commented that while the war may have legally ended slavery and given black people freedom in law, it did not remove prejudice from the heart. I thought about my own boyhood, knowing people who were bitter and prejudiced. I remembered the assassination of Martin Luther King, the Watts riots, and the Civil Rights movement in the '60's. The Civil War did accomplish the rebirth of our nation, but love had not yet been born in the hearts of the people.

Here, Isaiah pictures the remnant like a lone oak tree in a field, but then another fire rages, devastating the field and the tree. The tree is cut down and only the stump remains. But the fire has caused the stump to be holy, and out of it grows a little green shoot.

There are certain species of pine cones that will not release their seeds unless they are exposed to tremendous heat. The great fire at Yellowstone National Park which devastated one-third of that park caused this to happen. Thousands upon thousands of pine cone seeds burst forth and took root because they had been exposed to the fire and heat. This is the vision Isaiah has as he picks up this thought in chapter 11:

Then a shoot will spring from the stem (stump) of Jesse,

And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him. (Isa 11:1-2a)

In later chapters, Isaiah gives this One the title “Israel.” “You are my Servant Israel,” says the prophet. And this Servant hears. He is so spiritually perceptive he will not judge by what the eye sees or by what the ear hears. This Servant who comes forth from the stump sees what is in the heart: “And He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear.” I asked myself what fire did that stump go through that made it so holy, and then explode to bring forth countless holy seeds. At first I thought it might have been the great fire in AD 70, when Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed by fire. During that battle 1.2 million Jews lost their lives. But then I remembered that there was another tree that was consumed by a holy fire. I am referring to the cross of Christ. On that tree, the green shoot that sprang forth from the stump took upon Himself the full weight of God's holy wrath. That is what gave birth to the holy seed. Peter wrote that if now we have believed in Christ, we have purified our souls, for we have been born again, not of a seed which is perishable, but imperishable (1 Pet 1:22-23). Unlike the old covenant, which said, “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples...and you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5), the new covenant declares, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession” (1 Pet 2:9).

The Civil War cost 630,000 lives to take an ideal and make it law. But that did not change the heart of the nation. At the cross, however, in contrast, through the death of one Divine Son who was fully consumed by God's holy wrath, a holy seed, a new covenant, transcendently new and different, was born to all who will but believe.

I have but one exhortation: that we appreciate God for what he has done in Christ.

1. Special thanks to Jeff Wong for research.

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Isaiah 40:1-11

Third Message

Brian Morgan

October 14, 1990

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE KINGDOM: ALL THINGS NEW

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

My neighbors across the street celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary yesterday. Their children threw a surprise party for them and asked me to renew their wedding vows and remarry them. About 100 people attended. I thought to myself, "What a rare thing in this valley, to see a 50-year legacy of loyal love!" It is such a contrast to what we usually hear about.

Not everything is that great in my neighborhood, however. Around the corner from their house another couple wanted to build an addition to their home, and to save money they decided to do it themselves. But nothing was built according to code. The foundations are crooked. A chimney seems to go nowhere. The floor plan is totally unworkable. Before they could complete the work they ran out of money. All that is left is about 2,000 sq. ft. of framing studs, with tar paper for a roof. The house is actually worth less than when they began their improvements. It has been sitting that way, exposed to the elements, for over a year now.

How typical of many marriages and lives in this valley—lives that are not built according to code. People want to build on their own. They think they can take shortcuts, but their foundations are out of whack. There is no coherence to their lives, and they are exposed to the community and to the elements. These days I am getting more and more calls from people saying, "Our marriage is in ruins. Can you put it back together?" Just last week a woman called me asking this very question. I told her, "It's a lot easier to do new construction than to do remodeling when the foundations were wrong to begin with."

But the good news of our text this morning is that it is possible to begin anew. In our studies in the book of Isaiah, the news which the prophet gives to his nation Israel is the announcement of a kingdom where all things are made new. So I am going to take on the role of a building contractor this morning. I am going to give you the blueprints for restoring and rebuilding a life that has been wrecked.

The book of Isaiah was written for three different historical situations, thus it divides into three easy parts. In chapters 1–39 Isaiah addresses his contemporaries regarding the Assyrian invasion. In chapters 40–55 he leaps ahead 100 years and speaks to the exiles in Babylon, announcing a new kingdom which will be inaugurated by a Servant who is coming. Finally, chapters 56–66 comprise the word to the exiles upon their return to Jerusalem. In this series we will delve into chapters 40–55, the announcement of a new kingdom.

Our text this morning, chapter 40:1-11, plays like a drama in four movements. The first movement takes place in Babylon, where the word of the prophet calls to the exiles. The second two movements depart from the city of Babylon to the wilderness, and again a voice is calling to them. Then in the last movement we are in a city again. So we move from the city to the wilderness to the city. But the city is no longer Babylon, it is Jerusalem. The exiles are home, they are healed, and this time a new voice speaks. So in each movement there

is a voice giving an invitation, in three different geographical contexts.

I. New beginnings in Babylon: "Comfort My people" (40:1-2)

Let us look at the new beginnings. Verses 1-2:

"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem;

And call out to her,

That her hard service has ended,

That her punishment is accepted;

For she has received of the LORD's hand,

Double for all her sins."

A. The nature of comfort: A future restoration (40:1-2a)

Listen to the tenderness in this Father's voice. The days of estrangement are over. God, speaking through the prophet, uses the words of a loving husband, eager to woo his estranged wife. The word "comfort" is used twice for emphasis. This Hebrew word means a sigh of compassion; it also means to repent. It is used of God's deep sigh of compassion when he judges his people, and then he is so compassionate he changes his mind; he relents. Notice the title given to the people. No longer does he call them "this people." He calls them "My people."

Then he says, "Speak to the heart," of this people, and "Give them an invitation." Call out to them that their relationship has been restored. Their exile is over. There is a brand new beginning, a clean slate. What makes this new beginning possible? What is the basis of her comfort?" The text says, "Her punishment is accepted."

B. The basis of comfort: The past has been dealt with (40:2b)

The reason there is comfort is that the past has been fully dealt with. When God spoke to Israel back in Leviticus, he said that as a holy nation they were to set aside one year in seven to give the land a holy rest, a sabbatical year. Israel was in the land for 490 years, but never once did she obey the Lord and give the land a rest. God said, "If you do not do that, I will scatter you among the nations. Your land will become a desolate waste, and I will give it its sabbatical rest. You won't take time off, so I will make you take time off." He takes them back to the land of Babylon and the land enjoys 70 years of rest. Why Babylon? Because Abraham was called from Ur of the Chaldees. That is where this whole thing started. God is saying, "You can have a new beginning when you face the past."

I had a friend who actually made a bid on the house I mentioned earlier. Then they found a pit in the back yard that was filled with garbage. The family had removed the septic tank, and instead of filling it properly, they just threw all kinds of garbage in it. They were told, "If you are going to build an addition, you have to dig that up. You cannot just build willy-nilly on top of this thing." That is what

makes new beginnings possible—truly facing your past, beginning afresh. In this case God says, “Your past has been dealt with and your punishment is accepted. There is satisfaction. There is propitiation.”

So true comfort comes from facing one’s guilt and its consequences before a holy God. You cannot have a future until you do that. Israel had served her sentence in full, and the Lord was satisfied. That is the good news of the cross. God is satisfied with what his Son did, so any of us can face our past. The Lord says, “I am satisfied. You can go on.”

II. New Relationships: Meeting the King in the wilderness (40:3-5)

Having announced these new beginnings, the question arises, “Once we receive this announcement that all things are new, then what do we do?” Israel is now invited to participate in the new kingdom. She is to go out into the wilderness to meet her King. Look at verses 3-5:

A voice is calling,

“Clear the way of the LORD in the wilderness;

Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

Let every valley be lifted up,

And every mountain and hill be made low;

And let the rough ground become a plain,

And the rugged terrain a broad valley;

Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed;

And all flesh will see it as one;

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

What is Israel to do? She is to go out in the wilderness and “make a highway for her King.” This word “highway” would be significant to the exiles in Babylon because the city was laid out around a great processional highway that went through the center. This was where the gods met with the kings. The highway was 40-50 feet wide, and as the Jewish exiles walked on its paved stones they read these words underneath their feet, “I am Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon...I paved the road of Babylon with mountain stone for the procession of the mighty lord Marduk. May Marduk, my lord, grant me eternal life.” The Babylonians had hymns about this highway. They sang about their gods coming down from heaven. The god would say,

“From hostile Elam he entered upon a road of jubilation,

a path of rejoicing...of success to Su-an-na.

The people of the land saw his towering figure,
the ruler in (his) splendor.

Hasten to go out, (Nabu), son of Bel,

you who know the ways and the customs.

Make his way good, renew his road,

make his path straight, hew him out a trail.”

Then the Babylonians would ask the captured Jews, “Why don’t you sing a song about your god? Where is he?” That is when Psalm 137 was written: “By the rivers of Babylon we lay down and wept. We remember Thee in Zion.” The Jews responded, “How can we sing when we are here in Babylon, and our God has been defeated historically?”

What Isaiah says is, “God will demonstrate his power in making a highway, but the God of Israel does not show his glory in idolatry. He shows his glory by controlling history, and he is going to defeat Babylon. You are going to find him in the wilderness, so make a highway for him there.”

A. The necessity for obedience: Listen to the voice

To enter into this, Israel was, of course, to go and meet God. We know where these words were fulfilled. The minute we open the New Testament we read of a voice crying out in the wilderness, “Make ready the way of the Lord.” John the Baptist was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Israel was to go out in the wilderness and repent, and then the King would come.

In order to repent, the first thing the nation had to do was to obey this voice. But notice that the voice here in Isaiah is vague, obscure, almost cryptic. It never calls attention to itself. In the New Testament, this cryptic, anonymous voice, according to Jesus, is the greatest prophet ever born—John the Baptist. “Among those born of women there is none greater than John. He was filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.” But in the text he has no title, no designation. That is because when this new kingdom comes and the King arrives, his glory is so great that no other name is to be mentioned next to his. When a building contractor erects a new home he places a sign in front of it advertising who did the work. But in this kingdom, this contractor, Jesus, is so great that no subcontractor is to have his name on that sign.

That was true of John the Baptist. Though he was the “greatest born of women,” he said concerning Jesus, “I must decrease, He must increase.” He was the best man at the wedding, and the best man does not go on the honeymoon. Many Christian leaders who insist on having their name and title and glory rob people of intimacy with Jesus Christ. They insist on going on the honeymoon. But that is not how it is to be in this kingdom.

B. The necessity for vulnerability: Go out to the wilderness

The second thing that will show they are repentant is that they will be vulnerable. Where will they meet this King? Where will he become intimate with them? In a wilderness where they cannot cope, where they have no props, and nothing to support them. It is a land of cosmic enemies, historical enemies, and earthly enemies. There is no seed, no future there. If God does not act supernaturally to save them, they are dead. That is the wilderness.

What is true of Israel is true of us. To enter his kingdom you must hear this voice. You must leave, and you must allow yourself to be found in a wilderness where you cannot cope. The reason many Christians today do not have intimacy with Christ is that they have entered the wilderness in their motor-homes. They are heavy-laden, therefore God cannot deliver them and meet their needs.

It was a very specific time in my life, at my wedding, in fact, when God told me to leave. My parents at that time were not excited about my coming to this church to become an intern. My father sat me down a year earlier and said, “Brian, I want you to look at Harvard Business School. I really want you to go there or to Stanford. I will pay your way. Get your M.A. in business. Then if you want to be like Billy Graham, go ahead. But first get your M.A.” That was not bad advice by a loving father, but it was not what God was calling me to do. I knew at that point I had to leave mother and father to cleave to the Lord. To do so I had to go to a wilderness where I had no money, no props, no financial support, that I might be found by God. And God found me. That was a very specific time in my life.

C. The necessity for repentance: A smooth highway into the heart

That is what Israel must do. And if she will do that—be vulnerable, repent, and remove all these obstacles to repentance—then she will be building a highway: the mountains will be made low and

the valleys lifted up. That is a metaphorical description for making a highway into your heart by removing all the stumbling blocks that keep this King from coming in. If you will do that, Isaiah says, the King will meet you and all his glory will be seen.

“Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed; and all flesh will see it together.” When God acts, he is not going to do his work in a corner. All the people saw God’s glory when he led his people out of exile. When God became incarnate his glory was revealed, and today his glory is seen in his church. And when he comes again his glory will be seen. God does not perform his salvation history in a corner: “For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

So, once the Kingdom is announced, Israel is not to be passive. She is to go out into the wilderness to meet her King. And she must be willing to be vulnerable and honest about her sin. Then she will be found by her King.

Now the question arises, “How do you know it will work?” A woman called me last week and asked, “Can you fix my marriage?” I asked her to tell me about it.” She said there was adultery involved, and that the marriage was in bad shape. I said, “Well, I do know a way to make it work.” “What is your record?” she asked. I said, “My record of remodeling is not as good as new construction, but it is not because of the method.” When you ask the question, “Will it work? Will this really work in my life?” the answer according to the text is, “Yes.” It is because this new King, this new contractor, builds with different material. Look what he says in verses 6-8:

III. The establishment of the kingdom: A new security (40:6-8)

A voice says, “Call out.”
Then he answered, “What shall I call out?”
All flesh is grass,
And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
When the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
Surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.

I read a magazine article on leadership last week. The author said we are living in an age when people are anxious for our leaders to lead. If they would only come up with a vision, and share that vision with the people, then they could take the nation into new territory. But what we have is a crisis leadership that merely reacts to circumstances and events. It is much like going down the Colorado River in a canoe. You do not control when the rapids come or how long they last; you just hang on and react. Hopefully, you pretend to be calm and pray your canoe does not capsize as it goes through the rapids!

A. Not by flesh: Weak and temporary

Isaiah says that is the way all of man’s kingdoms end up. The best that man can put forward, says the prophet, is grass. The beauty of it is like the flower of the grass. This word “beauty,” or loveliness, is actually the Hebrew word that means loyalty. In other words, it does not endure. Man cannot keep his promises.

Babylon was absolutely impregnable. The city had two walls for defense. The inner wall was 21 feet thick, 300 feet high, and was reinforced with 420 foot-high towers every 60 feet. The wall was wide enough to sustain four chariots abreast, and it measured 56 miles around the city. The Babylonians dammed the Euphrates River to

make a moat clear around the city for protection. The city had many gates, and the beautiful Ishtar Gate has been reconstructed, brick on blue enameled brick, and it is on display in Berlin. At the end of the processional stood the temple tower, the ziggurat. Like a pyramid of boxes, its base was 300 yards square. It was eight stories high, and it looked like a mountain. Next to it stood Marduk’s palace. The walls were gold, with alabaster pillars supporting a cedar roof. Throughout the city there were 1,800 open-air niches housing shrines to different idols. This was the glory of Babylon, but Isaiah compares it to the flower of the grass. It will not endure.

B. A kingdom of word and spirit: Permanent

“But the word of our God stands forever.” In contrast to Israel and Babylon, however, this new kingdom of which Isaiah speaks will be built not by the hands of men, but by the Spirit (“the wind”) and Word. This “wind” simultaneously destroys the works of man and builds God’s kingdom. Here is a hint that Israel’s return through Cyrus will come through the destruction of Babylon, and the birth of the church through the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Because of this, the new kingdom will be permanent. Peter builds on this truth in his epistle, exhorting believers to long for the pure milk of the word because “you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living abiding word of God” (1 Pet 1:23).

Will it work? Absolutely! This new kingdom will be built by the word of God. As it evolves it will destroy kingdoms of men built upon idols, and establish a new kingdom that will stand forever.

The Jews have gone from Babylon, and they have heard three times the voice in the wilderness. Now in the last movement we are in Jerusalem. But this time a new voice is calling.

IV. A new joy in Jerusalem: Being a witness for the King! (40:9-11)

A. The joy of being a witness of the King (40:9)

Get yourself up on a high mountain,
O Zion bearer of good news,
Lift up your voice mightily,
O Jerusalem, bearer of good news;
Lift it up, do not fear.
Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”

There is new joy in Jerusalem, and the Jews are becoming witnesses for the King. They go to the highest point in the city to announce his coming. We get the word “gospel” from these words, “bearer of good news.” The messenger comes to the city, announcing that the coming King will make all things new. When your life has been rebuilt in Christ, with new foundations and materials that will last forever, you don’t have to take a course on witnessing to tell people the good news about what happened to you. You just naturally share your life with everyone you come in contact with. That is the mark of a healed life—sharing with others in appreciation for a remodeled and remade life.

Notice what the Jews were to share with others, the words, “Here is your God.” The work of salvation is so great that God will not entrust it to anybody but himself. Here we have a hint of the incarnation. Jesus was never embarrassed to apply these texts to himself. You can share this with your Jehovah’s Witnesses friends who do not believe that Jesus is God. Jesus sent out his disciples, telling them, “Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...you shall not finish

going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.” He applies this text to himself.

What kind of witnesses shall they be? Verses 10-11:

**Behold, the Lord God will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His recompense before Him.
Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs,
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.**

B. Being a faithful witness to His character as a judge (40:10)

The King is coming like a judge, as in the Exodus. His revealing will be majestic and powerful, convulsing the cosmos and overthrowing the enemy. What God did to Pharaoh he will do again in Babylon, and with the coming of Christ will use all his cosmic powers to defeat the greater enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

C. Being a faithful witness to his character as a shepherd (40:11)

On the other hand, the King is also coming like a shepherd. The same arm which he uses for judgment he uses to gather, feed, and gently lead his sheep. We find a picture of this in the Old Testament when Jacob returned from exile with his wives and children and all his flocks. As he was about to meet his brother Esau, he asked Esau to allow him to pass in a leisurely way. Fathers can learn from this. When I take my family on vacation I want my children to ski like me, swim like me, etc. But I have discovered that they cannot do that. They must be gently carried at times. Once when we were horseback riding in Oregon, my older daughters could keep up, but my youngest daughter screamed when she saw her horse. I found her a pony which was more suited to her, and led it around the paddock with her sitting in the saddle. This is the picture we have here in verse 11.

The early Christians were faithful to share this at great cost to themselves. The King is coming. He wants to care for you and hold you in his bosom. But there is a small window in time for your decision, and if you do not respond, he will be your judge. For the Jews, that particular coming was AD 70. They had 40 years, a generation, before that prophecy was fulfilled, and 1.2 million Jews were killed when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. They were those who had refused to enter into the bosom of the shepherd. Let us be faithful witnesses to God's character as a shepherd.

A number of years ago a friend told me his wife had left him. He said he had a number of problems, and that she had given him a list of seven things which she wanted him to change. He had tried several times to do so, but the more he tried the worse things got. I asked him what part if any Jesus played in his life. He said he was in prison once and that someone had told him about the Lord. He had invited the Lord into his heart, but that was all he knew about him. I told him that the One whom he had asked to forgive his sins would make him the kind of husband his wife desired to have. He went home and told his wife what I had shared with him. Later, she came to me and said she had no confidence in what I had told her husband. “You haven't lived with him,” she said. I told her I didn't need to know David; I knew Jesus Christ. I said to her, “Betsy, if you give your life over to Jesus, he will make your marriage everything you want it to be.” She too came to Christ. Every married couple they knew were having marriage problems, and they shared with all of them their new life in Christ. About 10 years later Betsy died, but even in the hospital she continued to share her faith.

That is the kind of kingdom that God has for us. There is a new life in store for us who live in Babylon if we will go out into the wilderness to meet this King. The tragedy was that after Isaiah announced this news, a great many Jews remained in Babylon and they never met the King. I pray that like my two friends, everyone here will find this King and have their lives rebuilt.

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Isaiah 40:12-31

Fourth Message

Brian Morgan

October 21, 1990

THE POWER BEHIND THE KINGDOM: DESTROYING THREATENING FOES

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Have you ever had a week when you felt buried, beat-up, and burned out? That was my experience last week. This prayer by George MacDonald eloquently expresses how I felt:

From sleep I wake, and wake to think of thee.
But wherefore not with sudden glorious glee?
Why burst not gracious on me heaven and earth
In all the splendor of a new-day birth?
Why hangs a cloud betwixt my Lord and me?
The moment that my eyes the morning greet,
My soul should panting rush to clasp thy father-feet.

A dear black man took me under his wing once when I worked on a construction site during my college days. He told me: "Some day you get the bear; others the bear get you; but then others, when the bear not only gets you, he eats you!" Living in Silicon Valley can be a stressful experience. When you tally up the score at the end of a week of dealing with public schools, politics, business or whatever, more often than not the result seems to be Lions 10, Christians 0.

In our text from the book of Isaiah today we sense there is a cloud between the nation of Israel and her Lord. Israel, as we have seen in our studies in this book, has been taken captive to Babylon. In the culture of the Ancient Near East, when one army conquered the forces of another nation, and overthrew the temple of their god, that god was considered to be dead in history. In the book of Lamentations we can sense the anguish of Israel as the captive Jews were forced to listen to the taunts of the Babylonians,

All who pass along the way
Clap their hands in derision at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem,
"Is this the city of which they said,
'The perfection of beauty,
A joy to all the earth?'"
All your enemies
Have opened their mouths wide against you;
They hiss and gnash their teeth.
They say, "We have swallowed her up!
Surely this is the day for which we waited;
We have reached it, we have seen it." (Lam 2:15-16)

Public reproach is a hard thing to bear. Israel had been overrun and intimidated. "Why is my way hid from the Lord?" they asked. Could it be possible that the Lord no longer had the power to help his people? Perhaps he had the power, but he had lost the will to deliver them.

But then, just as they had reached the depths of despair came the word of the prophet Isaiah that a new kingdom was coming by the Word and by the Spirit. Isaiah called upon the nation to clear a way in the wilderness so that they could meet their King. But Israel, languishing in captivity in Babylon, responded pessimistically. As the Jews viewed the three imposing obstacles that shed their influence

in every sphere of human activity—the nations, their rulers, and religions—they felt powerless and intimidated. In our text today, however, Isaiah weighs these formidable foes of Israel and contrasts them with the power and weight of the Lord God as Creator and Lord of history.

As we study this material together I want you to ask yourselves what are the threatening foes in your life that you find intimidating. What circumstance, bureaucracy, spiritual force, or person weighs you down and defeats you?

Isaiah begins by contrasting the glory of God with the glory of the nations.

I. The glory of God contrasted with the nations (40:12-17)

A. The glory of God as Creator (40:12-14)

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
And marked off the heavens by the span,
And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure,
And weighed the mountains in a balance,
And the hills in a pair of scales?
Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,
Or as His counselor has informed Him?
With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding?
And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge,
And informed Him of the way of understanding?

First, the prophet says that God has measured the finite universe. "The verbs in v. 12, measure, enclose, weigh, are all different ways of describing the same process, ascertaining the capacity of something by measuring or weighing it" (Westermann). Imagine taking a measuring cup and trying to measure and count the number of grains of sand on one of our California beaches. What an impossible task! But Isaiah is not just talking about one small part of the earth, rather "the dust of the whole earth." These three elements, waters, heavens, and dust, make up the organized universe. Isaiah then links these verbs with very insignificant human standards of measure, hollow of the hand, span, measure, pair of scales, to show that what is impossible for man is like child's play for God. Like someone measuring out a cup of flour to bake a cake, a child's task, God measures the limits of the universe in such simple terms.

Next, Isaiah asks who measures the infinite God. Who informed, who directed the Spirit of the Lord? he demands. This text would have been very significant to the exiles of Babylon since in the words of a Babylonian hymn, Marduk is called "the one who traverses the heavens, heaps up the earth, and measures the waters of the sea." But, unlike the God of our text, Marduk had to consult with many gods to accomplish this.

The point here is that if man cannot comprehend the fullness (i.e. measure) of what God created, how much less can man measure the

Spirit of God which is behind the divine planning. No one possesses the capacity to measure God. No one is even in his league, so no one can offer him advice; no one is competent to judge his actions as he brings forth his plans in history. These concepts ought to develop in us a deep sense of awe and humility before our great God.

Next, Isaiah weighs the significance of the nations in comparison to the glory of God as Creator.

B. The significance of the nations (40:15-17)

**Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales;
Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust.
Even Lebanon is not enough to burn,
Nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering.
All the nations are as nothing before Him,
They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaning-
less.**

In terms of a threat to the divine kingdom, Isaiah's judgment is that the nations are insignificant. In the divine scheme of things, nations that set themselves against the kingdom of God are like "a drop from a bucket, speck of dust on the scales." "When water is drawn, the drop that falls from the bucket does not matter, nor when things are weighed, does the dust on the scales" (Westermann). Nations are not considered a force to be reckoned with in the divine plan. No consideration is given to them.

Think for a moment how these words must have struck the Israelites. Babylon was protected by impregnable walls; a moat surrounded the city. But then came the prophetic word. While the Babylonians were celebrating one night, the Persian armies diverted the Euphrates river and walked into the city. Sixteen days later, on October 29, 539 BC, Cyrus himself entered the city amidst public rejoicing. So much for the impregnable Babylon. In the divine scheme of things the city's elaborate and seemingly insurmountable defenses were of no avail. For decades, the Berlin Wall was the great symbol for the captive Eastern European nations of the impossibility of escaping the chains of Communism. But then came the edict of God. In one night the wall fell, symbolically if not literally, and now it is no more.

In terms of affecting the kingdom of God negatively, the nations have no significance whatever.

Secondly, they have no moral significance to affect the kingdom of God. Supposing the City of Cupertino were to pass a tax measure to build for us a new church, with unlimited parking, and then offer to throw all the weight of the city government behind the work of PBC, would God be impressed? Look at what Isaiah says. Even if the great nation of Lebanon, the most verdant area in Canaan, and all of its possessions were offered as a sacrifice to God, it would have no moral value to move his heart to forgive sins or to affect his kingdom. Whether the nations are for or against God they can offer nothing, either positively or negatively, that will have any influence over his kingdom. The national wealth of Lebanon would not be sufficient for one daily sacrifice.

Isaiah summarizes the nations' substance, saying that when they are compared to God's greatness, they are "less than nothing and meaningless." "Meaningless" was the word used by Moses to describe the formless, void, and chaotic waters of Genesis 1:2. Thus man's greatest achievements make no impression upon God, and are no more a threat to his kingdom than the primeval watery chaos of

Genesis. In terms of a threat therefore, the nations are of no consequence; in terms of a benefit, they are without substance.

We sometimes think that if we could only conquer the bureaucracy, we could make great advances for the kingdom of God. Years ago, when Emily and I first moved to the Bay Area, our plan was for her to get her teaching credential so that she could put me through seminary when I had completed my internship at PBC. But the university bureaucracy fouled up her application to attend grad school. Two years went by and there was no resolution to the problem they themselves had caused. When I thought of my plans for seminary being put on hold, I could not help but think that the whole kingdom of God was being slowed up too! We had to stay on another year in PBC, and I ended up teaching our junior highers. But, in God's providence, at the end of that year the Elders asked me to stay on as a pastor and to regard PBC as my seminary. God in his sovereignty had worked through what we regarded as an intractable bureaucracy to get us exactly where he wanted us to be.

Thus the nations, despite all appearances to the contrary, pose no threat to God as he brings forth his kingdom. They have no substance, they carry no weight or consequence, because the Creator alone is Lord of history. Remember this when you face threatening circumstances or intractable bureaucracies in your own life.

Now we come to the second threat facing Israel.

II. The glory of God contrasted with the rulers and their idols (40:18-24)

Babylon was ruled by a mighty king. He lived in an imposing palace, measuring 350 by 250 yards, grouped around five courts. "One of these (197 ft. by 164 ft.) gave access to the throne room (156 ft. by 143 ft.) with its wall covered with glazed bricks forming friezes of garlands, palmettes and rosettes in blue, white and yellow" (D. J. Wiseman). This is the power that held Israel captive. How much weight does God give such rulers and their idols? Think of Saddam Hussein today. One million people were killed in the Iran-Iraq war through the power yielded by this man. Now he has destroyed and dismantled the nation of Kuwait. He has thrown the world into economic and political turmoil. But how much authority does he have to affect the kingdom of God?

Instead of weighing the king, however, Isaiah begins by weighing the idols which lie behind the heart of the king. Nebuchadnezzar was an idol-worshiper, and the kings of today are no different. Power, money, and greed are their idols. The prophet weighs the empty glory of idols, comparing it to the glory of God, and then he weighs the kingdom.

A. The empty glory of idols (40:18-20)

**To whom then will you liken God?
Or what likeness will you compare with Him?
As for the idol, a craftsman casts it,
A goldsmith plates it with gold,
And a silversmith fashions chains of silver.
He who is too impoverished for such an offering
Selects a tree that does not rot;
He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman
To prepare an idol that will not totter.**

Idols demand much labor and money. They require multiple skilled laborers ("a craftsman, goldsmith, silversmith"), at great expense and attention to detail ("casts, plates, fashions"). Even cheaper idols require a laborious selection of materials and skill to give them

stability. Here is Isaiah's strong polemic against the New Year festival of Babylon. Idols cannot see, hear, or speak. They cannot even stand unless they are anchored to the ground.

One idol we tend to worship today is the automobile. I saved up my pennies once and bought a new car. I bought the mechanic's manual, a wash and wax kit, and everything else I needed to keep my idol both looking and working well. When the carport next to our garage caught fire once, my first thought was not for our lives, but for my car. I raced out and drove it to safety. But once while Emily was driving, a spider fell on her lap from out of the windshield visor and she got such a shock she crashed into two parked cars. So much for my idol, I thought, if a spider can destroy it!

Next, in spite of expense and human effort, idols give nothing in return. They provide no lasting stability.

B. The glory of God as Creator and Lord (40:21-24)

Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is He who sits above the vault of the earth,
And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

Ignorance is inexcusable. God has been properly worshiped from the beginning, and the creation declares his glory. As Lord, he sits (meaning, He rules) over his creation. He is so exalted that men appear tiny and insignificant in comparison. Occasionally we get a television view from the Goodyear Blimp of some of our major sporting events. As important as things might seem at ground level, when they are viewed from a thousand feet in the air they tend to pale in significance. Imagine how the same scene would appear if it were viewed from a satellite circling the earth. Suddenly, what we once thought to be extremely important seems puny and meaningless.

The Lord is calling on the nation to disregard the rulers of earth and their idols and instead look up to his handiwork in the heavens. Creating the universe was no more work for God than pitching a tent is for the traveler. God spread the universe out like a tent curtain to make it his dwelling. (Here we have a hint that this universe is his temporary residence.)

As Creator, look at what God does to these rulers of the earth. Isaiah 40:23-24:

He it is who reduces rulers to nothing,
Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.
Scarcely have then been planted,
Scarcely have they been sown,
Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth,
But He merely blows on them, and they wither,
And the storm carries them away like stubble.

He makes the rulers of the world of no lasting impact, and reverses their fortunes. Their glory is but a moment, and before they take permanent root, his breath (perhaps a symbol for his Spirit by which he builds his kingdom) blows upon them to destroy them. The kings of the earth suffer the same fate as the grasses on our foothills which were a glorious green just a few short months ago. Then the summer sun turned the landscape brown, and the warm winds blew the withered grass and flowers away. (See also Job 12:13-25; 34:19). There is no recollection that they were even there. A couple of years ago, I stood with a group from this church outside the palace of the Romanian dictator, Ceascescu. One of our group read the words of the prophet

Amos, "Though you build your palaces of well-hewn stones, you shall not live in them because you turn aside the poor at the gate." This was the fate of Ceascescu. He was a withering king who never got to live in his palace. This is the weight we must give kings and rulers, and this is how we should regard those who threaten us or the rule of God.

In a land replete with idols and human glory, Isaiah declares that the glory of God is not dead. He will put these rulers and their dominion in the dust. The reason, of course, is that their rule is established on the shaky foundations of idols, which are empty and vain. As God establishes his rule, Israel will be reawakened to the inviolable nature of the first and second commandments.

Having dealt with the rulers and the nations, Isaiah now comes to the religions. The Babylonian religion was an astral cult, and their gods were identified with the heavenly bodies.

III. The glory of God contrasted with the stars (40:25-31)

"To whom then will you liken Me,
That I should be his equal?" says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these stars,
The One who leads forth their host by number,
He calls them all by name,
Because of the greatness of His might
And the strength of His power,
Not one of them is missing.

A. As Creator of the stars (40:25)

Things haven't changed much in all the years that have passed since the Babylonian kingdom. Every newspaper and magazine today has its horoscope chart where the foolish look for advice for their problems. Our schools accept just about any kind of religious practices except Christianity. Mention the gospel and quickly the response comes, "Separation of church and state!" Workers are made to attend company seminars based on Eastern religions. Christians feel outnumbered, so we need to weigh the influence of religions against the kingdom of God. But Isaiah says we should look past the astrologers, past the stars, and ask, "Who made the stars?" The answer, of course, is that the stars and the heavens are the handiwork of God himself.

B. As Lord of History: He cares for the stars like a shepherd

God not only created the stars, he cares for them like a shepherd: He "leads, names, and protects" them. His ability to do this demonstrates his might. He not only controls an innumerable host, but he also maintains an individual relationship with each one. God promised Israel that she would have a seed as numerous as the stars. Thus, how God created and cares for the stars is a picture of what he will do for the nation. Israel would be led, named, and protected by that same might and power. They should give no weight to astrology, but instead live in a relationship with the Creator.

If God truly has the power to destroy nations, rulers, and religions, then only one question remains: "Where is it?"

IV. Spiritual renewal replaces lament (40:27-31)

A. Israel's complaint (40:27)

Why do you say, O Jacob,
And assert, O Israel,
"My way is hidden from the LORD,

And the justice due me escapes the notice of My God”?

God had made a covenantal promise to make Israel as numerous as the stars, and a light and blessing to all the nations. But at the time of Isaiah's writing she was but a tiny remnant overpowered by the nations and their idolatry. Where is her vindication? If God had not lost his power to do this, perhaps he had lost the will. Have you ever felt that way concerning something in your life? Here is what God says.

B. God's answer: “wait on the Lord” (40:28-31)

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the LORD,
The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Does not become weary or tired.
His understanding is inscrutable.
He gives strength to the weary,
And to him who lacks might He increases power.
Though youths grow weary,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,
Yet those who wait for the LORD,
Will gain new strength,
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.

Israel's plight is not the result of God's weakness.

He is Everlasting: His power transcends time. He is Creator of the ends of the earth: His power transcends space. Nor is Israel's plight due to God's lack of wisdom: His understanding is inscrutable.

The point is, God is waiting for Israel to undergo a spiritual transformation in Babylon. The nation needs to be broken! God wants the world's system to so overrun and defeat Israel that they will never again fight on the world's terms. He does not want us to ever think that the world system works, so he beats us up with it. Then, when we do battle, we will not be tempted to use their weapons. We must transcend the world's system, and in our weakness call upon another power, one that transcends time and space. Then we are spiritually renewed by a revival which takes place in the heart—in Babylon!

This is how David defeated Goliath. Saul told David he had no experience in battle, but David replied that he was not going to fight in the way of the world, thus he refused the offer of Saul's armor to protect him. I wish Christians today would do the same thing. We are taking on the arsenal of the world to fight spiritual battles, but we end up defeated because the world is far better fighting these battles than we are. To Goliath's question, “Am I a dog?” David replied, “Yes, and I'm an animal trainer. You are going to fight this battle on my terms, not yours.” God wants to break all of us of any confidence in the world's system, its power and glory and men of might, so that all we are left with is our voice of prayer. When the Iron Curtain collapsed we discovered that the revival had already occurred there. People in those countries had already had their spiritual transformation in exile while their kings flexed their muscles against God's kingdom.

The three great foes of Israel—nations, rulers, and idolatrous religions—pose no threat to the Lord and his majesty. The faithful need have no fear, but instead realize that the spiritual desert they

found themselves in was not due to God's lack of power, his inability to devise salvation, or his unwillingness to be available; rather it was due to their need for brokenness, so that they might cast themselves unreservedly on him and experience a spiritual renewal that would transcend time and space.

V. Implications for ministry

A. Keep the sovereignty of God central in your thinking

Throughout the text Isaiah's powerful questions ring in our ears, demanding a response: “Who has measured?...Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord?...With whom did He consult?...To whom then will you liken God?...To whom then will you liken Me?” Each question relates to God's unparalleled power and sovereignty as Creator and Lord. This truth is foundational to all else, for two reasons. First, it forms the basis of the first two commandments: the Lord alone is Lord and cannot be compared to vain idols; and second, Isaiah's rebuke, “Do you not know? Have you not heard?” suggests that ignorance of this truth is inexcusable. The point is, when these truths hold the center of our faith, many of our problems dissolve, and what we thought of as threats to our faith are a merely “drops in the bucket.”

B. Fight the right war!

Since it is God's job (and by implication, not ours) to rule the nations, we must be sure that we are fighting the right battles in life. We must do battle for the kingdom on the same terms as those which Isaiah refers to. The key to the kingdom is our spiritual transformation, not our dismantling of pagan forces by the flesh. In fact, it is in the midst of Babylon that Israel's spiritual transformation was to take place! Therefore, with a renewed vision and trust we must allow God to work out his program of worldwide salvation as the nations interact with the church. We must lay down our carnal weapons of the flesh and in our weakness take up the shield of faith and allow God to transform us spiritually. Then as we wait on him we will “mount up like eagles.” Praise be to him!

So when you feel buried, beat up, and burned out, because the score always seems to be Lions 10, Christians 0, you can pray,

From sleep I wake, and wake to think of thee.
But wherefore not with sudden glorious glee?
Why burst not gracious on me heaven and earth
In all the splendor of a new-day birth?
Why hangs a cloud betwixt my Lord and me?
The moment that my eyes the morning greet,
My soul should panting rush to clasp thy father-feet.

Is it because it is not thou I see,
But only my poor, blotted fancy of thee?
Oh, never till thyself reveal thy face,
Shall I be flooded with life's vital grace.
Oh, make my mirror-heart thy shining place,
And then my soul, awaking with the morn,
Shall be a waking joy, eternally new-born.

George MacDonald, *Diary of an Old Soul*

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Catalog No. 834

Isaiah 42:1-4

Fifth Message

Brian Morgan

October 28, 1990

WHERE IS JUSTICE TO BE FOUND?

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Last summer, as I was traveling with one of our elders on a train from Romania to Vienna, during a stop in Bucharest a young Iranian man got on the train and sat opposite us. We began to converse with him, and we learned that he was in the process of escaping from Iran. We have been corresponding since last year, and I want to share with you this morning from a letter he wrote to me:

I must say my English language is not very well...in Iran the Islamic Republic doesn't give any praise for teaching English to students. I have learned English language only with some guidebooks without teacher's help. So I hope you pardon me if you are seeing very wrong words or grammar in my letter.

I became politically active against my government in Iran. At first, my government did not let me continue my studies at the University of Tehran. They sent me out of the university. After this, they were searching for me, but before they could catch me, I escaped from Iran. I came out of Iran illegally. I escaped over the mountains and through numerous forests. I passed from the frontier between Iran and Turkey. I went from Turkey to the Eastern Europe, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Hungary. At last I arrived in Austria the same time as you. I must say I did not have a true passport, My passport was a counterfeit, since in Iran if you conduct political activity the Islamic government won't issue a passport to leave Iran.

My brother was killed in the Iran land nearby the Basreh (the harbor in the Persian Gulf). He was killed with a chemical bomb. Iranian soldiers, searching for killed soldiers could not find him for almost two weeks. After this long time they found him and brought him behind the war square for relatives to identify bodies. The chemical bomb and the intense sunshine in that burning field decomposed his body.

Now that I am writing this letter I remember my brother's remains. My parents and I could not recognize him in the refrigeration room. We did a great trying, at last we could recognize him. I will never forget that sight. Just now, in my eyes tears have gathered.

We shared with this young man the fact that his country, Persia, is mentioned in the Old Testament. From the book of Isaiah we shared with him the account of the Persian King Cyrus' assault and destruction of Babylon. But he said, "I don't want God in my life. If there is a God, where is justice to be found in Iran today?"

How would you answer that question? Where is justice to be found in Jerusalem this week, as Jew and Palestinian seek to kill each other? Where is justice to be found in the killing fields of Cambodia? Where is justice to be found in racially divided South Africa? Where is justice to be found in the United States, where we are discovering widespread abuse being practiced in family after family? If God is truly sovereign, where is justice to be found?

This is the question which the prophet Isaiah will answer for the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Israel is in exile. Her temple lies in ruins, burned with fire. She who was to be a light to all the nations languishes under the torment of idolatrous Babylon. Israel's God is mocked. His people are derided among the nations. How long will this continue? Does Israel have a future? Will she be forever lost and relegated to lay in the dust of broken dreams? When will God vindicate his people and bring his justice to bear?

Out of the ashes of Israel's captivity come the words of Isaiah. There is a bright future for God's people, says the prophet. It lies with the One who will take on the role of his Servant, Israel. This One will not only bring restoration to his people, but he will bring justice to all the nations.

This Servant's life and ministry are poetically described in four Servant Songs (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-9; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12), each of which builds in beauty and intensity. In all of Scripture there is no better place to discover the glory of Jesus Christ than in these songs.

We will begin this morning by reading the first of the Servant Songs, from Isaiah 42:1-4:

**"Behold, My servant, whom I uphold,
My chosen one, in whom My soul delights;
I have put My Spirit upon Him,
He will bring forth justice to the nations
He will not cry out or raise His voice,
Nor make His voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed He will not break,
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;
He will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow dim or be crushed,
Until He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." (NASB)**

I. The instrument of justice: The Servant of the Lord (42:1)

First, we will look at the identity, the credentials, and the task of this Servant.

A. The identity of the Servant

This song of the ideal Servant uses much of the same language which Isaiah uses to describe Israel as the servant of the Lord. Isaiah 41:8-10:

**"But you, Israel, My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
Descendent of Abraham My friend,
You whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth,
And called from its remotest parts,
And said to you, 'You are My servant,
I have chosen you and not rejected you.**

**Do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,
Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’”**

But this Servant is not the nation Israel. “He is not identified as such (Isaiah 41:8; 44:2; 45:4); his role is active, not passive; he ministers to Israel (see v. 6) and he suffers willingly and obediently (v. 2). He is identified with Jesus Christ in the New Testament (Matthew 12:15-21)” (Bruce Waltke). Thus, he will bring universal justice and light to the nations (v. 4), and an everlasting covenant (v. 6), doing what Israel failed to do. To the age-old question, “Where will justice be found?” Isaiah answers, “Justice is found in the ministry of the Servant of the Lord.”

B. The credentials of the Servant: Backed by God himself

**“Behold, My servant whom I uphold,
My chosen one, in whom My soul delights;”**

The title, “My Servant” (verse 1), is the highest accolade given in the Old Testament. It was bestowed on very few individuals, just three, in fact—Moses, David, and Job. It refers to an honored individual, one who is chosen as an instrument to further the kingdom of God, one who serves God with his whole heart. The parallel term in Scripture, “I uphold,” is used of God’s unique relationship to his Messianic King. It carries the idea of being strengthened and placed in the intimate protection of God because of the King’s integrity.

Secondly, this Servant is called “My chosen one, in whom My soul delights.” Like Israel, this Servant is uniquely chosen by God. Israel was a particular people who were chosen by God to bless all peoples, but the nation failed in that assignment. God was still faithful to his promise, however. Out of the ashes of the nation he is now creating something new—a new Servant. This One will encompass in his person everything Israel was intended to be. He will be a light to the nations; and he will inaugurate a new covenant which will stand forever. Unlike Israel, this chosen One is righteous, thus God delights in him: “Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased” (Luke 3:22). The implication is clear: If you reject this Servant, you are rejecting the Father.

Thirdly, Isaiah tells of the task which this Servant will accomplish.

C. The task of the servant: Worldwide justice

**“I have put My Spirit upon Him,
He will bring forth justice to the nations.”**

The basic concept behind the Hebrew word for justice, *mishpat*, involves three parties: the oppressed party, the oppressor, and a third party who intervenes to judge the oppressor and free the oppressed. This judgment, which punishes one party and liberates the other, is called “justice.” Here we have the theme of the book of Judges: Oppressed Israel cries out to God, and he is moved in pity to send a judge who punishes the oppressor and sets the nation free. Given her situation in Babylon, Israel might have expected God to destroy the Gentile nations. This was what the Zealots of Jesus’ day hoped for—that the Messiah would save Israel by destroying Rome. But here Isaiah is referring to a new, different kind of justice. What good was accomplished by God’s delivering of Israel in the past? It did not succeed in changing the wicked heart of the nation. In the words of C. S. Lewis, “No arrangement of bad eggs makes a good omelet.”

But in this text, Isaiah has a new definition for justice: “He will bring forth justice to the nations.” In the words “bring forth,” the

verb form and tense speak of birthing something new. In Exodus, God brought the nation out of Egypt and birthed them as a brand new nation (Exod 3:10-12; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:11; 18:1; 20:2). Isaiah says that this Servant will establish a deeper and richer justice.

In earlier chapters, the prophet presents the Lord in a legal setting as he examines the idols of the Gentiles, and then proves their worthlessness (Isa 41:5-7, 21-29). They are the real oppressors of life; they enslave the human heart and soul. Justice in this context reveals that, rather than destroying the nations, God will judge their idols and invite the Gentile world to participate in the Servant’s salvation. The Zealots wanted Jesus to destroy Rome, but Rome was far too small an enemy for this Servant.

Once, when a man asked Jesus to arbitrate between him and his brother, who was oppressing him, Jesus replied, “Who appointed me a judge over you?” Think about that for a moment. The Messiah was to bring justice and judgment, but on this occasion Jesus went on to issue a warning against greed. Both brothers were greedy, so no matter how their inheritance was divided, justice would not be done; their hearts were still enslaved to greed and idolatry. At times, couples come to me for marriage counseling, hoping to make me a referee between them to solve their grievances. If this is the spirit they demonstrate, it takes but a moment to discern that they cannot be helped. If, however, they face up to their own wickedness, and if they confess their bitterness and anger towards each other, then there is hope for reconciliation.

This is the kind of justice which this Servant will accomplish. I told my Iranian friend that he would not see justice accomplished externally among the nations. It was to be found only in a Person, in Jesus Christ. “Get a copy of the gospel of John,” I told him, “and come to know this Person, then you will find justice in the heart.”

“I have put My Spirit upon Him,” says our text. The Servant has the full measure of God’s Spirit upon him to bring forth his kingdom. This theme is reminiscent of Moses, who had the Spirit in such great measure that a mere portion of it caused seventy men to prophesy (Num 11:25). By that Spirit, Moses gave birth to the nation Israel. This Servant will be greater indeed than Moses (Heb 3:3), for he will give birth to a new nation of both Jews and Gentiles who by the Spirit will have the law written on their hearts.

Justice will come to the nations through the Servant of the Lord, who has the unique credentials as Israel’s Messiah. His justice will be far deeper than physical justice, for it will be a justice that frees the human heart from idolatry.

And how will this Servant implement justice?

II. The implementation of justice: Suffering (42:2-3)

**“He will not cry out (from oppression) nor lift up (his voice)
Nor make His voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed He will not break,
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;
He will faithfully bring forth justice.”**

A. He will not seek his own justice (42:2)

This servant will be oppressed, as Israel was oppressed, but he will not respond like Israel—“He will not cry out...in the streets.” The verb “to cry out” was often used as a cry for help in distress or oppression (Isa 19:20; 33:7; 42:1; 46:7; 65:14). In her distress, Israel cried out in the public places and her voice could be heard all the way to Jahaz:

**In their streets they have girded themselves with sackcloth;
On their housetops and in their squares,
Everyone is wailing, dissolved in tears.
Hesbon and Elealeh also cry out,
Their voice is heard all the way to Jahaz. (Isa 15:3-4a)**

Even today when Israel is oppressed, her voice can be heard crying out all over the world. But this Servant does not cry out because he does not seek his own justice. He suffers in absolute silence.

**He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth. (Isa 53:7)**

If you want to enter into the ministry of this Servant, do not be a noisy lobbyist for your own rights. Although he will be oppressed, this Servant will not cry out. On the contrary,

B. He will seek justice for others (42:3)

**“A bruised reed He will not break,
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;
He will faithfully bring forth justice.”**

He will lift up the poor and needy: “A bruised reed He will not break.” He will carry injustice in the soul, and this will allow him to liberate others. He won’t break you, or lay anything on you, rather, he will take your burden, as Matthew declares, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for you souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light” (Matt 11:28-30). To the prostitute, Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” To Matthew, the compromiser who sought financial security and betrayed his nation, the man who lived with prostitutes and brigands, Jesus said, “I want to come to your home for dinner.” He did not add one thing to the load which they bore. Oppression had taught him this.

And he will give light and faith to those in darkness: “A dimly burning wick He will not extinguish.” A “dimly burning wick” speaks figuratively of people who have almost lost their spiritual resources of faith and hope (Bruce Waltke). This Servant fans the faith of those who are hurting. In Mark 9:24, the father of the demon-possessed boy said to Jesus, “If you can, you can heal my son.” Jesus replied, “If I can? All things are possible to those who believe.” The man said, “I do believe, help my unbelief!” “Come to me on my terms,” in other words, “I know nothing of theology. Take me as I am.” And that is what Jesus did. He never rebuked or laid an additional burden on anyone who came to him by faith. That is the kind of Servant we have. He never sought justice for himself, rather he remained silent in the face of abuse. This is what qualified him to seek out the bruised reeds and the dimly burning wicks from among the multitudes. I shared this with my Iranian friend, telling him, “Like you, this Servant has undergone great pain and injustice, so he can lift your burden of pain.”

The implementation of justice will come through suffering. Rather than seeking his own vindication, however, this Servant will use the oppression which he suffered in order to bring salvation to others. Oswald Chambers wrote, “One of the great stirring truths of the Bible is that the man who looks for justice from others is a fool. In moral and spiritual life, if a man has a sense of injustice, he ceases to be of value to his fellow man. Our Lord teaches us not to look

for justice, but never cease to give it. That is not common sense, it is either madness or Christianity.”

Finally, Isaiah tells us of the perfection of justice by the Servant.

III. The perfection of justice (42:1d, 3c, 4b,c)

**“He will not grow dim or be crushed,
Until He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”**

A. He will not be crushed until... (42:4a)

When I am around dimly burning wicks and crushed reeds, I too become dim and crushed. But not this Servant. When he encounters these kinds of people, his faith is not extinguished. And he is not crushed. His life will be spent, but every ounce of his energies will be successful.

On the cross, as God was pouring out his holy wrath on his Servant, the devil and sin were robbed on their power; the grip of idolatry was broken. The story of the thief on the cross is not about last-minute conversions. The spotlight in that incident is on the Servant. Even in his last hours of life he is not trying to vindicate himself or seek what is rightly his. What he wants instead is to liberate someone else. Next to him on the cross was a rebel, one who epitomized everything that Israel had become, a revolutionary grasping for the kingdom. But with just a few words, the Servant accomplished the liberation of this rebel, and took him to heaven with him. This is how successful this Servant is. He is forever surrounded by the dim and the crushed, but he will not be dimmed or crushed “until he has established justice in the earth.” Here we have a hint that he himself will be crushed. And he was indeed crushed by the cross; his light did go out, but not until justice had been established.

Next, Isaiah describes the perfection of justice.

B. Justice is perfected (42:1d, 3c, 4b,c)

**“He will bring forth justice to the nations...
He will faithfully bring forth justice...
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”**

This new justice will be universal. It will not be limited to Israel, but will extend to the nations. We can go anywhere and offer it.

And it will be everlasting. “Faithfully” literally means, “according to the truth.” In Hebrew, truth and faithfulness are closely related, because truth stands forever. This text may be alluding to the everlasting covenant which Jesus would inaugurate (Heb 8:6-13; 13:20). There will never ever be any need for another sacrifice because what Jesus did was done at the level of the spirit. It’s over, done with, finished!

And finally, it will be long-awaited for: “The coastlands will wait expectantly for His law [instruction].” “Coastlands” and “islands” were terms used to indicate the most remote places on the earth from Israel’s standpoint. This deep spiritual hunger among the nations is anticipated even in the gospels (Mark 7:24-30). The coastlands were not waiting for a law, but for this Servant to instruct them. Thus, when Jesus commissioned his disciples to make disciples of all nations, they were to go forth in expectation that the nations were already longing for this good news.

I did not have to tell my Iranian friend that there was a spiritual issue in his life that needed to be faced. He was already prepared. He wrote to me from Austria, saying, “Here I am. I risked my life to be free, and I am free politically, but I have discovered there is

deep prejudice against foreigners. So I'm still not free." He is hungering for another kind of justice, where people's hearts are set free in love and unity. This is what the Servant is accomplishing in a new humanity which loves from the heart. His justice will be perfect, universal, and everlasting.

In this song, the Servant is put forward by God himself as the One who will bring universal justice to the nations. God fully provides his credentials, and he responds by not seeking his own justice, but the justice of others. In the process, oppression does not crush him, but is used to perfect justice. Justice is found in no one else!

Implications for ministry

A. Proper credentials for ministry

Although the term "servant of the Lord" is used but a few times in the Old Testament as a title of highest accolade, Paul uses it to describe himself as an apostle. By implication, all Christians are "servants of the Lord" by virtue of our being "in Christ." Therefore, his credentials must be our credentials. Before we can begin to minister we also must take great delight that he has chosen us to be in Christ (Eph 1:3-4), and poured his Spirit into our hearts. With the gift of the Spirit we also receive divine gifts (1 Cor 12, Rom 12, Eph 4) which enable us to minister the life of Christ to others. It is essential that a Christian learn to minister through the power of the Holy Spirit, by the divine gifts of the Spirit, and not in his own strength.

B. Proper goal for ministry

The apostles used the ministry of Jesus as the model for our ministry (1 Pet 2:21-25), therefore his task and method must be ours. This is not an option. Like Jesus, we must seek "true" justice in the world by proclaiming "release to the captives" through the gospel. Our goal is not merely social justice, but a deeper justice that allows us to go through unjust suffering (injustice) to make the gospel known, and thus liberate the captives from the real bondage of idolatry.

Let us follow the example of Jesus. He refused to act as a judge between two brothers who were seeking physical justice, but rather pointed them to a higher justice by showing them that greed in their own hearts was the real enemy, not their brother (see Luke 12:13-15).

C. Proper expectations and demeanor

As servants of the Lord we must have proper expectations from this life. As our Lord suffered so shall we, for "the slave is not greater than his master." And like Jesus, we must adopt the proper response to suffering, and not seek our own justice but the justice of others (Matt 20:25-28). Let us be like Christ, not clamoring for our rights, but silently looking to our Heavenly Father, the true Judge, for our vindication.

D. Proper focus in ministry

As Jesus' rejection and suffering opened up the door of ministry, so shall it be with us. Let us ask God to use our suffering to benefit others who are downtrodden and despairing. Ministry is not programs but availability to people. Peter tells us of the great open door for ministry that is open to us when we suffer for righteousness, for it is then that "the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet 4:14).

Finally, our text reveals that God has already created an intense longing for the New Covenant in the hearts of many. Let us therefore trust him to lead us to those whom he has already prepared, just as Philip was led by the Spirit to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26ff).

I will close by reading the last paragraph of my friend's letter:

You had written in your letter, Jesus is creating a brand new humanity that loves and is filled with his peace, and one day this will culminate in a whole new heavens and a new earth. I really hope and will wish that your opinions become certain. In my opinion these expressions are certain. I think in that time there is no disagreeable morality or enmity and all the people of the world will live in peace and tranquility. You had written me if I can, to buy John's book [the gospel of John; I should have told him the New Testament], but I have searched for finding that, but I was not able to find John's book in three cities that are nearby my pension. I hope I can find that book in the future [there is one in the mail right now!].

Please write me again. I remain yours truly, —————

There are multitudes of people like my Iranian friend out there waiting to be liberated. Will you take on the ministry of the Servant and offer them the true justice of the kingdom, a justice of the heart?

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Isaiah 49:1-6

Sixth Message

Brian Morgan

November 4, 1990

DISILLUSIONED! THE SERVANT'S TESTIMONY TO THE NATIONS

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Have you ever been disillusioned in your walk of faith? I must confess that I have. But we must recognize that oftentimes we become disillusioned because we have a faulty understanding of the Scriptures; we claim promises that really are not promises.

One of the most painful and tragic examples in the history of the church of a faulty understanding of the Bible resulted in the Children's Crusade of the twelfth century. In 1212 a young French shepherd lad named Stephen claimed to have had a vision in which Christ appeared to him as a pilgrim and appealed to him to gather an army of children to rescue the holy places of Israel from the Turks. If they would obey, the Mediterranean Sea would part, and they would cross to the African continent on dry land, just like the occasion in the Old Testament when the children of Joshua crossed over the Red Sea. As news of the vision was carried afar, a great wave of enthusiasm built up all the way from Brittany to the Pyrenees. An army of 30,000 boys and girls was assembled. As they marched to the sea, they sang in faith, "We go to God, and seek for the holy cross beyond the sea." The poet, Charles Kingsley, wrote these lines,

The rich East blooms fragrant before us;
All Fairy-land beckons us forth,
We must follow the crane in her flight o'er the main,
From the posts and the moors of the North.

When the army of children reached Marseilles, in the south of France, however, the waters of the Mediterranean did not part, and 10,000 of them perished. Others went on to Genoa, in Italy, to sail the Adriatic, but the Alps took a tragic toll on their numbers. Hardship, death, and moral shipwreck reduced the army from 20,000 to 7,000. Others fell prey to slave traders who promised passage "for the sake of God and without price." The children were either shipwrecked on the island of San Pietro, off the coast of Sardinia, or they were sold into slavery in Africa. The Children's Crusade had become the slaughter of the innocents.

Everyone who reads and interprets the text of Scripture incorrectly will end up disillusioned.

But what happens if you read and interpret the text correctly and things still go utterly awry? Has that ever happened to you? This was the experience of the Servant, in the book of Isaiah. Today, in this remarkable text, the second Servant Song (49:1-6), we will examine the Servant's personal testimony concerning himself, and the role he would play in terms of his ministry.

Isaiah has been describing the nation of Israel. Occasionally, breaking through the text like a lightning flash, the prophet describes the coming One, the Ideal Servant, who will be the true Israel. He begins by saying,

Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.

The Servant makes his plea to the farthest outposts of the earth, and beckons everyone to give full weight ("Listen to Me" = listen

with the intent to obey) to his testimony. These texts ought to serve as a model for evangelism, since they so clearly declare the testimony of the Son to the nations, and the process by which he came to understand his ministry. I love the personal testimonies of Christians. I love to enter, as it were, into the history of someone who is open to sharing his story, and how life's circumstances changed his thinking. This is what the Servant is doing here in this second Servant Song.

But, amazingly, we discover, right in the very heart of his testimony, that the Servant became utterly disillusioned. He had read the text, he understood who he was, and exactly what he was supposed to do, but as history was played out there was no evidence that he had the impact God declared he would have. Here is his assessment of his own ministry (49:4a): "But I said, 'I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity.'" Are you surprised to discover that this is the testimony of the Servant? This marvelous text will show us what we should do when, even after we have followed the instructions, things still go awry.

Our text has three parts. The Servant tells of his preparation for ministry (vv 1-2); then, the pain of his disillusionment (vsv 3-4); and finally, his new perspective on his ministry (vv 5-6).

I. The Servant's preparation for ministry (49:1-2)

A. His Calling: A Prophet (49:1)

Listen to Me, O islands
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.
From the womb the LORD called Me,
From the body of My mother He named Me.

The language used in these verses declare that this One will be the unique prophet of Israel: "From the womb the Lord called Me, From the body of My mother He named Me." It signifies that this Servant will have a ministry like the prophets of Israel, who were called to restore the nation to their God. Prophesying the birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, "Behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Samuel, the first prophet in the Bible, was dedicated from his mother's womb to be a prophet. This verse is also reminiscent of the great prophet Jeremiah's calling (Jer 1:5f). Like Jeremiah, this Servant's entire life will be affected by this call, and he will lament his apparent failure (see Matt 23:34-35).

Verse 2 declares that the Servant is given gifts to fulfill his calling.

B. His Gift: Penetrating speech (49:2)

And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a sharpened arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver.

The Servant will have the gift of effective preaching. He will not institute the kingdom of God by the sword or by military power, but will minister like the great prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, using the gift of preaching. His speech will be like a sharp sword (it will penetrate to the intentions of the heart), and it will be like a sharpened or polished arrow (it will cover a broad range). Jesus was tested many times in his ministry by adversaries who were seeking to trap him, but the Scripture says of him, "No one spoke like this one. He speaks not like the scribes or the Pharisees, but as one who has authority." When he responded to disclose the motives of others, he laid bare their true intentions, yet he never became defiled by their vindictiveness and wickedness.

The Servant knew his calling and his ministry. Do you know yours? It is a marvelous thing in life to know your calling, because then you can focus on where you should concentrate your efforts. This is why Jesus could say, "Even if I bear testimony to myself it is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going." In Mark 1, while he was praying to his Father, Peter interrupted him, saying that a crowd had gathered, seeking to be healed. But Jesus refused, and said he was going to travel elsewhere to preach, which was his true calling. Healing was secondary; it was merely meant to authenticate his preaching.

What made the Servant's speech so effective? It was because he was hidden and prepared in secret: "In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;...He has hidden Me in His quiver." Under the silent, protective hand of God this Servant would be trained to speak in secret. For 30 years this arrow was hidden, and polished, thus making him more effective. God does his best work in the dark!

How different from what we do today! If anyone demonstrates any kind of giftedness today, he is immediately thrust in front of the TV cameras so that everyone can hear what he has to say. Have you noticed how hard it is for football players or baseball players to articulate their feelings or thoughts about a game they have just played in? A famous Bay Area baseball player has a telephone service which people call, and for a price they get to hear this man speak. But when they call the number, all they hear him talk about is what he ate that day, or where he went shopping. Speech, but no substance!

But not so with the Servant. He is hidden. This ought to encourage mothers. Motherhood is just about the last occupation left today where all the work is done in secret, offstage. Once the child goes on stage, as it were, it is too late for training. The mother teaches the child to pray and to speak in the privacy of the home. And this is what Jesus did with the twelve arrows he picked: He trained them in secret.

In 1972, while I was still an intern at this church, I accompanied Ray Stedman to a pastors' conference, where he was to be one of the speakers. At lunch on the first day, a few hours before he was due to speak, Ray took a paper napkin and wrote out five points which he planned to share. Later, addressing the assembled pastors, he spoke on the necessity for discipleship in our present evil age. His speech uncovered the true priorities of Scripture, and laid bare the hearts of many present. I sat there, spellbound, listening to every word. I thought to myself, "But it only took him five minutes to prepare! Maybe preaching isn't too difficult after all." I prayed that day that I too would become a conference speaker.

I have done a little of that since then, and I have learned something: Ray's words were not prepared in five minutes at the lunch table! What he took into the pulpit that day was the result of a life-

time of walking with God. From the time he was a teenager, in secret he had communicated with God. He had studied the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. He had read history and the sciences. And he had never forgotten anything that he read. When we installed computers at church, we realized that Ray hardly needed one to store the vast amount of data he has encoded on his "hard disc"—his photographic memory. All he was doing with the napkin that day was arranging in a few notes to himself the material in the "hard disc." What had made him a great preacher was all those years of preparation when he was hidden in the quiver. I have given up my desire to be a conference speaker. Now my prayer is, "Hide me, O Lord, in the shadow of your wings. Teach me, hone me, in the quietness of your tent."

The Servant will be called from the womb as the prophet of God, and he will be equipped with speech (powerful preaching) that will be effective in advancing the kingdom of heaven.

In the next verses, however, the Servant shares his disillusionment.

II. The Servant's realization during his ministry (49:3-4)

A. Realization of a past promise: His task to be Israel (49:3)

And He said to Me, "You are My servant, Israel,
In whom I will show My glory."

The Servant here is recalling a promise which the Father made to him: He had a specific calling from God, and the Father was backing him. The same title was given to Israel (Isa 44:23) as the one through whom God would show his glory. When the text was written, Israel had been dismantled and exiled. But God in his faithfulness would send a Servant who would accomplish everything Israel was designed to be, and in the process create an Israel who would obey him from the heart, in the New Covenant.

There may be the idea here that the Servant would be what Israel was meant to be all along, and that he would reconstitute Israel as a nation around himself. Therefore, to be in the true Israel, one must be in Christ (Isa 44:23; 60:21; 61:3; Rom 2:28-29). Thus, Jesus appointed 12 apostles, out of whom would be created 12 new tribes of Israel. When the Servant stepped out on stage, he had expectations of glory, privilege and success. Even the angels said of him, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:31-33). Yet he was to become disillusioned.

B. Realization of his present failure: Rejection by Israel (49:4)

But I said, "I have toiled in vain,
I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity;"

Notice what the Servant says of himself, "But I said, 'I have toiled in vain,' 'I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity.'" The Servant is brutally honest: He is disillusioned. God had promised him glory, and had promised that Israel would see that glory and return to God, but the promise was an empty one, it seemed.

When we become disillusioned, we tend to walk off the stage and stop talking to God. But we should not do this. Rather, we must be like the prophets, who poured out their honest feelings to God. Jeremiah did this. He called God a *wadi*, a dried-up river bed (Jer 15:14); one minute, it's filled with water, the next, it's dry. The Servant tells the Father that his promise seems vain.

When this text was written, Israel was in chaos, held captive in Babylon, dispersed among the nations. Then came the Servant, in whom God would display his glory. His mission was to regather Israel, so he gathered 12 apostles to create his church. But Israel rejected the Servant. That is why, just days before his crucifixion, Jesus cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matt 23:37).

And what happened to the 12 apostles? They were scattered. Before the crucifixion, Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered'" (Matt 26:31). When this text was written, in 586 BC, Israel was scattered and in chaos. When Jesus created a new nation in the 12 apostles, at the end of his ministry they too were scattered. Nothing had changed. This is why Jesus honestly says, "I have toiled in vain." The Servant knew his calling, and he was prepared, but in the end, he had to confess, "All is vain."

He expresses himself even more strongly in the words, "I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity." All he sees is a *tohu* and a *hevel*. *Tohu* is the word used in Genesis 1:2 to describe the chaos on every hand before God began his creative work, before he brought order. And that is what the Servant saw—nothing but a *tohu*, a chaos, after he began his new order. Then he refers to his work as a *hevel*, a vapor—the very word which the Preacher in Ecclesiastes used to describe all of life. Everything was utterly transitory, a breath, a vapor. The Servant could not discern any order or meaning in what he had accomplished.

America's greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards, gave his life to preaching. He prepared in secret, 13 hours a day, so that when he spoke, even in a monotone, which was his style, revival broke out in the form of the Great Awakening on the East Coast in the 1700's. After 25 years of faithful and fruitful ministry, however, Jonathan Edwards was dismissed by his church because he held that only those who were born again, not just churchgoers, should take communion. A *tohu* and a *hevel* were what he had to face at the end of his ministry.

This is what some parents have to deal with after a lifetime spent raising their children. Psalm 128 says of the man who fears the Lord, "Your wife shall be a fruitful vine, Within your house, your children like olive plants around your table." When you look at your home, however, it appears more like a war zone than the tranquil, fruitful scene pictured in the psalm.

This is what the Servant honestly shares in these verses.

But he doesn't end there

C. The realization of a future hope: The faithfulness of the God of Israel (49:4b)

**"Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD,
And My reward with My God."**

The Servant is saying that, despite the fact that there was absolutely no visible evidence that his ministry had met with any success—that although he was called Israel he did not regather Israel—yet he is going to trust the God of Israel that he had accomplished what he was called to do, and he would be rewarded. Jesus' prayer in John 17 is taken from this text: "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. I manifested Thy

name to the men whom Thou gavest me out of the world...And now glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:4-6).

Jesus had to undergo the same process in his thinking as Abraham had when he offered Isaac on the altar of sacrifice. The Servant saw no visible results in his task to create a new nation, but the God of Israel whom he served was the God who brought life from the dead. This is what Abraham came to understand. If Isaac truly was the promised seed, then God would raise him from the dead. If the 12 apostles were the seed of the new nation, then God would raise it from the dead, and the Servant would see the fruits of his labor in the resurrection (Heb 12:2). This was the thought process which brought him to this point, and this was what allowed him to set his face like a flint and enter Jerusalem, to endure the agony of the cross, knowing his work was done. He trusted the God of Abraham, the God of Israel who brings life from the dead.

The Servant was called to be Israel, and his rejection by Israel caused him to believe that he had spent his strength in vain. But this in turn would cause him to strengthen his hope in God, who would vindicate his ministry.

Finally, the Servant shares the new perspective on his ministry that he gained from the Father. The opening words, "And now says the Lord," again shows that this song is a conversation between the Lord and his Servant. We are permitted to enter into the prayer life of the Servant as he wrestles with these issues.

III. The Servant's new perspective of his ministry (49:5-6)

A. The original task and privilege (49:5)

**And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be
His Servant,**

To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him

**(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
And My God is My strength).**

The Servant repeats his original calling from God, to demonstrate that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). God said it; it was going to come about. The task would be accomplished. This original mission was a supreme honor (5c), and the Servant is supplied with the resources of God himself to accomplish the task.

This suggests that though the Servant was rejected by the nation while he was on earth, this task would not be set aside; it would be accomplished in a new and greater way. Some theologians say that Jesus failed to fulfill "Plan A"—his mission to regather Israel—so now he is going to the Gentiles—"Plan B." But there never was a second plan. On the contrary, God's original and only plan would be fulfilled in a better and greater way than anyone ever imagined. This is why the Servant repeats his earlier words, "[He] formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him."

B. The new task: Greater privilege (49:6)

**He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant,
To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones
of Israel;"**

How difficult a task was it to remake the nation? Ezekiel saw Israel as dead bones and graves (Ezek 37:1-14). It would require a miracle of resurrection to take the bones from the grave, and the wind of the

Holy Spirit to put sinews and flesh on them and breathe life into them again, so that Israel would have a heart that would respond to God. What a great task, and an honorable thing to accomplish!

Yet, God says that even this was too small a thing for his Servant.

**“I will also make You a light to the nations,
So that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”**

Following the cross and the resurrection, not only would the 12 tribes be regathered to sit at table in heaven, but people from every tribe and nation—Romanians, Indonesians, Australians, Colombians, people from right here in Silicon Valley—will sit next to the regathered Jews. It was too small a thing for this Servant to raise up just Israel alone; he is also the Light to the nations.

This one verse in the second Servant Song is amplified by the apostle Paul in chapters 9–11 of the book of Romans. Far from casting off his people, God is using their rejection to bring salvation to the nations. Through the conversion of the nations he shall restore Israel, using their own jealousy of the Gentiles to accomplish his purposes. And even though Paul knew the programme intimately, in his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles he, too, was disillusioned. Together with representatives from the Gentile churches, he brought a love offering to the church in Jerusalem, hoping that when they saw this, the whole nation would see the work of the Servant. But we do not know if the money was even accepted. Paul died in obscurity, writing letters from his prison cell. The churches which he had founded were falling apart—a *tohu*, a chaos. But God was saying the same thing to the apostle that he had said to the Servant: “It is too small a thing that you should raise up believers in your generation: You will have Jews and Gentiles yet unborn who will read your letters thousands of years from now sitting at table with you, too.”

Thus the Servant gains a whole new perspective on his ministry. What looked like apparent failure will take on a new, transcendent significance through the resurrection.

We are all familiar with the great *Shema* of the Old Testament: “Hear O Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord is one.” In the opening verse of this song, however, the Servant rewrites Old Testament theology:

**Listen to Me, O islands,
And pay attention, you peoples from afar.**

The words, “Listen to Me,” hearken back to the famous *Shema*. But now, with the coming of the Servant, the nations are included in the *Shema*, and the Servant is identified with the God of Israel: “Listen to Me”—listen to the Servant, in other words. He is claiming to have the same weight as Yahweh in the Old Testament! Now, however, rather than appealing to Israel, he appeals to the islands—“you people from afar.” All are now included in the *Shema*.

The last time this phrase, “people from afar,” was spoken, in Isaiah 5:26; 8:9, the words brought terror into the hearts of the Jews. Back then, the phrase was referring to the Assyrians, who were coming from afar to destroy the nation. But with this new Servant who was glorified in the resurrection, all things are new. Now people from afar are coming, not to destroy Israel, but to hear of the glory of the Servant. The *Shema* has been rewritten.

From the perspective of the cross, the ministry of the Servant looks empty, vain, and chaotic, but in the vindication of the resurrection came the birth of something new, a new dimension never before dreamed possible. From those 12 apostles come not just Israelites, but myriads from every tribe and tongue, to sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

What shall we say, then? If God shuts a door, and you become disillusioned, remember that he always opens a window. The door may shut out your earthly dreams, but the window will open you to the light of heaven.

If the Servant had to suffer apparent failure to accomplish his mission, can we expect anything different? Our disillusionment shall not be because we have claimed promises which are not really promises, as in the tragic Children’s Crusades, but because we have obeyed him. If God seems to slam the door on our earthly hopes, it is out of love, sweet child, for it is too small a thing for you to have only that. In the age to come, there will be that and much more.

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Isaiah 49:7-13

Seventh Message

Brian Morgan

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MORE THAN YOU COULD ASK OR THINK! THE LORD'S TESTIMONY TO HIS SERVANT

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

The theme of our study today in the second Servant Song, from chapter 49 of the book of Isaiah, is, What does God do with our shattered dreams?

A few weeks ago, I was reminded of one of my own unfulfilled dreams. My junior high-age daughter was playing softball with a number of girls, and some boys gathered to watch. The date happened to be October 26th, the same date my infant son died 15 years ago. As I watched the young people playing in the park, I wondered what it would be like to have a 15-year-old son by my side. Later that evening, someone on the television sang the song "Bring Him Home," from the stage show *Les Misérables*. The lyrics, a prayer sung by the hero, Jean Valjean, for his future son-in-law who was going into battle, seemed to articulate every yearning of my own heart 15 years ago.

God on high, hear my prayer.
In my need, you have always been there.
He is young, he is afraid.
Let him rest, heaven blessed.
Bring him home, bring him home.
He's like the son I might have known,
If God had granted me a son.
The summers die one by one,
How soon they fly, on and on,
And I am old, and will be gone.
Bring him peace, bring him joy,
He is young, he is only a boy.
You can take, You can give,
Let him be, let him live.
If I die, let me die,
Let him live, bring him home.

God did answer Jean Valjean's prayer. In the play, the father dies, and the son is brought home. Fifteen years ago, a group of people prayed this prayer through the night in our home, but in my case the boy died and the father lived. I remember feeling that night that I had spent my strength in vain; I would never be able to impart earthly joys to my son. For many of us, the approaching holiday season, far from bringing joy and celebration, only seems to intensify the pain of shattered dreams.

In our text today, we will see what God does with our shattered dreams. In Isaiah 49:3, the Servant recalls the Father's promise to him:

**And He said to Me, "You are My servant, Israel,
In whom I will show My glory." (49:3)**

The Servant's original task was to be everything that Israel was intended to be. He appointed twelve apostles, knowing that God was committed to the work that he was doing. But at end of his life, the Servant says, "I have spent my strength in vain." He could discern no order, no meaning and no permanence to anything he had done. Nevertheless he faced his execution on the cross, trusting that he had achieved what he was assigned to do. Though he was given no earthly glory, yet he knew he would be rewarded.

At this point in the text, the Servant has completed his testimony concerning himself. Now the Father takes the stand, and with the whole

weight of his Person (as the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, the Holy One) bears testimony regarding his Servant. These are the texts Jesus was alluding to in the gospels, when he said, "Even if I do bear testimony of myself, there is another greater than I who bears testimony of me." And the Father's testimony is that in the resurrection, the ministry of the Servant will take on a new, transcendent view. He would inaugurate a New Covenant, unlike any covenant ever made before in Israel.

Given the fact that we here have two confirming testimonies, and considering the weight of each of the Persons involved, contemplate the terrible judgment that awaits those who refuse to take their testimony to heart! We remember the words of Deuteronomy, quoted in the book of Hebrews, "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Heb 10:28-29).

Let us look then at the Father's testimony.

I. God will reverse the Servant's position (49:7)

**Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and its Holy One,
To the despised One,
To the One abhorred by the nation,
To the Servant of rulers,
"Kings shall see and arise,
Princes shall also bow down;
Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has
chosen You." (49:7)**

A. His initial reception on earth: Rejection

First, the Father bears witness concerning the reception which the Servant had while he was on earth. Jesus presented himself to the rulers of Israel as a king with a servant heart; but he entered Jerusalem humbly, mounted on the foal of a donkey. Rather than being received in honor and glory, however, he was "despised." The word has the idea of treating someone with contempt because he has no value or significance. "Abhorred" is the strongest term in Hebrew for rejection (from it we get the noun "abomination") because someone or something is ethically or ritually unclean. Perhaps Isaiah is giving us a hint of the terrible event of the cross, when Christ died, despised and abhorred, outside the camp, because he was considered to be under the very curse of God (Heb 12:12-13).

The Hebrew word for nation is the word *goy* (from it we get the word *goyim*, meaning Gentiles). Isaiah is hinting here that when Israel despised the Servant, and considered him an abomination, the nation lost its holiness.

I have visited Israel twice. On the first occasion, my tour guide was a veteran of the 1967 Six Day War. He related the glory of Israel's conquest of the Golan Heights and Jerusalem—how they took the conquered territories unto themselves, in other words. On my second visit we went outside the walls of Jerusalem, and there visited an Ultra-Orthodox community of Jews. They had quite a different view of the present state

of Israel. They referred to it as a “goy,” a Gentile state, because in their view, the land must be given to Israel by Messiah as a gift; it is not to be taken by force. This is what Isaiah is saying here concerning the nation of the Servant’s day.

The Servant is despised and abhorred. This was his initial reception by his own people.

But, God says that this initial reception will be absolutely reversed after his death.

B. His ultimate reception on earth: Revered and worshiped

“Kings shall see and arise,
Princes shall also bow down;” (49:7c)

This word about kings and princes is a reference to all nations and peoples. They will receive spiritual insight, and they will rise off their thrones to bow down at the feet of the Servant. He who served rulers in his lifetime will be the One who is served and worshipped in his resurrection. He will have overwhelming success among the nations.

The reason for this reversal is attributed to the faithfulness of God.

C. The basis for the reversal: God’s faithfulness to redeem Israel

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and its Holy One,...
“Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.” (49:7a,d)

The Lord spoke: “I will redeem Israel”; and the Lord acted: “He has redeemed Israel through his chosen Servant.”

God will act to reverse the role of the Servant. He who was rejected while on earth will be worshipped in heaven. And all this will come about because of God’s faithfulness to redeem his people, Israel, through his chosen instrument, Jesus.

Why this change? Why is someone who was despised and abhorred suddenly worshipped and honored? What happened historically to create such a sudden reversal? The answer lies in the resurrection.

II. God will authenticate His Servant by means of the Resurrection (49:8)

Thus says the LORD, “In a favorable time I have answered You,
And in a day of salvation I have helped You;
And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people,”
(49:8a,b)

A. God will save the Servant

These verses are referring to the resurrection of the Servant, the event which is the cornerstone of Christianity. God’s covenantal promise to the king finds its origin in 2 Samuel 7, where he promises that David will have a line of sons who will be kings in Israel. God committed himself to this line of sons in a Father-son relationship. When they would pray to be saved from death, God would hear and answer them. And this line will culminate with the King, the Messiah. This One would not be saved from death, but rather through death.

This commitment of God to the house of David is amplified in the Psalms, where the King prays from the grave,

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will dwell securely.
For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.
Thou wilt make known to me the path of life. (Ps 16:9-11a)

B. Establishing a New Covenant

God answers the Servant’s complaint and his prayer. He saves his King through the resurrection, and by this act establishes a new covenant, a new world order, through resurrection life, for his people. Paul uses this text in exactly the same way in 2 Corinthians: “And working

together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation, I helped you’; behold now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). What God has done for Christ in the resurrection is what he will do for you right now. Our time of service is over; the day of salvation is at hand!

Perhaps I can illustrate. Imagine you are part of a poor family, living in the 15th century, and you are in the midst of a severe winter. Your only source of light is candles; your only source of heat is firewood, and both are running out. Your situation is becoming desperate, so you pray to God: “Lord, provide me with heat and light!” But no provision is made. Your last candle is used up; the last fire goes out. Just then someone comes to the door to say that God has answered your prayer. You look around, hoping to see a stack of wood and a box of candles, but you see nothing. Then the visitor says, “God is going to do something new for you. He has inaugurated an entire new power source. It is called electricity, and you can avail of it even before it is invented in history. There is a new age dawning, the age of electricity, and you can have light and heat at the touch of a button. Are you interested?”

This is what Jesus offers in the resurrection—a new life, a new covenant, a new nation, risen from the dead.

The Lord will reverse the Servant’s position on earth, and through the resurrection will establish a new covenant for Israel.

III. The glory of the Servant’s ministry: All things new! (49:8b-13)

The greatness of the Servant’s ministry is described by comparing it to the work of great leaders of Israel in the past, Joshua, Moses, Solomon. There will be a new exodus, a new land, a new city, and in each case the Servant’s ministry will be superior. All of this will be accomplished through the resurrection of the Servant. This is the thought which the apostle Paul picks up in 2 Corinthians: “For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory which surpasses it” (2 Cor 3:10).

A. A new Joshua (49:8b)

“To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages;”

Following his vindication, the Servant will be like Joshua, who gave Israel the land, and defeated 31 kings in the process. But he will be greater than Joshua in that Joshua did not provide ultimate rest (Heb 4:8-10). He will “establish” (literally, raise up) a land and cause you to inherit “the desolate heritages.” Joshua gave the Israelites a land “flowing with milk and honey,” but the Servant will take a desolate land, a place that is so barren and ruined it is terrible to view, and make a new creation out of it. Joshua made the land holy for a period, but not the rest of the earth. Jesus, in contrast to Joshua, will make the whole earth holy.

There are hints later, in Isaiah 54:2-3, that this land will be much larger than the original borders of Israel. Her seed “shall possess nations”—not just the little land of Israel. And in the New Testament, the only references to land encompass the entire earth! Take Romans 4:13, for instance: “For the promise to Abraham or his seed that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Or Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” The apostle Peter makes reference to this in his letter: “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).

What does this mean to the believer living today? It means we do not have to be territorially-minded; we do not have to assert our rights. Imagine if the Jews in Palestine did this today with their Arab neighbors. Supposing they acted like Abraham. When Lot felt there was not enough land for his and Abraham’s flocks, Abraham offered him his choice of where he wanted to settle. He saw that the land was a mere

shadow of the heavenly city, which is what he desired. What if we acted this way at work? Someone else covets your next promotion, and you tell him, "Take it. I've got a better one coming in the heavenly city." Christians do not have to be territorial regarding their inheritances or their possessions.

B. A new Moses (49:9-10)

**"Saying to those who are bound, 'Go forth,'
To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves;'" (49:9a)**

This Servant will be like Moses, who set the prisoners free from their physical bondage in Egypt. But unlike Moses, who could not set the people free from their sin (Deut 9:6), the Servant will say to the leper whom he had cleansed, "Go forth and show yourself" (Mark 1:44), but he will also say, "Your sins are forgiven" (Mark 5:5). Because he is greater than Moses, the Servant will do what Moses could not do. John comments, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). We are all lepers, in a sense, but with a word, the Servant can cleanse us and release us from darkness.

The rest of verses 9-10 alludes to the time when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, and provided food and protection for them:

**"Along the roads they will feed,
And their pasture will be on all bare heights.
They will not hunger or thirst,
Neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down;
For He who has compassion on them will lead them,
And will guide them to springs of water." (49:9b-10)**

Like Moses, the Servant will be a faithful Shepherd who will provide supernatural food and protection in a wilderness. But unlike Moses, this food shall endure unto eternal life. (John 6:32,35; 7:37-38; 2 Cor 3:7; Rev 7:16-17). Moses was the meekest and most compassionate of men. In the wilderness, he shepherded a nation of murmuring and arrogant people. But, rather than striking out at them, he was forever interceding for them that God would have mercy on them and save them.

Meeekness and compassion are the dominant characteristics of the Servant. The word "compassion" is the Hebrew word for the womb, signifying the love bond which a mother has with her newly-born infant. She is eager to act in compassion for her helpless child whenever she is needed. This is how the Servant sees those who love him. We are always helpless and needy, but he never drives us or harshly rebukes us; he never whips us or abuses us in any way. On the contrary, he gently leads us to springs of fresh water, and feeds us from his banquet table. This is what Moses did for the Israelites in the wilderness. He supernaturally fed them with manna from heaven, and gave them water from the rock. But here, in the words of Jesus, is what happened to all those people: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh." (John 6:49-51) The Servant is a better deliverer, a better provider, a better protector than Moses.

This shepherd's compassion will continue over into the new heavens and new earth: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of waters of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev 7:16-17).

We do not need to be territorial, nor do we need ever to feel confined. No circumstance in this life can confine or restrict the Christian. The transcendent God will come to you in your wilderness, and set before you a feast of protection.

I took a book of poems with me when I went to Romania this past summer. One of the brothers there, Daniel, drew illustrations on the themes of my poetry and mailed them back to me. One poem compared the founder of the Christian movement, Traian Dorz, a Moses figure who gave birth to a spiritual people, and spent 16 years in prison for his labors, with Ceaucescu, the tyrant who plundered and robbed the country. Daniel illustrated this poem with a drawing of a prison window, its iron bars shattered, with an ink well and a quill set in the center. Even in a cruel Romanian prison, the transcendent God is not confined. Neither was his servant. Traian Dorz wrote 10,000 hymns to Christ during his imprisonment, and today those hymns form the worship manual of the movement which he founded.

What was true of a prison cell can be true of a home where children are abused, it can be true of a tyrannical work place, a serious illness, or an outbreak of war. In the Servant we are never confined or restricted.

Thus, the Servant's work is better than that of either Joshua or Moses.

In the next verses we will see that he is better than Solomon.

C. A New Solomon who will build a New Zion (49:11-12)

**"And I will make all My mountains a road,
And My highways will be raised up.
Behold, these shall come from afar;
And lo, these will come from the north and from the west,
And these from the land of Sinim."**

Solomon built Zion, the City of God, with materials which he gathered from all over the world, and people came from everywhere to see what he had built. Three times each year, Jews were required to make the journey to Zion to celebrate the Holy Feasts. But the mountains were always a great obstacle on their journey; they were fraught with danger and peril. That is why the pilgrim says in Psalm 121:1: "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From whence shall my help come?" But in the days of the Servant, the mountains will no longer be obstacles to worship of the Lord. Why? It is because worship has nothing to do with geography. The heavenly Jerusalem has descended to earth, and the shadows are dispensed with. That is why Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father... But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth [in contrast to places and symbols]; for such people the father seeks to be His worshipers." (John 4:21, 23). Now there is a new Zion, a heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), being built by the Servant, where all physical obstacles are removed. And when two or three gather in His name, he is in the midst of them (Matt 18:20). The mountains are no longer obstacles.

And, further, this city is inclusive of all peoples:

**"Behold, these shall come from afar;
And lo, these will come from the north and from the west,
And these from the land of Sinim."**

Sinim is "modern Aswan, ancient Syene, a district on the southern frontier of ancient Egypt. This shows that a universal salvation of all Israel is in view" (Bruce Waltke). A tiny remnant of Jews were living in that far corner of the earth, but God was saying to them, "Though you are far, far away, I know you, and I am going to call you home." But the vision is expanded way beyond the Servant's original task, for not only will he regather Jacob from all corners of the earth, as he does so, all the nations will respond to the glory of this One. Glory be to him! No wonder Zechariah declares, "In those days ten men from all nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech 8:23).

The song ends where it began. The Servant opened by beckoning those from afar, and the Lord concludes by guaranteeing that the Ser-

vant's desire will be fulfilled; people from all over the world will come to worship the Servant in the New Zion.

How wonderful it is to watch God orchestrate his salvation! I have found one of the most profound examples of this to be Mitali, a young Indian woman from Bangladesh, who was at Stanford University when I was college pastor at this church. One summer, she traveled to Germany to study with a group of Stanford students, and a few of them who were Christians shared the love of Jesus Christ with her. She thought deeply on what they had shared with her, and she began to feel spiritual conflicts stir within her as she compared what they told her with what she had been taught in the Hindu religion. The group later visited Russia, and one day went to view the great Leningrad Museum. The director of the museum, a man who spoke 18 languages, was a Christian, and on that day he led the tour of the museum. At one point he looked directly at Mitali, and said, "Something is troubling you." She replied, "Yes, there is something. I'm troubled about the person of Jesus Christ." As the tour progressed, this man spoke to her in Bengali, her own language, and addressed issues like atonement, predestination, forgiveness of sin, etc. While the rest of the group were being guided around the museum, and informed by the director, Mitali was coming home; she found Christ. She later returned to Stanford, married a Christian man, and they both became missionaries of the gospel. God had taken her around the world so as to orchestrate her coming home.

The Servant is greater than Joshua, greater than Moses, and greater than Solomon. He is bringing people home from all parts of the earth. He is greater than Joshua, for his land, a new creation, is the ultimate rest. He is greater than Moses, for he calls us out of our sin so that we might show ourselves clean indeed; and he gives us the food which does not perish, but which endures to eternal life. And he is greater than Solomon, for his city has no geographical obstacles, nor internal divisions, and not one soul is lost.

IV. Our response to the Servant's ministry: Shout for joy! (49:13)

A. For a new creation (49:13a)

**"Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth!
Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains!"**

Isaiah gives the command to rejoice at the miracle God has done. Paul also says that the redemption of God's people does far more than redeem a people, it inaugurates a whole new creation: "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God...that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:19, 21).

B. For a new and restored people (49:13b)

**For the LORD has comforted His people,
And will have compassion on His afflicted.**

The Lord has not only restored his people, but in the process has brought salvation to the whole earth.

I have but one exhortation: Do not receive this grace in vain! For thousands of years the Jews have been praying for candles for light, and wood for heat, but God has already blessed them with electricity. Let us not receive his grace in vain!

Although my son did not come to my home, but instead went to the Father's home, God has done more for me than I could ever ask or think. He has blessed me with many spiritual sons. Four years ago, Earle Canty, who is a Jew, met me here in church to receive Jesus Christ into his life. Earlier this year, this man whom God had sought and brought

home, traveled with his wife, Jolyn, to Romania, and there they adopted a little boy, Samuel Mihi. Last week we had a party for Samuel, and as we celebrated I could not help but think how I have been blessed with many sons.

I will conclude by reading to you a poem, inspired by this second Servant Song, in appreciation of my own son.

BRING HIM HOME

In appreciation for my son, David Jonathan Morgan
"The beloved gift of God, born by the sea"
October 26 – November 4, 1975

God on high, hear my prayer
In my need, you have always been there.
He is young, he is afraid,
Let him rest, heaven blessed
Bring him home, Bring him home.

A voice is heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
And she refuses to be comforted,
Because they are no more.

"Return your voice from weeping
And your eyes from tears
For your work shall be rewarded," declares the LORD,
"And your children shall return to their territory."

But I have spent my strength in vain.
What chaos is this, that your life perfected in secret,
Returns to the dust before I could reward you with earthly joys.
"O my son David, would I had died instead of you."

Grief bore a window into my steel heart,
Ache became light's channel of another place.
Now I long to be where you dwell, knowing
I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.

You made my soul a lyre,
And placed in it new strings,
To play a tune of broader range,
Than can be ever sung on earth.

I cannot sing the song yet,
But in my wanderings as a stranger here,
The God of Mt. Moriah has lifted the veil
And for a few moments I have stood there.

What I have seen the eye cannot tell,
But over the horizon my heart has heard,
You singing in harmony with the Son,
Not alone, but in a symphony of boys.

God on high, heard my cry, "Bring him home,"
He brought Him home,
Not my home, but His,
Not one son, but many.

So I am content to continue my journey here,
Not begetting but adopting
The orphans of every race
To join the procession Home.

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Catalog No. 837

Isaiah 50:4-6

Eighth Message

Brian Morgan

November 25, 1990

THE SCHOOL FOR DISCIPLES (PART 1): FACING REJECTION

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

As I was rummaging through my garage recently I found an old gun box which brought back memories of a special person. Bob Munson did some carpentry work for my parents when I was 11 years old, and for two weeks I was his eager helper. For my reward, he promised to take me deer hunting the following year. He signed me up for safety school, which I had to pass in order to get a hunting license. Then we spent hours in his garage building a gun box. He took me out in the fields to teach me how to shoot. He had no sons of his own, so in a sense I became his adopted son.

Finally, the day came for the deer hunt. We meticulously packed his pickup truck with everything we needed. We camped by a lumber camp, found an old cowboy cabin built with hand-split shingles, and settled down for the night in two oversized beds. At 4 a.m. we began to stalk the trails. We stopped at a trail head, hid behind large granite stones, and the long wait began. We did this every year for five years, but the weather never turned cold enough to bring deer that far south. But I didn't care. The memories were the important thing. Everything he did, I wanted to do; everything he said, I said; everything he was, I wanted to be.

This kind of yearning is part of our lives as Christians. We want a Father figure to come into our lives and train us in spiritual matters. We want to be disciples. This is not wrong; it is in line with the great commission of Jesus Christ, who after his resurrection commissioned his disciples by saying: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-19a).

Being a disciple of Christ and making disciples is the goal of this age for which God has instructed us and given us all of his resources to accomplish. But what is involved in being a disciple? Is every Christian to be one? What is the goal of discipleship? Who will teach me? How much of the education depends upon me? What help can I expect to receive to get through the course? Are the results secure?

Isaiah addresses these questions as he writes about the Servant to come in the passage which we will look at this morning, Isaiah 50:4-7. In the prior Servant Song (49:1-13), the prophet focused on the testimony of the Son and the Father regarding the ministry of the Servant. This next song focuses on the School of the Servant, from his own words. The text reads much like a curriculum catalogue for a university by listing the different aspects of the Servant's education: Goal, Faculty, Prerequisites, Course Requirements, and Assets needed to get through the course. The Servant concludes by applying the school to us, and exhorting us to enter it with him. Thus we have one of the clearest passages in Scripture on the school for disciples.

We will take this text, verses 4-11 of Isaiah 50, in two parts. Today we will take verses 4-6; and next week we will look at verses 7-11.

The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples,
That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.
The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not disobedient,
Nor did I turn back.
I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover my face from humiliation and spitting. (Isa 50:4-6 NASB)

I. The goal of the school (50:4a)

A. To learn how to speak

The goal of the Servant's education is to learn how to speak: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned." It is this effective tongue (which has the power to penetrate through God's word) that Jesus will use to bring forth the kingdom of God. The word "disciples" (*lamad*, "to learn"; *lemudim*, "learned one," from which the later term Talmud is derived) has the idea of learning through sheer repetition until one is accustomed to something and it becomes part of their nature (Jer 13:23; Isa 54:13). Thus the mark of greatness is not how accurately you throw a football, or how much money you make, but, can you speak effectively? God created the universe through speech. The apex of his creation is man, who is created in his image, and is gifted with speech so that he can rule the world. In Genesis 2, man obeys God by naming all the animals, and then his wife. But in chapter 3, everything is destroyed by the devil's deceitfulness, by his using speech to deceive man. From that day on man's speech is sprinkled with guilt, defensiveness, and paranoia; communication has been broken.

B. In an appropriate manner

"To sustain (answer) the weary one with a word." We have lost this ability, haven't we? Just look at the high-tech world of computers, or think about the number of lawyers we have today. We are busy sorting, filing, categorizing, charting, indexing, storing, retrieving, faxing, collating, binding. We are given so much printed matter that we must hire professionals to sift through it all. The bottom line is, no one takes the time to inquire and ask "How are you?" So the legal world comes into play. Two parties refuse to speak, or are unable to speak, so they must hire lawyers to help them communicate. But this is not communication of the heart; they end up talking past each other. But not so with the Servant.

Thus the goal of the Servant's education is to learn how to speak in an appropriate manner in order to bring refreshing life to those who are at their wits' end. This is fulfilled in Jesus as we see him in the gospels seeking out the weary in every situation, and knowing how to give the appropriate word (he seldom gives the same formulation twice).

There are three stages to this. The Servant has an eye to see what the normal eye cannot see, an ear to listen, and wisdom to give an appropriate word in response. To a religious Nicodemus, he spoke of the need to be “born from above;” to a thirsty Samaritan woman, he spoke of “living water;” to a hungry crowd, he spoke of himself as “the true bread.” Thus, the goal of our speech is not to patronize people with pat answers, but to ask God for the wisdom for the right word that is appropriate to their need. This is our task, says the apostle Paul in these words, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph 4:29).

Last week, a friend came to me and said he had been praying for an opportunity to speak a word about Jesus to his friend, and that this man had just told him his 22-year-old son had died suddenly. What do you say to a man who has just lost his son? A woman who works in the local Crisis Pregnancy Center needs a word to speak to a 15-year-old couple who asked for a pregnancy test. The boy told my friend that he was showing his love for this girl by using condoms. What do you say in a situation like this? Another friend’s secretary has sclerosis of the liver—only 10% of her liver is functioning. He needs a word to say to her. I know a man who is counseling a woman whose baby was stillborn. What can he say to her? What do you husbands say to your wives when you come home in the evening to a war zone situation? You don’t want to escalate the tension, but you don’t know what to say to alleviate it. Ours is a generation that needs more than any other to learn how to speak, but this is probably our weakest area.

The goal of the Servant’s education is to learn to speak in an appropriate manner, to be skilled at answering the weary one with a word.

Next, the Servant tells us the faculty of the school.

II. The faculty of the school: The Lord God (50:4b)

The reason we choose to attend a certain school is not its buildings, or its programs, but the faculty, especially the faculty to student ratio. This was a big disappointment to me when I first attended Stanford. I was just a freshman sitting among 300 other freshmen, peering down the long aisles at a professor reading his notes.

But things are very different with this faculty.

A. A personal tutorial initiated by God

“He awakens Me morning by morning,” says our text. Furthermore, it is

B. A personal tutorial taught by God

“He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.” It’s a one-on-one thing, initiated and taught by God himself. Here we are told the amazing truth that the Father himself roused Jesus every morning to personally teach him (“Morning by morning” carries with it two ideas, that of being first priority, and continuous). This theme takes us back to the garden of Eden, where God walked alongside Adam in the cool of the garden in order to teach him. Thus, before the Servant could speak he had to listen. His role is that of a prophet, speaking from what he hears the Father say. This is why Jesus frequently sought seclusion from everyone—in order to hear what the Father had to say to him. His words are the very words of God. This is why he could make the claim, “For I did not speak on My own initiative,

but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak” (John 12:49).

Jesus spent most of his study time working through the book of Deuteronomy, the Psalms, and the book of Isaiah. Those were his three favorite books. If you want to study three books in the New Testament, I would suggest the gospel of John, the book of Acts, and the epistle to the Romans. If you do this, the Holy Spirit will prompt you during the day, giving you insight in a personal tutorial.

In the age of the New Covenant we all enter into this relationship, according to Isaiah: “And all your sons will be disciples of the Lord; And the well being of your sons will be great” (Isa 54:13). Your quiet time therefore is not a question of your having to grind out your devotions. Know that the Father longs to be with you. I discovered this through personal experience. Despite my grand plans to read through the Bible every year, etc., I never could accomplish my goals. What changed my thinking was learning that God the Father was awaiting me every day to teach me in his classroom.

Bob Munson took the initiative to teach me, and I listened to his every word. When he was coming to do a project in our house, I waited for up to two hours, looking out my bedroom window to see his truck arrive. When he said to me, “Leave my tools out overnight and you are flirting with death, lad,” that made an impact on me. When he told me, “Don’t ever have sex with a woman before you are married,” I placed his words in my heart, although he wasn’t a Christian. How tragic it is to realize that though the Father is sitting in the classroom every morning, ready to teach us, still we run off to our busy affairs and refuse to listen. How many times during the day he is ready to teach us, but we respond by turning on the radio or the TV and refuse to hear him. He has a gentle voice, but we must first listen and block out all other distractions.

The goal of the Servant’s education is to learn to speak, and the faculty is a tutorial with the Father. What are the entrance requirements?

III. The entrance requirements of the school (50:4)

He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

College entrance requirements are becoming more demanding each year. I was at a back to school night for my junior high, and a teacher announced to all of us that our kids were not ready for high school. He said his own daughter had a 3.75 GPA and yet was turned down by UCLA. A few years ago, when I sought admission to Berkeley to take some post-graduate courses in Ancient Near Eastern studies, they refused me admission because they said I could not “compete.” When I told them that learning, not competing, was my purpose in applying, they responded by saying I had to return first to undergraduate school and take a whole list of other courses. But in the school for disciples there is only one requirement—listening: “He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.”

Are you willing to be attentive and obey? If you are, God will teach you the truth “and the truth will set you free.” Unlike the servant Israel who could not rouse herself to listen to God, this Servant is awakened and his ear is open to heed God’s word. God has in fact opened his ear. This is the same role Jesus takes up with us, as we see in the miracle of the deaf mute. “*Ephphatha!*” (“be opened!”) said Jesus to this man, “And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.” (Mark 7:31-37.) In the same way, if you are open to hear God, he will open your

ear and give you the ability to hear and obey. So it is not an intellectual, but a moral issue. Are you willing to be attentive, and obey?

There is a wonderful story in 2 Chronicles concerning King Jehoshaphat, who was asked by Ahab, the king of the north, “Will you join me to fight Ramoth-gilead?” Jehoshaphat asked if he had prophetic sanction, and Ahab said, “Yes, I have lots of prophets.” So the prophets were asked, “Should we fight, and will we win?” They went into their ancient dance routine, and replied, “Yes. Fight, and Israel will win.” But Jehoshaphat asked, “Do we have a prophet of the Lord here?” Ahab responded, “Yes, but he never prophesies good for me.” “Get him,” says Jehoshaphat. So enters Macaiah Ben-Imlah. To the question, “Will we win this war,” this prophet goes through the same gyrations as the false prophets, and says, “Yes, you will.” But Jehoshaphat says, “No, no, we want the truth.” “Oh, so you want the truth,” says the prophet, “that’s a different story! If you go to battle, you will be dispersed among the peoples of your enemies.” What is the point? You can make the Bible say anything you want it to say. I have heard people justify all kinds of wrong behavior through this book, but if you trace the theology of the godly, there is very little deviation in interpretation.

The only prerequisite to entering on this course is a listening ear and an obedient heart.

Everything is in place to disciple you. The text has been written, the Teacher is waiting. The only reason you haven’t taken up the offer lies with your unwillingness to be attentive and obey.

IV. The curriculum of the school: A willingness to face rejection

**I was not disobedient,
Nor did I turn back.
I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard.
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. (Isa 50:5-6)**

There is good news and bad news about the curriculum. The good news is that there is only one course to it; the bad news is, you’re not going to like it. The curriculum which Jesus had to face while he was on earth was rejection.

A. Rejection by his own flesh

The Servant’s rejection began with the leaders of the nation, then it extended to his relatives, to his brothers, and even to his mother. In a few weeks we will celebrate the events of Christmas—the manger scene, the shepherds, the wise men, etc, but at the time of Jesus’ birth, the people of Bethlehem were not thinking of such quaint scenes, they were remembering a bloodbath, because Herod slaughtered every male infant under two years old:

**Herod...slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under... Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying,
“A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she refused to be comforted,
Because they were no more.” (Matt 2:16-18)**

When Jesus began ministering, Mark tells us, “He came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. And when His own kinsmen heard of this, they

went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses.’” (Mark 3:21).

Closer to home, here is what his own brothers said of him, “His brothers therefore said to him, ‘Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’ For not even His brothers were believing in Him” (John 7:3-5).

But what about Mom? There’s always Mom, even when others reject you. Isn’t that so? But Jesus had to even rebuke his mother at the wedding at Cana, when she tried to manipulate him. “Woman, what do I have to do with you?” he asked. He did what he did not because she asked him to, but because he was Messiah. The psalmist says,

**For Thy sake I have borne reproach;
Dishonor has covered my face.
I have become estranged from my brothers,
And an alien to my mother’s sons. (Ps 69:7-8)**

I think the most extreme statement in Scripture of the alienation of the Servant is in Matthew 8:20: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

Why all this rejection? It is because Israel could not be affirmed in the flesh. Flesh cannot recognize spirit. Jesus came to give birth to a people born of Spirit, Jews and Gentiles alike, but fleshly Israel could not see that, so they rejected him

B. His willingness to submit to it

Jesus was willing to submit to rejection because he knew it was designed by God to enhance his ministry. This is why he says,

**I was not disobedient,
Nor did I turn back.
I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard.
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.**

Here we see the full magnitude of Jesus’ education. God opened his ear to equip his tongue to speak. Then he submits his back, cheeks and face to utter rejection. “To strike on the cheek and the face signifies that one is so defenseless that he can not even protect his face from the blows of an enemy and so is humiliated by him” (Bruce Waltke).

The apostle Paul would agree that this is the mark of a truly educated man in the school of discipleship. It is not circumcision, or degrees; it is whether he carries on his back the brand marks of suffering for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

C. Rejection enhances his education

Far from rendering him dysfunctional, this rejection enhances the ministry of the Servant. This is why he can hear the weary, and why he can speak a word to encourage them—because he himself suffered rejection. What we learn here is that part of the curriculum of learning “to answer the weary one with a word” is to face rejection of others. May we see our suffering in a similar light! Rejection lifts an earthly barrier and opens the window to heaven: we have an ear to hear God. This works in the heart so that we can speak gentle speech to the hurting, broken and needy souls all around us.

Implications for ministry

A. Have we entered this school of discipleship?

Think of all that is available to us in this school! It should overwhelm us with awe and praise, that the same relationship the Father had with Jesus is available to us! He wants to rouse us each and every morning, and throughout the day to speak to us personally through his word. With the word deep in the heart he will burden us to speak to the weary ones, and give them refreshment from his heavenly waters. The questions are, Are we available? Will we be attentive? Will we obey? Lord, do to us what you did to the deaf mute. Open our ears that we might hear you above all others.

B. How have we responded to rejection?

If the Lord was rejected, so will we be, for the slave is not above his master. Will we be like Christ, and allow the rejection of others to magnify our ministry by drawing us nearer to God, or will we become bitter? May God use rejection in our lives to equip us to speak to the weary.

To illustrate the gentleness of our teacher, let me share with you a poem I just received from Bucharest, written by Traian Dorz. This man faced 16 years of rejection in prison, but found that to be the true school of disciples.

How Quiet Are Your Steps
By Traian Dorz

How quiet are Your steps,
When You let down in me;
With a myriad ways
You surround my being with love.

As the walking of the stars on the sky,
Like the moon rise
Like a boat travelling through
The sea of my prayers,
Like the spring of the drops
From the deep toward the waves
So is the mystery of grace
When it touches my soul.

Like dew of the serene sky
On the bowing grass,
Like evening that is wrapping
The stone still forest.
Like the sweet breeze whispering
Among the blooming ears.
Like the peace of the great silence
On the sunny peaks
Like the peaceful sun's murmur
Of the spring.
Like the holy thrill
From the Easter night
Like the sweat fire of love
To the treasure of the heart

How quiet are Your steps
When you let down in me.

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Catalog No. 838

Isaiah 50:4-11

Ninth Message

Brian Morgan

December 2, 1990

THE SCHOOL FOR DISCIPLES (PART II): THE TRIAL THAT LIBERATES

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

We come now to the conclusion of the third Servant Song, from Isaiah 50:4-11. Last week we saw that the goal behind the education of the Servant was to learn how to speak: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of the disciples, To sustain (answer) the weary one with a word" (50:4a,b). The Lord God himself was the Servant's tutor: "He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple" (50:4c,d).

We saw that there was only one course which the Servant had to take, and that was the course of rejection by his own flesh, by the people of Israel, and by her national leaders. But this rejection would enhance his intimacy with God, and would enable him to speak so as to "answer the weary one with a word."

This morning we will seek to answer the question, "If rejection is the course, how do we get through it?" Rejection by your own flesh is extremely painful no matter what form it takes. Whether we are faced with cutting words that go straight to the heart, or just plain indifference, rejection creates a sense of low self-esteem, and can result in codependency on others.

While I was counseling one of our young mothers recently I discovered that some of the difficulties she was experiencing in her marriage went back to her rejection by her father. She had buried most of the pain, and learned how to survive with a low self-esteem, but this sense of rejection was affecting all of her relationships. She asked me what should she should do, and I suggested she write everything down. I reminded her that a third of the book of Psalms are psalms of lament, where the writers express their grief. "Why don't you write about your grief and, hopefully, deal with it that way?" I asked her. This morning I will share with you what she wrote:

I was a young sweetpea
tender, vibrant, beautiful, rich in color
with fragrance as sweet as perfume
basking in the warmth of the desert sun.

Slowly the sun turns its warmth into harshness.
the environment turns on this gentle flower like a storm brewing,
the tormenting calm and silence burn within the heart of the flower
the thundering words cause an unbearable ache.
Then the rain comes;
all around,
the flower can only see cold,
cruel drops of rain;
Under its crushing weight,
The flower collapses to the ground
Lightning etches the hurt, the pain,
and loneliness into this fragile flower's heart.
Almost dead, there remains less than a spark of life
more a spark of determination

fueled by anger, bitterness and hurt.
This flower revives, but not as before.

Now she is an obstinate freeway daisy
hardened by the environment,
determined never to be fragile again
but all the while longing for the sweet life of a sweetpea.

She has trouble reconciling
the desire of her heart within
to reality of the hardening outside appearance.

And when the environment becomes too harsh again
this seemingly tolerant flower becomes a voracious monster
gnarling, devouring all the harsh reality of her life.

Hoping somehow to make them go away
she returns to the tolerant flower, none the wiser
everyone else commenting on the useful purpose
of this freeway flower.

But now the disease is inside her,
eating her alive, slowly she falls to the ground,
weakened by the bitterness and hurt
no one noticing the passing of just another flower

Small gentle tears fall
That is when this vulnerable flower hears
the Lord Jesus Christ say,
For those tears I died.

How does the Servant get through the course? He does so by learning that when rejection comes, all the assets of God himself, everything that God is, are open to him. Like this young mother discovered, when earth's rivers run dry, the heavens are opened.

The scene we are looking at this morning, written 700 years before the fact, is actually fulfilled in the court trial of Jesus. It takes place in three stages: First, the Servant makes his journey to court; second, he boldly invites all to cross-examine him; and third, the Judge issues his surprising decree from the bench. The trial that was intended to destroy the Servant instead liberates him in a transcendent way from all human relationships.

I. The journey to court: Unaffected by circumstances (50:7)

**For the Lord God helps Me,
Therefore, I am not disgraced;
Therefore, I have set My face like flint,
And I know that I shall not be ashamed. (NASB)**

Humiliation is one of the hardest things to bear in life. When we have been humiliated we carry in our spirit a sense of lasting shame. If we feel that a set-up is at hand, that we are going to be humiliated, we avoid it like the plague. But in this case the Father tells the Servant to go into the hardest of all circumstances, to subject himself

to a kangaroo court where everything is rigged, not to administer justice, but to abuse and humiliate him, and finally execute him on a tree. How can the Servant possibly undergo such humiliation and rejection? It is because he knows who he is, and he knows who God is. It is no different for us. It is merely a question of identity. Who are you, and who is God?

A. He knows who the Lord is: His personal help (50:7a)

**For the Lord GOD helps me,
Therefore, I am not disgraced;**

At his trial, Jesus lost all human support. The Sanhedrin and the Romans were arrayed against him; his disciples had fled. But then the heavens were opened and he discovered an infinite resource in God alone. Rejection enhances his relationship with the Lord, and also his own sense of worth. The Lord is his personal advocate.

If you have ever been to court, you will know that the whole outcome depends on which side the judge decides is right. I got a speeding ticket once when I was a student, and I decided to go to court with a long list of reasons why I should not be convicted. But when I saw the stern-faced judge rail on several other defendants I quickly accepted his offer to plead guilty. Years later I was in court again, this time on jury duty. When I entered the courtroom, to my surprise I discovered that the judge was my close friend. There was quite a different atmosphere about the courtroom for me that day. Knowing the judge has that kind of an effect.

Because of his relationship with the Judge, Jesus knows he will not be humiliated ultimately. (The word “humiliated” is from the same root in verse 6c, “I did not cover my face from humiliation and spitting.” He will give himself to humiliation knowing that ultimately he won’t be humiliated.)

B. He knows who he is: The Servant of the Lord (50:7b)

**Therefore, I have set My face like flint,
And I know that I shall not be ashamed.**

The Servant understands that his sufferings are from God, therefore he can submit to them and accept them fully. As the Servant, he has only one voice to respond to. This brings great liberty. He can submit to that voice contrary to all others. Thus he can set his face like flint (much like Jer 1:18 and Ezek 3:8f), as he did on his journey to Jerusalem (Mark 10:33; Luke 9:51). God the Father told him to go, and he went. The suffering he would undergo was from God—it was not arbitrary—thus it had meaning.

God wants us enslaved to no one. I love my wife because God tells me to love her. I love my children because God asks me to love them. I honor my parents for the same reason. In his book *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, J. I. Packer wrote,

All the Christian’s human involvements and commitments in this world must be consciously based on his awareness of having been separated from everything and everyone in creation to belong to his Creator alone. Ordered, costly, unstinting commitment for the Lord’s sake to spouse, children, parents, employers, employees, and all one’s other neighbors, on the basis of being radically detached from them all to belong to God-Father, Son and Spirit, and to no one else, is the unvarying shape of the authentically holy life.

The thing that destroys the soul is having different masters, and being pulled in many directions as a result. But God did not design this. Christians have one Master. This is why they can set their faces like flint to submit to his rule, even if that means suffering. “The

hardness (or power of resistance) derives from his acceptance of the blows and shameful treatment with which he meets. It is this complete acceptance, and it alone, that enables him to make his face hard as flint” (Claus Westermann).

Tom Hill, who worked at Discovery Publishing for 10 years, was a wonderful example of this kind of singlemindedness. Tom suffered from cystic fibrosis, asthma, and diabetes, yet he never complained. He had resigned himself to the suffering which God had designed for him. He was a beautiful fragrance of Christ, using the gifts which the Holy Spirit had bestowed upon him, during the years he worked in PBC. He had set his face like flint toward the cross, and he did not look back. Tom died in March of 1988. His friend, Dennis Chamberlain, whose wife had died some years earlier of cystic fibrosis, wrote a tribute to Tom, which he shared at his memorial service. I will quote just two of the verses:

I see him still,
his face a storm of resignation
and glintings of other powers;
my aged-in-the-oak friend,
companion in death.

In life and death he compelled us
to feel his fundamental contradiction;
weakness and strength...meek,
yet intractable. A man of opposites,
a life of God-made tensions.

That was Tom Hill—“a life of God-made tensions.”

Because God is the Servant’s personal help, and he is his Servant, Jesus is unaffected by the worst of circumstances.

II. Making his defense: Unaffected by intimidation (50:8-9)

**He who vindicates Me is near;
Who will contend with Me?
Let us stand up to each other;
Who has a case against Me?
Let him draw near to Me.
Behold the Lord GOD helps Me;
Who is he who condemns Me?
Behold, they will all wear out like a garment;
The moth will eat them.**

A. God is the vindicator of what is right (50:8)

The Servant knows that the earthly court was not the real court. He is not intimidated by his accusers, but rather is very bold as he faces them. In his sufferings, his spiritual eyes are opened to see the heavenly court and the nearness of the One Holy Judge.

We catch a similar instance of this in the life of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. During his trial the heavens were opened to him, and his eye captured his heavenly advocate near to him: “But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’” (Acts 7:55-56).

This closeness gives the Servant such boldness he invites all others to draw near him to conduct the legal proceedings. He asks, “Who will contend with me? Who has a case against me? Who is he who condemns me?” May God so open our spiritual eyes in the midst of our suffering to behold his glory!

I have a friend who has this kind of boldness. He has lived with a certain roommate for four years, and recently he heard this man castigating Christians for their wrong behavior. He confronted him and asked him, "In the four years we have been sharing this apartment has there been anything in my life that has discredited Christ or Christianity? You owe me an answer, because if I'm wrong, I'm in trouble, but if I'm right, you're in trouble!" What boldness! Examine me, he said to this man. This doesn't mean Christians live perfect lives; it merely means that our sails are set correctly, and we are willing to make things right.

B. God is the Judge of what is wrong (50:9)

On earth the Servant will receive no vindication, but he knows that not only will he be vindicated (in the resurrection), but that the Sovereign Lord will judge his enemies. He sees that their judgment is a quiet, slow, almost imperceptible process. Like the moth which slowly destroys a garment in a process invisible to the naked eye, judgment is absolutely sure. Because of this, the Servant expends no effort at his trial either in his own defense (he is silent) or in thwarting his accusers (John 18:5-11, 36; 19:11). He does not spend any of his resources in taking vengeance on his accusers. Christians need not try and vindicate themselves when they are falsely accused, because someone else will do the vindicating.

The Servant is free from shame, and from fear and intimidation because he knows that God will vindicate him.

III. The surprise decree from the bench: The tables are turned! (50:10-11)

Who is among you that fears the LORD,
That obeys the voice of His servant,
That walks in darkness and has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.
Behold, all you who kindle a fire,
Who encircle yourselves with firebrands,
Walk in the light of your fire
And among the brands you have set ablaze.
This you will have from My hand;
And you will lie down in torment.

A. A warning to the accusers (50:11)

There are only two groups at this trial, those who oppose the Servant, and those who are enrolled in the school of the Servant as disciples. There are no fence-sitters present. The accusers come to try the Servant, but he is vindicated and instead they themselves are tried. We see this same spirit of boldness imparted to the disciples after the day of Pentecost. Peter, who once cowered in fear, is so bold before the Sanhedrin he exclaims to his accusers that he is not on trial, they are (Acts 4:7-13). To "kindle a fire" and "gird yourselves with firebrands" are metaphors to describe the actions of the wicked in opposing the righteous. These terms are especially used of slanderous speech. Like lighted arrows that are fired at the righteous, slander burns in the heart. This is what happened to Jesus during his trial. Similar expressions are found in the Psalms:

I must lie among those who breathe fire,
Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
And their tongue a sharp word. (Ps 57:4)
Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips,
From a deceitful tongue...
Sharp arrows of the warrior,

With the burning coals of the broom tree. (Ps 120:2, 4)

God's command to those who "kindle a fire" is, "Walk in the light of your fire, And among the brands you have set ablaze." "Walk"—carry out your plan, fill out your works with abandon, in other words. This means that once they shoot their arrows at the righteous the arrows will turn around, light their path and burn them. God often uses the very tools of destruction which the wicked desire to use against the righteous and turns them instead upon the wicked.

Then, after they have "walked," "you will lie down in torment." The wicked will lie down (a metaphor for death) in a place of fiery torment. Notice again that humanity is divided into two categories, those who respond to the Servant and those who oppose him (much like Psalms 1 and 2). There is no third alternative! During World War II, Dr. C. Joad, writing for the British Broadcasting Corporation, said, "We have abolished the fear of God and instead we live in the constant fear of man. We have done away with the idea of a hell in the future and we have succeeded in turning our lives in this world into a living hell." What was true in 1940 is still true in 1990.

B. Encouragement to disciples (50:10)

Who is among you that fears the LORD,
That obeys the voice of His servant,
That walks in darkness and has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

The first thing which the Judge does in this courtroom drama is redefine what it means to be a true Jew. In the Old Testament, a Jew was known as "one who feared the Lord." What is true religion? "Fearing the Lord." And what is true religion now? God is saying that man cannot claim to fear the Lord anymore unless he obeys the voice of this Servant. Man must have a relationship with the Messiah. He is the way to the Father. These were the exact words of the Father to Israel at the baptism of Jesus, and repeated to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:5): "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" It is clear now that in order for Israel to be part of God's school of discipleship they must come through this Servant.

Then God asks of those who want to be disciples, those who fear the Lord and obey the voice of the Servant, "Are there some who walk in darkness and have no light in themselves?" A time will come when disciples will enter a dark tunnel and the light they have in themselves will go out.

But flowers need night's cool darkness,
The moonlight and the dew,
So Christ from one who loved it,
His shining oft withdrew. (Rutherford)

What God is saying is that the school that Jesus went to is the same school his disciples will attend. While he was hanging on the cross, Jesus cried out in despair, "Why have you forsaken me?" Darkness covered the land for three hours. This too will happen to you. But when it does, "Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God." Lean on nothing else but the Lord God. You can trust him. The God of the Servant will do for you what he did for the Servant: He will raise you from the dead.

I was at El Camino Hospital last Sunday, visiting Roberta Luce, wife of Charlie Luce, one of our elders. Charlie had just had a conference with the doctors, and he told me that he and Roberta had decided to forego surgery; she wanted to go home and be with the Lord. As I watched Charlie that day, I don't know if I could turn my

spouse over to the Lord like that. He told me she had said to him, "We have had 42 wonderful years together. I want to go home. You're 72, and it won't be long before you join me." In their dark hour, the Luces fully leaned on the Lord God. (Roberta died later that week.) That is the school of the disciples.

I read the rabbinical literature to see if the rabbis had anything to say about this text, and I found this fascinating piece by Judah Halevi:

God has a secret and wise design concerning us, which should be compared to the wisdom hidden in the seed which falls into the ground, where it undergoes an external transformation into earth, water and dirt, without leaving a trace for him who looks down upon it. It is, however, the seed itself which transforms earth and water into its own substance, carries it from one stage to another, until it refines the elements and transfers them into something like itself, casting off husks, leaves, etc. and allowing the pure core to appear, capable of bearing the Divine Influence... The nations merely serve to introduce and pave the way for the expected Messiah, who is the fruition, and they will all become His fruit. Then, if they acknowledge Him, they will become one tree. Then they will revere the origin which they formerly dispersed, as we have observed concerning the words: 'Behold, My servant prospers.'

The trial at which the enemy sought to destroy the Servant by shutting off all human support, becomes instead the trial that liberates him with a new boldness and a new peace.

I will end by reading another poem by the woman who wrote the lines which I quoted at the outset. This time she writes about the transforming power that is in Jesus Christ.

There I was, a seed, dry and lifeless,
blown by the winds of the cruel environment.
Helpless, sad, abandoned,
destined to live a life of worthlessness.

Then you came along, dear Lord,...
You picked up this small, fragile, lifeless seed,
and place me in the dark, damp, tomb of a hole.
What's happening? I questioned.
Why are you doing this to me?
Before I knew it, the light was gone.
I felt abandoned, angry, hurt.
There was no one I could turn to
I was alone.
I felt the ache of my own emptiness.
Fear began to overwhelm me
like a ravenous worm searching a choice morsel.
Oh, the pain.
Oh, the never-ending tears of bitterness and anger.

I felt like I was dying
And with all my minuscule powers
I could not change it.
I felt life was going on without me.

Suddenly I felt a strange new sensation.
Warm and somehow comforting.
It penetrated the shell of my existence,
It reached to my innermost, deepest core.

It began healing, putting together, and putting right
things I thought would never be right again.
The wetness from my own tears seemed to change
in the presence of this warmth.
I began to feel different.
I began to get nourishment
that You had planned for me.
I couldn't believe that You cared enough for me
to have planned all this.

The shell that surrounded me,
seem to be loosening, disintegrating, separating from me.
There was something new and exciting in me.
I began to understand that this was not the end,
but just the beginning.

I had died to the world, to self,
and because of You,
Now, I'm going to live.
I felt my roots embracing the abundant nourishment
I felt new life, powerful enough to part the soil,
reach toward Him who created me.
How wonderful it was to be free of the old shell,
though it was still lurking near by.
The warmth of Your love now glowed inside me.
I realized how great was Your tenderness, compassion for me.
I realized the power of Your sacrifice.
With humble thankfulness, I praised my living God.
I finally broke through the deep darkness of my life
into Your glorious light.
And it was wonderful!

That is the school of disciples, the school which transforms hardened freeway daisies into transcendent and free new beings.

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Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Tenth Message

Brian Morgan

March 10, 1991

EXALTED, YET DESPISED

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Over the past couple of months I have been astonished and amazed at God's grace in the salvation of my father at the age of 81. Twenty-three years ago, when I came to Christ, I began praying for my dad. One Father's Day, I wrote him a letter telling him how much he meant to me. I also told him that I had another Father, the Lord God. As I had been about my earthly father's business up to then, I wrote, as a maturing man I now felt called to be about my Heavenly Father's business. After he read the letter, dad told my mother that he felt he had lost his one and only son. Shortly afterwards I left the field of economics and began teaching the Scriptures, and he was very upset by my decision. I continued to pray for him, and later, after I was married, I prayed that my children might lead him to faith. In the mid-1970's, Emily and I lost a son, and a year later a daughter, but I felt that it was all worthwhile if my dad came to Christ. Even this, however, failed to make a difference. I gave up hope, and I even gave up praying that he would ever be saved.

Several weeks ago, my mother telephoned me to say that my father had a blocked carotid artery, and they were rather concerned about him having a stroke. Although he had been a practicing surgeon in the Los Angeles area for 50 years, he could not find a surgeon who would operate on him because he did not manifest any symptoms. I shared this with a Christian cardiologist friend. He called my dad that very day and invited him to come up to the Bay Area, saying that he knew an excellent vascular surgeon who would perform the surgery. He accepted, and flew up here a couple of days later. In surgery, the doctors discovered that his artery was 95% blocked. It was a miracle he had survived up to then. The surgery was successful, and within a couple of days he was recuperating in my home. I sensed that he had changed. He wanted to be involved in everything I was doing. He went with me to pick up my children; he asked me to write thank you notes to the doctors and nurses; he followed me around, observing me in all I was doing.

Our PBC Men's Retreat was scheduled for the following weekend, and I had planned to spend the two days preceding the retreat with Michael Green, the guest speaker. I invited my dad to come along with us, and he said he would like to come. During those two days we had several conversations about family matters, and for the first time in my life I felt we had begun to communicate about these things. One evening he shared with me concerning various personal events in his life. Then suddenly, out of the blue, he asked, "If Jesus is the Messiah, why did the Jews reject him?" I about fell off my chair! As I thought about his question, and how I would respond, I suddenly thought how interesting it was that the relationship between Jesus, the Jews, and the nations was almost an exact parallel to the relationship between my dad and me.

That relationship between Jesus, the Jews, and the nations is the theme of the fourth Servant Song from the book of Isaiah, to which we come today in our studies in the Servant Songs. Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the most frequently quoted text in the New Testament. Here we

enter into the Scriptural Holy of Holies, as Isaiah gives a detailed description, 700 years before Christ, of the Servant's atoning work and his reception by God, the nations and Israel. The song is composed of five sections, each having three verses. Each section describes an amazing, astonishing paradox in God's actions in bringing his salvation to the whole earth.

This text forms the basis of Peter's first sermon to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, a message which resulted in the conversion of 3000 Jews. Because the early Christians were so effective in using this text to evangelize the Jews, it was officially removed from all synagogue readings. The distinguished orthodox Jewish scholar, the late Herbert Loewe, wrote, "the reason the prophecy of the Suffering Servant is not included in the synagogue lectionary, although the passages immediately preceding and following it are found there, is the Christian application of that prophecy to Jesus." Since this was a favorite text of the apostles, one that proved so effective for evangelism for the early Christians, ought we not master it for the good of our own souls and in order to spread the gospel?

The literary structure of the text is easy to follow. It will be helpful if we can imagine the setting as a stage, and as each section of the drama unfolds, a spotlight is turned on the different participants involved.

I will begin by giving observations on the literary structure of this song.

A1: Spotlight on God: 52:13-15

God exalts his Servant, granting him great success among the nations.

B1: Spotlight on Israel: 53:1-3

Israel evaluates the Servant, and rejects him because he did not have the credentials she sought.

C. Spotlight on the truth: 53:4-6

The Atonement: The Servant suffers our death for us!

B2: Spotlight on Israel: 53:7-10

Israel executes the Servant, while the Servant remains silent.

A2: Spotlight on God: 53:11-13

God rewards the Servant and grants him eternal glory. God has the first and last word regarding his Servant.

Each section unfolds an amazing, astonishing paradox concerning God's salvation in history. These events demonstrate that God is extremely complex in the manner in which he brings about salvation. In the same way, I was astonished when my father came to faith just a few weeks ago. God answered in an amazing and complex manner the prayers which I had prayed for my father 23 years ago.

Let us look then at this first section.

I. The exaltation of the Servant by God (52:13–15)

A. The description of his exaltation (52:13)

**Behold, My servant will prosper,
He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted. (NASB)**

The Hebrew word for “prosper” has three aspects. First, the Servant will have insight; he will have a plan—he will know what to do; second, he will successfully do it; and third, he will be rewarded for it. This verse focuses on the third aspect, namely, the Servant’s reward.

Recent events have made it obvious that General Schwarzkopf, the commanding general of the coalition forces in the Gulf War, is a military genius. This is the man who came up with a plan for the liberation of Kuwait. Military campaigns are won by deception, and he deceived the Iraqi forces by feigning an amphibious landing, but instead, he accomplished the greatest ever movement of troops and supplies in history, and invaded Iraq from the west. He had a plan, he carried it out successfully, and he has been rewarded with honor. Now, however, comes the difficult work of cleaning up the mess in Kuwait — the carnage, the oil spills, the fires, the destruction.

This is what the Servant has done for man. He knew what needed to be achieved in order to accomplish salvation. By dying on the cross he cleaned up the wickedness of man, brought forgiveness for sin, paid the damages, and is creating a new heavens and new earth. As a result of his success, he will be exalted: “He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted.” Many scholars see in this a parallel to Jesus’ resurrection, ascension and exaltation. No one else, however great his record, has achieved the heights which the Servant has. God rewarded him by crowning him Lord of all. We see this elsewhere in this book. In his first vision of the Lord, in Isaiah 6, the prophet sees him, “high, exalted on the throne.” Here the prophet is saying that due to the work of the Son, the Son is everything that God himself is. Every honor that God has, the Servant also possesses. Here is how the apostle Peter, from his sermon in Acts, described this, “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth that which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:32–33). Thus we see described the exaltation of the Servant.

Next, Isaiah describes the impact which this exaltation will have on the nations.

B. The impact of his exaltation among the nations: Worshipped in amazement (52:14–15)

**Just as many were appalled at him,
So His appearance was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men.
Thus He will startle many nations,
Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;
For what had not been told them they will see,
And what they had not heard they will understand.**

To the astonishment of the nations this Servant, like Israel, suffers. When they behold the suffering of this once glorious man from Galilee, men will be absolutely horrified. They will be appalled to the point of being speechless by the appearance of this one. Jesus suffered to the point where he was beyond human recognition. In the words of Psalm 22, he said of himself, “I am a worm, and not a man.” Suffering that results in disfigurement sometimes causes the sufferer to be cut off from his fellow men. Jesus was flogged with 36

lashes; he was beaten with a reed; crowned with thorns that pierced his skull; mocked and spat upon. He was scarcely recognizable as he made his way to Golgotha. And this was the great stumbling block for Israel. How could Jesus be the beloved Messiah and suffer a fate that set him apart as under the curse of God?

The first step in understanding the work of Jesus on the cross is to experience in our being a deep sense of horror that leaves us speechless at the suffering he endured. In the television news accounts of the Gulf War we viewed the reporters’ pool reports of what the military wanted us to see. What was presented, of course, was not the human carnage, but what some have described as a Nintendo-type war—smart bombs hitting their targets with pinpoint accuracy, Stealth bombers on nighttime missions, etc. One reporter, however, spoke of other video he had seen of the Apache helicopters blowing dozens of Iraqi soldiers to pieces. We would find that horrifying; we wouldn’t want to look at it. Yet we will never fully appreciate the love of God until we look upon the face and the body of Jesus and be horrified at the sight of what we deserved to suffer for our sin — because what happened to him was intended for us. He loved us so much that he suffered the torture and torment which we justly deserved.

Just as the nations are appalled at the sufferings of the Servant, they will be startled and speechless at his exaltation: “He will startle many nations/Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him.” What was unheard of is comprehended, so that they will be speechless. News will go like wildfire into faraway places (nations) and into exalted circles (kings). This is the paradox: the nations (the *goyim*)—those who were not studying the prophetic promises, who had no preparation in the sacrificial literature, who had never heard of the Word—are the ones who freely give their hearts to Jesus when they hear his name. They learn the background afterwards, reversing everything. This is truly astonishing!

Verse 15b: “What had not been told them they will see.” In the Old Covenant, God first displayed his acts of salvation so that the first generation saw them with the eye. It was their responsibility to pass to the next generation what they saw, thus succeeding generations heard God’s acts of salvation with the ear. The psalmist says,

**Listen, O my people to my instruction;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
We will not conceal them from their children,
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.
(Ps 78:1–4)**

In the New Covenant, says Isaiah, “what had not been told them, they will see.” Perhaps this is a hint that by means of the Holy Spirit, one’s experience is so real that he becomes, in a sense, an eyewitness of God’s salvation, as if he were part of that first generation. We remember Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians, “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

How astonishing, that this man who was smitten, crushed under the wrath of God until he was utterly disfigured, should be given such approval and significance among the nations! And especially

so when the nations who worship him so readily had no previous knowledge of him!

Last year, I met an Iranian man on a train journey from Romania to Austria. He was escaping from his country, having suffered under the horrific war between Iraq and Iran. His brother had been killed by an Iraqi chemical weapon, and his family were speechless at the barbarity of his death. I shared the gospel with him, but he replied, "I don't want God in my life. He has allowed too much pain." We exchanged addresses, and later I sent him a copy of the New Testament. I told him about the pain which Jesus suffered, that he was "marred more than the sons of men," and this is what finally opened the door to Farzad. Each time he writes me now he quotes from the New Testament. Just last week he wrote and said, "I have found another Christian propagandist, just like you! He's taking me to church in Austria every week." Isn't that amazing? This man is a Muslim, with no Christian background whatsoever, and now he loves the New Testament. Doesn't that astonish you? It ought to. This is God's plan of salvation.

Thus the first paradox in our text is the fact that the nations who have not heard of the Servant, begin to worship Jesus immediately when they hear his name.

We find the second paradox in verses 1-3.

II. The rejection of the Servant by Israel (53:1-3)

A. Astonishment at the Servant's rejection by Israel (53:1)

Who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

If it is astonishing that those with no previous knowledge of the Servant can worship him, it is even more amazing that those to whom the promises were given, for the most part rejected him. What a paradox this is!

Next, Isaiah gives the reasons for Israel's unbelief. It is because the Servant seemingly did not have any credentials for the task.

B. The reasons for unbelief: Lack of credentials (53:2)

For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,

And like a root out of parched ground;

He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him,

Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

"Tender shoot," a suckling, or sapling, is a shoot which grows from a plant's stem or root. Vegetable gardeners know that as soon as the sucker shoot grows up in the tomato vine, it must be removed or it will sap the vitality of the plant. This is how the Jews regarded Jesus. When he presented himself to Israel, they charged that he was not part of the established lines of Judaism. He would not identify himself with the Essenes; he attacked the Pharisees, the Scribes, and the Sadducees; and he would not partake in the cause of the Zealots. He said the Kingdom of God was different from what all these groups had anticipated.

Secondly, the Servant was regarded by the Jews as "a root out of parched ground." The Servant seemed to have no promise for success. He was like a root out of parched ground. He was raised in Galilee, outside the main centers of Jewish life in Jerusalem. His parents were poor, lacking prestige. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. His disciples were a collection of outcasts from varying backgrounds. At his death he had no following, yet he claimed to be the Messiah.

Thirdly, the Servant had "no stately form or majesty." He had no outward beauty, unlike David, who was ruddy and handsome, or Joseph. In the OT, beauty symbolized God's blessing, but Jesus had "no appearance that we should be attracted to Him." At the announcement of his kingship in Jerusalem, he entered the city, riding on the foal of a donkey (Matt 21:1-11). He was not crowned not with gold, but with thorns. Instead of a scepter he wielded a broken reed (Matt 27:29). The Servant demonstrated nothing in his personal appearance that pointed toward his Messiahship.

Next, we have Israel's assessment of this man.

C. Israel's evaluation of the Servant (53:3)

He was despised and forsaken of men,

A man of sorrows, and (well) acquainted with grief;

And like one from whom men hide their face,

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

"Despised" is the key word here. The Servant's physical appearance led Israel to esteem him of no value. Having "esteemed" him—having put a lot of thought into their appraisal of him, in other words—they felt he was without significance. Rather, they despised him; they held him in contempt. The words here are reminiscent of the language used by the psalmists to describe the pain of rejection. In the psalms, however, these concepts are used only of a period in someone's life, while here in Isaiah they speak of one who was despised all throughout his life, even unto death. He was held in contempt, without kindness or courtesy all his days. In fact, the expression, "like one from whom men hide their face," in Israel referred to one suffering from leprosy. The Servant was treated like a leper, and subjected to great mental anguish. Today, we could say he was treated like a child who, through no fault of his own, suffers from AIDS, and is treated like an outcast, a leper, at school. This will give us an inkling of how Jesus was treated all his life. The astonishing thing, of course, is that he suffered all of this willingly for us. Surely one of the most poignant verses in the entire New Testament must be Jesus' words, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). He was welcome nowhere. His entire life was stamped with grief and sorrow. The psalmist wrote,

Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach;

Dishonor has covered my face.

I have become estranged from my brothers,

And an alien to my mother's sons. (Ps 69:7-8)

During our Men's Retreat, I taught a seminar on coping with grief. Two men who attended shared that their wives had committed suicide. One of them said that when he told his mother, she challenged him and said, "Don't cry. Grow up." So, as men are wont to do, he held everything inside. Isn't it true that your own family circle is very often the arena where you feel the most pain? Fathers, mothers and children have a way of hurting one another deeply at times. It is amazing that the Servant deliberately chose abuse, verbal abuse throughout his life, and intense physical, verbal and emotional abuse on the day of his death, so that he could bring healing to you and me. Truly, he was "a man of sorrows, and well acquainted with grief."

The second amazing paradox in God's plan of salvation, is that the Jews, the very people who possessed the law and prophets, to whom were given the promises, were the ones who esteemed the Messiah of no value, and they rejected him. He willingly endured abuse, for you and me. Why? you ask. The glorious note of this text, however, is

that God has not forgotten the Jews. He went to the nations because, just as we discover in our own family circles, it is hard for one's own flesh to discern spirit. The Jews were too close to Jesus to recognize Spirit, thus God dispensed the gift among the nations so that they might play the symphony of the love of Christ for man. Then God dispersed the Jews among the nations so that they might hear the divine symphony, so that they might see and believe that God has not rejected his people Israel.

When my father asked me that question, "If Jesus is the Messiah, why did the Jews reject him?" I could have responded, "Dad, it's just like you and me. I'm too close to you for you to see Jesus." It is amazing that God brought my father to the Bay Area on the only weekend when he could hear the symphony of love played by 500 men. By the time the Retreat began, I was already emotionally spent by what had already happened between us. Then I heard him singing the hymns, and I was amazed again. Many men spontaneously shared with him what the Lord meant to them. Although there were several seminars, he wanted to come to mine dealing with grief, and I shared about losing my children. Tiredness prevented him from attending Michael Green's group meeting that evening, during which Michael spoke on coming to faith in Christ. On Sunday morning, Michael delivered an altar call to everyone present at the Retreat, although I knew he was speaking directly to my father. He did not respond, however, and I felt discouraged. People began to file out to eat breakfast together, and I went to do an errand. While I was gone, Michael sat with my father and looked him right in the eyes. "When are you going to come to Christ?" he asked him. "I'm ready right now," my dad replied. When I returned to our rooms to take Michael and my father to the airport, my dad looked at me, with tears in his eyes (the first time in my life I had ever seen him cry). He stretched out his hand to me and said, "I have just accepted the Lord." Then we embraced. A friend brought the news to the hundreds of men just sitting down to breakfast. The entire crowd stood and cheered, many of them weeping with joy.

This is the kind of God whom we worship. He took one life, and multiplied it, so that when my father, at 81 years of age, came to the Bay Area to undergo life-saving surgery on his body, he heard a symphony of love sung by the many. God was all the while operating on his spirit, and he ended up coming to faith in the Servant.

In appreciation to the Lord, I have written the following poem:

My Father Remembered

O Father, you heard the cry of a boy,
Who first learned to weep over his father,
When he sat silent in the face of love,
You put his tears in a bottle,
And hid them.

Years later you called him to Mt. Moriah,
But he thought not in vain,
If the sweet scent would
Place the Son in the father's heart.

He descended the mountain
And clung to his father,
He looked into his face
But saw only silence.

The boy went into the desert to forget.
He sang in the cave of Adullam;
And there he found men,
The discontent and fatherless.

They grew strong together,
And became his mighty men of renown,
He loved them,
They would be his father.

In all their travels,
The son thanked his Father,
For such a wound,
That forged this new family.

But whenever he returned to Ziklag
Under the darkness of the night,
He heard his daughters cry, "Daddy,"
He knew he could not forget.

Then God remembered the boy,
And visited him with his father,
"Take now your father, the one whom you love,
And journey to land of Moriah."

They journeyed quietly up the mountain,
The father asked,
"Behold the fire and the wood,
But where is the lamb?"
The son was silent.

Then he raised his eyes,
And heard them singing,
All the men of renown.
With the lamb upon their shoulders.

Those thousand eyes,
Broke into the father's heart,
The father wept, took the lamb,
And became a son.

O Father, how great are your wonders,
You heard the cry of a boy,
And kept his tears in a bottle.
I shall never forget.

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Isaiah 53:4-9

Eleventh Message

Brian Morgan

March 17, 1991

SCOURGED, YET SILENT

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Modern society has, I feel, caused great damage by saying that people are not responsible for their actions. We have all but removed the word “sin” from our vocabulary. Today, we treat all kinds of wrong behavior as sickness. When we say that people are not responsible for their actions, however, we diminish their dignity as human beings. We remove the possibility of true guilt, which weighs heavily on the soul that is being dealt with. In his book, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*, Dr. Hobart Mowrer wrote, “Just so long as a person lives under the shadow of real, unacknowledged, and unexpiated guilt, he cannot... ‘accept himself’... He will continue to hate himself and to suffer the inevitable consequences of self-hatred.” The Scriptures teach that even the psychotic who has turned his back on God, still is aware in the depth of his heart of “the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death” (Rom 1:32). “Sin must be dealt with in the private courts of the human heart,” wrote Karl Menninger.

The truth of this came home painfully to me a few years ago. A member of my family married a young man who did not disclose to his bride that he was an alcoholic. He had abstained from alcohol for five years before the wedding, but on his honeymoon he began drinking again. She forgave him, but his shame was so great he could not accept her forgiveness. Then he went and had an adulterous affair with her best friend. She forgave him yet again, and offered to reconcile with him. Once more, however, his shame weighed so heavily on him he could not accept forgiveness. He died at 38, from cirrhosis of the liver. Why could he not accept forgiveness? The Scriptures declare that forgiveness cannot be offered until someone pays a price. This young man felt he had to punish himself with self-hatred, and he began that punishment by hating the one he loved most. Perhaps this explains much of the abuse we hear about today—it is really a form of self-self-inflicted punishment. Many people live in a deep well of shame. They spend much of their life hiding their shame, because it is too painful to expose. They feel there is no possibility of cleansing because the damage that has been done is too great.

Our text from Isaiah 53 is good news for anyone suffering from this syndrome. There is One who has already exposed your shame, and has already paid in full the damage caused by your sin. We are referring to the atonement, the pure, naked truth of the atonement, set out in the Holy of Holies of Scripture, chapter 53 of Isaiah. Last week, we saw that this text breaks down into five sections, each composed of three verses. We likened the scene to a stage, upon which God displays his Servant to the entire world, and in each section the spotlight shines on a different person onstage. And we discovered that each section unveils an amazing, astonishing paradox about salvation history. We saw revealed the complexity and the majesty of God, and the astonishing way in which he brings about salvation.

We could say that the soul must take a five-step journey in order to comprehend the depth of the love of Christ as it is expressed in his cross. In the first section, the spotlight was on God, who exalted

his Servant. The astonishing thing was that the Servant would have great success among nations who had no Old Testament background whatever. They were not looking for a Messiah; they knew nothing of the patriarchs or the prophets, yet when they even heard the name Jesus, they began to worship him. Later, they would come to know the background details. Isn't that astonishing? The nation of Israel, on the other hand, who had the background, the promises of the OT and the blood relationship with the Servant, rejected her Messiah. Don't you find that amazing?

Today, the spotlight shines on the naked truth of the atoning work of the Servant. I feel unworthy to share this good news. I would rather have one of our Romanian brothers, whom we ministered to over the last three years, preach this text, because they have suffered so much and have entered into the meaning of the cross.

I. The work of the Servant for Israel: He died my death! (53:4-6)

A. A vicarious atonement that was misunderstood (53:4)

**Surely our griefs He himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted. (NASB)**

Notice there the repetition of the pronouns “our,” and “He”: our griefs He himself bore; our sorrows He carried; He was pierced through for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our well-being fell upon Him, etc. Jesus suffered vicariously for us by carrying our sins and dying our death. He need not have died at all. The fact that he died is evidence that there is an atonement; he had to die for someone else because he was sinless.

The term “bore” is an allusion to the scapegoat which was banished on the Day of Atonement, foreshadowing Christ's atoning death. “Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgression in regard to all their sins... And the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land” (Lev 16:21-22). “Griefs” and “sorrows” refers to the consequences of our sins, that trail of mental and physical anguish that sin leaves behind in its path.

In a television interview a few nights ago, General Schwarzkopf described what he saw during his journey to meet the Iraqi commanders to arrange the cease-fire—the fireballs from the oil wells, the thick black smoke, the death and devastation. If there is a hell, he said, this is what it must look like. It will take years to clean up the mess. Isn't this what happens in our lives when we want to go our own way? We seek a divorce from our mates, or we enter into alcoholism or other abuses. It doesn't seem we are hurting anyone; we are just doing our own thing, we say. But the damage has been done, and the consequences of our sin will pass down among the generations. The good news of this passage, however, is that not only

has Jesus forgiven our sins, he also has paid the damages. One writer put it this way,

Jehovah lifted up his rod;
O Christ, it fell on Thee!
Thou was sore stricken of thy God;
There's not one stroke for me.

The Servant died our death for us. How astonishing!

Secondly, he died our death misunderstood and unappreciated. He died our death willingly, and yet the text says that the nation esteemed him, "Smitten of God, and afflicted." The reason, of course, was that Israel regarded him as being under the curse of God. They had the book of Deuteronomy as proof: "And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God)" (Deut 21:22-23). Even while he was hanging on the cross, dying for them, they mocked him, as Luke's gospel declares: "And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.' And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save Yourself!'" (Luke 23:35-37).

The cross has always been the great stumbling block for the Jews. In a debate between Trypho, a Jew, and Justin, a Christian philosopher, following the crushing of the Jewish revolt in Palestine in AD 135, Trypho said in response to Justin's teaching that the Messiah had to suffer, "It is quite clear that the Scriptures announce that Christ had to suffer... We know that he should suffer and be led as a sheep. But prove to us whether he must be crucified and die so disgracefully and so dishonorably the death accursed in the Law. For we cannot bring ourselves even to consider this." Israel disdained and despised him.

And so does the modern world, with its love of power, its arrogance and ambition. Here is how Friedrich Nietzsche, in 1895, regarded Christianity, as quoted in John R.W. Stott's book, *The Cross of Christ*:

Near the beginning of his book *The Anti-Christ* (1895) [Nietzsche] defines the good as 'the will to power', the bad as 'all that proceeds from weakness', and happiness as 'the feeling that power increases...', while 'what is more harmful than any vice' is 'active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak—Christianity'. Admiring Darwin's emphasis on the survival of the fittest, he despised all forms of weakness, and in their place dreamt of the emergence of a 'superman' and a 'daring ruling race'. To him 'depravity' meant 'decadence', and nothing was more decadent than Christianity which 'has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted'. Being 'the religion of *pity*', it 'preserves what is ripe for destruction' and so 'thwarts the law of evolution'. Nietzsche reserved his most bitter invective for 'the Christian conception of God' as 'God of the sick, God as spider, God as spirit', and for the Christian Messiah whom he dismissed contemptuously as the 'God on the Cross'.

This is the philosophy that our university students are exposed to throughout our land today: The will to power, to be your own god, have contempt on everything weak. Yet the astonishing thing is that in the cross of Christ, the very One for whom you are taught to have contempt was dying for you. What an amazing love, to give your life for someone, knowing that it will not be understood or ap-

preciated, to do a good deed only to be despised for it. Yet he did it for us anyway.

Furthermore, our inability to recognize the atonement did not make it ineffective. If you as a parent give a gift to your child, and it is not appreciated by him, that renders your gift ineffective. It is not so with the cross of Christ, however, as we will see.

B. A vicarious atonement that was effective (53:5)

**But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening of our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.**

The Servant was pierced through, crushed, chastened, and scourged, yet his atonement was not ineffective. Our guilt was heaped upon him, and his life to us. Isn't that astonishing? Abused people often take upon themselves the guilt of the one who abused them, but it is unheard of for an oppressor ever to take on the righteousness of his innocent victim. Yet this is exactly what happened on the cross. Jesus took our guilt, and in return we were given his righteousness. Sometimes today we hear people say, "I don't want forgiveness. I want to pay my own way." Well, here is the charge: "pierced through, crushed, chastened, scourged." As guilt bears down on the soul it has a crushing weight to it that rips apart the flesh, penetrates deep into the bowels and then pulverizes one into the dust. If you want to pay your own way, go ahead. That is the cost Jesus paid. This is how Scripture describes it: "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and had Him scourged" (John 19:1); "They pierced my hands and my feet" (Ps 22:16); "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water" (John 19:34).

And what did we, his oppressors, receive in return? "Well-being," is the answer given in this verse. *Shalom* is the term. Because full payment was made, all the well-being that was due to Jesus is gifted to you and me—reconciliation (we have been reconciled to God), justification (it is as if we had never sinned), adoption (as sons and daughters, having the same rights as Jesus himself), and glorification (we are made like Christ, without the presence of sin). Isn't that amazing? That is how effective the Servant's atonement was.

Thirdly, the sacrifice of the Servant resulted in

C. A vicarious atonement that was universal (53:6)

**All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused to fall upon Him,
The iniquity of us all.**

The need is universal, as this verse clearly states. The New Testament letters agree. In 1 Peter 2:25, for instance, the apostle wrote, "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls." And in Romans 3:23, Paul wrote, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

If the need was universal, however, the sacrifice of the Servant was adequate for all. To make the point clear, the Hebrew text begins and ends with the word "all." All are in need of Christ's sacrifice, and Christ's sacrifice was adequate for all. The writers of the New Testament will expand this to include not only *all* Israel, but also the *whole* world. "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

There we have the third paradox of the cross. Jesus died my death, and though his sacrifice was utterly unappreciated and despised, its very rejection ensured that its benefits became available to the whole world.

Two weeks ago, our Romanian brother, Vasile, the man who organized the many conferences we held in that country over the past few years, visited us here in PBC. He spoke to our men's Bible study and astounded the men by saying, "I came to say thanks. You did everything for us. You sent us brothers and sisters who loved us. You taught us, and gave us our hymnal, all in the midst of danger. We have one gift to give you, and that is our suffering. Perhaps that is Romania's gift to the nations." Having seen the spiritual benefits of the suffering they experienced, I have to say that their gift of suffering has more value than all of our gifts combined.

When God became flesh, the only gift he gave to his apostles was the cross, the gift of suffering. He did not give them money, position, status, or prestige. The value of this gift of suffering was so great, however, that when the apostles suffered, instead of cowering and complaining, they experienced joy and a sense of privilege to be considered worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. They were more than willing to be treated as the scum of the earth in order to impart this gift to others. Why is this gift so great? It is because no other gift so perfectly displays the love of God for man than this.

II. The execution of the Servant: I killed him! (53:7-9)

A. His trial (53:7)

**He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.**

We come now to the fourth paradox of the cross. Here we have juxtaposed the violence of the nation, and the silence of the Servant. He died a violent death, yet he said nothing. The account in Matthew's gospel tells the story of the cruelty and the violence he faced: "Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, 'Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?'" (Matt 26:67-68).

Yet he did not respond to his torturers and accusers. "He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street" (Isa 42:2). Matthew corroborates: "And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer... And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed" (Matt 27:12, 14). Why did Jesus not say anything in his defense? It was because his silence magnified the horror of his death and the depravity of his executioners. Furthermore, in his silence, Jesus was showing that he was saving his speech for the courts of heaven, when he would stand before the true Judge and Advocate. Silence in the face of unjust charges forces the accuser to think most carefully about his own depravity.

Now we come to the death of the Servant. Here again we see the violence and the blindness of the nation.

B. His death (53:8)

**By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living,
For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?**

No one present at the Servant's trial had enough insight to consider that he was dying for them. They scourged him, crowned his head with thorns, beat him, and forced him to carry his own cross to Golgotha. What violence they inflicted upon him! Yet, he says, "I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting" (Isa 50:6).

Referring to the blindness of the nation in his sermon in Acts 2, the apostle Peter said,

"You nailed (this Man) to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power... Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:23, 40)

Likewise, the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians,

but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor 2:7-8)

Finally, we come to the burial of the Servant.

C. His burial (53:9)

**His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.**

It is significant that Pilate, in order to free Jesus, offered to release to the crowd Barabbas, a convicted murderer and revolutionary. Barabbas, in a sense, epitomized what Israel had become—a nation of Zealots determined to introduce the Kingdom of God by force and violence. Jesus instead took his place and died the death of a wicked revolutionary. Pilate asked the mob,

"Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"... And they said, "Barabbas."... And they put up above His head the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. (Matt 27:17, 21, 37-38)

Immediately after the death of Jesus, however, God began to vindicate his Son. This is seen in the fact that no one, except those people who loved Jesus, was allowed to touch his body. God "kept all of his bones, none of them were broken." Though he died the death of a criminal, he was placed in a virgin tomb that was fit for a king. Here is Matthew's account of the burial:

And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered to be given over to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock." (Matt 27:57-60)

Archaeologists have since discovered only three tombs of the type which used a rolling stone to close the entrance, in all of Jerusalem. Two of them belonged to royalty, and the third to Joseph of Arimathea, which means that Jesus' burial was fit only for a king.

Truly, this second part of our text is an amazing self-disclosure. In the first part we find that Jesus died for us, revealing the love of God. But now alongside that is the revelation of the depravity of man. Not only did we not recognize him as King of kings and Lord of lords, we slaughtered him. Isn't that the height of wickedness? Don't ever make the mistake of saying that the Jews did it, or the Romans did it. The truth of the matter is, you and I did it. We were represented at the trial. We scourged him. We mocked him. We spat upon him. We slapped his face. We refused to recognize him. Here is how Charles Haddon Spurgeon described what happened, "We took our sins and drove them like nails through his hands and feet. We lifted him high up on the cross of our transgressions, and then we pierced his heart through with the spear of our unbelief." It is a travesty to say that the Jews were the Christ-killers. They were merely fleshing out the sin of Adam. You and I tortured and killed him just as surely as if we were there at his kangaroo court and his execution. The cross not only reveals the magnitude of God's love, it also reveals the horror of our own depravity. John Stott wrote,

Nothing reveals the gravity of sin like the the cross...It is impossible for us to face Christ's cross with integrity and not to feel ashamed of ourselves. Apathy, selfishness and complacency blossom everywhere in the world except at the cross. There these noxious weeds shrivel and die. They are seen for the tatty, poisonous things they are. For if there was no way by which the righteous God could righteously forgive our unrighteousness, except that he should bear it himself in Christ, it must be serious indeed. It is only when we see this that, stripped of our self-righteousness and self-satisfaction, we are ready to put our trust in Jesus Christ as the Saviour we urgently need.

The cross exposes each one of us in our shame and blackest sin. Earlier, I shared about a young man who could not bear the shame and guilt of his past once it was exposed to the light. When you are exposed, you have to choose between suicide or confession. But in the cross, Christ took the shame, and paid in full the penalty due your sin. Do not cower in shame and self-hatred any longer, but boldly expose your sins to the light, and in that radiant light which is the Son, they will evaporate like morning dew.

Contrast the Servant's meekness and submission with the cruel violence and repudiation of him by Israel. Is this not a necessary ingredient to salvation? Our sin must be fully displayed in its darkest hues that we might see by contrast the glory of God's grace in his Servant. It is then that the wicked heart is converted.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to your Cross I cling;
Naked, come to you for dress;
Helpless, look to you for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

Augustus Toplady

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Catalog No. 841

Isaiah 53:10-12

Twelfth Message

Brian Morgan

March 24, 1991

CRUSHED, YET SATISFIED

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Raising children is not an easy task today. It is hard to find models whom we can learn from. A number of years ago, I knew a Christian couple, Lynn and Della Berntson (Lynn was an elder at Peninsula Bible Church at the time), who seemed to me to be extremely godly and wise in this respect. When I asked Della to share with me the secret to their enviable family life, she replied, "It's simple. Lynn has always sought to impart two things to our children—he loves Jesus, and he loves them." Since that day, I have always tried to impart these same two things to my own children—I love the Lord, and I love them.

To help accomplish this, I have for several years kept journals for my daughters of delightful moments I have spent with each of them. When they go away to college, I intend to present each daughter the journals I have kept about her. I write about spontaneous, mundane, even simple things which we have done together. At the end of each paragraph, I write, "I love you. Dad." This is how God raises every one of his children. And this, in fact, is the theme of our text this morning. In the same way, the Father himself wants us to know these two truths—that he loves his Son, and he loves you. He loves you with the same love he has for his own Son.

Isaiah 53, the "Holy of Holies" of Scripture, as we have already seen, divides into five parts, each composed of three verses. In order to comprehend the magnitude of the love of Jesus as it is expressed in his cross, we could say that the soul must make this five-step journey. We have already likened the scene portrayed in this Servant Song to a stage setting, upon which God is displaying his Servant Jesus to the entire world. In each section the spotlight shines on a different person onstage. An amazing paradox concerning salvation history is recorded in each part. Here is revealed the complexity and the majesty of God, and the astonishing way in which he brings about salvation.

The first section revealed that although the nations had no knowledge about Jesus, still they fell down and worshiped him at the mere mention of his name. The second paradox was that when Jesus went to his own people, the Jews, those who had the priests and the prophets, they rejected him. Thirdly, we saw the paradox that the very One whom they rejected was actually dying for them. Then, fourth, the Servant was violently executed upon the cross, yet he said not a word. It is amazing to contemplate that not only did Jesus die for us, but that we killed him; it was our sin that nailed him to the tree.

Today we come to the final, most amazing paradox of all. The spotlight once more falls upon the Heavenly Father, whom we learn was the Director of this five-part drama. He now appears onstage to reveal that he himself was behind everything. He himself orchestrated all of these events because of his love for us. In this text, therefore, Isaiah 53:10-12, we will learn two truths: The Father loves his Son, and the Father loves us with the same intensity.

Here, then, we will discover that our loving Father orchestrated all of these astonishing paradoxes set out in this Servant Song because of the depth of his love for us.

I. The Servant will be personally rewarded by God (53:10)

But the LORD was pleased to crush him,
He made him sick,
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
(then) He will see His seed,
(then) He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

A. The reason for His reward: Submission to the Father

The atonement was not a new concept in salvation history; it was always part of God's eternal plan. This is what Peter declared in his sermon in Acts, when, referring to Jesus, he declared:

"This Man, delivered up by the *predetermined* plan and foreknowledge of God." (Acts 2:23)

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose *predestined* to occur." (Acts 4:27-28)

Backstage, behind the betrayal, the beating, the insults, the thorns, the nails, the three hours of darkness, the final thrust of the sword in his side; behind the apostles, the Romans, the Jews, Pilate, the Sanhedrin, Judas, and the devil, stood the loving Father God, directing everything. In these verses from our text which I have just read we are enabled, in a sense, to listen in on the intimate conversation between of the Father and the Son, speaking about us, before eternity. The Father is asking his Son, "Will you be a guilt offering?" What an amazing word! Among the offerings of Israel, the guilt offering, which covered the full damages due to sin, had added to it one-fifth more, to ensure that it was more than enough to make reparation (Lev 6:5). Thus, there is no question that the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins was full satisfaction in God's eyes.

Think for a moment of the cost of this to God the Father. He bankrupted himself in order to accomplish his plan. He had only one Son, yet he willingly gave him up. And the Son is eternally maimed because of the price which he paid. However, Scripture nowhere tells how much pain this caused the Father. Nowhere do we hear God saying to us, "Do you know what it cost me to buy your salvation?" We do, however, get an occasional clue as to the cost, such as the occasion when God directed Abraham, concerning Isaac, "Take now your son, your only son, the one whom you love, Isaac" (Gen 22:2). Behind these words we can sense the Father's heart being torn by the enormity of what he was about to ask Abraham to do. We get another glimpse of the cost to God when we hear David lamenting the

death of his wicked son, Absalom: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam 18:33). How much more profound and deep was the grief of the Father as he contemplated the death of his righteous, sinless, only Son!

Incredibly, however, our text says that God was “pleased,” he was “delighted” to crush his Servant. “Delight” means exited agitation, taking pleasure in something. This is what the words pleased, and good pleasure mean. Rather than telling us the cost, God instead tells of the delight he had in us! He will never tell us how it impoverished him; he will never tell us of the eternal wounds which pierced his heart because of what he had done. There are many things I could write about in my daughters’ journals. Children at times break your heart. Frequently, after you have given of yourself, they show no appreciation. But I don’t write about any of those times. Instead, I remember and write about how much I love them and delight in them. That’s all I want them to know. This is how my Heavenly Father raises me. He delights in me, and he is not going to bring up how much his love for me cost him.

Backstage, the Director is grieving for his Son, but when he comes to announce what he has done, no tears are visible. Rather, he says, “I delighted to do this for those I love.” Do you know that, if you are a believer, every day of your life, you delight God, you bring him pleasure? Every evening, when day is done, he will say of you, “I love you.”

B. The rewards of obedience

Because the Servant was willing to become a guilt offering he will personally be rewarded by the Father. This is how fathers demonstrate their love. It’s one thing to be told by someone that you did a good job, but when your father tells you this, it means so much more. Fathers, remember this. Your children may receive a thousand compliments, but if you withhold your appreciation and love for them, that is all they will remember. Here the Father rewards the Son with three things: A new family, a new (eternal) life, and a new position.

First, a new family: “He will see His seed.” This is an amazing word. Jesus never married, so he never had any seed. Yet, it says, because he was willing to become a guilt offering, “He will see his seed.” This is referring, of course, to spiritual seed. What it is saying is that in the new age, in the resurrection, the Servant will be given an abundance of spiritual seed. The next verse, in Isaiah 54, says,

Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child;
Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud,
You who have not travailed,
For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous
Than the sons of the married woman. (Isa 54:1)

The “desolate one” here is not Israel, but Jesus, who died barren. In the resurrection, his spiritual seed will be far more numerous and fertile than any physical seed of earthly Israel. God rewards his Servant by giving him a new family. This is the same seed which the apostle Paul is referring to in Galatians, where he says to Christians, “if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29).

Secondly, God will reward his Servant by giving him a new kind of life—eternal life—described in the OT as “length of days.” Preaching from this text on the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter declared, in Acts 2:24, 27-28,

“God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. For David says of Him,

“Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,
Nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.
Thou hast made known to Me the ways of Life;
Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.”

Thirdly, the Servant will be given a new position of honor: “And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.” Do you know what the Lord delights in? He delights in you! You are that “good pleasure.” The Son will enjoy enduring success as the executor of God’s good pleasure.

God personally rewards his Son to show how much he loves him. Notice that this does not happen in this life, but in the resurrection. But that’s not fair, someone says. The resurrection is that other age, when we will have no sense of history. On the contrary, the resurrection is as much the reality of history as today is history. It is in the resurrection that the promises of the prophets will find their fulfillment, when God answers the prayers of Jesus. We must expand our limited horizons. Those of you who are older know what I mean. At our elders meeting last week we anointed with oil a brother who was facing a potentially dangerous illness. We shared and prayed together in a time of wonderful fellowship. Later, one of our older elders said to this man, “I have been under a sentence of death for along time, but rather than limiting my horizons it has expanded them. I see the great future that lies before us, when everything will find its fulfillment. I’m living for that day.” This was how Jesus lived. If he had lived for this life alone, he would be without hope, for he died with nothing in his possession.

This, then, is the paradox. Behind the players in the the crucifixion, behind the Romans, the Jews, Pilate, and the devil, was a loving Father occupied in orchestrating the entire drama. Here in these verses the Father comes onstage, wipes away his tears, and says, “I delighted to do all of this for you. I will not tell you what it cost me. I only want you to know that I did this because I love you.”

Behind the cross was the loving Father suffering the agony of the death of his Son, because he delighted in you and me. He personally rewards the Son in the resurrection with a new, incorruptible family.

Next, Isaiah tells of the impact which this new family will have upon the Servant.

II. The servant will be satisfied: “He will see it” (53:11)

As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
Because He will bear their iniquities.

A. His anguish will be turned to joy

The word “anguish” here speaks of pain and toil that has no resulting fruit. Parents feel this kind of emotion at times with respect to their children. We remember that in Isaiah 49, Jesus evaluated his ministry on earth. He was supposed to embody everything that Israel was intended to be, yet when he faced his cross he was abandoned by everybody, even his own apostles. He cried out to his Father, “The result of my labor is chaos, a *tohu* [the Hebrew word from Gen.1:2 foe chaos], a vapor, without substance, without result.” But in the

resurrection, all that pain will be vindicated. We can take this to mean that the pain which we suffer in this life is not wasted. What it will do, rather, is increase our capacity for joy in heaven. As we have already seen, in Isaiah 54:1, the prophet amplifies this thought when in the age to come the “barren one” will produce an abundance of seed greater than could be produced from any physical union. Pain increases capacity for joy. When the Son sees his spiritual seed—you!—he will be satisfied.

In the resurrection, Christ will see his seed, drawn from every nation and tongue, and he will welcome them into his kingdom with great joy.

B. Because of the success of his work

Through skill and insight, Christ’s one act, his sacrificial death on the cross, reversed the terrible destruction caused by the sin of Adam. It is hard to comprehend this. One can pollute an entire river system by dumping poison chemicals at the source of the river. Death and destruction will follow this one act. But how many acts will it require to clean up the original destructive act? Yet this is what Jesus did. One act by this righteous Man—his crucifixion—justified the many, and repaid all the damages due to sin. Here is how the apostle Paul illustrates this, in Romans 5:18-19: “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”

No wonder Isaiah gives Jesus the title, “Wonderful Counselor.” The Servant had the insight necessary to accomplish what he set out to do. And when he had completed his work, he became an “Everlasting Father”—the head of a new spiritual seed.

The Son will be justified by the Father, and he will be satisfied when he sees this new creation.

Finally,

III. The Servant will be glorified (53:12)

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He himself bore the sins of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

A. He will be given the highest place of honor in heaven

Strength and greatness, the spoils of victory, are divided and shared among the victors, and the Servant is given the lion’s share. The fact that there are spoils indicates that a battle has been fought and won. The battle, of course, was fought over evil. Evil was dealt with at the cross. The power of the devil was broken; his captives set free; the world’s idols were smashed.

How was all of this accomplished?

B. Because of his willingness to be weak on earth

God’s method of destroying evil is quite different from man’s ways. In the Gulf War, the United States and its allies wrested Kuwait from the grip of an evil dictator. But our success was achieved at a terrible cost in lives lost and damage done to Iraq. Supplies of water and food, electricity, communications, almost everything the Iraqis need to run the country were destroyed. To conquer evil, we first

had to create havoc. Contrast this result with the way the Servant conquered evil: The mighty God became weak; without firing a shot, he defeated the evil one. This is why he is called the Prince of Peace. He gave his whole life (“He poured Himself to death”), to its fullest extent (“He was numbered with the transgressors”), yet he refused to seek vengeance, although he was identified with the worst of sinners and bore their sin. He even interceded for them, as Luke records: “But Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing’” (Luke 23:34). This prayer resounds through the generations, and God hears it. This is how the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace conquered evil—without firing a shot.

Strength and greatness, therefore, are gifts of grace. This illustration of dividing the spoils of war is applied by the apostles as the dispensing of spiritual gifts to the church of Jesus Christ (Eph 4:8-12). Therefore, Christians demonstrate that Christ is Lord in the outworking of these supernatural gifts to build his church.

The final grand paradox of God’s salvation is that God the Father was behind all the events of the trial, execution and death of his Son. In the cross, God expended his holy wrath against all sin. Because the Son freely submitted, and was willing to be misunderstood, he is given the place of honor above all.

What is required of so great a salvation?

As we have already seen, this text of Isaiah 53 became the basis for the apostle Peter’s first sermon. As he concluded his words, the Jews grasped the implications of what he had said. They recognized the depth of their sin and the depth of God’s grace, as Acts records:

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”...So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-38, 41)

In that hour, the words of the prophet Zechariah were fulfilled:

And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born...And the land will mourn, every family by itself. (Zech 12:10, 12)

Every family will weep as if they had lost their first born. I lost my first born, and I wept over that loss. But I must admit that I never wept in the same way over my sin. This is what God desires, however. If we truly come to see the shame of what we have done, every family will weep “by itself.” This Hebrew idiom conveys the thought that because one was wounded in the house of his friends, the resulting sense of shame felt by everyone made them go out and weep alone for the part they played in the shameful act. God desires this same spirit of repentance for every generation, for this text from Zechariah was written for us, too, not just the Jews. We also were there at the cross. We pierced him with our sins.

This becomes the repeated experience in the history of the church, as the following illustration shows. David Brainerd, a missionary to the American Indians from 1743-47, writes in his personal diary how God graced him to experience this kind of spirit among the Indians.

As he was preaching to the Indians, the Holy Spirit was poured out in tremendous power, converting even the worst sinners.

In the afternoon I preached to the Indians, their number was now about sixty-five persons—men, women and children. I discoursed upon Luke 14:16-23, and was favored with uncommon freedom in my discourse...afterwards the power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly “like a mighty rushing wind,” and with an astonishing energy bore down all before it.

I stood amazed at the influence, which seized the audience almost universally; and could compare it to nothing more aptly, than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent, or a swelling deluge, that with its insupportable weight and pressure bears down and sweeps before it whatever comes in its way. Almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together, and scarcely one was able to withstand the shock of this surprising operation.

Old men and women, who had been drunken wretches for many years, and some little children, not more than six or seven years of age, appeared in distress for their souls, as well as persons of middle age...There was almost universal praying and crying for mercy in every part of the house, and many out of doors; and numbers could neither go nor stand.

Their concern was so great, each one for himself, that none seemed to take any notice of those about him, but each prayed freely for himself. I am led to think they were, to their own apprehensions, as much retired as if they had been, individually by themselves, in the thickest desert; or I believe rather that they thought nothing about anything but themselves, and their own state, and so were every one praying apart, although all together.

It seemed to me that there was now an exact fulfillment of that prophecy (Zechariah 12:10, 11, 12); for there was now “a great mourning, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon”; and each seemed to “mourn apart.”¹

How great a love is this! The Father, who for us wounded and maimed his only Son, dries his tears before he addresses we who were responsible, saying, “I delight in you.”

With whom does the high and lofty God dwell? Isaiah asks. Here is the answer:

**But to this one I will look,
To him who is humble and contrite in spirit,
And who trembles at My word. (Isa 66:2b)**

The word “contrite” here is the same word translate “crushed” in Isaiah 53:5: “He was crushed for our iniquities.” When we come to truly understand that the Servant was “crushed for our iniquities,” the full weight of this realization will bear down upon us and crush our hearts in thankfulness and appreciation. This is what God wants from us. May that be our gift to him today.

1. Walter Searle, *David Brainerd's Personal Testimony, Selections from his Journal and Diary* (Grand Rapids: Baker).

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Catalog No. 842

Isaiah 52:7-12

13th Message

Brian Morgan

April 7, 1991

BEARERS OF GOOD NEWS

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

President Bush has declared April 5-7 as National Days of Thanksgiving for the allied victory over Iraq. At 3 p.m. EST today, church bells across the nation will peal to celebrate the liberation of Kuwait and the end of hostilities in the Persian Gulf. Quoting the President:

I ask that Americans gather in homes and places of worship to give thanks to almighty God for the liberation of Kuwait, for the blessings of peace and liberty, for our troops, our families and our nation... We prayed for a swift and decisive victory and for the safety of our troops. Clearly, the United States and our coalition partners have been blessed with both. We thank the Lord for His favor, and we are profoundly grateful for the relatively low number of allied casualties, a fact described by the commanding general as "miraculous." Nevertheless, because each and every human life is precious, we also remember and pray for all those who made the ultimate sacrifice in this conflict... and for the innocent men, women and children, wherever they may be, who have suffered as a result of the conflict in the Gulf.

At the end of our service today, I will lead us in prayer. I agree with the President: we have much to be thankful for. We should be thankful that we have a President who acknowledges the living God, and that we had godly leadership during the crisis. We are thankful for the quick victory, that our nation was unified and was willing to confront injustice. Personally, I thought that God would not only deal with the injustice of the Iraqi takeover of Kuwait, but that he would use the Gulf War to punish the United States for its wickedness. We, too, are fully deserving of the wrath of God. But, in a manifestation of God's grace, what we received was mercy, not wrath. I am reminded of the time when Israel was executing the sword on the Canaanites. God said to them, in effect, "Because you are using the sword, don't think you are more righteous than the Canaanites. You're just as wicked. I'm merely using you as a sword of justice" (Deut 9:5).

We do indeed have much to thank God for. Now we are celebrating the homecoming of our troops to a land awash in yellow ribbons. How different from the homecoming of our Vietnam veterans! Nightly we see the television footage of relatives waiting and watching for their loved ones to return in glory. We see their joyful weeping when at last they are reunited. We can read their eyes: we did it! We have broken the back of the oppressor.

But the elation is dampened, the celebration clouded by a number of facts: Saddam is still in power in Iraq. There is still much conflict and bloodshed in that country as a terrible civil war rages. The Shiite Muslims of the south have been ravaged; in the north, the Kurds are facing annihilation by the forces of Saddam Hussein. The devastation and destruction of both Iraq and Kuwait remind me of the Hebrew word *shamam*—meaning, devastation so horrifying it leaves the onlooker speechless. Even as we celebrate victory we are left to wonder if we will ever have a lasting, permanent peace, when

all conflict and hostilities will end, when nations at last will "turn their swords into plowshares, and never train for war" (Mic 4:3).

Our text this morning, Isaiah 52:7-12, speaks to this very issue. The prophet is writing to a war-torn remnant of Israel, exiled in Babylon (modern-day Iraq), her capital, Jerusalem, lying in ruins, like Bagdad today. To this remnant, therefore, comes this announcement which the Bible calls the gospel (those bearing good news). The New Testament word for gospel, for evangelism, originates right here in this text in Isaiah. It will be helpful to us to uncover the original meaning of this word. In the original context, the word pictures a runner racing home to the capital city to announce the good news of a great military victory. Here the runner's feet are declared to be a pleasant sight as the watchmen on the city wall wait eagerly for the news. And when the runner at last arrives at his destination he comes with good news of peace and well being: the God of Israel has defeated her enemies and has established his rule! The watchmen respond with a shout of unifying joy! This act of salvation and restoration of God's capital city is so glorious and majestic that all the nations witness in absolute awe what God does with Jerusalem. This then is the context of the gospel, the good news.

In our text we will meet the three players in this drama—the messenger, the watchmen, and the nations. Each one of us, depending on where we are spiritually, falls into one of these categories. But the main thrust of our text will answer the very important question: "What does it mean for us to be bearers of good news, to be witnesses for Christ?"

I. The Messenger of the good news: A runner from battle (52:7-12)

How lovely on the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who announces peace,
And brings good news of well-being,
Who announces salvation;
Saying to Zion, "Your God reigns!"
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices,
They shout joyfully together;
For they will see with their own eyes
When the LORD restores Zion
"Break forth, shout joyfully together,
You waste places of Jerusalem;
For the LORD has comforted His people,
He has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared His holy arm,
In the sight of all the nations,
That all the ends of the earth may see
The salvation of our God. (NASB)

There we have the first announcement in the Bible of the gospel, the good news.

A. The message of the good news: A military victory

What kind of news does this runner, this messenger bring from battle? The text speaks of a military victory, using military terminology about a battle fought and won, with the resultant eternal implications.

The word “salvation” refers to God’s people being delivered from enemy rule and being set free. “Peace” is not referring to an armed truce, but to God’s thorough, dramatic defeat of the enemy, with the result that peace is won. The prophet Nahum uses similar terms with reference to the gospel:

Behold, on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news,

Who announces peace!

Celebrate your feasts, O Judah;

Pay your vow.

For never again will the wicked one pass through you;

He is cut off completely. (Nah 1:15)

This is a description of true peace.

The prophet Micah uses even more graphic descriptions. Referring to the Messiah who will be born in Bethlehem, he says,

And this One will be our peace,

When he [Assyria] tramples on our citadels,

Then we will raise against them

Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.

And they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword,

The land of Nimrod at its entrances;

Thus He will deliver us from the Assyrian

When he attacks our land

And when he tramples our territory. (Mic 5:5-6)

Assyria, of course, is modern day Iraq. When Messiah comes, says Micah, he will raise up a multitude of leaders who will invade the capital cities of the enemy and defeat them on their own turf. This is true peace, not an armed truce.

This then is the message which the messenger brings: Salvation and peace, with its result, “Your God reigns.” God has established his rule; his sovereignty is fully established.

B. The fulfillment of the good news: The cross and the resurrection

When we turn to the pages of the New Testament, we find a whole array of messengers whose feet come bearing this good news. The angels, Jesus himself, the apostles, the writers of the NT, all see the fulfillment of this gospel in the work of Jesus the Messiah. I will quote a number of NT texts which use terms drawn from our text in Isaiah:

The angel: “Do not be afraid; for behold I bring you *good news* of great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

Mark: “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the *gospel* of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the *gospel*.’” (Mark 1:14-15)

Peter: “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the *good news of peace* through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” (Acts 10:36)

Paul: “And we preach to you the *good news* of the promise made to the fathers, that God has *fulfilled* this promise to us their children

in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘Thou art My son: Today I have begotten Thee.’” (Acts 13:33)

But, we must ask, what battle did Jesus fight and win that convinced these NT messengers to go forth and announce the good news of peace? The Romans (the new Assyrians), the enemies of Israel, were still in power! Jesus did not defeat them. Nor did he instruct the apostles to take up a sword, go to their capital city of Rome and defeat them. How then could the NT messengers convince Israel that Jesus was the Messiah?

After the resurrection, the apostles finally learned what the prophets were referring to. When they referred to spiritual realities which were yet future, they used historic terms of their own day, casting events in that light, using poetic metaphor. Thus, Rome was too small an enemy for Jesus to take on. This one soldier, Jesus, who had been abandoned by all others, gave himself up to the enemy, to be treated however his enemies wished. On that cross, he himself, not a coalition of allies, dealt with the real enemy, the real power behind the forces of evil—the devil, the world and the flesh. On the cross, Jesus “made a public spectacle of them,” exhibiting them as “the powerless powers” (Col 2:15) they now are. The apostles, who were eyewitnesses to what happened on the cross, were so moved by the defeat of the real enemy their whole lives changed. A flame of love so burned in their souls that everywhere they went they joyfully announced the good news, the gospel. Eventually, every one of them was martyred for telling the news. The tyrant had been defeated. The spiritual enemies of life had been routed. All that remained to be done was a mop-up operation to set free the captives.

By the way, have you noticed that the devil is back in the news lately? He made the cover of *Newsweek* magazine a few weeks ago. Recently, the television programs *Nightline* and *20/20* featured the devil. The latter program showed film of an actual exorcism, done very fairly, I feel, to demonstrate that there are such things as demons, powers that man in his own strength cannot control. Only the Savior can release us from such bondage.

C. Implications for modern-day messengers

What are the implications of this text for Christians today? First, I would say that believers need to rid themselves of the old caricature of what witnessing actually involves. Here is what I think is a typical caricature of witnessing: Witnesses are religious salesmen who venture forth from known and familiar territory to arenas unknown; and then, with great boldness and an utter lack of tact and sensitivity, impose their religious opinions upon people they’ve never met. Their method is answering questions no one is asking, using religious jargon no one understands. Their goal is to have people feel that their lifestyle is offensive to them, but this could be alleviated by their attending their church.

We desperately need to rid ourselves of this baggage. Witnesses are not salesmen who have memorized several steps which they are ready to recite to the first person who comes along. On the contrary, they are eyewitnesses to something that has touched them personally, something that has made them radically new people. Having been a spectator to the great acts of God they share their firsthand experiences of how God defeated the enemy in their lives. Their minds have been touched; their whole disposition changed. The problem with Christianity today is that not enough Christians have truly seen the cross. We haven’t looked at its power. We haven’t sat under its authority. That is why our lives have not changed. Thus our witnessing impresses no one. The late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones objected to

training methods in evangelism. He said, "I never trained a single convert how to approach others, but they did so...the best witnesses are the best Christians." The key to being a witness for Christ is to be an eyewitness who has experienced his wonderful delivering power.

Finally, witnessing should not be reserved for the professionals. All are called! The early church did not organize meetings and hire professional witnesses. They had an army of witnesses, all of whom were touched by the cross of Christ and were ready to share the good news that had so utterly changed their hearts and lives. In fact, as the book of Acts records, to make witnessing more effective in the early church, God locked up the professionals in prison. "Now that I am in prison," wrote Paul to the Philippians, "you are much bolder in your presentation of the gospel." In his Ephesian letter, in a direct quote of Isaiah 52:7, Paul says that part of every believer's suit of armor in waging spiritual warfare is "feet shod with the gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15). This implies that every believer should be poised as a messenger to proclaim the good news of the kingdom in any setting, even in the very strongholds of Satan. The good news empowers us to enter into enemy territory and defeat him on his own turf. Witnessing is not what you do, it is what you are. So put your shoes on!

To summarize, a witness is an eyewitness of God's salvation. He is so touched in mind and heart that he shoes his feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

II. The recipients of the good news: The Watchmen (52:8-9)

A. The joy of the watchmen: Witnessing the restoration of Jerusalem

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices,
They shout joyfully together;
For they will see with their own eyes
When the LORD restores Zion
Break forth, shout joyfully together,
You waste places of Jerusalem;
For the LORD has comforted His people,
He has redeemed Jerusalem.

In chapter 62, Isaiah has a further word about these watchmen:

On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen,
All day and all night they will never keep silent.
You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves;
And give Him no rest until he establishes
And makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Isa 62:6-7)

As the messenger comes into the city with the news of victory, God has appointed eager watchmen, a faithful remnant who never forsook the God of Israel or gave up hope. As they see the messenger coming they give a resounding shout of joy. Peace had been won, and in peacetime the ruined Jerusalem could be rebuilt. They would see with their own eyes the restoration of Zion. Jerusalem was to be "the desire of all nations." One of the rabbis wrote: "The world is like unto an eye. The ocean surrounding the world is the white of the eye; its black is the world itself; the pupil is Jerusalem; but the image within the pupil is the sanctuary."

B. The watchmen in the NT rejoice over the new Jerusalem

Likewise, when we turn to the New Testament, the messengers of the good news are greeted by watchmen who had been prepared by God. Simeon was worshiping in the temple when the baby Jesus was brought for dedication. He is described by Luke (2:25-35)

as the first watchman, who was "righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel." Note how closely Simeon's prayer mirrors Isaiah 52:8:

**"Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bond-servant depart
In peace, according to Thy word;
For my eyes have seen Thy salvation,
Which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,
A light of revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Thy people Israel."** (Luke 2:29-32)

Luke then proceeds to tell us about another watchman, Anna, a prophetess. She approached to see Jesus and praise God just after Simeon's prayer.

Watchmen represent all who long for salvation and eagerly keep watching and waiting for the Lord to fulfill his word. Throughout the Scriptures we find that God always prepares a remnant who will hear the word of the messenger. When they meet, there is always a shout of joy, for God is restoring Jerusalem.

The Jews, however, would question whether this good news was true. If Jesus was the Messiah, and he had destroyed the enemies of Israel and restored Jerusalem, how was it that the Romans still controlled the city, and they sacked and utterly destroyed it in AD 70. We can see the fulfillment of the restoration of Jerusalem beginning with the resurrection of Christ. Jesus did not go to Rome to defeat the enemy; he descended into hell to defeat the real enemy. At Easter, then, the first shout of victory is given as the foundation stone of a new temple in a new and greater Zion is laid. This is a Jerusalem "made without hands, eternal in the heavens, descending from heaven." Jesus himself, raised from the dead, is the Cornerstone of that new city; its foundation is made up of the apostles and prophets; and living stones, believers in Christ, are crafted and fitted into the building of the city. These shouts of joy that are made whenever a watchman enters the city will continue until that great day when the New Jerusalem is at last complete and it descends from heaven with a shout (Matt 25:6; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10)! Hebrews reminds us, "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb 12:22).

C. Implications for modern-day messengers

Witnessing is supernaturally governed and guided. We must not destroy our witness by turning it over to marketing experts. The fact that the first witnesses were angels ought to indicate that all witnessing is the activity of angels putting together divine encounters. God prepares the watchmen. We don't have to go door to door; we go to hearts that are already prepared. This is what we find all through the gospels and the book of Acts. Jesus didn't go from house to house in Samaria. He introduced himself to a woman whom God had prepared; then she in turn shared with others. Philip was directed by an angel to go to Gaza, a ruined desert city. There, an Ethiopian eunuch, an official in the court of Queen Candace, was awaiting the evangelist in a divine encounter. He had come to Jerusalem looking for salvation, but had found nothing. Returning home in his chariot, he stopped in Gaza, and there was reading Isaiah 53, seeking to understand it, when along came Philip to explain the text to him (Acts 8). In the desert, not in Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem came to earth. This man became the first African convert; then the angel whisked Philip away as if to say Philip's job was done and that the Spirit would be in charge of the follow-up. How encouraging!

All witnessing is like this—a series of divine encounters. When you go to work tomorrow, be aware that angels go with you. Maybe this coming week you will meet a watchman, longing for salvation, in a divine encounter.

Once the runner reaches the capital city, a shout of resounding joy comes forth from those who have long waited for God's salvation. The messenger is the bearer of the good news; the recipients are the watchmen waiting on the walls.

And third, there is an audience to everything that is going on.

III. The audience who witness the good news: The nations (57:10)

The LORD has bared His holy arm,
In the sight of all the nations,
That all the ends of the earth may see
The salvation of our God.

A. The majesty of salvation powerfully displayed: Like the first Exodus

The picture being drawn here portrays that the salvation of the liberated city will become public knowledge, even to the ends of the earth. All the nations will see the salvation of God's people, and they will have to make a decision regarding it. The figure of the Lord's arm is an anthropomorphism which depicts his majestic power in deliverance. "By throwing back His encumbering royal robe the Lord made bare his arm to fight majestically" (Bruce Waltke). Just as the Lord displayed this majestic power in the Exodus (Exod 6:6; 15:6; Deut 4:34; Ps 77:15), so will his power will be seen in all its majesty when he brings about our final redemption in Christ. The book of Colossians says, "and He has taken it [the certificate of debt] out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col. 2:14-15).

B. The majesty of salvation universally acknowledged: Greater than the first Exodus

Throughout church history, God sets the stage in restoring this beautiful city. He uses the nations as the audience who behold the beauty of Zion, and they stand in awe. On the day of Pentecost, according to Acts, "there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). We have already spoken of the Ethiopian eunuch's encounter with Philip. Then, in Acts 13:46-48, the Gentiles upon hearing the good news of salvation, "began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Paul foretells the final day when all the nations will recognize that salvation comes through Christ, and that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father" (Phil 2:10-11).

Finally, when the new Jerusalem has descended and all things are made new, the nations will take their place as citizens of the celestial city: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...and the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it" (Rev 21:1, 24).

Because the majesty of this great news shall be universally acknowledged, the implication is clear: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19-20).

C. Implications for modern-day messengers

Believers should not make the mistake of thinking they must set the stage for witnessing. God is the one responsible for that. When we set the stage, and invite the audience, hoping for someone to come to Christ, we get so caught up in the planning and marketing that there is no beauty in Zion to attract anyone.

I made that mistake when I was college pastor. A liberal pastor had addressed a certain dorm on campus, and had great success. Hearing this, I arranged with a friend to be invited to the same dorm to address the students on apostolic Christianity. On the evening of my talk, as I was ascending the stairs to the dorm, fully three-quarters of the students were coming down the steps, all of them dressed in black. They walked in procession over a hill, and stopped by the side of a small lake on campus. "What's going on?" I asked my friend. "My roommate's goldfish died," he told me, "and he's having a funeral for it." My gospel talk had been upstaged by a dead goldfish!

I did not learn my lesson, however. A year later, I asked another Christian friend, who was having a wonderful ministry with Jews on campus, to invite me to speak on the topic, "Christianity is Jewish." I was setting the stage once more, hoping to lead people to Christ. On the night of the talk, however, no one came. But God in his grace gave me another chance. The following year I was meeting each week with a rabbi on campus to read the Hebrew Bible. He told me he was planning an evening around the topic, "The Five Views of Jesus as Messiah," and he asked to me share my views. On the evening of my talk, 300 people were present. The implication is clear: don't set your own stage! Allow God to do that for you.

A careful look at this text reveals what is our role and what is God's role in witnessing. First, God's role:

God wins the battle;
God prepares the watchman;
God rebuilds the city;
God sets the stage for the nations behold its majesty.

What is our role?

We see;
we run;
we announce;
we shout;
we stand in awe.

At noon today, stop and give thanks, for God has graced us. Then, look beyond the kingdoms of men, to the heavenly kingdom, where the real battle was fought and won by that one Soldier. He is the one who made everlasting peace. One day, a new Jerusalem will descend from heavens and all the nations will walk by its light. Then, men will turn their swords into plowshares, and never again will they train for war. Amen.

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Isaiah 54:1-3

14th Message

Brian Morgan

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THE BIRTH OF A NEW AGE: A NEW PROSPERITY

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

Some of the television preachers—televangelists, as they are called—say that it is God's will that Christians be rich. If you send them your money, they infer, God will see to it that you become wealthy. This is known as the gospel of prosperity. Many of them are easy to write off since their greed is so blatant. But how do you respond to others who quote legitimate promises from the Old Covenant to back up their claims that the believer in Christ today is promised prosperity? Take for example, the words of Moses from the book of Deuteronomy:

"Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey your God...all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you...the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow." (Deut 28: 1, 11-12)

Now these are legitimate promises of blessing from the Old Covenant. The question becomes for us, "Didn't Christ, in making a New Covenant, fulfill these Old Covenant promises and give us much more besides?" Believing that life ought to be as Moses described can often lead young Christians into shattered dreams when they experience real life. They are surprised and confused when, for instance, they suddenly find themselves unemployed. In our Wednesday morning men's Bible study we are finding that the list of unemployed men is growing weekly. Some young couples anxious to begin having children are discovering that they are barren. Instead of earthly blessings pouring upon them, the heavens seem to be raining a curse. Many young Christians become disillusioned, therefore, when their dreams for themselves are unrealized. They can readily identify with the well known song, "I Dreamed A Dream," from the musical version of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*:

I dreamed a dream in time gone by,
When hope was high
And life worth living.
I dreamed that love would never die,
I dreamed that God would be forgiving.
Then I was young and unafraid,
And dreams were made and used
And wasted.
There was no ransom to be paid,
No song unsung,
No wine untasted.
But the tigers come at night,
With their voices soft as thunder.
As they tear your hope apart,
As they turn your dream to shame.

I had a dream my life would be
So different from this hell I'm living,
So different now from what it seemed.
Now life has killed
The dream I dreamed.

When Emily and I first got married, we did not have any extravagant dreams for the future, but we lived the carefree life of a young married couple, looking forward to what lay ahead for us. But suddenly it all came crashing down when we lost our firstborn son, and then a year later, our little girl, Jessica. Reflecting on those painful times the other day, Emily confessed to me that she felt something had died within her then. Our carefree, happy-go-lucky spirit toward life was over.

What then can the believer in Jesus Christ expect in life? What happened to the promises of prosperity in the Old Covenant? Is their prosperity to be found for the believer today?

These questions are the theme of Isaiah 54-55. Now that the Servant, "who combined in his person all the people of Israel, the prophet and prophetic institution, and the Messiah in His role as Servant"¹ has finished his work of atonement (Isa 52:12-53:12), the prophet announces that a New Age will be born! It begins with a shout of joy and acclamation as Isaiah depicts the glory of the Messianic Age of a new prosperity, a new covenant, a new temple, a new glory, etc. Each of these details is described in terms of the glory of the Old Covenant and then contrasted with the Old as being so much better. "For indeed, what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it" (2 Cor 3:10).

As to when these things would be fulfilled, the Jews anticipated they would occur immediately following the coming of the Messiah. They saw life in a two-age scheme—"this age," followed immediately by "the age to come." Under the Lord's teaching, however, the apostles saw that these promises were indeed fulfilled at the coming of Christ (as the book of Acts indicates), but they were not fully consummated. That is, the two ages overlapped, so that "the world to come" was realized now in principle and spiritually applied in the church, but it still awaits its final consummation at the second coming of Christ. All of this quality of life in the age to come, however, is a present reality in the believer's life now, as it is imparted by the Holy Spirit. This is what eternal life is (literally "the life of the ages")—living the life of the age to come, the age which the prophets wrote about—now, in the midst of this decaying world. The new age is being birthed in the midst of the old, but at the second coming of Christ it will descend from heaven in all its grandeur and glory.

In our text this morning we will look at two of the great promises which God made to Abraham—that he would inherit a seed, and that he would inherit a land for that seed. God told the patriarch that though his body was as good as dead, and Sarah's womb was barren, she would yet have a seed who would outnumber the stars of the heavens or the sand of the sea, and they would possess a holy

land. This is the first thing Isaiah refers to in chapter 54. Christ fulfilled and transcended God's promises. Christians are given a new seed and a new land.

I. A new seed: From barrenness to fruitfulness (54:1)

**"Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child,
Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have
not travailed,**

**For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous,
Than the sons of the married woman," says the LORD.**

A. Zion's present pain of barrenness intensified three times

Zion is depicted as a barren woman with no children, and her resultant pain is contrasted with the joy she will experience in the future. Notice that her barrenness is described with three different terms, and that each term indicates an intensification of the pain.

First, Zion is described as "barren." Like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Hannah, her womb was closed; she was unable to have children. Second, Zion is described as, "You who have not travailed." She had never writhed in labor pains, or never miscarried. She had never even started the hormonal process of nurturing or mothering. And third, she was "desolate." The only woman who is thus described in the OT is Tamar, David's daughter. She was raped by her brother Ammon, and afterwards, it says, he hated her with a greater hatred than the lust he had had for her, and he threw her out of his presence. 2 Samuel 13:20 says of her, "So Tamar remained and was desolate in her brother Absalom's house." She had no future possibility of marrying or having children because she had been violated and defiled.

The wonderful OT story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, captures the intensity of this pain which Zion was suffering. Hannah too was barren at one time, and everything about her life was focused on the pain resulting from her barrenness. The yearly feasts which she attended with her husband only served to intensify the pain which she felt. She was silent at the feast because she felt no joy; and she could not eat, which meant she had no fellowship. Her husband, in an effort to console her, made matters worse by saying, with typical male insensitivity, "Am I not better than ten sons?" The year we lost our first child, each of the younger pastors on the staff had healthy babies, and this only served to intensify our grief. Many couples in our own church are struggling with infertility. Statistics indicate today that almost 20% of American couples have problems in this area.

Yet, Isaiah speaks to this one who was barren, this one who has never writhed in labor, this desolate one, saying, "Shout for joy." Who is this "barren one"? When Isaiah wrote these words, there was a remnant of physical seed in Israel, but at the time of Jesus' birth, Israel had several million children born according to the flesh. But there was One born who represented Israel in his body. He never married, never had any physical seed, and he died on a tree, forsaken, barren and desolate. He is the "barren one" in this context, the Servant of Isaiah 53, the Lord Jesus himself. "He shall see His seed," says Isaiah 53:10—although he never had any children. The cross not only made salvation possible, but it also secured salvation for his seed. In the new age, everything is radically new and different because of the resurrection of Jesus.

B. Zion's new joy intensified three times

"Shout for joy,...break forth into joyful shouting,...cry aloud!"
Each level of Zion's pain is now matched with joy.

C. The reasons for her joy

The reasons for her joy are twofold. First, this new seed will be supernatural in origin; it will not be born according to the flesh. Israel is pictured like Sarah of old—barren and childless—but she will be blessed with seed born supernaturally by the Spirit. Now every child will be like an Isaac, who was born from a dead womb—children born of promise, not of flesh. John wrote, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God...who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). To inaugurate the new age, God chose Elizabeth, who was barren, and Mary, a virgin, to demonstrate that the new seed which was coming would be supernatural in origin. Paul was referring to all of us when he wrote, "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together in Christ" (Eph 2:5). The apostle quotes our text in Galatians 4: "The Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, 'Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more the children of the desolate, than of the one who has a husband.' And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise" (Gal 4:26-28). Paul is saying that the present Israel, born according to the flesh, are really descendants of Ishmael; they are not true Israelites. But Gentiles and Jews who trust Jesus Christ are like Isaac, born according to promise, born in Christ raised from the dead.

And secondly, says Isaiah, this new seed will outnumber Israel of old. In the upper room, Jesus blessed his twelve apostles. But he did not do this with the intention that they have many children according to the flesh. When the gift of the Spirit was given without measure, the blessing of fertility was far greater for the spiritual seed than for the physical seed of ancient Israel. Peter discovered this when he preached on the day of Pentecost as he witnessed the birth of 3000 believers in one day! A nation of twelve patriarchal heads became 3000 after they heard him speak. A short time later, 5000 more came to Christ. This is God's wondrous grace of the New Covenant. In Romania we witnessed this same truth. From Lord's Army, a denomination persecuted almost to extinction, one man, Traian Dorz, survived. Yet God produced from that one man a movement of some 300,000 to 500,000 believers in one generation. We think of Mother Teresa. She never married, and yet she has tens of thousands of children in the New Covenant.

This is why Zion's joy is intensified threefold. When Israel enjoys this new fertility, she will burst forth into joyful song like Hannah of old (1 Sam 2:1-10) with joy inexpressible, and full of glory. Pain is not only the gateway to joy, it increases capacity for joy. No wonder John wrote, "Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that child has been born into the world" (John 16:21).

In order to enter into true prosperity in this age, God wounds us and breaks us in some arena of earthly productivity. This in turn produces a spiritual productivity whose joy is unparalleled, a joy that transcends this age. This is why the early Christians not only endured suffering, they rejoiced in it because it was the gateway to heaven.

Thus we have seen the new seed, proceeding from barrenness to fruitfulness, in the new age. And this new seed needs a new land, which we discover in the next verses.

II. A new land: Boundless and free! (54:2-3)

"Enlarge the place of your tent;

**Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not;
Lengthen your cords,
And strengthen your pegs.
For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
And your seed will possess nations,
And they will resettle desolate cities.”**

A. The command to enlarge your vision

Here the metaphor changes from a mother who has just given birth, to a homemaker creating a nest for her new family. One of the most painful experiences Emily and I had was putting the baby furniture away after our child died. The second time we were faced with this task I found I could hardly do it. I told Emily we should leave it just as it was. I began to sense that God had another program for us, and that he would do something we were not expecting. Two weeks later we adopted our daughter Rebecca, a marvelous new gift, a new seed we had not counted on. This experience is so much like life in the new age. This new nation will be so fertile, says our text, she is told to expand her dwellings beyond measure, to not spare any effort, material or expense. Jerusalem, once desolate (Lam 1:1-5), will be revitalized and teeming with people. Thus, she is commanded to make preparation to expand her dwelling beyond her wildest dreams. This is what our own Ethel Smith does with her Eastern European refugee ministry. She keeps calling us up, telling us that new people, new families, new children are arriving, and she needs furniture, clothing, food and housing for this new seed. When I was college pastor, I asked my friends, Lee and Colette Cort, if I could use their home on the Stanford campus for our Tuesday evening Bible study and fellowship time. They not only obliged, but they got a contractor to enlarge their living room and kitchen to meet the needs of the 80 students who came every week to study together. Each week, two students cooked dinner in their kitchen for this group, and then we sang together and studied the Scriptures. This couple truly “enlarged the place of their tent, and stretched out the curtains of their dwellings, sparing not,” so they could accommodate these children of the new age.

We need this exhortation today. We tend to look only to our own physical seed, seeking to arrange everything just right for them. But when we do this, we miss out on so many things that are ours to richly enjoy in this new age. May God help us to broaden our vision!

B. The reasons to enlarge

**“For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
And your seed will possess nations,
And they will resettle desolate cities.”**

Here, Isaiah is expanding on the Old Covenant promise which was given to Jacob. The old holy land had boundaries, but the new inheritance will know no geographical limits. When the holy land was first given, the whole earth was the Lord's, but only Israel was holy. When Israel went into her inheritance, she was told, “You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful; do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even as a little as a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.” The messengers whom Moses sent to the king of Edom said, “Please let us pass through your land. We shall not pass through field or through vineyard; we shall not even drink water from a well. We shall go along the King's highway, not turning to the right or left, until we pass through your territory” (Num 20:17). But in the new age,

because of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, something happened to change all this. Jesus did not merely defeat some local tyrant; he dealt with the ultimate enemies, the devil, the world, and the flesh. This is why he could say to his apostles and disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20). Now there is endless, boundless freedom, because the enemy behind the nations has been dealt with.

Thus there is no room for timidity. Christians can go anywhere, live anywhere, taking the message of the gospel of peace with them (just make sure you go in two's!). The whole earth is his possession and one day it will all be holy. Go to the right, go to the left. Don't fear entering any office, any workplace, any neighborhood, any country. The cross not only made possible the salvation of the saints, it also secured it. The apostles preached with boldness, and they suffered, but when they were finished preaching, Luke wrote, “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). This is why Christians have the freedom to go anywhere God calls them to—to liberate those whom he has chosen, those who are waiting for the good news of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Don't be timid! Don't be tempted to build new Christian monasteries and ghettos. Get out there and liberate the captives!

The second reason Israel was to enlarge her vision was that the vision of restoration would be much better than she ever dreamed—the new inheritance will include all nations as well as Israel. The Jews had a dream that one day God would restore things to how they were in the days of David, Solomon, Joshua, and Moses. Like many people today, they were nostalgic for the old days. The old generation wanted to go back, but in the new age Israel would not only resettle the cities left desolate by her exile (Isa 1:7), she would expand the kingdom to include all the Gentile nations. So it was not only restoration, but new, transcendent reunification!

Don't ever go backwards in your spiritual life; this is what kills spiritual growth. God is always doing something new! The book of Acts demonstrates how hard it was for the apostles to grasp this truth. Peter refused to go to the home of Cornelius, a tanner, an unclean occupation. God had to show the apostle a vision to get him to do what he wanted done, which was to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. The apostle Paul was one of the few who clearly grasped the vision of this new Zion, yet he was often unappreciated for his efforts. One of the most painful scenes in the book of Acts is when he brought to Jerusalem with him the representatives of the Gentile churches—the real temple made of living stones to visit the old temple (a mere shadow of the new!). Rather than rejoicing in this new work of God, the Jews rioted because a rumor spread that the presence of these Gentiles within the temple precincts had defiled the temple. But in the new age they were the new temple! Paul ended up in prison, unappreciated for what he was trying to convey to the Jews.

How often do we try and hold on to the past and miss the new thing God is doing? We must enlarge our vision. It's only going to get better until the day you die. God's ways of working are new and fresh every day.

This is the new seed, supernaturally born, as numerous as the stars. And the new land is boundless and free; it knows no limits.

III. Implications to those hungering for true prosperity

A. Expect to die

We must remember that this text was addressed to the barren one, the childless, desolate one. Earthly barrenness, therefore, is the doorway to spiritual productivity. Thus, we must expect to die. Don't fight it. Don't hang on to what is earthly. Let go. Because this is the norm, we must learn to be a weeping community. Weep, therefore, knowing that will open the door to heaven. Suffering is what opens the door to this new, transcendent joy. Without it there is no joy.

B. Enlarge your vision

Don't be so bound up with your vision of your own physical family. Remember the words of Jesus to his apostles, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). God has blessed us with three girls, but as a softball coach, I have 13 more, and I'm praying for each one of them. This week we have a young French girl coming to live with us for three weeks, and later this year one of our girls will go to France for three weeks. Let us enlarge our vision.

C. Rejoice

Pain not only opens door to heavenly affections, it increases our capacity one hundred fold. In the one area where I was most wounded—my longing for a son—I recently received one: my own father, who came to Christ at our men's retreat earlier this year. In appreciation, I wrote a poem about his conversion, and I sent it to a friend in far away Romania. For the past two weeks, I have been flooded with letters from that country. They have translated my poem, and they are singing its praises across the seas. I do not have the words to adequately express the joy I have experienced through these letters, but, in closing, let me read to you one which I received just a few days ago:

Dear Brian,

When we open the wings of hearts that miss you, we have begun a trip of love from the Eternal One. This road across the ocean is so very known to our prayers.

From this date a joy of oceanic dimensions soars in a unique flight to Peninsula Bible Church where those eyes, blue like the skies, overflowed with so many holy tears of joy over the salvation of your father.

We give glory to the God of patience for this wonderful victory. Oh, if only we had been there to share in this inestimable joy.

There is no one as wonderful as our Lord who causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him. Truly we are witnesses of abundant miracles.

Don't forget, holy brothers, that we carry you in our unceasing prayers because we cannot do otherwise. We will not forget your warm love which made you leave your pleasant surroundings there to spend your time and money, to risk so much and to accept our modest conditions here.

Lord, we don't have other possibilities, but we ask You, repay the incomparable love from the warm heart of our brothers which consistently remains with us. In their limpid eyes I saw the love of Christ.

With a burning desire we await the moment when we shall once again be together. Until then, don't forget that we often visit you through our prayers. In your secret moments only listen attentively, and you will hear us.

Remembering all of you for all that you have done for us, as much spiritual as material, we embrace you with love,

Violeta and Ioatan

P.S. Until we see each other again, if all goes well, we will receive another child from the Lord. We would like very much for her to be a girl.

Is there prosperity for the believer today? Yes indeed, a transcendent prosperity the world knows nothing of. Rejoice, O barren one. In this new age God will make you a mother whose children are so numerous they cannot be counted, and a homemaker whose nest knows no limits. Amen.

1. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward An Old Testament Theology*.

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Isaiah 54:4-10

15th Message

Brian Morgan

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A NEW COVENANT, A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

A good friend of mine recently received word that his older brother, whom he loves very much, was leaving his wife and children. Later the same week he learned that his sister's husband has been unfaithful to her for more than 15 years. Two broken relationships in the span of one week. The covenant between his sister and her husband was actually no covenant at all. It had the appearance of faithfulness, but deep down one party was feeding on a secret idol. It began with a look, and then a taste, which turned into a meal, and before long the idol became a voracious beast. Many Christians who find themselves in similar circumstances discover that, rather than their feeding their idols, their secret idols begin feeding on them. Soon, matters are out of control. They give themselves over to compulsive behavior that seems to have no limits. At last, however, everything is made public. The hidden secrets of their hearts are exposed to shame, humiliation and disgrace that has an impact to the third and fourth generations.

Is there any hope for someone who sinks into that condition? Is it possible to restore a covenant once it has been broken? Our text from Isaiah 54 this morning resounds with good news. Earlier, in chapter 53, the prophet wrote about the suffering Servant who would undergo a humiliating death on a tree, but who came back to life in a glorious resurrection. Then in chapter 54, Isaiah revealed that through his resurrection the Servant gave birth to a whole new age, one which not only fulfilled the Old Covenant, but which was so much greater that the old, which once had glory, seemed to have no glory by comparison (2 Cor 3:10). Then the prophet went on to take every aspect of the Old Covenant—the promise of a seed, a land, a love relationship between Israel and her God, a city, an education, etc.—and compared them with the far more glorious and transcendent promises of the New Covenant.

Last week, we saw that the promises of the seed and the land are fulfilled in Christ. Today, we will look at the marriage covenant between God and Israel. Are there people here this morning whose Christian lives are a sham of hypocrisy and fakery? Are you tired of turning over a new leaf, only to return to your shame again and again? Are you living with guilt and failure because of your compulsive behavior? Take heart. This is your text. It is this beautifully poetic passage, a marriage is reenacted. At Mt. Sinai, God and Israel entered into a marriage agreement. God liberated Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and in response, the nation was to give him her whole heart. But Israel was an unfaithful spouse. The faithful Husband was forced to give his wife a bill of divorce and send her out into the wilderness because of her long history of adultery and prostitution. There she was stripped naked and abused by her lovers. Even though God was the wronged party in this marriage, however, he still has deep compassion for her despite her filth and shame. He initiates reconciliation by searching for Israel in the wilderness. Once he finds her he cleanses her of all filth and defilement, and they renew their wedding vows. But this time everything is different. This time, because of the work of Christ, Israel has a new heart. This time, she partakes of a New Covenant, one which will outlast history. Now she is able to respond to the love of her husband.

What, then, are the reasons this marriage will work now? It is because in this New Covenant God, through Christ, has met Israel—and us—at the point of her four deepest needs to restore what she by her own behavior had ruined. In 54:4, we find that the first of these new gifts is cleansing: our guilt is removed.

I. Its benefit: Cleansing! (54:4)

**"Fear not, for you will not be put to shame;
Neither feel humiliated for you will not be disgraced;
For the shame of your youth you will forget,
And the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more."** (NASB)

A. Ends all guilt for past shame

Here, the prophet is saying that from her youth, when she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness, until her widowhood, when God was forced to abandon her to abuse by her new lovers, all that time, from the wilderness to Babylon, Israel had been an adulteress. To help us feel the weight of Israel's sin, and the sense of shame which God in Christ has cleansed her of, substitute your own name instead of her's as I read from the book of Ezekiel:

"Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem, "Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. As for your birth, on the day you were born you navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born.

"When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!' I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall, and reached the age for fine ornaments. Your breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare.

"I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you [at Mt. Sinai] and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine...then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil [the Exodus]. I also clothed you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands, and a necklace around your neck. I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head [the days of David]. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty [the time of Solomon and the temple].

"Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty...you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing [during the period of the Divided Monarchy]. You took some of your clothes, made for

yourself high places of various colors, and played the harlot with them...you also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for your male images that you might play the harlot with them...Were your harlotries so small a matter? You slaughtered My children, and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire. And besides all your abomination and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.

“You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them to come to you from every direction for your harlotries. Thus you are different from those women in your harlotries, in that no one plays the harlot as you do, because you give money and no money is given you; thus you are different.

“Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries...So shall I gather them [all your lovers] against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness...I shall also give you into the hands of your lovers [the Assyrians and the Babylonians], and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare...because you have not remembered the days of your youth.”” (Ezek 16:3-43)

How many of you entered into a similar relationship with God under the Old Covenant? God loved you and saved you, and then you took it upon yourself to love him in return. You tried hard, but even as you tried outwardly an inner idol was consuming you all the while. Your second state became worse than your first, so you entered into deep shame. The impediment to new beginnings, of course, is that sense of past shame that consumes us and makes us feel hypocritical in our attempts to begin anew. That shame of the past must first be dealt with. Examine what Isaiah says: “Fear not...for the shame of your youth [in the wilderness]...and the reproach of your widowhood [in Babylon] you will remember no more”—all because of the blood of Christ. Painful memories plague our soul, but an amazing thing happened on that cross: the blood of Christ is so powerful it can wash more than the skin; it cleanses hearts from even the memory of all past shame—“for the shame of your youth you will forget, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.”

B. Ends all fear of future disgrace

But it goes even further. Not only is the past cleansed, the future too is taken care of—you will never again fear humiliation. The alcoholic is forever recommitting himself to a change of lifestyle, but he always carries with him his past shame. Because of his failures, he is fearful to try again lest he subject himself to shame once more. This is how it was with Israel under the Old Covenant. Under that arrangement, despite God’s gracious acts of salvation, the nation still lived in fear of humiliation and banishment if she lapsed into idolatry again (see Deut 28:15ff). But God said, “Enough of that.” Under the New Covenant, the blood of Christ will so cleanse you, and the gift of the Spirit so change you, you will never again fear another terror (like the Assyrians) or an exile (under the Babylonians). Jesus took our shame, humiliation and disgrace on the cross. No longer do we need to live in fear of future humiliation, or fear of being abandoned by God in another exile. We can begin all over again, this time without fear.

There we have met the first of our deepest needs—cleansing from our guilt. The glory of the new covenant is the deep cleansing that washes and cleanses our defiled flesh from past and future sin.

How can this be? What is new about this New Covenant? Our past history makes us feel inadequate, and we are fearful to enter into

this new arrangement. Why will it be different this time? We find the answer to our fears in verse 5.

II. Based on the Lord’s resources, not Israel’s (54:5)

“For the husband is your Maker,
Whose name is the LORD of hosts;
And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,
Who is called the God of all the earth.”

Calling himself “The Lord of Hosts,” God declares here that he used all his resources as Creator when Israel was first created as a nation. He had at his disposal all the armies in creation, among the nations, and the angels to accomplish his task. All of these groups came into play in the Exodus. The sun grew dark, various plagues of frogs, gnats, etc., tormented the Egyptians. The angel of death went through the camp of the enemy and killed all the firstborn. The wind and the sea obeyed God’s command and Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land. Pharaoh’s army appeared right when God called, and his chariots were submerged in the sea. All of creation obeyed the voice of the Lord when he judged Egypt, and this is what it took to create Israel. They were in exile now, not because God was weak, but because they had broken the covenant. But he had not stopped loving them. When he redeemed them, he would use all those resources once again, everything that he had at his disposal in heaven and on earth, this time not just to remake the nation, but to make them holy.

Consider what this task required: God became a man. The glory of the New Covenant is that God not only keeps loving man faithfully, but Christ takes on the role of Israel, the bride, and loves God in return. Thus the equation is complete: God loves man, and man loves God. We are placed in Christ. He lives in you and me, and everything God now asks of you he will do in you by his Holy Spirit. How different from the Old Covenant! Under that arrangement, to illustrate, the believer is like a man sitting in a boat, trying to row from the East Coast to England. Try as he might, the Gulf Stream keeps drawing him off course. That’s the Old Covenant; the Law is the sextant which shows him how far off course he is, but which gives him no power to propel the boat. No matter how many courses one takes on “motivational rowing” or “team rowing,” there is no hope! Enter the New Covenant. The oarsman discovers that his boat has a mast and a sail, and that he can use a heavenly resource—the wind—to take him to his destination, contrary to the Gulf Stream. No more rowing! He still feels the pull of the currents trying to draw him off course, but the new resource speeds him on to England.

Where does this come out ethically in the New Testament? If a couple who are both believers choose to divorce, the Bible says they may not remarry: “let them remain unmarried, or else be reconciled” (1 Cor 7:10-11). Why? Because in the New Covenant God has done everything needed to create and sustain love. Though couples feel the constant urges and pulls of the flesh (like that hidden Gulf Stream) they can choose to make a continual presentation to the Lord within (like hoisting the sail on the boat); he will cause them to make continual progress in their relationship (like sailing against the current), and they will ultimately experience the fruit of joy and fulfillment. If there is any hardness of heart resulting from a lengthy period of drifting (which happens when we drop our sail) in order to satisfy the urges of the flesh, the Bible casts the sole responsibility on us. There may be a need in some cases for a time of separation so that God can work on the one who has hardened his or her heart, but to eliminate the possibility of reconciliation with a Christian spouse is a denial of what God has already provided in the New Covenant. If they cannot love now, it is either because they do not know about the New Covenant, or they choose not to appropriate it.

Thus the New Covenant not only deals with our guilt but also our inadequacy. It inaugurates a supernatural cleansing of the past, and freedom for change in the future.

But, someone says, how can we be sure that God will take me back when I have failed so many times? How can I be sure he's not mad at me? Some Christians feel that God is forever waiting around the next bend on the road, big stick in hand, ready to chastise them when they fail. The next verse has an extremely helpful word here.

III. Initiated by the Lord, not Israel (54:6)

**"For the LORD has called you,
Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
Even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected,"
Says your God.**

A. Israel as the wife

Israel, the wife, is the guilty party in the breaking of the covenant, but in her destitute state she is powerless to do anything about her condition. Without a divine miracle there is no hope for her. I have counseled many wives "forsaken and grieved in spirit" because their husbands broke their marriage covenant, and I can tell you it is a heartbreaking thing to see a woman forsaken by the husband of her youth.

B. The Lord as the husband

Notice that Israel is the guilty party. She wronged the Lord. She is the one who spent her life on her lovers. She was stripped naked, languishing in the wilderness, and sold on the slave market. The Lord was the wronged party who was forced to give his wife a certificate of divorce. Yet, he is still moved by Israel's grief and her deplorable condition. He responds by calling for her and searching for her with the same depth of compassion as if she was innocent!

God has the same compassion toward us. Just as it was with Israel, he initiates the process of reconciliation. The world knows nothing of this kind of love. The New Covenant is founded on the Lord's resources, not ours. Today God is calling some of you. He is initiating the process, and flooding love into your life. Will you respond to his New Covenant?

Finally, how can we be sure this new arrangement for living will last? Past failure makes us fear that God might give up on us. Verses 7-10 set out the fourth gift that is ours in the new covenant.

IV. Established by a love greater than His judgment (54:7-10)

A. The permanence of His love contrasted with His wrath (54:7-8)

**"For a brief moment I forsook you,
But with great compassion I will gather you.
In an outburst of anger,
I hid my face from you for a moment,
But with everlasting lovingkindness (loyal-love) I will have compassion on you,"
Says the LORD your Redeemer.**

At times, the OT prophets refer to Israel's exile when they want to contrast the new, Messianic age with what occurred in the past. Here, God's love is contrasted with his wrath, under which Israel suffered for 70 years in the exile. In Lamentations, we have a graphic illustration of the magnitude of his wrath:

**"See, O LORD, and look,
For I am despised."
"Is it nothing to all you who pass this way?
Look and see if there is any pain like my pain
Which was severely dealt out to me,**

**Which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.
From on high he sent fire into my bones,
And it prevailed over them;
He has spread a net for my feet;
He has turned me back;
He has made me desolate,
Faint all day long." (Lam 1:11b-13)**

The phrases, "I will gather you," and, "in great compassion," describe, in contrast, God's love. Ezekiel wrote, "As a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, and I shall prove myself holy among you in the sight of the nations" (Ezek 20:41). Here is a NT example of a usage of the word "gather," from John's gospel: "[Caiaphas] prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nations, and not for the nations only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:51-52). And God always looks upon his children with compassion, in the same way a mother looks upon her nursing infant. He is always moved to compassion at our helplessness.

Yet, compared to God's everlasting loyal-love, the 70 years of exile in Babylon will seem like a "brief moment," like "an atom in time" (Acquila). Ezekiel gives us a description of the duration of this love: "Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel." declares the Lord God" (Ezek 39:28-29).

B. The permanency of His love compared to His oath with Noah (54:9)

**"For this is like the days of Noah to me:
When I swore that the waters of Noah
Should not flood the earth again,
So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you,
Nor will I rebuke you."**

Isaiah looks into the past of Israel's history "in search of a turning point comparable with the one which now confronts Israel," and he finds none! "He has to go further back to that turning-point in pre-maelval times which marked the end of catastrophic events involving the whole human race!" Thus the magnitude of events are of the same order as the promise to Noah after the universal flood.¹

The mercy shown to Israel after the captivity parallels the mercy which God demonstrated toward mankind following the flood. Then, God established through an oath that he would never again destroy the earth by a flood. In Noah's day, the reason given for God's mercy is that judgment did not change the heart of man, as Genesis records: "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Gen. 8:21.) In like manner, judgment did not change the heart of Israel, but loyal-love will accomplish this. This is why we do not get abused or sent into exile by God—he has made an oath that he will never again do this.

C. The permanency of His love contrasted to His oath with Noah (54:10)

This New Covenant even surpasses the covenant God made with Noah. It will outlast history.

**"For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake,
But My lovingkindness (loyal-love) will not be removed from you,
And My covenant of peace will not be shaken,"
Says the LORD who has compassion on you.**

The New Covenant is greater than the Noahic covenant, because God's new people outlive the old, created order. His love has created within them new hearts, therefore they forever remain secure in his abiding love. So while God's judgment did not change the hearts of men, his love did! Therefore God's people remain secure in his love forever! This is what the apostle Paul is referring to in Romans 8: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39). There is nothing to compare with the depth of God's love for his people, with its permanence and security for the believer. It covers our guilt, our inadequacies, our sense of acceptance, and our sense of security.

It is almost impossible to comprehend the glory of the New Covenant that the Servant Jesus inaugurated through his death and resurrection. What is clear is that those who do begin to comprehend and taste of its glory live radically different lives. People who have been living for years under the Old Covenant, seeking to please God by trying harder every year, suddenly discover the transcendent love of God for them and they become radically different as a result.

How are they different? In four ways, I believe.

Implications of the New Covenant

First, they are free to expose their deepest shame because Christ took their shame upon himself. Christians therefore can be vulnerable, without fear of condemnation. Now, when we act in the flesh, in our own strength, unlike Moses, who covered his face with a veil to hide his fading glory after his encounter with God on Mt. Sinai (2 Cor 3:13), we can share our struggles and not cover them over with hypocritical devotion. We will not seek to deceive people by mixing self-effort with devotion to Jesus Christ. No matter how wretched we have been, no matter how often we fail we can always hoist our sails again and continue on, without condemnation (2 Cor 3:16). Our sin has been taken care of in Christ.

Second, a dominant characteristic of someone who is living under the New Covenant is an overwhelming sense of appreciation. Love for Christ burns in their breast, consuming all that it cannot love. Words can hardly describe the warmth and depth of this love. Nor can the mind alone comprehend it. It takes the very person of God living in our hearts to give us assurance of how much he loves us, as the apostle Paul wrote, "The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom 5:5). We become so appreciative of God's secure love for us under the New Covenant, a love that sought us, bought us, washed us, and healed us, that new affections are created in the soul that we knew nothing of before. Writing in the 12th century in his book *The Fire Of Love*, Richard Rolle put it thus:

Concerning...the time I first felt my heart begin to warm I [was] amazed more than I am able to say. I felt it truly, not simply in my imagination, but just as though my heart was burning with a physical fire. I marvelled, you may be sure, at how this burning in my soul leapt up, and at its unanticipated comfort. It was so vivid an experience that often I put my hand against my chest just to see if I could feel any cause for the heat outwardly! But once I knew that it was purely a matter of inward, spiritual nature, and that the burning sensation was not from carnal love, I realized it had to be a gift from the Creator. Accordingly I was glad, and melt with a desire for a greater experience of love, especially on account of the inflow of

the sweetest pleasure and spiritual delight with which that spiritual flame comforted my mind. Before this comforting warmth came to me, shedding its sense of devotion within, I frankly believed that no such experience could come in our present state of exile, for truly it enflames the soul just as if a real fire were burning there.²

Third, if we live under the New Covenant, we, like Paul, will never lose heart (2 Cor 4:1). This is a preeminent theme in the new order. Although the world is falling apart, all is well, because nothing, not even our worst behavior, can separate us from the love of Christ. Thus we never lose heart. We do not have to be in control of everything, manipulating others so that they love us. We have love from the very Source of love himself, a purer, greater, more transcendent love than anyone else can provide us. This security allows the Christian to live in quietness and peace. Some Christians seek the limelight, parading their godliness for all to see, but not those who live in the New Covenant. The distinguished pastoral theologian, Thomas Shepard, wrote, "A Pharisee's trumpet shall be heard to the end of the town, but simplicity walks through the town unseen."

Fourth, New Covenant Christians are ardent lovers. They are neither possessive nor manipulative. They are pilgrims whose sweet glance and focused eye draw you not to themselves, but to the Savior whom they focus upon as they march toward Zion. Thus, love becomes the dominant mark of their lives. This is the glory of the New Covenant. May this be our legacy.

Traian Dorz, that great spiritual leader of the Lord's Army (an evangelical denomination within the Romanian Orthodox Church), found acceptance and security in the transcendent love of Christ during his 16 years in a Romanian prison. I will close by reading one of his poems, written from his prison cell:

Here where You are, O Jesus,
I have all that is below and above.
I have my home and my country,
And all that I would ever wish for.
Here, only here, where You are, O Jesus.

Here, when I sit and listen to You,
I have all heaven and much more.
I have brothers, mothers and sisters,
Thousands times more than others.
Here, only here, when I sit and listen to You.

Here, lost in happiness
I behold the heaven—large and shining.
I hear angelic accords,
And feel heavenly embraces,
And fellowship with God.
Here, only here, lost in happiness.

Jesus, most sweet God,
You are my only wealth.
You—my love and my life,
You—my glory and all I desire.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, most sweet God.

1. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 275.

2. Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, in *The Law of Love: English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif* (ed. David Lyle Jeffrey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 183–184.



Catalog No. 845

Isaiah 54:11-17

16th Message

Brian Morgan

April 28, 1991

THE BIRTH OF A NEW AGE: A NEW CITY

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

One of my dreams as a young Christian was to visit Jerusalem. By God's grace I have had opportunity to fulfill my dream, and I count it one of the most memorable experiences in my life to have tasted the charm of Jerusalem.

A number of things enhance the splendor of this great Middle Eastern city: its long history of glorious relationships; its 4000-year history of thriving education; and its prophetic hope of a secure place where God would establish his rule. And, of course, Jerusalem was unmatched in its glory. It was the crown jewel set in God's hand, his choice for Zion, the temple and the Shekinah glory. Here, generations of fathers taught their sons the sacred texts. In fact, the famous Dead Sea Scrolls, dating from the time of Jesus, are housed in a museum in the city today. The very text which we will be studying, Isaiah 54, is unrolled and on display in a round room in the basement of the building.

During my visit, our tour guide was a government official and a scholar, a former military man who had fought in the Six Day War in 1967. He knew the details of all the battles and skirmishes, and his passion for Jerusalem was obvious. When we came into the city on the first evening, the sun was setting, casting yellow hues against the white stone buildings. It was a glorious sight. We found it hard to argue with our guide's assessment, "Here is the greatest city in the world." When we were settled in our hotel and we began to explore Jerusalem, however, that glory began to tarnish a little. The tension we felt on all sides overshadowed the relationships, security and zest for learning we had expected to encounter. Three-quarters of the city was off limits due to a strike by Arab workers, and several incidents of violence broke out. I visited the university, expecting to find students filled with a sense of life and knowledge of the Scriptures, but I was sorely disappointed. Where was the glorious Jerusalem the prophets wrote about? I wondered, the city of which the prophet Isaiah said,

**"A nation which knows you not will run to you,
Because of the LORD your God, even the Holy One of Israel;
For He has glorified you." (Isa 55:5)**

We have been studying the marvelous Servant Songs from the book of Isaiah, and we discovered that the prophet records in them a detailed description of the life of Jesus Christ, written 700 years before his incarnation. We have looked at his atoning death on the cross, and his glorious resurrection from the tomb. In Isaiah 54, we heard the shout of joy uttered at the new age which the Messiah would introduce: a new seed, a new land, and a New Covenant, whose glory far surpassed the old order. In our text today, the prophet speaks of a New City to demonstrate that what Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection not only fulfilled the Old Covenant, but it far surpassed Israel's grandest dream. The splendor of this New City would be such that nations would run to her to be taught by the Messiah, and everyone would dwell in peace under his own fig tree, with none to make them afraid (Mic 4).

In our text, Isaiah sets out three qualities which will make this city great: its splendor, its love of learning, and its security.

I. The future splendor of the New Jerusalem (54:11-12)

A. The backdrop of its future splendor (54:11a)

**"O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted,
Behold, I will set your stones in antimony."**

Isaiah begins by contrasting the future glory of Zion and her people with her dark past, when she was battered relentlessly by the storm of God's raging wrath. Just as a jeweler displays a diamond against a black velvet background, so the prophet introduces his theme by comparing the city's future with her painful past. We catch a glimpse of that past in chapter 51:

**Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise O Jerusalem,
You who have drunk from the LORD's hand the cup of His anger;
The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs...
Your sons have fainted,
They lie helpless at the head of every street,
Like an antelope in a net,
Full of the wrath of the LORD,
The rebuke of your God. (Isa 51:17, 20)**

Against that dark backdrop Isaiah says that God will lay precious stones in *antimony*. The Hebrew word translated antimony refers to a black mineral powder which was used by Middle Eastern women as a cosmetic to increase the brilliance of their eyes by darkening the eyelids. In this context, antimony refers to a dark mortar used to set off the brilliance of precious stones. In Romania last year as I was teaching this very text, I noticed that just behind where we were gathered stood a building constructed of white stones set in black mortar—a perfect illustration for my text. Perhaps the idea here in Isaiah is that the splendor of the city to come will not only be glorious in comparison to its dark past of 586 BC, when it was destroyed, but the New City will be glorious by contrast to the dark world in which it is newly constructed—so glorious in comparison to the dark world of death and idolatry, in fact, that nations will long to be part of its community.

B. The new material of its splendor: Precious stones! (54:11b-12)

**"And I will lay your foundation in sapphires.
Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies,
And your gates of crystal,
And your entire wall of precious stones."**

This would be especially meaningful to the captives in Babylon, "where Nebuchadnezzar said he had erected such and such a building in precious stones; mention is often made in particular of the unknown stone, that is lapis lazuli or azure stone. In actual fact, of course, what came in question were perfectly ordinary bricks overlaid with blue glass paste" (Claus Westermann). Nebuchadnezzar used a paste to cover the clay bricks. Like the Babylonian religions, his beautiful buildings were phony! In contrast to idolatrous Babylon, the New Jerusalem will be constructed with authentic precious gems, eternal in value, and splendid in beauty in their ability to reflect light.

No expense will be spared in the New Jerusalem. In contrast to Old Jerusalem, where gems were used only in the temple area, these materials are used throughout the entire city to form the foundations, walls, towers and gates.

C. What are these stones?

There is a hint in text as to what these stones are. Isaiah writes, "I will set your stones in antimony." This verb is not the normal word used for the work of a stone mason or a jeweler. Usually, this word is used of shepherds who cause their sheep to lie down to feed (Jer 33:12; Ps 23:2; Ezek 34:15). Thus, the stones referred to by Isaiah are a poetic description of

sheep! Here are two examples of how the word is used in the OT: “There shall again be in this place which is waste, without man or beast, and in all its cities, a habitation of shepherds who *cause* their flocks *to rest*” (Jer 33:12); “He *makes me lie down* in green pastures; He leads me beside waters of rest” (Ps 23:2).

The NT is even more explicit. There we discover that the New Jerusalem is a city built of “*living stones*” of which Christ himself in the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). The foundations of the New City are the twelve apostles, signifying that every life in the city is built upon the apostles’ teaching concerning Christ. On these foundations the city is constructed with a multitude of *living stones* (1 Pet 2:4-8) which includes both Jews and Gentiles. Picking up the same theme in Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:19-22). And here is what the apostle Peter wrote concerning these living stones: “And coming to Him as to a *living stone*, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as *living stones*, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:4-5).

The final revelation of the splendor of this city is given in Revelation 21, when the completed city descends from heaven: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband...having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates...and the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it” (Rev 21:2, 11-12, 14, 24). The glory of this New City is not blue-glazed stones, nor is it diamonds or rubies; it is the glory of its people whose beauty reflects the life of the indwelling Christ. That is the New City whose glory shines brighter than the sun.

D. Implications for City-dwellers

The first implication of this text, I feel, is that Christians ought to be encouraged by having the right perspective. Though we live in a fallen, evil world we need to remind ourselves daily that God is building his New City in the midst of this world. The darker the backdrop, of course, the more beautiful his church appears. When we travel to places like Indonesia, Romania, the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, etc., we discover that where the world has nothing to offer, the church is most glorious. A friend of mine looked rather glum a few days ago, so I asked him what was the matter. “Life is kind of tough when you are trying to change the world,” he said. I had to remind him that this world is a mere vapor and one day it will all fade away, but that God’s city endures forever. This perspective should take away our fear and timidity and make us bold, confident witnesses for his name.

Second, we should be focused. If God’s great work in this age is to build this city of living stones, this should also be our focus. Therefore, let us be like the first century disciples who did not invest in the earthly Jerusalem. How vain would such investments prove when the city was destroyed by the Roman legions in AD 70! The apostles invested instead in a city whose architect and builder is God. Our focus should always be on the lives of men and women, not on buildings, programs, budgets or other externals. I have appreciated the fact that the elders of PBC have always had this as their priority. A mere 8% of our budget goes into our buildings; the rest is invested in people. Even now as we wrestle with problems of Sunday School space, parking, etc., their primary concern is with the living stones who make up the congregation, not with peripheral matters.

Isaiah sees the glory of a New Jerusalem, set against the dark backdrop of Israel’s past suffering and the darkness of the evil world. The splendor of the city is highlighted by its new building materials—“*living precious stones*”—which reflect the brilliant light of the Savior forever.

Next, the prophet writes of its education.

II. The future education in the new Jerusalem (54:13)

**“And all your sons [or builders] will be taught of the LORD:
And the well-being [peace] of your sons will be great.”**

A. All sons are personally tutored by the Lord

Our education system in California is in a state of crisis. Each year, 200,000 new students enter the system, thousands of whom come from other countries and other states. The whole state languishes under such heavy debt that some school systems, like Richmond on the other side of the Bay, have had to close down their operations due to lack of funds. Even those that are in full operation probably don’t rate more than a ‘D’ grade. The future looks bleak for our schools.

By contrast how does God accomplish the task of education in his new city? In OT times, God’s curriculum was accomplished through mediators, peculiar people—priests, prophets, and wise men, who had the Spirit upon them. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, these men then taught the masses how to walk in the ways of the Lord, passing down the traditions of the fathers and giving forth new revelations for their day. But, at best, the results were minimal; a mere remnant was affected. Thus, each Jew had to exhort his brother “Know the Lord!” Now, however, in the days following the coming of the Servant, the Spirit will be given to all, without measure (Acts 2:17); and, according to Jeremiah “they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jer 31:34). How very different from our method of educating our children! All who believe will be taught by the Father, personally and intimately, every day, just as the Servant himself was:

**The Lord God has given me the tongue of disciples,
That I might know how to answer the weary one with a word.
He awakens me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. (Isa 50:4)**

That same relationship is now made available to every son and daughter in the kingdom. The Spirit is given without measure to all believers, thereby guaranteeing the well-being of the city. No one has to rely on a secondhand education. The Spirit of God himself teaches us, as John wrote: “And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him” (1 John 2:27). What more can we ask for?

We see this point illustrated with the Samaritan woman (John 4) who had an intimate conversation with Jesus, and afterwards ran to her village to tell everyone she had met the Messiah. In response, the villagers went out to meet Jesus for themselves. Later, they said their impressions of him were no longer based on what the woman said, “for we have come to see and hear for ourselves that he is the Messiah.” There is no secondhand education in the New Covenant. If your experience of Jesus is secondhand, based on the testimony of others, don’t wait. Enter into this city, make Christ Lord of your life, and his Spirit will teach you and guide you. My father paid \$20,000 for my education at one of the best universities in the country, but I have to admit that I remember very little of what I learned during those four years. While I was in school, however, I was taught the Scriptures without charge through some godly teachers, and the Holy Spirit began to give me a heart of wisdom. And I remember everything I learned in that free education; it is forever etched in my memory!

B. This guarantees their peace in the city

Because of the work of the Servant and the gift of the Spirit, all the workmen in the city enjoy a state of peace. The Hebrew concept of peace

(shalom) includes the ideas of well-being resulting from the victory of righteousness over evil. Paul refers to this in Galatians: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13-14). Righteousness having been established by the Servant, his New City endures in unshakable peace, harmony and well-being.

C. Implications for City-dwellers

Since we all possess the gift of the Spirit in God’s New City we need to encourage all to be co-workers with Christ, each using his or her spiritual gifts to build this New City to the glory of God. Pastors and leaders must not dominate the flock; they must set the saints free to minister through dependence on the Lord. Paul instructs us that as we are incorporated into this New City with its new foundations, we become the new workers who build up the city. And second, we must be careful how we build in this city which is constructed of precious material. We are warned that we must be careful to build with “*gold, silver, precious stones*,” not with “*wood, hay and stubble*,” which shall not withstand the fire (1 Cor 3:10-15).

What a great day Isaiah sees! As a result of the Servant’s securing righteousness for all the inhabitants, the gift of the Spirit is given in full measure. Now all the sons in this city enjoy intimacy with the Lord, an intimacy that earlier was granted only to kings and prophets. And unlike Old Jerusalem, whose security could always be threatened if a king turned from God’s law, this New City will enjoy lasting peace.

Next, Isaiah addresses the security of this New City.

III. The future security of the New Jerusalem (54:14-17)

A. The basis of their security: Gifted righteousness (54:14a)

**“In righteousness you will be established;
You will be far from oppression, for you will not fear.”**

Security has always been Jerusalem’s most pressing problem. Although the city is naturally fortified by three valleys, the northern approach has no natural defenses, and this has always been the point at which the city was invaded. At the time of Isaiah, Jerusalem faced the threat of the Assyrians. In response, Hezekiah increased taxes to build his defense structure and his famous tunnel (which you can still wade through if you visit the city). But, according to the OT, the security of Jerusalem depended not on fortifications, military might or foreign alliances, but solely on the righteousness of its King. Thus, in the very significant text of Deuteronomy 17:14-20, called the *Law of the King*, God instructs all future kings to put aside worldly security (in foreign alliances and trust in chariots) and seek the Lord by putting his word in their hearts: “Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel” (Deut 17:18-20). With the coming of the Messiah, however, the city finally had a King who fulfilled God’s law with his whole heart. In his work on the cross, he imparted his righteousness to his people as a gift, and the city he builds stands secure.

**My Servant, will justify the many,
As he will bear their iniquities. (Isa 53:11)**

B. The result of their security: Freedom from fear (54:14b)

“And from terror, for it will not come near you.”

The New Jerusalem, built on the righteousness of the Servant, will be surrounded with walls of protection erected by the Lord himself. Thus,

Israel will no longer live in fear of terror (as from the Assyrians of the past), or oppression (as in the Babylonian exile). Jesus provided this protection for his disciples during his lifetime (John 17:12), then he promised that the Spirit would provide this same ministry for them when he himself departed (John 16:7). Nothing, not even death itself, could separate them from his glorious city (Rom 8:35-39).

C. The new battles: Guaranteed victories (54:15-17a)

**If anyone fiercely assails you it will not be from Me,
Whoever assails you will fall because of you. (54:15)**

Though the city is being rebuilt, and it remains secure, there are still battles to be fought, says Isaiah. The outcome is secure, for three reasons. First, there has been a dramatic change of relationship. Under the Old Covenant, security was based on Israel’s faithfulness. And when Israel refused to remain loyal to the covenant, God removed the sword of holy war from them and gave it to her enemies to execute judgment on his people. This was described by the prophet Amos as “The Day of the LORD” (Amos 5:18). It would be a day of terror, not triumph, since God would be fighting against his own people. Isaiah wrote,

**But they rebelled,
And grieved His Holy Spirit;
Therefore, He turned Himself to become their enemy,
He fought against them. (Isa 63:10)**

But now, under the New Covenant, God says he will never again war against his people because through the cross of Christ there was created a new people who have the law of God written on their hearts (2 Cor 3:2-6). What good news! Think of this truth when your boss rips into you tomorrow at work; or a family member gives you a bad time; or when you receive a hate letter in the mail. You can say with assurance, “This is not from God. He is not behind this.” That is the New Covenant.

Second, our new security is based on the nature of holy war.

**“Behold, I Myself have created the smith, who blows the fire of coals,
And brings out a weapon for its work;
And I have created the destroyer to ruin.” (54:16)**

In the age to come, God is still the sovereign commander of all holy war. He creates the one who makes the weapons, and the one who wields the weapons—he controls the result, in other words. The outcome of holy war is under his sovereignty, therefore victory is guaranteed.

**“No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper;
And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn.”
(54:17a)**

God’s Servant was killed by slander and the sword, but the weapons could not prosper. Rather, the Servant prospered, and was highly exalted by being raised from the dead.

D. The basis of their security: Gifted righteousness (54:17b)

**“This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
And their vindication is from Me,” declares the LORD.**

The destiny of the Servant will be the legacy of all of God’s servants in the New Jerusalem. This is well illustrated in the life of Stephen, the first martyr of the church. While being stoned, “He gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’” (Acts 7:55-56).

There we have the New City—glorious in its relationships, with a personal tutorial by the Holy Spirit for every inhabitant, and a security that outlives death. Rejoice, all you inhabitants of the New Jerusalem!

E. Implications for City-dwellers

First, we should fight the right battles. We must always remember that God’s City stands secure, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. It is the devil’s strategy to cause us to feel so threatened that, drunk with anxiety, we fight our battles with the world’s weapons, doing more dam-

age than good as a result (John 18:10-11). Here, however, is Paul's descriptions of the weapons we should use: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor 10:3-4). And, "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:10-12).

Second, we should have deep feelings of humility. I am overwhelmed with the sense of privilege of being part of this New City. I once dreamed of visiting Jerusalem, but now I am privileged to be part of the New Jerusalem, with its glorious relationships, being personally tutored by God, and having a sense of complete security. By stark contrast, how many Jews have given their blood for the earthly Jerusalem! Yet we Gentiles have been grafted into the New City. Words cannot express my sense of wonder and appreciation at what God has done in Christ.

I will close by reading a poem which I have dedicated to a friend of mine, Avron Isaac Canty, a Jew, born in Poland in 1911. As a young boy, he experienced the bitter pains of persecution and anti-Semitism. His life was spared because he was concealed under the floorboards of the basement in the synagogue he attended. Overhead, he heard the shouts of violence and anger directed at his people as the building was set on fire. He was sent to Montana, where he graduated at the top of his class. He was offered a scholarship to the university, but he refused it because there was no Jewish spiritual life there. Then, because there were not enough Jews in the area to warrant a rabbi and a synagogue, he became the rabbi. He remained faithful to the Torah and the readings all the days of his life. A few years ago, I met him through his son, Earle. Recently, even though he was in failing health, Avron still wanted to go to the synagogue, and I accompanied him. I watched him as he bound the Scriptures to his hands and to his head. I marveled at his prayers. And I wondered, too. Who am I that I should inherit his dream, while he endured the pain? He died last week, and I lost a friend. I wrote this poem, Avron's Dream, based on our text, to express my appreciation for being in this New City.

Avron's Dream
Isaiah 55:11-17

O Avron, you were a Jew
Of that chosen race, Israel's seed,
Formed in the womb,
To walk in Torah.

The prophets taught you to dream,
Of Messiah, a restored land,
A new city, Jerusalem,
Where the wolf lies down with the lamb.

But life crushed the dream.
Foolish fires fueled by hatred
Flamed in the Polish countryside,
And charred your synagogue with blood.

But the God of Abram
Placed you under the rafters,
Hid you in the shadow of His wings,
While you quivered under the consuming flames.

God plucked you from the fire,
Sent you to an unknown land.
You spread out to the right and to the left
But where were your people?

You took your tent and altar,
And beloved Torah,
And in that strange land
You called upon the name of the Lord.

That Word you never forgot,
And the pain,
You never understood
While you walked this earth.

I met you in the last days, through Isaac your son.
I watched you read the sacred scrolls,
I heard your speak of Israel's pain,
I marvelled at your prayers.

O Avron, I loved you.
Who am I, a goy,
To be loved by your Messiah,
And grafted in to your tree.

Who am I to know, your Isaac,
The son you thought was dead,
But came to life on Moriah,
Your dead son, my brother?

Why should your Torah,
Bound to your head and wrist,
Be written on my heart,
Through the blessing of Abraham, the Spirit?

Why should your city,
Whose desolation etched your heart in grief,
Be my dream, my delight, my security,
My glory, all my days in every place?

Were you hardened,
That I could see?
Should you be cut off,
That others be grafted in?

Should your pain, be my joy?
May it never be!
I am not worthy.
And it says, "He is able to graft you in again."

O Avron, in the resurrection of the just,
Would that God permit me
I would lift your eyelids,
And remove the veil.

I would take you to the New City,
Not mine but yours,
To see what you thought had died
But lives in glory greater than any dream.

On that day, you will understand
The pain, the blood, the fire;
And it will not be a strange land,
For you will be home.

O Avron, may you see your dream
Next year in Jerusalem! Amen.

In Memory of Avron Isaac Canty
June 28, 1911–April 21, 1991

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Catalog No. 846

Isaiah 55:1-5

17th Message

Brian Morgan

May 5, 1991

AN INVITATION TO A BANQUET

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

I like to run our home with very few rules, but we have one rule that I try to abide by. When sales people or marketers telephone and offer something free (and they all seem to call around dinner time), I have told my wife to never accept a free gift from any of them. Once, however, it seems she succumbed to their pressure tactics. She accepted a free vacation. The salesman would call around dinner time, she told me; he would demonstrate something, and we would get a free gift vacation. When the man called, I told him we didn't want to see the demonstration and we didn't want the gift, either. He said his company was obligated to give us the gift anyway, and he handed me a brochure which offered "a free vacation to the city of your choice." Inside it said, "A free, three-day, two-night vacation to the city of your choice, free hotel, etc. The only charges you pay are transportation to and from the city and meals while you are there." A free vacation costing around \$800 per person! And the cities of choice were Atlantic City, Las Vegas, and Reno. The only thing free about this vacation offer was the air space between the four concrete walls of a resort area hotel bedroom. I'd rather be in prison, I said. How typical of the world. Temptingly, they lay out their wares and cry, "Come and feast yourself at no cost." When you read the fine print, of course, you discover that there is a price; it will cost you dear.

Our text today from the book of Isaiah describes a very different kind of banqueting table. In this feast, the Lord God himself is host, and he invites all of Israel to participate in a rich life which the world knows nothing of.

Having thoroughly described the richness of the age to come, with its New Seed, New Land, New Covenant and New City, which the Servant would inaugurate through his death and resurrection (Isa 52:13-53:12), the prophet now sends out the invitation to Israel to come and enjoy the richness of this new age, employing the metaphor of a feast which the King has prepared for his special guests. The King sends out the invitations, and then pleads with his people to enjoy his rich banquet. This feast is free, and it delights the soul, in stark contrast to the empty feasts of idolatry which cost us dear and ravage the soul. The prophet declares that the King in question is a new David. The Lord is about to act in history to fulfill his covenant with David (see 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:26-37); he will raise up a new David whose kingdom will endure forever. Not only does the King invite his guests to eat at his table, he also invites them to share in his reign as co-regents! Isaiah expresses the Lord's grief and surprise that anyone would be so foolish as to turn away such a free gift.

This same poetic language was used by our Lord on several occasions when he identified himself as the "feast" (John 6), and he invited all in Israel to share in his glorious reign by feeding upon him (Luke 14:14-24). But only a remnant of the nation responded. The feast must be shared, so Jesus told his disciples that if the invited guests (Israel) would not come, they should go out into the highways and hedges (outside of Israel) and compel others (the Gentiles) to come and enjoy it (Luke 14:23-24).

Our text breaks down into three sections: First, the motivations to come to this feast; second, the way to enter into the fullness of the feast; and third, the life which this feast offers. These verses serve as a model of what God offers his people and the nations (thus it is a marvelous text to use in evangelism); and, furthermore, it should convict our hearts concerning our own foolishness in feeding our souls at the empty banquets of idolatry.

I. Motivations to come to the feast (55:1-2)

**"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, 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 do you weigh out silver for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself [your soul] in abundance." (NASB)**

A. The glory of the banquet

Three things make this a glorious feast. First, its availability. Notice that there are no requirements demanded before one can attend. Who may come? "Everyone who thirsts," says the Lord. There is no class to attend, no creed to believe, to rules to obey, no liturgy to memorize, no traditions to learn, no dress code to adhere to. Just come!

Next, we see the quality of the food offered. This feast is costly and rich in quality. "Waters, wine and milk" hearken back to the Promised Land, a land rich in natural resources, with an abundant supply of milk and honey (Deut 8:7-10). This feast is like a restored Promised Land.

But it is even greater than that. Notice the prophet says, "Delight your soul in abundance...that your soul may live." "Delight" is a rare word in the OT, meaning, to take exquisite pleasure in something because it is a rare luxury. This feast is not common food. It is rare, unknown to the world. Why? Because when you partake of it, your soul will live. This is the same language which was used in the Garden of Eden. God instructed Adam, "Eat of all the trees," which not only were good to partake of, but were "a delight to the eye." In that garden stood the "Tree of Life" that would cause man to live forever and would give him a level of life in his soul beyond the original creation. This would do something far more profound than food could ever do: it would give him eternal life.

But this feast which God is offering is even better than the Garden of Eden. Notice that all the commands here in Isaiah are positive: "come," "eat," etc. But in the Garden it was, "Eat of all the trees but one, and if you eat of that tree, dying you shall die." Something has happened in the New Covenant. If you eat at this banquet in this new garden, there is no evil, no temptation. It is all good! You can eat all you want. There is no cholesterol, no fat, no preservatives!

Everything is wholesome and good for the soul, and it will give you eternal life.

A man shared at our men's Bible study last week and said, "Men, I have AIDS." Then he went on to say that we should not feel sorry for him that he has a terminal illness; everyone is terminal, he reminded us. "I don't think of AIDS as a disease," he went on, "but as something that brought me ease, because through it I met Christ. The Spirit of God has filled my soul and I am content for the first time in my life. I have life I knew nothing of before." After a lifetime in the wilderness, he has come to the banquet table of the Lord.

The third aspect of this feast's glory is its cost. How much does it cost? Absolutely nothing! "Come...without money and without cost." This is amazing, isn't it? The host of the banquet, God himself, is going to pay all the expenses. Just like the father of the bride at a wedding, he will pick up the tab. There are no hidden costs, no presentation of a check at the end of the meal. The gospel is always offered free of charge to all who will come.

B. The empty comparisons of other tables

If the availability, the quality of its fare, and the free cost of this banquet do not convince you to come, the Lord now goes on to compare his table with the table of idolatry, greed, ambition and adultery. First, its expense: "you weigh out silver for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy." Silver, hard-earned wages, and other resources too—like wives and children and relationships—idolatry consumes them all. Isaiah is astonished that anyone would weigh out silver for other feasts that offer nothing. So was the Son of Man. He fed the five thousand to demonstrate that he was the Bread of Life, and he was astonished that the people came back the next day looking for more bread. He told them, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal" (John 6:27). My own children have had a graphic visual aid of the cost which their aunt paid at the world's banqueting table. After she had spent \$70,000 on cocaine, and was almost destitute, they saw her empty soul, her broken body when she visited our home. They saw that idolatry not only paid her nothing, it cost her her very life.

Lee Atwater, the Chairman of Republican Party, died a few weeks ago. Though the cancer which attacked his brain he came to Christ near the end of his life. I will quote part of an article he wrote for *Life* magazine in February:

Long before I was struck with cancer, I felt something stirring in American society. It was a sense among the people that something was missing from their lives, something crucial. I was trying to position the Republican Party to take advantage of it. But I wasn't exactly sure what "it" was. My illness helped me to see what was missing.

The 80's were about acquiring—acquiring wealth, power, prestige. I know. I acquired more wealth, power and prestige than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty. What power wouldn't I trade for a little more time with my family? What price wouldn't I pay for an evening with friends? It took a deadly illness to put me eye to eye with that truth, but it is a truth that the country, caught up in its ruthless ambitions and moral decay, can learn on my dime. I don't know who will lead us through the '90s, but they must be made to speak to this spiritual vacuum at the heart of American society, this tumor of the soul.

I've come a long way since the day I told George Bush that his "kinder, gentler" theme was a nice thought, but it wouldn't win us any votes. I used to say the President might be kinder and gentler, but I wasn't going to be. How wrong I was. There is nothing more important in life than human beings, nothing sweeter than the human touch.

This month marks my 40th birthday—that deadline I set for achieving my life's goals. I lie here in my bedroom, my face swollen from steroids, my body useless and in pain. I will probably never play the guitar or run again; I can only hope to walk.

There is one man's testimony to the emptiness of America's tables of idolatry.

Thus we have to motivate us the glory of the banquet, and the emptiness of the tables of idolatry. There is one further motivation, by far the most important one, I feel.

C. The passion of the Host

The Host longs to have us come and eat at his table, and he expresses his longing three different ways. First, in the opening word of the text, the exclamation *Hol*! This is the Hebrew word *hoi*, which is usually a cry of judgment, but here it is changed to an impassioned cry to be heard with a touch of pity and empathy. The Host longs to eat with you.

Second, he expresses his grief, using the word *Why*, at your dissatisfaction with your experience of eating at the tables of idolatry. "Why do you weigh out silver for what is not bread?" Compare this with the Lord's word in Jeremiah, expressing his grief at Israel's pain,

**"Has a nation changed gods,
When they were not gods?
But My people have changed their glory
For that which does not profit.
Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD.
"For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me,
The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns,
That can hold not water." (Jer 2:11-13)**

How can you refuse the Lord who looks at you, with tears in his eyes, grieving over what you have done?

If this doesn't convince you, maybe his persistence will. The third word is, *Come*. It is repeated four times for emphasis: "Come, come, come, come to my feast!" In Romania I learned that if you want a Romanian to accept a gift, you must offer it three times. For politeness' sake, the first two offers are refused. Here, God offers his gift of a glorious, free banquet not thrice, but four times. He wants you to come to his feast! If you respond negatively, and mail your "No!" answer to him, saying you are not interested, he will, in effect, send you a fax, saying, "Come to my banquet. I want you there." But you are still not interested. So he calls you on the telephone, pleading with you to come. You refuse, and hang up on him. Still he persists. Then on the day of the feast he arrives at your front door in a limousine! "Come on, the party is beginning and I want you there with me!" he cries. How can you possibly turn down such a gracious, loving and persistent Host?

Such long-suffering persistence we see illustrated in Israel's history. How many prophets did God send to Israel, inviting them to the feast? Most of them paid with their blood for their persistence. Then, in an effort to whet the appetite of his people, God ordained 400 years of prophetic silence. Following that, he broke the silence by sending the greatest prophet, John the Baptist. But Israel still refused. Finally, he sent his Son. Incredibly, Israel said no to him too. Even this refusal, however, did not dissuade the Lord. He still persisted. Following the death and resurrection of Jesus, when the apostle Peter preached to the same crowd that had cried, "Crucify him!", through the gift of the Holy Spirit, three thousand people believed. How many of you here this morning could give testimony of the number of times you refused him and turned away, yet you are here because of his loyal-love and persistence? Can there be any stronger motivation to come than his amazing persistence? How gracious, how tenacious is the God we worship!

From this text we discover that before you do anything for God, he wants to feed you. He doesn't desire any of your possessions, your service, or your money. He wants to feed you until you are satisfied. Come as you are, and eat freely. Delight yourself in him. This theme is repeated all through the Scriptures. He fed Israel in the wilderness; he fed Elijah when he was depressed; he fed Peter by the sea. Thus the hallmark of the Christian is joy and satisfaction. Come, and eat of him.

So accept God's invitation and come to his feast. Now, how do we enter into the fullness of it and partake of its benefits? There are so many distractions today to lure us away from partaking fully.

II. The way into the feast (55:2b-3a)

**"Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight your soul in abundance.
Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that your soul may live."**

A. Listen to the King: Hear

Notice the repeated use of the verb listen, hear. In contrast to idolatrous feasts, which capture us through the eye, this Host captures us through the ear. We can illustrate by using this guitar which you heard played this morning. If we wanted this guitar made glorious and beautiful, the world might suggest, for example, overlaying the wood with gold leaf, with a border of mother of pearl, etc. But that wouldn't move our emotions, would it? The guitar wasn't designed to please the eye. People are moved when someone plays the strings. A skilled guitarist moves the soul to a whole range of feelings and emotions. Remember, the soul is not fed through the eye (just watch television; you'll see what I mean); it is fed through the ear. Listen to the Word. Let it penetrate your mind, not with facts and information, but with the glory of the image of Christ himself. Then your soul will be enlightened as this glorious melody takes hold of your heart. You will experience a level of life you never before knew was possible. This is why the great commandment to Israel was, "Hear, O Israel, and give ear to My commands." But we have neglected the ear for the eye, haven't we? We have lost our listening skills. Let us turn off our televisions, throw away our walkmans, and listen in silence to the voice of God through his Word.

Once you begin to hear, and your inner eye sees the glory of Christ, then you can come to God, "that your soul may live" (see 2 Cor 3:18).

And second,

B. Come to the King: Believe

God wants you to come to his table in order to have a relationship with you. Eternal life is not some sort of abstract life form that flows in your veins. It is an intimate relationship with the King himself. We visited Washington D.C. once as a family. Our congressman gave us a tour of Congress, and a friend introduced me to the chaplain of the Senate. What I really wanted to see was the White House, but there were no visitor's passes available that day. While I was standing on the Mall, however, the President's helicopter suddenly appeared in the sky and landed on the White House lawn. From three-quarters of a mile away I strained to see the figure of the President exiting the helicopter. That was as close as I got. Now how do you think you would feel if President Bush personally invited you to eat with him in the White House? When you arrived, you saw a dining room set for 2,000 guests, and your heart dropped. But then you saw on the side a private room, with a table set for two. The President came down the hallway and said to you, "I'm not eating with all those people tonight. I want to have dinner just with you." What do you think that would do for your soul? Yet our text is saying that the King of kings wants to eat alone with you, with no crowds around and nothing to distract you.

But we don't enter in, I believe, because we are nervous about relationships. Many of us have been hurt in the past, therefore we are fearful of taking a risk and being vulnerable. But God wants to be intimate with us. When my father came to Christ at our men's retreat, the most profound thing he heard all weekend, he told us, was Michael Green's statement, "Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship." I have known that truth for 20 years, but that was what impressed my father. Christianity is a one-on-one relationship with God—and this is what he wants to have with each one of us.

So there you have your invitation to the feast, to dine with the King himself. What will happen to you if you do come and eat?

III. The life this feast offers: Sharing in the reign of the King! (55:3b-5)

**"And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
According to the faithful loyal-love of David.
Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
A leader and commander for the peoples.
Behold you will call a nation you do not know,
And a nation which knows you not will run to you,
Because of the LORD your God,
Even the Holy One of Israel;
For He has glorified you."**

Up until now, Isaiah has been speaking of this feast to come in terms of metaphor, but now he comes to the reality of the feast. Here we learn that, by sending the Messianic King, God is about to fulfill the covenant he made with David. He is the feast, and those who feed on him will share in his reign.

A. A new and greater David will arise (55:3b)

In 2 Samuel 7, God made an everlasting covenant with David that Israel would never lack a man to sit on David's throne, and that God would establish his throne forever: "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod

of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My loyal-love shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:12-16).

King Solomon, David's son, who built the earthly temple, was the first fulfillment of this text, but it finds its ultimate fulfillment in David's greater Son, Jesus, who is building the heavenly temple without hands, eternal in the heavens. Isaiah thus identifies the feast as "feeding" on the Messiah to come, which results in eternal life. For those who enter in, this covenant will be established forever: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst...for this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:35, 40). "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38).

B. God will fulfill his promise to David's seed (55:4)

Just as God established David's rule over Israel and also over the surrounding nations (particularly the Philistines), God will establish the rule of David's greater Son. And God kept his oath in the resurrection of Christ who now reigns over all nations. "God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus...and as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David'" (Acts 13:33-34).

C. The benefits of the Davidic Covenant are offered to the whole nation (55:5)

Anyone who eats at this banquet will not only have the privilege of eternal life itself, but will also share in the Messiah's reign. The glory which the Messiah has, he graciously shares with his people! We have an example of this with Peter in the New Testament. Although he denied his Lord, following his resurrection Jesus fed his apostle a meal by the sea (John 21). But it was not just a meal. Jesus also made him a pastor and ordained him to share in his reign. This is what eating this meal does for you, too: you become a king, which is what you were originally designed to be.

And in the New Covenant a wonderful change occurs. In David's time, the king's rule over the Philistines was established by the sword, but when God exalts the Messiah, Isaiah says, God's people will merely "call," and a nation they know not will come "running." Nations will not be coerced into the kingdom; they will come willingly because of the glory the Messiah shares with his people. In John 4, the disciples went into a Samaritan town to buy food because they were hungry, while Jesus remained behind to talk with the Samaritan woman. When they returned, Jesus said to them, "I have a feast you know nothing about." They looked toward the village and they saw the whole town, a nation they did not know, running toward Jesus. We catch another glimpse of this in Acts 8:26-40 in the conversion by Philip of the Ethiopian eunuch (although in this case Philip is the one who is running!). This Ethiopian represented the first African nation to hear the gospel. Although Philip had never met this man, the Lord had already prepared the ground. All Philip had to do was ask ("call") one question, and the highway was opened

for this man to accept the Messiah. In the new age there is no coercion, no marketing of the gospel to arouse people's interest. On the contrary, "A nation which knows you not will run to you, because of the Lord your God."

Our missionary in Paris, Dudley Weiner, wrote recently about a woman he ministered to. She was a troubled single mother, who began to dabble in the occult. Finding no answers, she painted a question mark on her forehead and left it there. One day she saw a man walking through a town outside Paris carrying a large wooden cross, and this caused new questions to come to her mind. She saw him again, two years later, standing outside a Christian bookstore in Paris. A few Christians who were in the store invited her to come to a meeting that evening. The speaker did not arrive in time, so Dudley had to give the talk. His message was "Change Your Master," from Romans 6. As he concluded he asked, "Would anyone like to change masters tonight?" The woman raised her hand, and accepted Christ right there. She returned the following week, and this time the question mark on her forehead was replaced by a cross. When Dudley asked her why she had done this, she replied, "I don't need to put the question mark there any longer, all my questions have been answered. And I no longer need to display my need for answers; but only display the answer itself...the cross! I put the cross on my forehead so other people will ask me why I have it there, and then I can tell them...I used to have so many questions in my heart; but now I have Jesus."

Yes, God is preparing a feast, rich in quality, free of charge, and abundant in measure. This feast not only imparts eternal life to the soul, it allows us to share in the glory of the Messianic King who reigns over all the nations. No wonder Isaiah is astounded that anyone would turn from this rich feast to feed on emptiness. Who can refuse such an offer of life?

IV. Implications of the feast

A. Come and eat in abundance

How can we continue to feast on the empty food of idolatry that destroys our soul, when God offers us in Christ a far richer banquet at no cost to ourselves? Why do we keep on refusing it? The only answer I can think of is our twisted pride which deceives us. Come to this feast which is rich beyond measure.

B. Invite others

Then, having eaten and been satisfied, how can we be silent around those who are thirsty and starving? Like Christ's first disciples, let us be co-regents with him. Let us go out into the highways and byways and compel people to come in and eat with us. And be sure you share it as freely as you yourself received it. Set your table, and invite people.

C. Be expectant

Finally, you don't have to market the gospel, you don't have to come up with strategies to make it popular. Don't water down this fine wine; don't put preservatives in this rich bread. Do not adulterate eternal life by seeking to make it more attractive. This feast is pure. God has already made people interested in the New Covenant. Just call, and they will come running. Amen.

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Catalog No. 847

Isaiah 55:6-13

18th Message

Brian Morgan

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AN INVITATION TO REPENT

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

The Servant Songs from the book Isaiah were written to comfort the exiled Israelites during their Babylonian captivity (586 BC). They had lost everything they held dear—their temple, their land, their seed (they had been reduced to a remnant)—and they were held captive in idolatrous, materialistic Babylon. Most tragic of all, they had lost their relationship with God. They were feeling a deep sense of abandonment and loneliness as a result. Isaiah's comforting words to them, however, declare that out of the ruins of the exile a restored kingdom would result—not from the dust up, as they might expect, but rather from heaven down. From it would come a Servant who would embody in his very being everything that Israel was originally intended to be. In fact, in Isaiah 49 this Servant is given the very title “Israel”: “This is My Servant Israel in whom I will show my glory.” So Isaiah writes these beautiful poetic pieces describing the work and ministry of this coming Servant who is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. In chapter 53, the prophet details the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. Chapter 54 resounds with a shout of joy as this Messianic King gives birth to a new age. And this new age is described in the terminology of the Old Covenant—a seed, a land, a city, a relationship—but in the new age everything is brand new in Christ, so new that a sense of transcendent joy ought to fill our being as we come to understand its implications.

Isaiah 55:1-5, which we looked at last week, describes a rare and precious, abundant feast given free of charge by God, to which he invited all of Israel and the Gentile nations. As we have seen, this feast was really the Garden of Eden restored—even down to the tree of life. What the Host was offering, of course, was eternal life itself. The feast to which he was calling the nations to eat their fill was incomparably better than the empty feasts of the world. And it was free of charge, unlike the expensive banqueting tables of the world which cost wages and silver, perhaps even life itself.

An obvious question arises at this point: Why would anyone refuse such an offer? As a young Christian, I thought the stumbling block was intellectual in nature. The cure, I felt, was for Christians to write books on apologetics to demolish these stumbling blocks to the banqueting table of the Lord. Something happened in my freshman year in college to change my mind, however. One evening, David Roper, our college pastor at that time, was leading an evangelistic meeting in one of the dorms. A young woman interrupted and said, “If your gospel is true, and Jesus is the only way to salvation, what about the people in Africa who have never heard of the gospel?” David graciously answered her question, and went on with his presentation of the gospel. But she interrupted again and asked the same question she had asked earlier. David looked at her, and with penetrating insight said, “Isn't it a fact that the reason behind your refusal to believe the gospel has nothing to do with the natives in Africa, but rather because you don't want to stop sleeping with your boyfriend?” “You're right,” she replied, “that is the reason.” I was astonished!

As Jesus once said, “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:19-21). People refuse to

come to the feast to which God had invited them, not because they have intellectual scruples with what God is offering, but because there is a moral problem in their lives. What is required before we can enjoy this rich banquet of eternal life, of course, is repentance, a turning from our old ways and a returning to the Lord. Isaiah 55:6-13, to which we now come, is a powerful exposition on the nature and basis of Biblical repentance.

This text is built around this term, *repent* (*shuv*), meaning, to turn, which is used three times in the text. First, we have its definition; second, what motivates it; and third, what is the hope of repentance.

I. A definition of repentance: “Turn and return” (55:6-7)

A. Turning away from old habits and thoughts

Seek the Lord while He may be found;

Call upon Him while He is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way,

And the unrighteous man his thoughts;

And let him return to the LORD.

Many people have a faulty definition of repentance. They feel sorry for their actions not because of their sin, but merely because of the consequences they have brought on themselves. King Saul (the Clint Eastwood of the Old Testament) had this problem. He had been rebuked by Samuel for failing to obey the Lord in his mission to destroy the Amalakites. Confronted with his sin, the king at first denied any wrongdoing. Then he admitted saving some of the spoils of battle. But he blamed the people for this, and said they were going to devote all of it to sacrifice. He finally admitted his sin, but he asked that still he be honored in the presence of the elders and the people. “I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek...but the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal...I have sinned...but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me” (see 1 Sam 15:20-33). Saul was sorry for the consequences of his sin, not for the sin itself. Repentance, however, has nothing to do with wallowing in self-pity, or with the consequences of sinful actions.

The Hebrew word *repent*, which is used three times in our text, means literally, to turn 180 degrees. Thus, repentance is a complete *turning* away from one road, and *turning* back to God. It requires forsaking old ways, followed by prayer and actively seeking God. The word “forsake (“Let the wicked man forsake his way”) is the same word used in Genesis 2 instructing man to “forsake” (literally abandon) his parents and cleave to his wife.

Last summer I led a men's retreat at a church in Calgary. A brother there who used to fellowship with us (and who really came alive spiritually at that time) invited me to come and take along with me some men I was discipling. He promised great times of adventure and spiritual intimacy in the Canadian Rockies. How do you think he would have felt if we arrived in a caravan of TV-equipped motor homes, towing boats and dirt bike trailers, and all of us wearing Walkman radios?

In the same way, we cannot experience eternal life if we insist on bringing all our baggage with us. Times of intimacy do not require any of these props.

The same principle applies in our relationship with the Lord. We cannot have intimacy with him and return to him if we are carrying baggage with us. That is not repentance. We must first abandon and leave our old ways of sin.

B. Returning back to the Lord

Positively, this is what we must do. We must “Seek the LORD...Call upon Him...return to the LORD” (55:6-7). This is modified by the two verbs “Seek the Lord,” and “Call upon Him.” “Seek” means, do something—start your feet moving toward the Lord, seek fellowship with other believers, attend where the Word is taught so you can hear from him. Then, “Call”—pray to God. Many people try to clean up their act, thinking that is repentance, but they never seek to restore their relationship with God through active prayer and an aggressive seeking of him. True repentance is impossible if we are still clinging to all the old baggage. I have been studying Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Psalter (it has eight verses for each letter in the Hebrew alphabet), and I have been surprised to discover that the petitions of the psalmist are rather striking. They can be distilled down to two main requests: “Revive me” (give me eternal life), and, “Teach (disciple) me.” You can do no better than the psalmist. Call out these things when you want God to be intimate with you, when you want to repent.

Repentance then is not mere sorrow, nor is it wallowing in self-pity. Repentance is an active abandonment of old ways of thinking and actions, followed by an aggressive pursuit of God through his word and prayer.

Some people, however, feel they have created so much destruction and rubble by their sin they think it is impossible to ever clear a path-way to heaven to make the journey home. This was how the Israelites felt in Babylon. How could they ever go home? they wondered. It was way too far, and there were just too many obstacles in their path. Even if they succeeded in making it home, they fretted, how could they be sure God wanted them back? Hadn't he abandoned them in the first place? How could they be sure now that God wanted them home? Isaiah's goes on to give two motivations to repentance.

II. The motivations for repentance (55:6-7)

A. God's accessibility (55:6)

**Seek the LORD while He may be found;
Call upon Him while He is near.**

The nation was thousands of miles away from Jerusalem, but God is not limited by that. The moment you acknowledge your guilt he comes right to your door and forgives you. There are no obstacles too great for him. Call upon him, then. He is near to you.

Of course, God was not always accessible to the nation. Once he left them to their lovers and idols, and he was not to be found. But that was only temporary thing, meant to cause them to repent. This is what Hosea wrote about,

**They will go with their flocks and herds
To seek the LORD, but they will not find Him;
He has withdrawn from them.
They have dealt treacherously against the Lord...
For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
And like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away,
I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver.
I will go away and return to My place
Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me. (Hos 5:6-7a, 14-15)**

In the age that follows the death and resurrection of the Servant, God will be easily accessible and near to those who will seek him. Israel (and the nations) must take advantage of this unique time period in history and repent. He won't always be easily found, so enter through this window of opportunity. Call upon him in this hour.

In an amazing text in Deuteronomy, Moses predicted this captivity of the nation, “And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you shall be left few in number among the nations, where the LORD shall drive you...But from there you will *seek* the LORD your God, and you will *find* Him if you *search* for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days, you will *return* to the LORD your God and listen to His voice” (Deut 4:27, 29-30).

God is accessible. He has come to Babylon, and he has come to you. All you have to do is acknowledge your guilt.

But would God truly forgive? Did he keep a list of wrongdoings committed by Israel? I used to keep a list of the things my big sister did whenever my parents were away. I couldn't wait for them to return so I could get out my list and cause trouble for her. God is not like this. He does not keep a list.

B. God's mercy (55:7)

**Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts.
And let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him;
And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.**

The word translated “compassion” is the same Hebrew word used for “womb.” God has the same feelings for a sinner who repents as a nursing mother has for the child of her womb: she is moved to pity to help her helpless infant. In the same way, Isaiah says that the love and mercy of God should motivate us to repent. If the wicked and unrighteous man will forsake his sinful attitudes and actions and run to God he will not find a condemning judge, but a loving Father who has been waiting for him. In the story of the prodigal son in the New Testament, the son bankrupts his father, wishes him dead, and spends his inheritance on wild living. Finally he comes to his senses. The weight of his sin so fills his heart he composes a speech to share with his father when he repents. But he never gets to deliver his prepared text. Seeing his son on the horizon, the father pulls up his skirts (something men did not do in the Ancient Near East), and runs to his son, falling upon his neck and weeping with joy over his return. There is no penance to be done, but rather a party to attend as the father instructs the servant to kill the fatted calf for a celebration feast. This is how God thinks of everyone who has been away from him and who wants to return home. There is no penance, no list to go over, only a party to celebrate.

“Pardon” means unmerited forgiveness. This concept is so radical that it is never used in the Old Testament of the way men treat other men. Men are reluctant to forgive. They may claim to have done so, but they still keep account. But God through his Servant lifts up our sin, places it on the Servant, carries it away, buries it in the depths of the sea, and erases it, not only from his memory, but from ours as well. The only thing that can disqualify us from this gift is our own refusal to accept it.

If you doubt what I'm saying look to the story of Manassah. Manassah was the most wicked king in his history of Israel. He rebuilt all the high places which his father Hezekiah had torn down. He erected altars to Baal, made Asherah poles, worshipped the host of heaven, built altars to idols in the house of God, made sons pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft, and consulted mediums. But by far the worst thing he did was place the carved Asherah pole in the holy place of the temple. The Ancient Near Eastern view of their god was that he was an old man lacking energy and he needed to be stimulated through lust.

They sought to accomplish this by placing a carved image of a female front of him so as to stimulate him, and the result would be that rain would fall on their land. Manassah did this very thing in the holy place, declaring, in effect, that the God of Israel was just like all the other false gods of the land.

Beyond this, he led the nation to partake of child sacrifice to the god Molech. The Israelites placed their firstborn on the flaming altar to Molech and watched as they burned to death. This wicked king of Israel was an ancient Saddam Hussein. God judged him, and he was taken to Babylon in distress by the Assyrians. There Manassah humbled himself: “he entreated the LORD and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to His kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.” (2 Chr 33:12-13). Manassah repented. He removed all the high places and restored the house of God. Do you doubt that God abundantly pardons? Then remember the story of Manassah.

What are the obstacles to repentance? There are none. Climb out of your pit and look up to heaven. All the obstacles have been cleared to make a smooth highway to heaven. The only encumbrance left is the boulder of pride which remains at the door of your own heart.

But, someone asks, Is this really the only way? Do I have to repent? Isn't there another way to heaven? We find the answer to this question in the next section.

III. The necessity of repentance (55:8-9)

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways, My ways,” declares the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My way higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

A. Man does not think like God

The holiness of God is so profound compared with the depravity of man that it is greater than the chasm between heaven and earth. How then can one possibly relate to God without first repenting of one's wicked ways? It's impossible. The chasm is too great. Jeremiah said, “The heart is more deceitful than all else, And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9).

Man does not think or act like God. This word “thoughts” in the Hebrew Bible refers to the way the human mind thinks, weighs things, evaluates, makes rational assignments of place and rank. Once, the grief-stricken Hannah, distressed over her barrenness, was pouring out her heart before the Lord in the temple. She was so upset she could not talk, but was only moving her lips. Eli the priest came along. What did he think was going on? 1 Samuel tells us: “Eli *thought* she was drunk” (1 Sam 1:13). Our wicked hearts cannot make right evaluations. Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah. Seeing her in the street one day, her face covered, “Judah *thought* she was a harlot” (Gen 38:15). An incestuous relationship was the result of Judah's faulty evaluation. Job's body was so deformed by sickness that his maidservants *considered* him “a stranger” (Job 19:15). Another wrong evaluation. Job was beloved of God. Proverbs instructs us, “Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is *considered* wise; When he closes his lips, he is *considered* prudent” (Prov 17:28). All a fool has to do to be considered wise is keep his mouth shut. The Jews themselves had this evaluation of Lord of glory, “We *esteemed* his stricken”—smitten of God, in other words (Isa 53:4).

Man does not think like God. I learned this lesson on my first visit to Romania. I was sitting in the back of a covered truck with a number of very poor looking peasants, on our way to a week-long retreat. As I looked at them, listening to our translator, whose English was not good, I must say I was not very impressed. Yet these people were the spiritual sons and daughters of Traian Dorz, the great spiritual leader of

their denomination. The translator turned out to be a spiritual giant. Now these brothers and sisters are taking our messages and translating them into Romanian for distribution in their newspaper to half a million people. So much for my evaluation. Man does not think like God.

B. Man does not act like God

Because man does not think like God, he therefore cannot act like God with his moral perfection or mysterious way of salvation. We see the two juxtaposed in stark contrast in the life of Joseph: “And as for you (Joseph's brothers), you *devised* evil against me, but God *devised* it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen 50:20).

C. The chasm between the two is infinite

This moral difference between man in his sinfulness and God in his complete holiness is so great that it is higher than the heavens are from the earth. If you need proof, just consider the offerings which the Israelites made to Molech. They thought that sacrificing their children in the fire was an act of worship which would be pleasing to God. But here is what God thought of this: “They built high places to Baal to burn their sons in the fire, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter into my heart” (Jer 19:5). Even the infinitely wise and all-powerful God could not think of such a perversion. By the time of Jesus, the valley in which these things were practiced had become the garbage dump of Jerusalem, a place of constant burning. It had been renamed Gehenna, the word which Jesus used for hell all through the NT. The place of man's misguided and evil worship had been renamed hell. This is what God thinks of modern day abortion. People have abortions to spare themselves the expense and stresses of child rearing, but God calls this hell on earth. This is how different are man's ways from God's.

Therefore, how can reconciliation be possible if man will not forsake his ways of thinking and his actions? Isaiah says it is impossible. How then can Christians neglect to have a daily quiet time? We need our minds cleansed daily. Does a mariner neglect to consult his compass? If he does, he will stray off course. Likewise the Christian who neglects the Word of God. You might consider purchasing one of those one-year Bibles. Read and meditate on it daily. Hearing the Word will cleanse you. Then get a journal and write down the gentle rebukes which God brings to your spirit. Last week I noted 12 different occasions when God gently rebuked me. I got two more following the first service this morning! Let us therefore immerse ourselves in the Scriptures so that we may hear his voice morning by morning.

Having explained the definition, motivation, and necessity of repentance, Isaiah now concludes with the hope of repentance.

IV. The hope of repentance: God's omnipotent word (55:10-13)

What hope do we have that things will really be different this time? We want to be different—we have repented—and we want life to be different. Man need not be left in despair because of this great moral divide between himself and God. Isaiah tells the good news that God is ready to bring about a whole new creation by the power of his word, not the faltering efforts of men. God's new creative work (which we have already seen is based on the work of the Servant) will actually give man a new heart so he can dwell in God's holy presence. And God will ultimately remove the curse from the existing creation.

Isaiah first describes the power of God's word, using the metaphor of rain (50:10-11), and then he explains its reality (50:12-13). If we will but *return* to the Lord, the Lord will send his word to us and, like the rain which does *not return* without making the earth fertile, so it will *not return* to him without accomplishing his purposes of leading his people out of bondage into a new exodus and a new creation.

A. Described in metaphor: It is like the rain (55:10-11a)

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
 And do not return there without watering the earth,
 And making it bear and sprout,
 And furnishing seed to the sower
 And bread to the eater;
 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
 It shall not return to Me empty.”

In February, we had government committees meeting all over California discussing how to allocate our meager water resources. Then the heavens opened in March. Once more we learned that we are helpless to make the land fertile. The rain must do that for us. The rain descends from heaven by God's command and does not return without accomplishing its purposes; it makes the creation fertile. As it waters the earth it makes the land fertile, causing it to bear much fruit. And it satisfies the creature. The result is an abundance of food that brings life and satisfaction to the creature, and the potential of a new crop for future generations.

Isaiah says that the word of God is like the rain: “It shall not return to Me empty.”

B. Described in reality: It is greater than the rain (55:11-13)

“So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
 It shall not return to Me empty,
 Without accomplishing what I desire,
 And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.
 For you shall go out with joy,
 And be led forth with peace;
 The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy
 before you,
 And all the trees of the field will clap their hands.
 Instead of the thornbush the cypress will come up;
 And instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up;
 And it will be a memorial to the LORD,
 For an everlasting sign which will not be cut off.”

The word of God comes from his mouth in the heavens and, like the rain, it shall not return to him without doing all for which he sent it.

Notice the intensification in each line to describe the power of God's word: 1) It shall not return *empty*; 2) without *accomplishing* what God desires; and 3) without *succeeding* (the same word for the Servant, who would succeed or prosper, 52:13) in the matter for which God sent it.

And what will God's word do? The implication is that this will give us absolute confidence that the word of God can change the wicked hearts of men into fertile gardens that bear abundant fruit. The dry soul which formerly could not respond to God will be changed into a new heart, and eternal life will come pouring in.

When this new creation is complete we will be led out of our present exile on earth (which Peter describes as living in Babylon, 1 Pet 5:13) with great joy and peace (unlike the first Exodus when Israel was led out only to be chased by an Egyptian army).

Not only will God's word create a new humanity, but this new humanity will dwell in a whole new created order with the curse of Genesis 3 completely removed. Rather than leaving and going into an empty wilderness (like the Israelites in the first exodus), God's word will create a whole new order. This is why the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8, “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that

the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:19-21). Under the curse, in this generation man was created from the dust, to work in toil and pain, only to return to the dust. But if he returns to the Lord, God will send his word from heaven to water his life and return him to heaven. “And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bondservants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 21:3-5).

How eager we ought to be to repent! God has arranged it so that nothing ought to stand in our way. Every obstacle has been removed. If we come, we will find compassion, forgiveness, and the power of God's word to cleanse us and give us a new heart to obey. And then on that great day we shall be freed from our exile once and for all to enter into the new heavens and the new earth.

Isaac Watts has well captured the yearning of my own heart to enter into the new life that true repentance offers. May this be our legacy too.

We are a Garden wall'd around,
 Chosen and made peculiar Ground;
 A little Spot inclos'd by Grace
 Out of the World's wide Wilderness.

Like Trees of Myrrh and Spice we stand,
 Planted by God the Father's Hand;
 And all his Springs in Zion flow,
 To make the young Plantation grow.

Awake, O heavenly Wind, and come,
 Blow on this garden of Perfume;
 Spirit Divine, descend and breathe
 A gracious Gale on Plants beneath.

Make our best Spices flow abroad
 To entertain our Saviour-God:
 And faith, and Love, and Joy appear,
 And every Grace be active here.

Let my Beloved come, and taste
 His pleasant Fruits at his own Feast.
 I come, my Spouse, I come, he cries,
 With Love and Pleasure in His Eyes.

Out Lord into his Garden comes,
 Well pleas'd to smell our poor Perfumes,
 And calls us to a Feast divine,
 Sweeter than honey, Milk, or Wine.

Eat of the Tree of Life, my Friends,
 The Blessings that my Father sends;
 Your Taste shall all my Dainties prove,
 And drink abundance of my Love.

Jesus, we will frequent thy Board,
 And sing the Bounties of our Lord:
 But the rich Food on which we live
 Demands more Praise than Tongues can give.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

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