

Isaiah (Part 2) - That They May Serve Me

by Ron Bailey

The sermon explores the importance of having a heavenly orientation and living in the light of the eternal perspective, using the book of Isaiah as a guide.

Duration: 1:15:22

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-2, Isaiah 40:26-31, John 10:1-3, Revelation 12:5

Topics: "Isaiah"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preparing the way for the Lord. He quotes from Isaiah, stating that every valley will be exalted and every mountain and hill will be made low, symbolizing the leveling of obstacles in our lives. The preacher then focuses on the message Moses was instructed to deliver to Pharaoh, highlighting the two parts of the message: 'Let my people go' and 'that they may serve me.' He emphasizes the need to serve God wholeheartedly and not be divided in our loyalty. The sermon concludes with a call to focus on God and His eternal word, rather than being consumed by worldly concerns.

Transcript

Let's just lift our hearts briefly to the Lord again. Father, we look to you. We do trust you, Lord, to be your own interpreter of this wonderful book.

We put ourselves into your hands and we ask you, Lord, to open our hearts and teach us of yourself. Amen. What I was trying to do yesterday was to give a kind of background to the book of Isaiah.

And was just saying that Isaiah's prophecies took place over a period of about fifty years. So, they didn't all happen at once. And during the reign of about four different kings.

And outside the land of Judah, where Isaiah lived, north of them was what had now become a separate country of Israel. And then beyond that, up in the northeast, there was a kind of superpower called Assyria. And over to the east, there was another power which had been powerful in previous years, had gone into a period of weakness, and later on was going to be powerful again.

One of the things that happened right in the middle of Isaiah's life as a prophet, and this is an important date if you're interested in dates, in 722 BC. It's like an equivalent of 1066 for English people. In 722 BC, the armies of the king of Assyria came into the northern half of Israel.

And laid siege to the capital city of Samaria, and conquered it. And took the people from the northern part of Israel captive into the land of Assyria. There's a part in Kings, which if I just read it, please do turn with me to it.

It's 2 Kings chapter 18. And this is one of those useful places in the scripture where it synchronizes the reigns of the northern kings of Israel with the southern kings of Judah. And it can help.

This is 2 Kings chapter 18 and verse 9. Remember this happened about halfway through Isaiah's ministry. Isaiah was in the south in the kingdom of Judah, which was the smaller kingdom with just a couple of tribes. And the main part of Israel was in the north.

The ten tribes were there. And it came to pass in the fourth year of Hezekiah, he was the king of Judah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea, he was the king of Israel, son of Elah, king of Israel, that Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came up against Samaria and besieged it. And at the end of three years they took it.

Even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea, Hoshea, king of Israel, Samaria was taken. And the king of Assyria carried away Israel to Assyria and put them in Hala and in Habor by the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes. Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant and all that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commended and would not hear them nor do them.

Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, did Sennacherib, king of Assyria, come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, that's the remaining southern kingdom, and took them. And Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended. Return from me that which thou puttest on me will I bear.

And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah, king of Judah, three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord and from the pillars which Hezekiah, king of Judah, had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.

I just wanted to read that so that we can get a little bit of the atmosphere of the days in which Hezekiah was reigning and in which Isaiah was prophesying. There were days of tremendous uncertainty. Their sister kingdom to the north had been taken captive.

They had been expatriated from the land and settled in other countries and people from other countries in their turn had been settled in the land of Israel. They became known as the Samaritans and the true Jews always hated them because as far as they were concerned they were foreigners living in territory which wasn't theirs. And the Samaritans became a kind of a half and half people.

They became people who were not descended and were not linked in covenant to the people of God and yet at the same time they were people who were trying to keep the laws of the people of God because they were frightened of the consequences. And there's a very poignant statement in the scriptures which says, so they feared the Lord God of Israel and they served their own gods. Amazing statement.

Compromise, almost a definition of compromise. That's what the Samaritans were. Meanwhile in the kingdom south of that, in Judah, you had all these uncertainties with superpowers threatening and the kind of circumstances in which Hezekiah, in order to pay the massive tribute that was imposed upon him by the

king of Assyria, had to strip the gold from the temple, had to plunder the treasury.

It was a time of tremendous uncertainty. It was a time when the fortunes of God's people really did seem to be victims of circumstance. They were hostage to the events that were being played out in the lives of the superpowers.

They were a tiny nation, insignificant, and it did seem as though nothing that they did in any way could affect their destiny or their future. They were just stuck with it. The circumstances of life were as they were and they were in the middle of it.

On one occasion, Hezekiah, trying to make friendship with other empires, kind of gentle alliances in order to strengthen his own position so that he wouldn't be absolutely at the mercy of the king of Assyria, invited one of the kings of Babylon to come to Jerusalem to see things. And if we go now to Isaiah chapter 39, and we're going to leave part of the history of things now and just try to see what it means in this kind of context. We're at Isaiah 39.

At that time, Meredyck Baladin, the son of Baladin, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah for he had heard that he had been sick and was recovered. The chapter previous to this is the one that has the famous fig plaster in it. Those who were at Rurah a couple of years ago, I think, will remember the fig plaster.

Chapter 39, Hezekiah had been sick and he'd recovered. Verse 2, And Hezekiah was glad of them and showed them the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious ointment and all the house of his armor and all that was found in his treasures. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah showed them not.

Then came Isaiah the prophet to the king, Hezekiah, and said to him, What said these men? And from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon. Then said Isaiah, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that is in mine house have they seen, and there is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them. Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord of hosts.

Behold, the days come that all that is in thine house and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. He said, Moreover, for there shall be peace and truth in my days. That was submission on the part of Hezekiah to the word of God that was coming to him.

It's interesting, he says, Good is the word which you have spoken. I wonder whether you would have thought that that was good, the word which the Lord had spoken. Very often, we've all done it, we all use this kind of phrase and we say, Oh, the Lord has really been good to me.

And we really mean I approve of what he's doing at this present time in my experience. If I had chosen for myself this is exactly what he's chosen, the Lord is good. Well, the Lord is good whether it suits you or not.

And maybe you get a trace of Hezekiah's faith here when he did recognize that what God says is always good. It might not be pleasant, it might not be desirable, but it is always good. It comes from the good God and can't be other than good.

Well, here are these people. They've now had this ominous prophecy that's been given to them or given to Hezekiah that in time it will be not the kingdom of Assyria, which was the superpower in that day, but it will be the kingdom of Babylon who would come to Judah and this time would take the people of Judah into captivity and everything would be gone. There's a quote, I've forgotten where it comes from, but it's at the back of my mind and it's a quote from a historian who was talking about the time 150 years almost after this time when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar came from Babylon to Jerusalem and they laid siege to Jerusalem and as you know they conquered Jerusalem.

And this quote, this historian simply said, The battering rams of Nebuchadnezzar's army breached the faith of Judah. That's an interesting statement. The battering rams of Nebuchadnezzar's army breached the faith.

For those of you whose first language isn't English, battering rams are a kind of means they used in ancient times to break down a wall or a gate in order to get access to that city. But what this historian was saying was it wasn't just the city that was broken down by Nebuchadnezzar's attack against Jerusalem. It was their whole expectation that was broken down.

They lost everything. You see, as far as they were concerned, they had been told that there would always be a descendant of David upon the throne. And the descendant of David was taken away captive to Babylon.

They had been told that God would always dwell in his city, in Zion, in Jerusalem. And Jerusalem was a smouldering heap. They had been told that God's presence would always remain in his house.

And God's house had been made derelict. All the treasures had been taken out of it. The Ark of the Covenant stolen, taken away into Babylonian captivity forever.

Lost forever. Everything that they had regarded as fixed points, absolute certainties, went overnight. Their royal family, gone.

Their priesthood, gone. Their house of God, gone. Their destiny, gone.

And Hezekiah would have realized part of this with this word that came from Isaiah. It was a terrible thing that God was now saying to them. And then there's something that happens often in prophetic scripture, and that is the prophet suddenly jumps.

He jumps a hundred years or more. Remember, he is writing around about the time that the northern kingdom had just gone into captivity in Assyria. They never returned.

They vanished into obscurity. Ten tribes lost, vanished forever. But the southern kingdom of Judah, later on, about 590, 80, that kind of time, B.C., they were taken into captivity by the Babylonian Empire.

And now God begins to speak. He begins to speak to a people who have just heard this death sentence declared against their nation. That's really what it was, in effect.

They've just heard a death sentence declared against their nation, and then God begins to speak. And He begins to speak like this. And we come into the second part of Isaiah, which is really where I wanted to get to from when we started.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem. Literally, speak to the heart.

When people are distressed, they don't really need reasons. They need that word of God which comes to the heart. When someone really gets distressed and agitated, it doesn't matter how carefully you can assemble reasons, it never settles anything.

But if that word can come, which is the word of God to the heart, that will settle things. Even though it doesn't always bring explanations with it, it's just this word that comes to the heart. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. In just a matter of a couple of verses, the prophet has skipped over 70 years of Babylonian captivity. The Bible does this at times.

There are times sometimes when, in the Scriptures, you're reading maybe several chapters, and they're only relating to one or two days at a time. And then you'll have another part of the Scripture where just a verse is the whole era. That is a verse, let me illustrate if I may, from the book of Revelation.

There's a verse in Revelation chapter 12. I think I'll need to read from the beginning of verse chapter 12, but the verse I really want to give a little bit of attention to is verse 5. This is chapter 12 and verse 1. And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she, being with child, cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

And there appeared another wonder in heaven, and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman, which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

And she brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. In that fifth verse, I'll read it again.

And she brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. In that one verse, you have the incarnation, the thirty years of secret life of the Lord Jesus, three years of public ministry, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and his being seated at the Father's right hand in supreme power and authority.

It's all in the one verse. There's an amazing sweep that takes place. It just goes from the moment of his entrance into the world, straight up to the throne of God.

And there's no mention of what to us are crucial details. But this isn't the purpose in this particular verse, to mention all the details. It's this wonderful spread of history, and the ability to see the sweep of history that is part of what prophets do when they speak from an eternal perspective.

You see, if you speak from the perspective of the few years that you have lived upon the earth, there are things which dominate us, there are things which have affected all our thinkings. Most of us here, one of the dominant things that has affected the whole of our lives has been the communist empire. Now maybe, if the Lord tarries in two or three generations, historians will look back, and maybe just almost as a footnote of history they will say, well, for seventy years, or something like this, most of Europe and part of Asia was under this powerful political system called communism.

But for we who lived in the centre of it, as it was all happening, we are very, very conscious of it. But get someone who stands outside it, and they'll be able to see things in a different kind of perspective, a different kind of sweep. What you've got here is someone from the eternal perspective seeing this sweep from the birth of the man-child to the moment of his accession to the throne.

And it's all in a verse. Just in a moment. Remember that when you're reading the prophets.

It happens like that sometimes. Sometimes you're going through verse by verse in a sequence. Sometimes there's a sudden sweep.

The old Bible teachers, when they were trying to illustrate this truth, used to speak about mountain-peak perspectives. Some of you will be old enough to kind of remember this illustration. If you look at a terrain, at some kind of territory where there are lots of mountains and mountain peaks, as you look at them, you will see the foothills, and then the lower peaks, and then the higher peaks, and then the highest peak.

And from your point of view, the perspective of it will just be one panoramic sweep. You'll see from here to there just in a moment. But if you're walking it, it'll take you more than a moment.

Because in between all those peaks there are valleys and wide expanses, and sometimes the Bible is like that. Sometimes the prophet sees the mountain peaks. He sees this peak, that peak, that peak, and there's no mention of the valleys.

No mention of the great passages of time in between. And so we need this eternal perspective. We need it.

Otherwise we shall get bogged down with the nitty-gritty, or what some people call the nitty-grotty. All the bits and pieces of life. If we don't have a heavenly perspective, we will never be able to live a heavenly life upon the earth.

We'll be tied down all the time with the mundane, the ordinary, the managing of this, the measuring of that, the eking out of this, and this, and this. We need this eternal perspective. One of the wonderful things about this book as we read it is that it keeps on giving us a heavenly orientation.

We live here on the earth, we have to. Most of us have to earn our livings here. We live ordinary kind of lives with ordinary kind of responsibilities, but we need a heavenly orientation.

You know what I mean by heavenly orientation? It's a funny word, orientation, because it's kind of changed its meaning. In ancient times, when they made maps, they put the east at the top. So when you put a map the right way round, you orientated it to get the east at the top.

Now, of course, you've got maps with north at the top, so now when you orientate it, you put the north at the top, even though orienting really means putting the east at the top. Have you understood that? It just

means getting the thing the right way round, seeing it in its right way. One of the wonderful things about this book, if we keep on reading it with an open heart, is that it will keep on orientating us heavenwards.

We'll keep on remembering the eternal perspective. If you do not live in the light of the eternal perspective, everything will crush you. Everything will be too much.

How can you live another day? Well, in the light of a different kind of orientation, a different kind of perspective, because you're seeing things in the way that people upon the earth can't see them. It's one of your birthrights as a child of God. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, you can't see the kingdom of God unless you're born again.

But if you are born again, you can see what other people can't see. You can see what other people can't see. You can see the hand of God.

You can see the rule of God. You can see the kingdom of God in a way that other people can't see it. And it's only by seeing what other people can't see that you will endure.

That's what it says of Moses. He endured because he saw the one who is invisible. If you see invisible things, you will endure.

If you can have this heavenly perspective, if you allow the Spirit of God, as you read this, to keep on giving you that heavenly, eternal perspective and orientation, it will transform the way you look at everything. These people of Judah, the remnant, at this time, what faced them in the natural was disaster. What faced them was the loss of everything that they thought was so dependable.

And maybe if they had looked just on the earthly level of things, they looked behind them to the north and they saw an empty land, bereft of the people who really ought to have been living there. If they looked to the northeast, they saw all the ominous brooding power of Assyria. If they looked to the east proper, they saw this threat that God had spoken of Babylon.

It seemed as though wherever you looked, the situation was hopeless. And if you only look in two dimensions, it is hopeless. And one of the things that God has to say to these people is, lift up your eyes.

There is another dimension. Lift up your eyes. Not just this dimension.

Not just what you can see on the horizon. There is another dimension of things. Speak comfort to my people.

Tell them that there is another dimension of things. It may seem at this moment that all the superpowers are having things their own way. It may seem that you are just the victim of circumstances and you have no way at all of controlling any of the events that are going to take place.

But there is another perspective. This is what it goes on to say. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem.

Cry to her that her warfare is accomplished and that her iniquity is pardoned for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of Jehovah. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain. About a third of the Old Testament is poetry. About a third of it.

Poets don't see things in straight lines. They don't need to see things in straight lines. They see another dimension of things.

They see another depth of things. They express things in different ways. In the times in which Isaiah was prophesying, these kings of the earth really were absolute despots.

They were absolute monarchs. What they wanted to do, they did it. They didn't have to fear the wrath in inverted commas of the United Nations passing some resolution or disapproving of what they've done.

It didn't make any difference. If they wanted to do it, they did it. They were gods upon the earth.

Almost the equivalent of that. And when they had conquered a place and they were coming to view their conquests and they wanted the conquered people to get the right idea of what they were, they would have one of these magnificent processions and the conquering king would come to the land that he had conquered. And so that everyone could get a good view of the splendor of this coming conquering king, they would literally level everything.

They would straighten all the crooked paths. They would fill in the valleys. They would shave the tops off the hills so that you had something that was straight in both dimensions so that everyone could see the approaching splendor and the glory of this conquering king.

Now listen to what Isaiah says. Verse 3. The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of Jehovah. It may seem that it is the superpowers that are calling all the tunes and making all the decisions, but there is something else happening.

The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain and the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed.

And all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is the flower of the field.

It all passes. There's a story told, I suppose, it's just a legend, but there's a story told of an ancient oriental monarch who wanted to give the appearance that he was very wise and understood things that other people didn't understand. So he gathered together a council of his best advisors, his wisest men, and he said to them, I want you to think up a single sentence that I can use in any possible circumstance which will give the impression of wisdom so that no matter who is there, whoever the king is, whatever the situation, I want to be able to say something which sounds profound and wise and will make people understand exactly who I am and my great sweeping wisdom.

And his counselors and advisors went into a huddle and they came up with this phrase, And this also shall pass away. Good phrase, isn't it? That is always relevant. And this also shall pass away.

All these splendors, all the frightening power of Assyria and Babylon, the grass withers, the flower fades, because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people is grass. This also shall pass away.

I remember hearing a story, I don't know whether this is a legend as well, of an old lady who was once asked which was her favorite Bible verse and she said, that one where it says it shall come to pass. Because things don't come to stay, she said, they just come to pass. And if you know they haven't come to

stay, you can survive because you know they've come to pass.

It's a kind of an interesting exposition. But God speaks in a strange way to his people. These things shall pass away.

All these mighty empires, they'll all pass away. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever. Oh Zion, or as it says in the Morgian, Oh thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain.

Oh thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength. Lift it up. Be not afraid.

Say unto the cities of Judah, what are you looking at? Are you looking at Assyria? Are you looking at Babylonia? Are you looking at the recession? Are you looking at the mortgage rates? What are you looking at? Behold your God. What are you looking at? What you are looking at will determine the way you understand things. It will determine your perspective.

It will determine your reaction to everything. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold your God. Verse 10, Behold the Lord Jehovah will come.

That's really very simple to say, isn't it? But that is a wonderful statement. I think it was when we opened out in the first meeting or something like that and someone made reference to the fact that our expectation for this Bible week, our hope, our longing and our expectation is that God will come. Nothing else matters.

Everything else is peripheral. Everything else is on the edges. The only thing that matters is that God will come.

And this is His promise. This is His promise when circumstances are beyond your control. This is always His promise.

Behold your God will come with a strong hand and His arm shall rule for Him. Behold His reward is with Him and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.

He shall gather the land with His arm and carry them in His bosom and shall gently lead those that are with young. And then, this man, this prophet in poetry begins to describe what God is like. This is what he says of Him.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand. That's just in the hollow of one hand. I've got a kind of a scientific leaning.

I'm not a scientist, but I'm curious and I do like to experiment and find out what things are like. And I can recall some time ago thinking now, how much can you hold in the hollow of your hand? When you go back to where you're staying today, I just recommend that you stand with a tap for a moment and see how much you can hold in the hollow of your hand and then put it into something. You probably need nothing more than an egg cup to put it into.

He holds the waters. He measures them in the hollow of His hand. He measured out heaven with a span.

Amazing, isn't it? Amazing power of this language. The astronomers are always kind of arguing and recalculating what the curvature of space is. And as far as they're concerned and the literal truth is that this earth is just one tiny planet of several that's spinning around one star which is one of several in this

spiral arm of a galaxy that we call the Milky Way.

And this galaxy is one of billions of galaxies and it is beyond any possibility to imagine the curvature of the universe. And Isaiah says, I know how big it is. It's just a handful for God.

That's how big it is. It's just a span. He measures the whole thing in a span.

If we get this perspective, you know, it alters things. It alters the way you think about the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Well, it goes on to say this.

It goes on for His measuring. He comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in balance. Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord or being His counselor has taught Him? With whom took He counsel and who instructed Him and taught Him in the path of judgment and taught Him knowledge and showed to Him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as the drop of a bucket.

You know, these are very rural situations. Can you imagine someone coming from the well with a bucket full of water? And it's inevitable. As you walk and you swing it or as you put the pot on your head, there's bound to be one or two drops that go astray.

You don't worry about them usually, do you? Just the drops and the bucket. You don't get into a big fuss about that. You don't kind of go, I've got to go back to the well and get another two drops because I'm two drops short from what we started.

They're hardly to be considered. The nations, Assyria, Babylonia, they're just like the drop of a bucket. And they're counted as the small dust of a balance.

Behold, He takes up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted to Him less than nothing and vanity.

To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? And then He begins to speak about the gods of the nations. The workman melts a graven image and the goldsmith spreads over it with gold and casts silver chains. And then with irony, He says, he that is so impoverished that he has no ablation chooses a tree that will not rot.

He seeks to him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image that shall not be moved. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits upon the circle of the earth. We had reference to this verse earlier on this morning.

It's God who sits upon the circuit of the earth. There's another dimension. Often in the Bible we're encouraged, even in the natural, even in the physical, to consider the other dimension.

Consider the heavens and the works of His hand. Just get your eyes off this earthbound level of things. The next time that circumstances seem to be conspiring and coming together to lay siege to you and threaten all your petty security, I recommend you do something.

I recommend you go outside on a dark night and just look up and think a minute and say, He holds all this. It's a span. It's just one handful for Him.

He sits on the circle, the circuit of the earth. People who lived much more out of their homes were very conscious of the night sky, conscious of the way that they moved around in a big circuit. Who does this? On the earth, things happen very quickly.

Very, very quickly. But in the heavens, where the stars are, things are much more predictable. If you went back to the place where you were born, I did this just a little time ago.

You go back to the place where you were born and it's very, very different. Very, very different. I made a kind of a strange allusion yesterday to the kind of situation.

I come from a place called Burslem in Stoke-on-Trent, which is the potteries. In the days when I was born there, they used to call it Smoke-on-Stench. It spent all its life under a kind of a yellowy haze.

We used to go on excursions. My mum would take me to see the trees. Other parents would take their children to see the ducks and we would go to see the trees.

Because the nearest tree to my house was a mile away in a park. But if you go back there today, they've landscaped it. They've made it into the Rio, which was all shrafft tips.

If you come from the potteries, that's what all the rubbish goes to. That's all the bits of broken cups and saucers and those are my hills that I played on as a lad. We didn't have gutters to play on.

We just had to play with broken cups and plaster of Paris moulds and things. But if you go there today, they've landscaped it. They've shaped it.

They've put grass on it. They've made golf courses. There are trees.

It's magnificent. In just half a century. You see, things on the earth change very, very quickly.

But if I go back to Burslem and stand on the same spot and look upwards, nothing's changed. It's the same as it was 50 years ago. There's nothing changed.

There's a circuit here. There's another perspective. There's another time scale.

There's something quite different. And the prophet says, don't you understand? He isn't like one of these gods that people have to make when there's an emergency arises. When things go wrong, when you say, oh quick, we need a god quickly.

Let's commission the goldsmith. If we haven't got the money to commission the goldsmith, let's get a piece of a tree. We'll do the best we can.

We'll get a tree that doesn't rot. We'll make a god. We need some help quickly.

We're in trouble. He says, come on. Haven't you known? Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? Hasn't it been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? He is the one who sits upon the circuit of the earth.

Does it make you feel a bit safer? He's the one who sits upon the circuit of the earth. He doesn't need emergency plans. He doesn't have to make quick and instant alterations of course.

He sits upon the circuit of the earth. The inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreads them as a tent to dwell in.

He brings princes to nothing and makes the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted. They shall not be sown.

Yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth and shall also blow upon them and they shall wither and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will you lighten me? Or shall I be equal? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and behold who has created these things.

That brings out the host. That's the story host. By number.

He calls them all by names. By the greatness of his power because he is strong in power. Not one fails.

There's a wonderful picture here. He's just spoken of God being like the shepherd. You know, one of the things Jesus said about the shepherd is that he knows his sheep by name.

He calls them. Let's have a quick look in John chapter 10 just to identify a verse. John chapter 10.

I'll read just the first two or three verses. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that enters not by the door into the sheepfold but climbs up some other way, the same as a thief and a robber. But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

To him the doorkeeper opens and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Now go back to Isaiah.

And verse 26. Lift up your eyes on high and behold who has created these things that brings out their host by number. He calls them all by names by the greatness of his power because he is strong in power.

Not one fails. Do you know what that means? In this powerful imagery of the prophet speaking in the power of poetry, he says the whole starry sky is just his flock. And he calls each one by name.

The reason that Deneb and Sirius and Canopus, these individual stars, the reasons that they're in the right place is because he's calling them that. He does it every day. This is his flock.

Millions and millions, billions upon billions, beyond anything that we can imagine. He knows every one by name. And the reason it's in that place where it was 50 years ago is because he calls it forth every day.

He sustains it. He hasn't just created the universe like a machine and then wound it and left it to go. Moment by moment, he sustains it.

Every part of it. Every particle of it. Every star.

Every blade of grass has all of his attention. We are very limited. Because we are limited and finite, we have to withdraw our attention from one thing in order to give all our attention to another thing.

But God doesn't. God can give all his attention to one thing and without withdrawing any of it, can give all his attention to the next thing. And without withdrawing any of his attention, can give all his attention.

See what Wesley says. He says, all the attributes divine are now at work for me. If this is the way he deals with the stars, calling each one by name, like a shepherd with his sheep, knowing each one, putting it in its

right place.

I know it's poetry. Don't let it stumble you. Let it speak.

Let it speak in a way that scientific measurements could never speak to you. This is his great flock. Next time you're out and you look up, just look.

This is his great flock. It's not an accident that that's there. It's not just in the language of what we're being taught now.

It's not just that some rules of physics are operating and gravity is having its effect. It's more than that. Behind all that, there is a shepherd who is calling them out one by one, putting them in their places.

Oh, I feel very, very safe. This is what he says. Verse 26.

Lift up your eyes on high and behold who has created these things that brings out their host by number. He calls them all by name by the greatness of his might because that he is strong in power. Not one fails.

Why do you say, oh Jacob, and speak, oh Israel, my way is hid from God and my judgment is passed over from God? Can you see what he's saying? They were saying God's forgotten us. God doesn't know what's happening to us. Our way is hid from God.

We are entering into parts of our life that are uncharted. They're out of control. And the prophet says, lift up your eyes.

Just look at the control. Every star in its right place. What do you mean your way is hid from God? He knows every part of it.

It's all under his care. This was a tragedy that was about to come upon Israel because God had had a great destiny for them. He was going to show them that he had other ways of implementing his purposes, but that didn't mean that he was withdrawing from them at this time his destiny for them.

They had failed him. That hadn't taken him by surprise. He knew that it was going to happen.

I knew that you would deal very treacherously, he said. I knew this would happen. Some years ago, I used to play with a chess board.

I won't call it play chess, but play with a chess board. And I used to enjoy trying to do these puzzles that you get in certain newspapers and you'd set out the chess board and it would say White to mate in eight moves against any defense or something like this. And then you'd sort of try and work out all these things.

Well, this is God to mate in a million moves against any defense. It doesn't make any difference. It's all in his hands.

He knows every eventuality. He knows every possibility. He knows what you'll do.

He knows when you might have done this and didn't do it and chose that. He knows. He knows.

All gloriously provided for. I'm not preaching determinism. I'm not a Muslim.

I'm not preaching any of those things. There are consequences if we do not do the things that God has given us to do. But the amazing thing is that no matter what a muddle we get ourselves into and whatever situation we produce or others produce we can always lift up our eyes.

And there's always you'll always hear this promise in the Spirit if your heart is open Behold, your God will come. He never, never, never says they got themselves into that mess they can get themselves out of it. Never, never your God will come.

But I got myself into this mess yes, He'll still come. Men do measure things in certain ways. They try to measure responsibilities.

That's what the theologians do and they say well how much of the responsibility really is Adam's responsibility because of his sin and how much of the responsibility is my responsibility because I haven't responded. And God says I'll take the responsibility. That's what the cross is all about.

I'll take the responsibility. It's my responsibility. I'll take the responsibility.

Not that it's His fault. That's not what I'm saying. But He says I'll take the responsibility.

These people when you get yourself into a situation where there are so many possible powers that come from different directions with their different consequences it's possible for a kind of paralysis to settle upon you. You get so tired. One of the signs very often of depression.

I'm not a doctor but I know it's tiredness. And it's very often because people can no longer control their circumstances. They don't know what to do and there's this terrible weariness that comes upon people.

Well there was a weariness upon the people of Israel and Judah at this time. A terrible weariness. Could they ever be what God had wanted them to be? What had God wanted them to be? What had been His original purpose and intention for this people? Well let's go back to the time when He made the nation His nation.

Go back to the book of Exodus. I want to just say a word or two. I won't explain this fully.

Maybe there will be some little glimpses of why I'm saying what I'm saying a little bit later on. But I just want to say this now to begin with. It is important when you read the scriptures that you make a distinction between what God determined to do with the blood descendant of Abraham, the one that we call the seed.

It's important to distinguish between that and what God was determined to do with the nation of Israel. What God was going to do through the family line of Abraham was fixed. It was without conditions.

God had determined to do it and if you go through the first chapter of Matthew you will read a terrible pedigree of people. All kinds of people who did all kinds of wicked things at different kinds of points. Let me just go to Matthew for a moment.

Keep your finger in Exodus chapter 4. We'll see if you believe me and keep it there. Matthew chapter 1. Here's a list. This is the root of the royal seed.

This is the seed that was promised in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15. It's going to come obviously from a descendant of Eve but later on God becomes more detailed in what He expresses of it and it's going to come down through Abraham. It's going to come down through a part of Abraham's descendants.

It's going to come through Isaac. Not just going to come through Isaac, it's going to come through part of Isaac's descendants. It's going to come through Jacob.

Not just going to come through all of Jacob's descendants, it's going to come down through Judah's. And it keeps on like this. And when you get to Matthew chapter 1, here's the list.

The book of the generations of Jesus Christ or generation of Jesus Christ. The son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac and Isaac begat Jacob and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren and Judas begat Phares and Zarah of Tamar.

Do you know that story? It's not a pleasant story. It's not a pleasant story. Tamar was Phares' daughter-in-law and he thought she was a harlot and used her as a harlot and from that union came the next generation.

This is not a pretty story but this is the seed. It's coming down. Irrespective of conditions.

Irrespective of what the devil will do or attempt to do. It's coming down. And Phares begat Eson and Eson begat Aram and Aram begat Amminadab and Amminadab begat Nashon.

Nashon was one of those who came out of Egypt and never entered into the promised land. One of those who did not believe. He was the prince of Judah.

And Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab. There's only one Rahab really in the Bible. This is Jericho Rahab.

And Boaz begat Obed of Ruth. Now Ruth was a Moabitess. And Obed begat Jesse and Jesse begat David the king and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah.

This is not a pretty story. But the seed is coming down. God is continuing with his purpose to do what he will.

And Solomon begat Roboam and Roboam begat Abiah and Abiah begat Asa and Asa begat Josaphat and Josaphat begat Joram and Joram begat Ozias and Ozias begat Jotham and Jotham begat Achaz and Achaz begat Ezechias and Ezechias begat Manasseh? Do you remember this man? We talked about him yesterday. The most wicked king that they ever had. The man who sacrificed his own children in fire to heathen gods.

The man who produced the situation in Judah which was worse than what it was like in the days when Jericho was first taken and God came in to cleanse the land of its pollutions. Manasseh. It's the seed.

A forebearer of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, this isn't a conditional promise. This is just a clear thing.

God is going to bring this seed into the world. Traces it all the way down. We needn't go any farther.

But in the book of Galatians, when Paul writes to the Galatians, he speaks concerning these things and he says he speaks of the seed and he says the seed is Christ. One of the wonderful things about having the New Testament is that it gives us definitive explanations concerning some parts of the Old Testament. This isn't a question of your opinion.

It doesn't matter what your opinion is as regards who the seed is or who the seed might not be. This is the Spirit of God speaking in Paul the seed is Christ. The seed to whom the promises were made is Christ.

He is the terminus of that line of prophecy. He is the one who should come, who shall declare his generations. There are no generations of Jesus in the natural sense.

Although it says in Psalm 22 a seed shall serve him. We'll come back to that at another time. So you've got this line of prophecy that culminates, terminates in the seed which is Christ.

And like we've heard also this morning, when God brought in the disposition of the law it was only ever intended to be for a period of time. It was only until the seed should come. That's Galatians.

It was never intended to be permanent. It was an accommodation, like we heard this morning. You hear Jesus saying when they questioned him about the law that Moses had given to them and he said, it wasn't like this from the beginning but because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses permitted you to put away your wives.

That is an accommodation. That's God saying this is not what I would have chosen. This is not but I accommodate to this setting, this situation because of the hardness of men's hearts.

In many ways the law was a kind of damage limitation exercise. That's what the law was. It was a damage limitation exercise.

It was restraining the wickedness of men, holding it in so that not too many people would get hurt by not too many things. It was never intended to be a means of salvation. It was intended to make it plain to every man who was under it what he himself was like.

Like again we've heard earlier, I don't know if it was this morning or yesterday, that the Old Testament gives us, if we read it and the Spirit of God is allowed to teach us, it gives us an amazing concept of the holiness of God. But more than that, it gives us an amazing concept of the sinfulness of man. It was given so that man might become exceeding sinful.

That he might know exactly what he was like. That he would no longer live under any illusions that basically I'm really a nice person and given different circumstances I would have done different things. The law was given to them so that they would know exactly what they were like.

They would be without excuse. They would know the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The law was given not to the seed of Abraham in the sense of it being the promise of the coming Messiah but it was given to a group of people who were the descendants of Abraham and others who were added to them.

Now I'll just let that settle in because for some people this is a new idea. Although it's very plainly spoken of in the scriptures, if you look at these things, you'll see that others were part of that group who came out of Egypt with what were known as the children of Israel. You'll know that others were baptized into Moses in the clouds and in the sea.

It was some of those others who first began complaining, which you read about in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. But they were all joined together in an amalgamation to become the covenant people of God for a specific purpose. God gave to them a conditional covenant.

If you have any dealings at all with computers, and if you haven't I don't think this will stumble you too much, but if you do a little bit of programming of any of the most basic languages with computers, there's a thing called an if-then statement. Yes? Some folks of you will know. It really means if... it's a line of

instruction to a machine which really says, if these are the circumstances, go to this place in the program.

If this, then this. And by application, if not this, then go somewhere else and do something else. That's really what happens.

What you've got in the story of the Exodus is one of these if-then statements. If you turn, please, to Exodus chapter 19, we've just got a few more minutes left so that we can see how this thing begins to come about. Exodus chapter 19.

In the third month when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness, and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel, You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings.

Remember the eagles' wings, in case we get back to Isaiah. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bear you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if - here it is - now therefore if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall become a peculiar treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine.

And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel. God opens before these people the prospect of a unique relationship between him and the nation.

They will become his nation. If words mean anything at all, if you say to somebody, if you do this and this, you will become my nation. If words mean anything at all, it can only mean that they weren't his nation when he was saying it to them.

That's straight-line thinking, I know, but it's not too late in the day for us to kind of think about that. If he says, if you do this, then you will become my people, it can only mean that at that point, in some sense, they were not his people. They were going to become his people in a unique sense.

All the world is mine, he says. It's all mine. But if you do this, and if you do this, then you will become mine in a unique sense, in an exclusive sense.

You will be my people. You will be my nation. I have a work for you to do.

I have a purpose for you to do. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests. What were priests? They were the servants of a God.

That's what the priests were. They were the servants of a God. Have you still got your finger in Exodus chapter 4? Oh, you unbelieving people, you didn't think I'd go back, did you? Um, Exodus chapter 4. Yes, well, there was a good chance that I wouldn't have done.

Exodus chapter 4. I don't have the best sense of direction in the world, as some people who know me will tell you. Just to make you feel really as though you're in safe hands, I'm related to the captain of the Titanic. This is Exodus chapter 4. Exodus chapter 4. Verse 22.

These are the words, or this is what Moses is to say to Pharaoh. Verse 22. And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith Jehovah, Israel is my son, even my firstborn.

And I say unto thee, let my son go, that he may serve me. Let my son go, that he may serve me. The word that God brought to Pharaoh through Moses had two very definite parts to it.

The first part we're very, very familiar with. Let my people go. The second part is absolutely vital that we understand that they may serve me.

No man can serve two masters. At this time, the nation of Israel was serving Pharaoh. They were under another king, under another set of law.

They could not be free. Because they weren't free, they could never be God's servants. So, the process begins.

Let my people go. And the reason is, I want them as my servants. They are to be my servants.

Let my people go. Israel is my son, my firstborn. It was the special role of firstborn sons to act as priests to the family.

Israel is my son, my firstborn. God doesn't ignore all the other nations. He has a great heart for them.

There was always a Gentile dimension in the promises that God gave to Abraham. But this people who came from Abraham, who were to be God's people, were to have a unique role. They were to be a kingdom of priests.

They were to be a mediatory people. They were to be an in-between people. They were to be the eldest son who was to serve God in a unique way and act as priests for the whole world.

That's what they were to be. They were to serve him. And now Isaiah speaks to them when they're under the threat of these superpowers.

And it seems as though forces over which they have no control is moving them round the board, and they have no say in the matter, and how can they do anything at all except just give way to an intolerable weariness of spirit? Go back, please, to Isaiah. Verse 27 was where we left. We're coming to an end now.

Verse 27 Why sayest thou O Jacob, and speakest O Israel my way is hid from the Lord and my judgment is passed over from God And then it goes on Hast thou not known Sorry, I'll wait for you. Isaiah 40 verse 28 now. It's good for you to see this as I'm reading it.

Hast thou not known Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God the Lord the creator of the ends of the earth fainth not neither is weary There's no searching of his understanding. He gives power to the faint and to them that have no might he increases strength even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fail but they that serve the Lord they who wait upon the Lord these are the priests they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings as eagles. That's how they began.

God brought them on eagles' wings to himself to make them his people over the years they've grown so weary, so beaten and broken by all the circumstances, many of them their own fault but God hasn't given them up he hasn't given up with you either doesn't matter how weary you have become, doesn't matter

how broken, doesn't matter how much you feel yourself to be the victim of circumstances those who wait upon the Lord they shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings like eagles hallelujah, let's pray Lord if life has broken you and discouraged you and you felt at times your way was hid from God listen Israel of God you new nation you kingdom of priests those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles into another dimension above it all where none of the earthly things dictate to their lives you seen eagles they're almost out of sight oh Father, oh Lord, I don't bless you, Lord, that you have chosen to reveal yourself to us we could know nothing we'd be like worms in the earth, we wouldn't even know if it was day or night but Lord you've revealed yourself to us Lord oh God Lord, lift up our eyes and teach us to lift them up Lord, let's just love him let's just love him for a minute or two

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/2/SID2756.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ron-bailey/isaiah-part-2-that-they-may-serve-me/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net