

Your Maker is Your Husband

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we've had a long break, but if you remember, we are still in a series on Isaiah's servant songs. We've been looking at the servant songs in the book of the servant, which is in Isaiah chapter 40 to 55.

And in that section, there are five servant songs. And we've already looked at all five of those. We spent six weeks on those five servant songs from Isaiah 42 up to Isaiah 53, which is the climax of the servant songs, the suffering servant.

And these, remember, are songs. They're songs. They're beautiful, carefully constructed and crafted Hebrew poetry. And we looked at all five sermons at the fact that the New Testament repeatedly quotes the servant songs and testifies that the servant that's being spoken of in the servant songs is Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

And so what we've said is that you can come back to the servant songs in Isaiah and find an Old Testament Christology of sorts, the Old Testament teaching you things about Jesus that even the Gospels don't talk about.

And that's what we've been doing. Now we turn to Isaiah 54 and 55 and 60, the next three weeks just around out January. And Isaiah 54 and 55, particularly, they're not songs that are about the servant.

[1 : 2 4] They're not technically servant songs, but the logic in the book of the servant, which they're a part of, is that because of what the servant will do that we've already seen, particularly Isaiah 53, the suffering servant, then Isaiah 54 verse 1, seeing O'Baron 1 or Isaiah 55, because of what the servant has done, come to a free feast, you who have no money, you who want to buy without cost, come to a free feast.

And so the back part of the book of the servant in Isaiah is the application. It's the application of what it means that the servant has accomplished, what he has done in being crushed, as we saw in Isaiah 53.

It's what will come from it. So let's just dive right into it. Isaiah 54 is about two women, and it's divided into three sections.

And if you just look down, if you have a copy of the text, you'll see that there's a double space between verse 3 and verse 4. There's also, would be one if it didn't start a new page between verse 8 and verse 9.

Those are the three sections. It's just telling you that in Hebrew, it's in three different sections, and it's about two different women. So here's what we're going to learn. We're going to learn first that there is an undeserved marriage, that there is an unending promise, and lastly that there is a supernatural family.

[2 : 5 6] So first, an undeserved marriage, which starts at verse 4, talking about the second woman in the passage. We're going to look at the second woman first. In this section, our relationship with God is being cast in the metaphor of romance, of a romantic pursuit.

And the scene is that in verses 4 to 6, God is speaking to a woman, and her current state, he tells us, she is ashamed.

There was shame in her youth. She has the reproach of widowhood, more precisely the reproach of being husbandless because of a divorce.

She's a deserted wife. She's a wife of youth that has been cast off. And so you can picture the scene here. You've got a woman that married young.

That's the wind, I think. You've got a woman that married young. She lost her husband young. Years of deep shame in a culture where being single is especially hard, but that's not even the reason why she's ashamed here, as it's talking about her being ashamed.

[4 : 18] It's something else. The word that's being used here in verses 4 and 5 for shame is a word that means hopelessness because of holding on to sin from the past, from your earlier life.

And the reason she is ashamed, this woman here, this deserted woman, is because of the bigger picture that you have to read from other parts of Isaiah and even other parts of the book of the servant.

And in Isaiah 50 verse 1, Israel, who this woman stands for symbolically, is issued a certificate of divorce from God.

So God comes to Israel in Isaiah 50 and says, I am issuing you a certificate of divorce. In other words, I married you, but now I'm divorcing you. And that's what this section is referring to, Israel, the woman, the husbandless woman who is full of her approach and shame because she has no husband, because God has divorced her.

Why? Well, he says in Isaiah 51, because of her iniquities is the quote. In other words, God married the woman he loved, the people he loved.

[5 : 31] He loved, ferocious love for her. And she chose idols. She chose other gods.

She chose to worship creatures rather than the Creator. That's what we're talking about here with this second woman. The prophetic language, especially in other books like Hosea, does not shy away from filling out this metaphor by using the language of prostitution.

She was an adulterer, Hosea says. Israel was an adulterer. Just listen to how Hosea, who's a contemporary of Isaiah at the same time, describes it.

Someday God says, when I bring you back, you will call me my husband and no longer will you call me my bail. Now bail is a generic term for God.

It's just a generic term for the gods. And so what Hosea is saying there, what God is saying there is when I call you back, you're no longer just going to call me bail. You're going to call me husband. Meaning that Israel, the woman here at this time, was calling God one of the gods, generic, one of the pantheon, one of the many gods.

[6 : 45] They were referring to God as a, Yahweh, their redeemer as a bail, just like any of the other nations gods. Meaning that they were willing to go out with many other men, metaphorically speaking.

So God in verse six, verse eight, verse seven refers to it, he did what is justified. It says, for a season I cast her off.

You see that verse eight, he hid his face for seven. He deserted her. And it's not so much that God abandoned the wife of his youth.

It's that she abandoned him and he gave her up to the men, the idols that she desired. In other words, he withdrew from her.

He pulled back from her. And in the immediate context, what that means is that Israel is a tiny little nation, not very military, she doesn't have a powerful military at the time.

[7 : 43] And when God withdrew from her, his protection, his love for her, all the bigger nations came down upon her and she was an easy captor. And what this is prophesying about in the book of the servant in the immediate context is that she's been taken into Babylon, she's been crushed, Jerusalem has been destroyed.

And she is in the shame, shame, a shame to widow, a husbandless woman, metaphorically. She's an abused woman.

God gave her over to exactly what she wanted and what happened is results in a shame, disgrace for approach and homelessness is what the passage is talking about.

But verse five, but not anymore. Your maker is your husband.

The climax phrase of the text. Your maker is your husband, he says, despite the adultery, despite the prostitution as Hosea puts it, because of great compassion, God says here is the language, because of overwhelming ferocious love, love that's being cast here in the language of romantic pursuit.

[9 : 00] No matter what she's done, no matter what you've done, you see, no matter what you've done, he will take her back, which is the simple definition of redemption.

Now don't confuse the fact that he's using the metaphor of a woman here to forget that he's also talking to adulterous men, to men who are idolaters, to an Israel who's cast in the language of a woman here that would have been led by men, men and women, both adulterous, chasing after idols, that's who he's talking to.

Now there are a bunch of really grand juxtapositions here in this section. Just notice from verse five when he says, your maker is your husband, from there, just listen, this is what he says about himself, that I am maker, creator, the Almighty, the Holy One, the Lord of all the earth, he says. In other words, he's drawing us up into the language of transcendence, of power, of majesty, of might, of all mightiness in all of these sentences. He's saying I'm the Lord of all the earth. In other words, you've gone after the gods of some of the places on earth because gods were designated in a specific realm in the ancient Near East.

But I'm the Lord of all the earth. He uses the language of wrath and anger and I've deserted you. I've departed from you. I'm angry with you.

[10:33] And then I am your husband in the very same sentence. I am your redeemer. The Lord of all the earth has called you back.

And the verb there for called you back is, it's a romantic verb. You can't really tell that in English, but it's specifically a verb for wooing, like chasing after a woman you love or something like that.

The Lord of all the earth has called you back. You see, it's these grand juxtapositions set side by side.

The climax, he calls himself the redeemer. And literally in the Old Testament in the ancient Near East, redeemers were well known. I mean, it's a common cultural concept and it simply means one who buys back.

And you'll remember the notion of the kinsmen redeemer who can buy back their relative. He's saying, I will take you back from the men that you have given yourself over to.

[11:37] Now the great illustration of this, of course, in the Old Testament is again from a contemporary of Isaiah is Hosea. You'll remember the story of many of you of Hosea.

He's prophesying around the same time. And he did what a bunch of the prophets are called to in the Old Testament, Ezekiel and Hosea especially. And that's, Hosea uses the phrase that I was called to live out God's heart.

In other words, these prophets are actually called in their own personal life to be illustrations of God's own heart.

And so what is, how does Hosea live out God's heart? God says, go and marry a prostitute named Gomer. And so he did and she cheated on him, right?

And she left him. And in Hosea chapter three, God says, go again and love her anyway.

[12:38] And so Hosea goes to a marketplace where they sell sex slaves, concubines, and he buys his wife back from the sex slave market.

He takes her home. Just as an aside here, this is not the main point, but as the church, we have to be aware and praying and asking ourselves what can we do to combat the issue of women and young girls captured in the sex slave market, which is enormous in our world.

We're here than any of us can imagine, I think. Back to the main point. She was in this market, Gomer, his wife. And this is what he says. So I went and I bought her back for 15 shekels of silver and about a Homer and a Lefk of barley.

Your salvation, this is not just about Israel. We've been looking at the book of the servant. We know that the New Testament tells us this is about us.

Your salvation is being cast in the language of God's romantic pursuit for you. The God who is your father by nature, the Lord of all the art, the maker, the creator, the God to whom all of us said no, but he said yes.

[14:10] It's precisely at the moment that we said no that he comes and says, yes, I will buy you back. I will redeem you. I will go to the marketplace for you.

God marries us cheaters. You see, this is simply about your maker is your redeemer. And this prophecy is about us.

Now secondly, how can he do this? How can you reconcile the juxtapositions that we just looked at?

That God is the Lord of all the art, the creator, the maker of all that there is. And before him, we deserve the wrath that he talks about here, the anger, the desertion with the fact that he comes to her and says to us and says, but I will redeem you.

I don't care. My love is so ferocious. And how can he do that? Where's the justice in reconciling those two ideas?

[15:10] And the answer is in verses nine and 10 where we read about, we learn about an unending promise, the third section here, this passage. Now it's peculiar this section.

This is like the days of Noah to me as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth. So he jumps into talking about Noah. And the subject of this idea is actually the waters of Noah.

And so what he's simply saying is back in the days of Noah, I flooded the earth with water and the water was judgment over the earth.

And when the judgment, when the waters recited, I said, no more. I will make a covenant with this land. No more will I do this. The exact same way I'm here to make an unending promise with all of you that I left you, I withdrew from you, but no more, never again.

Not from my people. I won't do it. And why? How is he willing to say that? How can he say it? And the answer he gives is in verse 10. And it's in the language, a little phrase, my covenant of peace shall not be removed.

[16:20] My covenant of peace is the answer. Now, covenant of peace, this idea of a covenant of peace, it only appears four times in the whole Bible.

All of them are in the Old Testament. And what is it? The English word that's translated here, peace, it doesn't really capture the whole of the idea.

It's the Hebrew word that all of us probably know. It's the word shalom. And in the modern world, when we think of peace, we think of the ending of hostility, the ceasing of war or something like that. But what's being talked about here is something much bigger than that. Shalom is a concept that we just don't have a word in English for. But if you go and read biblical scholars on this idea that pops up all throughout the Old Testament and in the New Shalom, they'll say something, a word more like flourishing or well-being or the good life or something like that.

But even that doesn't capture it because in the modern world, for us, for the contemporary society, the good life is usually thought of as something like in the language of entertainment and amusement and working Monday to Friday so you can get to the weekends and binge watch Netflix or something like that.

[17:39] That's the modern language of the good life. But it doesn't mean that, of course. It's something much bigger and much grander. This word shalom, this covenant of peace, what is it?

One of the main places that it's also mentioned in the Bible is in Ezekiel chapter 34. So I don't usually do this, but if you do have a Bible, turn over to Ezekiel 34 because it's worth seeing because there's a direct description of shalom here in Ezekiel 34 where he mentions the covenant of peace down in verse 25 to 31.

And just if you didn't turn there, that's fine. Just listen to what type of a place is being talked about when this covenant of peace shalom takes hold.

I will make with them a covenant of peace, there it is, and I will banish wild beasts from the land so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.

And I will make them in the places all around my hill a blessing. And I will send down the showers in their season. They shall be showers of blessing and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit and the earth shall yield its increase.

[18:57] And they shall be secure in their land and they shall know that I am the Lord when I break the bars of their yoke and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

They shall no more be afraid of the nations nor shall the beast of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely and none shall make them afraid and I will provide for them renown plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations.

They shall know that I am the Lord their God with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord. What's the picture of Shalom?

He will banish wild beasts. He will give you safety in the woods. He will put a mountain of blessing in the middle of your city. He will bring showers that yield crops, fruit, plenty to eat.

He will provide security, he says. He will end your slavery. He will break the bars of your yoke, all you who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest.

[20:01] Take my yoke upon you for my yoke is light. It is not burdensome. No more exile, he says. No more will you be a prey to the nations. No more persecution.

None shall make you afraid. None shall be hungry. None shall suffer in the climax. I will be with you like a shepherd with their sheep.

What is he describing? Much more than ceasing of wars or something like we might think of peace today. It's much bigger. He's describing the perfect city, the perfect society, the perfect garden, if you will.

And at this, he's describing the union of heaven and earth, Ephesians 1, 9 to 10. He's describing exactly what salvation came to do and that's to bring the union of heaven and earth.

He's describing the city of God. The covenant of peace is a covenant of shalom. It's about much more. It's about the city of God. It's the restoration of nature, the destruction of our slavery to sin and the presence of God fully, finally and forever.

[21 : 09] Nicholas Wolterstorf is a scholar that's worked a lot on thinking about shalom throughout the Bible and this idea of the covenant of peace. And this is how he describes it. It's big and broad.

It is cosmic redemptive promise. It's being friends with God. It's being in harmony with other people. It's being in harmony with nature.

It's the removal of the curse from nature and it's being at peace in our own selves. It's the absence of any mental illness. It's where you truly desire the good, where your head and your heart no longer clash with each other, that you do exactly what you want and it's never sinful.

It's the presence, he says, of justice, truth and beauty. It's the absence of sin, chaos and death. And one of my favorite agrarian theologians back in the States, Wendell Berry, he puts it like this, I take very literally the statement in the Gospel of John that God loves the world, the whole world.

I believe that the world was created and approved by love, that it endures by love and that because it is redeemable it will be redeemed only in love. I believe that divine love, incarnate love summons the world always towards wholeness which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement with God.

[22 : 37] Now look, this is the logic of the whole book of the servant encapsulated right here in these last two verses of this section and here it is, verse 9 and 10.

The world in Noah's day came under the waters of chaos. It came under the waters of judgment and just as the judgment of those deathly waters when they receded led to a covenant of peace with the land, a covenant of life.

So the work of the servant will lead to an unending covenant of peace with the whole world, the promise of Shalom.

It's the application of Isaiah 53, the servant crushed, maimed, broken in Isaiah 54, meaning you get Shalom.

What's this about? This is about the cross. The cross is the reconciliation of justice and love where a creator can be the husband of the adulterer.

[23 : 50] This is where the servant, the cross, it's where the servant takes wrath so you can be the bride of God. It's where he got destroyed so you could have the hope of Shalom.

It's where Christ is ultimately abandoned so that you would never have to be. You would never have to be the widow.

We're doing this new thing now. I hope you like it. I like it in our bulletins where we print the evening service and we give a reflection at the beginning just to help put your mind at it.

Tozer, AW Tozer here, he puts it this way at the end of that quote in the bulletin, Jesus Christ our Lord surrendered in order that he might win. He destroyed his enemies by dying for them and he conquered death by allowing death to conquer him so that you could have Shalom.

Yes so you could have the forgiveness of sins. Absolutely. And much more than that, salvation, it's much bigger. It's the restoration of everything.

[24 : 56] It's the end of the curse, the covenant of peace. That's what it's about. Now, thirdly and finally, we'll be just very brief here. We're almost out of time. The sermon takes an unexpected turn here as we go back to the first woman there at the beginning of the passage.

The desolate woman teaches us about a supernatural family. It says in the first couple verses, this is a different woman, a different metaphor.

She's desolate or in other words, she's barren. She can't have any children. Who is she? And the answer is metaphorically, symbolically. She's not just the whole nation of Israel, but she's more specifically the symbol here is that she stands for Jerusalem, the city.

Now how do we know that? Well, we read in our New Testament reading just a little bit ago about this woman, if you remember. In Galatians chapter four, Paul quotes from Isaiah 54-1 and he says

in that passage, seeing barren woman, your children will be more than the one who has a husband. He quotes Isaiah 54, but right before that, he identifies the barren woman. And who does he say she is? He says, the Jerusalem above is your mother.

[26 : 18] And so Paul identifies this woman right here and says this is Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the barren woman. Now why? What does that mean? Well, in the immediate context, just think about it, in the immediate context, Jerusalem has been destroyed.

That's what the prophecy is about. And all of her children are in Babylon and so she's become barren. She has no children. And so the prophecy is saying, oh, Jerusalem, you barren woman, all your children are gone.

You're desolate. You've been destroyed. You've been laid to waste. But you will have more children than the married woman, Babylon. You will have more children than you can possibly imagine. And then verse two, expand your tents, pick up your tent pegs, stretch them to the corners of the earth. You're going to have to be a much bigger city than you currently are now to get what I'm about to give to you. And so what he's saying here is that, yes, I am your husband.

And Paul tells us he's talking to the church. I'm your husband. And Jerusalem, Jerusalem in this metaphor, is your mother. Now that's the immediate context.

[27 : 25] But when we look at it across the whole Bible, Paul says this. He's speaking about not the city of Jerusalem as it presently stands in Israel at the moment. He's talking about, he says, the Jerusalem that is above.

Not the earthly city, but the heavenly city of Jerusalem. The city of God is what Hebrews 12 puts it. The city of God, in other words, the city of God, he's saying, is where I will have tons of children, supernatural children that won't be born by blood, Jew, Gentile, all sorts in the city above.

It's not about the city of Jerusalem, the city in the Middle East. It's much bigger than that. She's got to expand her tents. She'll never be able to hold all the children that are going to be members of the city that is above.

Even now, even now, the Jerusalem that is above, our mother, Paul calls her, has thousands and millions of children from every single generation that there's been since of all of history.

Now, I don't want to say much about this because we're out of time, but I just want to say, especially as we think about verse 2 here, expand your tents, O Jerusalem, that we as members here in the Free Church of Scotland and as a nation who has an immense history of Christianity at the base of our society, that we have to be more and more conscious all the time and fight to be conscious of the global church.

[29 : 01] I want to draw us into being more conscious of the global church. Nearly two-thirds of Christians that will go to church today are not in America or the UK or Europe, but are in the majority world, the global south.

Two-thirds of all the Christians. Philip Jenkins in *The Next Christendom*, a very important book in the last decade, he writes this, which I still shocks me in a way.

The average Christian today is not a young white male living in Mississippi or Scotland, but is a female, is black, and lives in a Brazilian slum or an African village.

When you look across the Christian population throughout the world and find medians and means and averages, we are not in the median mean or average any longer, middle of that average any longer churches in places like the UK or even in America.

If current trajectories remain the same, the country and the world with the largest Christian population by the time my son will be a young adult and maybe even a teenager will be China.

[30 : 21] One Chinese pastor recently in the telegraph put it this way, Mao thought he could eliminate religion. He thought he had accomplished this.

It's ironic. He didn't. He actually failed completely. China would have the largest population of Christians for any country in the world in the next decade.

We've got to know about what God is doing in the world. We can see the prophecy of Isaiah 54-2 already being fulfilled as the church moves across the global south and the majority world.

100 years ago in 1910 at the World Council of Churches, Western countries had four times the amount of Christians that the majority world has.

Four times 100 years ago. And in 2010, the global south had two times more than the west of Christians.

[31 : 19] And that's happened in one century. Jerusalem above, you better get bigger tent pegs and expand your tent because the church is big and broad and it will always, always be spreading.

Give me two minutes and we'll be done. I just want to give you four things, 30 seconds each, four times that makes two minutes, I think, of how you can respond tonight.

First is verse six, answer the call. God calls his wife out of the slave market.

And your husband is calling and the simple application that he's referring to, it means don't commit adultery, don't cheat on him.

And what that means metaphorically is that you have to be willing to identify your idols. You have to be willing to know what they are and to take your precious ring and throw it into the volcanic magma of Mount Doom.

[32 : 34] You have to be willing to cast away. You have to answer the call. He is your husband.

What are your idols? What do you love most?

Secondly, verse four and five, forget your shame. Forget your shame.

Shame here is a hopelessness because of what you have done in the past. And you are not beyond the pale of forgiveness, no matter what you've done.

And for Christians especially, you too have to let your guilt be forgiven. You have to let your guilt go. Your maker is your husband.

And if your husband, God himself, is willing to say yes to you because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross, how can you continue to hold on to guilt that God himself has forgotten?

[33 : 35] It is to put yourself above God as judge, like you needed something more than the cross for you to truly forgive yourself. Forget your shame.

Thirdly, verse four, sing. Sing, rejoice, because you deserve death, but the servant got death so that you could have peace.

Rejoice with Jerusalem your mother. And lastly, and finally, and we'll pray, love the Jerusalem that is above.

Now, this one's more enigmatic. Love the Jerusalem that is above. What Paul's talking about there is the invisible church, the whole body of saints, Christ's body being prepared in the Jerusalem, the city of God that is above.

Love the church. That's what he's saying. The Jerusalem that is above, he calls her your mother because it's in the church that you are nourished, raised, brought up, that you grow, and you have to love her even when you don't want to.

[34 : 58] Love the global church. Get to know her. We probably don't know her that well here. Get to know the global church and love her and pray for her.

All right, let's pray. Lord, we ask that you would show us the beauty of the fact that we have been redeemed from our idolatrous adultery.

Thank you for Jesus Christ, the servant for us. We ask that you would bring some of us back, maybe, Lord, that need to be brought back. We ask that you would change our hearts, that you would give us love for the church, joy, if we don't have it.

We just ask for these things, a spirit of Christ come. We ask for that in Jesus' name. Amen.