

# The Transformed Society

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's been a couple of weeks since we've been back in the book of Isaiah. We're working through Isaiah part one this semester. We only have a few weeks left. We'll end this series at the end of May.

And Isaiah part one is chapters one to 39. Typically the commentators will divide Isaiah into three parts. And part one chapter one to 39 is often called the book of the king.

And the reason for that is you see kingship come up quite often. And the big idea that you start to gather from Isaiah's poetry is that if the promises that God made to Abraham all the way back in Genesis are ever going to come to fruition, be fulfilled, then Israel and Jerusalem, they're going to have to have a good king.

And they don't have a good king. They haven't had a good king in quite some time. And Hezekiah is the king in the chapter that we're reading about here, Isaiah 32. And he's an okay king, but he's not a great king, not always.

And there's been a lineage of very bad rulers before him. And there's going to come a sequence that's pretty bad after him. And so because of that, God has said so far in book one, things have fallen apart and it's too corrupt in Jerusalem.

[ 1 : 16 ] And that means that Assyria is coming first, 701 BC, and then Babylon's coming, 586 BC. And in both those occasions, Jerusalem is going to experience partial destruction and then full destruction.

And there's nothing that you can do about it. And the reason God says this over and over and over again is because all of your leadership has been corrupt and evil and unjust.

And the theme of Isaiah book one is that when the ruler falls, so goes the people. If you have a good king, you're going to have a good society. And if you have a bad king, then eventually you're going to become Babylon.

And over and over again, even though Babylon is the great enemy of Israel and Jerusalem, God keeps saying, but you are Babylon. You've become Babylon. You're just like Babylon and your kings have been corrupted.

And one commentator says, this is the plight of all societies that eventually every nation, every society, every great city becomes Babylon. And that's because Francis Spufford put it, we break things.

[ 2 : 22 ] Human beings break things. And we have a tendency to corrupt everything. And all it takes is one bad ruler and eventually society crumbles and falls.

And that's the plight of every nation, the rise and fall of every kingdom throughout all of history. Isaiah 32 is Isaiah's vision from God of a better city.

We've been talking about that throughout the series of ultimately a transformed society. And really the question that underlies this chapter, this is a climactic chapter in the book of the king, the first 39 chapters, is the question really is this, what does it take for society to be ultimately transformed?

What do you need for the final transformation of true society, of a good society? And here's the answer, you need, Isaiah says, a great reversal, a righteous king, and a transformed people.

So let's think about that together. First a great reversal. If you look with me, start right in the middle of the passage, more towards the end, verse 14, Isaiah summarizes the plight of Jerusalem here.

[ 3 : 32 ] And he says, the palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted, the watchtower dens for donkeys.

And so he's saying, he's speaking in the present tense about a future reality and saying, when a Syria and Babylon come, there's going to be no people left, there's going to be no king, and there's going to be no cultivated society, no culture.

It's just the city, what you once knew as a great place is going to be a place where the donkeys spend all their time. There's no cultivation, there's no society. And he's picking up from the very beginning of Genesis here and saying that human beings were made in the image of God to live in a great city, to live in a great society, that we were made by God as the pinnacle of creation, to live not in the wilderness, but in the garden, to live in a cultivated space, a space with a good king, a cultivated culture, and a good, healthy society.

And when you get to the middle of history right here, we learn that ultimately he's saying to Jerusalem, the great city of God, there's going to come a day very soon where you don't have a king, you don't have any culture left, no buildings, nothing, and you don't even have a people. You're completely abandoned, it's just a place where donkeys like to come and hang out. Because you're so corrupt, because your kings have been so corrupt, and then you look back at verse nine where he starts this idea, he says, rise up you women who are at ease, hear my voice, you complacent daughters.

[ 5 : 05 ] Now he's not just talking to women there, to females, instead he's doing what he's been doing the whole first book, and that's speaking to Jerusalem in feminine metaphors.

So oftentimes throughout the Old Testament when God speaks or a prophet speaks directly to a city, it speaks to the city as a her, as a she. And so he's saying rise up you women, you daughters of Jerusalem, the word city is a feminine word.

And he's saying that means you men and you women, you are all the daughters of Jerusalem and every single one of you is complacent. And you see you put those two ideas together. Verse 14, this is truly coming because of your corruption and you know about it and you're complacent.

You men and women, you're just sitting around, you don't ultimately seem to care at all. And then verse 10, he puts a time stamp on it, in a little more than a year you will shudder.

Meaning this is probably the commentators think that you're 702 when he writes this, when he speaks this. And that means a year from now, 701, Assyria, Sinakarib is coming and he's going to camp right outside your door and you will shudder.

[ 6 : 15 ] You will experience the things that Isaiah has been prophesying about. Now, that means that in the middle of this passage, it's bad news.

And then when you look at verse 14 and finish that sentence and scan your eyes over to 15, you get one of these moments in Isaiah that we've pointed out a few times in the series.

They're moments of irrationality, moments where the text doesn't make any sense. Did you see it? You're about to have no king, no people, no culture, and the great city of God is going to be nothing but a den for donkeys.

And then verse 15 says, until the spirit is poured and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field. Now, he's done this three or four times already in the book of the king where he says everything is, devastation is coming and then the spirit's going to pour down.

And what became the wilderness, the place where humans are not supposed to be, the place of sin is all of a sudden going to become the fruitful field, the garden all over again. And Isaiah keeps putting these two things together.

[ 7 : 24 ] In the middle of the 20th century, Tolkien, the author of The Lord of the Rings, wrote a wonderful essay called On Fairy Stories. And it's an essay that changed the literary community in many ways and coined a famous term that's almost become a cliché at this point, but it's the literary concept of eukatastrophe.

This is the idea. And it put together two different ideas. The EU at the beginning in Greek means good, so it's a good catastrophe. And Tolkien said that a good catastrophe, a eukatastrophe, is in essence a massive turn in fortune from a seemingly unconquerable situation to an unforeseen victory usually brought by grace rather than by heroic effort.

Now, there's a biblical idea that precedes Tolkien's idea. GK Beal has called it redemptive irony. There's a redemptive irony, a eukatastrophe motif that runs all throughout the Bible.

And here's how he defines it. He says, it's when everything seems to be cursed, but in the middle of that disaster, God is actually blessing the world.

That's the eukatastrophe. That's the redemptive irony. And it happens over and over and over again. Derek Kidner writing about this passage says, when you read verse 14 and then you get to 15 to 20, you realize that everything that Isaiah writes about transcends anything that Isaiah would ever see.

[ 8 : 52 ] That the fruitful field, this reversal that Isaiah is mentioning, never will happen in Isaiah's lifetime. It will never happen under Hezekiah's rule. None of the things that take place even in the Old Testament.

A truly transformed society is what he's talking about. And it's going to be an 11th hour rescue. And it's something the Old Testament never saw.

And that's why most of the commentators say that when we read verse 15 and it says, one day the spirit will fall and the desolate place will become a fruitful field. It's actually talking about Pentecost. This is Isaiah's prophecy about the day that the spirit will finally fall. And we'll begin the process of transforming society fully and forever.

And it's the day of Pentecost. Now, if Isaiah here, knowing without knowing that he's talking about the day the spirit will fall, the day of Pentecost, that means that what the story of Jerusalem here really is about is about the day of darkness, the true day of darkness.

[ 9 : 52 ] You see, he says in verse 14, one day everything will become desolate. One day you won't, it will be like you don't have a king. One day there will be no people. Everybody will shudder.

Everybody will run away and flee. And ultimate darkness will fall upon the land and then the spirit will fall down. And if that coming of the spirit is Pentecost, that means what Isaiah is really prophesying here is the day of darkness at the end of the gospels.

When darkness truly fell, when the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, the true King, hung on the cross and he lost everything. The king of power became no king at all. He ran away.

There was utter desolation surrounding the true King. Darkness fell upon the land on that day. And that means that he, Jesus Christ, what Isaiah is saying is Jesus is the eukatastrophe of history.

The cross of Christ is the great eukatastrophe. It's the great redemptive irony that Isaiah was prophesying without fully understanding all the way back in the eighth century BC.

[ 10 : 52 ] Now what does this mean for us? Here's the takeaway. It means this, that only the resurrected spirit of Jesus Christ can build the truly transformed society.

Only the coming of the resurrected spirit of Jesus can truly usher in the finally righteous and just society of history.

It can't happen any other way than that. And that's actually what Isaiah is talking about here. In other words, all cities, all societies, all nations will end up like Babylon eventually.

They rise and they fall. All cities, all societies are temporary in that way. And that means Isaiah is saying you cannot hope in the earthly city. You can't hope in the earthly politic.

That all politics will come and go. But only the spirit of Jesus Christ can bring the fully transformed society. That means on the one hand you can't hope in the present. And on the other hand, at the same time, he's saying a truly transformed society is actually possible.

[ 12 : 00 ] You see, he's saying to you, don't hope in the present because the good politic only comes when the spirit descends. And at the same time, a truly good political order is actually possible and so hope in it at the very same time.

And see, the early Christians understood this as because Jesus has come, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, Revelation 19, we can both say, I never hope.

In the order that I live in in the present, not ultimately, but at the same time, I care about it so much because the spirit can descend. The spirit can actually come. The spirit can change the order that we live in even now.

Now, here's how the Christians in the first century thought about this. Rodney Stark wrote a really helpful book called *The Cities of God*. And in it, he, as a historian, categorizes how the early church transformed the urban landscape of the Roman Empire in the first two centuries.

So he looks at what happened in the Roman Empire in just those first 200 years after Jesus Christ came and lived and died and rose again. And he said, here were the two great principles of how the Christians lived in that season.

[ 13 : 08 ] He says first, the Christians of the early church, in order to care for the city, the society that they lived in, to point to a city that was to come, the one that the spirit would bring, it says they lived a life where they cared first for the circle of intimates around them.

In other words, they were saying, look, you live for a city that is not yet, a society that is not yet. Only the Holy Spirit can bring that. Only the Spirit of Christ can bring that. But because that's coming, you live as a witness, a light in the present to that which is to come.

And how do you do that? How do you seek a great city now? How do you seek the transformation of Edinburgh right now? And he said, here's the way the early church understood it. They said, first, deeply care about the people that are closest to you in your daily life.

In other words, they saw it for small transformations, small wins. And so he says they deeply cared about their family, their neighbors, and their colleagues. In other words, he said they understood that since the Holy Spirit is the only one who can build the transformed society, they can't build it. We can't change Edinburgh. We can't change the world. We can't change the city. We can't change very much at all. But what you can do is deeply care about the people God's put closest to you in your life.

[14:27] You can seek small wins. And so they took the word of the gospel, Jesus Christ, and the mercy of the gospel, deeds, to their intimates, a start puts it, those nearest them.

Now the second thing they did, one more and we'll move on, they not only cared about their circle of intimates, he said secondly, the other notable thing, the first two centuries, they cared for people outside their tribe.

And so in the Roman Empire, there were more than 30,000 gods being worshiped when the apostles first set forth in the Great Commission. 30,000 different deities that we can catalog across the Roman Empire.

Almost every urban city had at least five major temples in that time, to Jupiter, Athena, all these different gods. And it just so happened that if you followed Jupiter, if you followed Athena, you very probably only cared about the people in your life who followed Jupiter and Athena.

You see, people cared about the people in their tribe and not anybody else. Have you ever heard of that? And Stark says that when you read the early literature, what you see is that what the Christians did, you see, the Christians knew that they were called to be salt and light, that only the Holy Spirit could bring the truly transformed society.

[15:42] And yet to witness to that society that is to come, they said, we care about people no matter what tribe they're in. And so we have a letter from one of the emperors in the fourth century named Julian, and he's writing to a priest, a pagan priest.

And he writes this, he says to the pagan priest, you know, the Christians have been gaining all the territory. Everybody's been, everybody's becoming a Christian in the Roman Empire. What is happening?

He complains, he says, the pagan temples are all empty. Why? And he notes one thing. He says, I think it's because the Christians care for the poor that are not their poor.

In other words, he's saying the Christians are going around and caring for the pagan poor. And he says, and we're not even caring for the pagan poor. And so everybody's becoming a Christian. You see, Stark says, they witnessed to a society that is to come.

Can you imagine a society, the true society, the transformed society, where Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords, is truly King, a kingdom of justice and righteousness that is to come? Well, the Christian call is to say, I want to show forth that light in the present, to be salt in light, preserve and shine the light of the future into the present.

[16:57] And he said, here are two simple ways to do it. Love the people closest to you with the word of the gospel and deeds motivated by the gospel, and care about truth rather than tribe.

Speak to care for people that aren't like you. And that's how the early church did it, and that's how they transformed the Roman Empire with the good news. Now, secondly, and we've got to hurry, the early Christians, the Christians, as soon as Christ was resurrected, did not find their hope in their present society in the political order yet they deeply cared about it.

And it's because they were waiting for the King and knowing that Jesus called them to live a life that mattered in the present. Now that means that the second thing we need to have a transformed society is we need the King.

We need the King, and this is what the passage is ultimately about. Chapter 32, verse one, you see what he says, behold, a king will one day future reign and righteousness.

Now in the ancient Near East, kings are not like King Charles at all. They were the CFOs, the CEOs, they were the lawmakers, the courtrooms, the executioners, the judges, the justices, they were everything.

[18:10] We're talking about absolute monarchy. But above all, and especially in Babylon, the King regarded himself as God. So we see kings all throughout the ancient Near Eastern Empire saying that they're demi-gods, that they're connections or priests to the God.

But when you get to Babylon, you see Nebuchadnezzar stand on his balcony and say, I am the most high. You see, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kings regarded themselves not only as demi-gods, but as full gods.

And the Bible does something revolutionary in ancient history for then and for now. It comes into Deuteronomy and says, Israel, if you want to have a king, you better know that your king is never really a king.

In other words, your king is never really the king, there is only one capital K king, and that king is the Lord your God. And so if you get a king, the king is a magistrate, he's a ruler, he's there to help. He's there to govern, but he's not really the king above all kings. In other words, you will never have a human that is truly the king. Now when you come to Isaiah, you get to a passage like Isaiah 32.1 and it says, one day a king will reign in justice and righteousness.

[ 19 : 24 ] And we call it the book of the king. And Isaiah has been building a case. We read in our call to worship Isaiah chapter nine verses six and seven. You know, God said on the one hand, no human being from Israel will ever truly be the king, but then you get to Isaiah and Isaiah starts to build a case.

And he says, well, Isaiah chapter nine verse six and seven, one day a child will be born and on his shoulders will hang the whole government of the world. And he will reign in righteousness and justice.

And you will call his name, wonderful counselor, mighty God. And Isaiah put something together. Isaiah says, he's going to be born, but his name will be mighty God.

And then the people in the eighth century have to look at Isaiah and say, well, what do you mean that the mighty God could be born? A child. And then you come to chapter 11.

Chapter 11 says, Israel, Jerusalem, you've become so corrupt that God is going to cut you like a tree. Jerusalem's going to fall like a tree and you're going to be nothing but a stump.

[ 20 : 29 ] And even that stump is going to be burned with fire all around it. And he says, and one day from that stump, a tiny little shoot's going to come out of the middle with a couple of small little leaves.

And it's called the shoot, the branch of Jesse. And he says, and from that branch, go, if you read chapter 11, six or seven verses of it, he says, from that little branch, the entire government of the world will be built on the branch of shoulders.

He says it again. And he says, in righteousness and justice will fall. And he will be the branch of Jesse, this man, this lineage, the lineage of the house of David. And Isaiah is building a case.

And that case is the argument of the book of the king. And he's saying, remember Deuteronomy? God said, you can never have a human king that is really the king.

And then Isaiah comes along and says, but wait, what if God becomes born? What if the stump of Jesse is really actually God?

[ 21 : 27 ] What if the great son of David, you see, the king becomes the man of the great reversal. The king becomes the one of ultimate redemptive irony. You see, we never expected this.

That's Isaiah's point. And when you come to the gospel of Mark, Mark says, Mark one verse one, unrolls the scroll of Isaiah and says, prepare the way of the Lord.

What's the Lord? What is a Lord? A Lord, the Lord just means king. And so Isaiah and Mark's gospel are both the books of the king.

And when you get to the very end of the gospel of Mark, chapter 15, the king stands before a punches pilot and pilot says, are you the king?

And Jesus responds, you have said so, meaning no, but yes. No, I'm not the king that you've ever expected. I'm not the king that you thought you were looking for, but I'm the king.

[ 22 : 23 ] And he gets nailed to the cross and they hang above his head a sign that says king. You see redemptive irony, the great reversal. He says, this isn't the king, but we're going to nail a sign above.

It says king. They meant he's not the king he thinks he is, but oh boy, they were right. And that's exactly Isaiah's point.

Revelation 19, we read it as our New Testament reading. And it's important because the king hung on the cross and the king, the God become man, he died.

God was born and he died in Jesus Christ. But we can't stop there because Revelation 19 comes to you and says that now he is the great white rider. He stands on the ultimate horse.

He sits on the ultimate horse and he comes. What does Revelation say? King of kings, Lord of lords. And all of this is about one simple thing that if you want to have a transformed society, you need an absolute king, a good king, a righteous king, a just king.

[ 23 : 24 ] And Isaiah is saying that king had to be both God and man and he is Jesus Christ. You have an absolute king. Now let me bring this home to you for a second and tell you what this means for right now, for tomorrow, Monday.

It means that our true citizenship is with the king, the true king, and the kingdom that he's bringing in the future, but is already present today because he's with us.

It's both now and it's not yet. And that means takeaway. That means something very important for both kings and presidents and prime ministers and rulers and for all of us citizens.

And it means this, one, all kings, all presidents, all prime ministers, all magistrates, all rulers are temporary and relative. They matter so much and they don't matter very much at all.

That's the revolution of the biblical politic. Is the gospel political? Absolutely it is. Jesus Christ has founded the ultimate politic and it means something for every other political order in all of history.

[ 24 : 27 ] He gives meaning and purpose to all political orders and the first thing he tells us is I'm the king of kings and that means every other king is important but relative.

Not that important, not ultimately. And that's why throughout Christian history, Christians have developed an ethic of what we call civil disobedience at times.

And Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the great examples of history. You know, he says, I listen to what Jesus says. Jesus says, render to Caesar what is Caesar's. And they gave Jesus that denarius and on one side it had the face of Caesar and under Caesar's name it said, son of God.

Caesar Augustus, son of God. You see what Jesus was saying? He was saying, pay your taxes. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's but do not give him what is God's. Caesar says, pay your taxes

but he also writes on his calling, I'm the son of God. Don't ever give Caesar that. And that's the ethic. And so Martin Luther King Jr. came and said, I will

look at my government and say you're important, you matter and I will obey until you tell me to sin against the living God.

[ 25 : 34 ] And I can't go that far. I can't do that. That Jesus Christ is my ultimate king. Our Dietrich Bonhoeffer or William Wilberforce or all the Christians that have stood against totalitarianism on the right and on the left in all myriad of ways.

They were encouraged by this politic, the politic of the king of kings and the Lord of lords. Now let me move on finally. But before that say that this is also a revolution for you rulers.

So some of you today are bosses. You are in charge of people. Maybe you're not the king, you're not the prime minister but you have people that work for you and that are underneath you.

Now listen to what Saint Augustine writes about this. He says this, he says that Jesus Christ makes happy bosses. And here's how. We call those Christian rulers or people in charge happy who govern with justice never forgetting that they are only human.

They think of sovereignty as a ministry of God. They fear and they worship God above all. They're slow to punish. They're quick to forgive. They temper with mercy and generosity the unavoidable harshness of their commands.

[ 26 : 44 ] They rule not out of glory but out of love for an everlasting bliss. They offered to God the humble sacrifice of their repentance and their prayer. And in this life they are happy in their hope and they're destined to be truly happy when the eternal day comes for which we all hope the city of God.

Augustine saying there is a true king, you people who are in charge of stuff in this life and you're not it. And that actually should make you incredibly happy.

I mean you're relative and that when you make mistakes you can repent and it doesn't all hang on you and it teaches you how to be a boss. How do you be a king? How to be a prime minister? How to be in charge to see always our relativity and our temporariness is Christianity a political movement.

Oh boy. Yes, it says care so deeply about the political order today but because you're here to shine light on the political order of tomorrow, the not yet of the kingdom that is to come.

The true politic, the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Now let's close and we have to close quickly. We need to have a truly transformed society.

[ 27 : 52 ] The Holy Spirit has to come down and we need a righteous king and lastly the text tells us we need to be transformed people. That's how we seek a transformed society.

If you're a Christian tonight, if the Spirit of God has moved in your life, you've repented of your sins, you are now a dutiful subject to all people but you are a slave to no one.

You only have one master ultimately and that's King Jesus. And in this passage we see lastly exactly what that person looks like, the transformed person as we live life now.

Now, very quickly, verse one, a king will reign in righteousness and princes will rule injustice. And Derek Kidner says about this that whenever you have a true king, a good king, a king of righteousness, then the people, the people who truly follow the king, you have here princes in power that use power like God uses power.

In other words, people become like their king when they truly follow him. There's a call here to follow Jesus in other words and to become like him.

[ 29 : 01 ] To become like him for the sake of building a great city. So if you're a prince of Jesus, of the kingdom, a Christian, prince or princess, there's a call here, an invitation to be like the master, to be like the king.

And here's how the passage tells us to do that very quickly. In verses five to seven to eight, it's that there's one main idea and it says that you are to become noble like the king.

Now yesterday in God's providence, as Derek said this morning, we had the coronation and this morning's passage in Mark was all about kingship and tonight it's all about kingship. And here at the end of the passage, the middle of the passage, verses five to eight, it says that ultimately those who follow Jesus are to be noble people.

What is he talking about? And he's not talking about the kind of nobility that we saw yesterday in the carriages, not being dukes and duchesses, nothing like that. Instead you can see it when you place nobility against the opposite here in verses five and six.

He says, what's the opposite of the noble? The fool will no more be called noble, nor the scoundrel said to be honorable. So it's saying that a truly transformed society has a transformed person.

[ 30 : 16 ] It's noble, the follower of the king, a noble person. And that person is the opposite of the fool and the scoundrel. What's a fool? What's a scoundrel?

And you can see it. It says, the fool is the one who practices ungodliness and utters error concerning the Lord. And then it says the scoundrel is the one who has wicked schemes against the poor.

Now think about that. The fool, the word fool in the Old Testament is referring to someone who says foolish things about God himself, who utters error about the Lord.

It says the scoundrel is the one who then turns and devises wicked schemes against people. And when you look at the Old Testament, you look at the law, the Ten Commandments.

The first several say, here's how you're to serve God. In the back half, the second table say, and here's how you're to love people. And you see what it's saying? The fool in the scoundrel is actually one person.

[ 31 : 17 ] And it's the person who rejects the Ten Commandments, who says, I don't want to follow God. Table one, I don't love people, table two. And Jesus comes in the New Testament and says, you want to become like me and follow me?

Here's how you do it. Love God, table one, love people, table two. And you see the true person of nobility in this life is not hereditary, it's not by your bloodline.

The true person of nobility is the person who loves God and loves people. The people who love God and they love people because of Jesus Christ, all for the sake of Jesus Christ, witness to the society that is to ultimately come one day in Jesus Christ.

Let me close our time with verse 17. Verse 17 says this, the effect of righteousness is peace. If you want to pursue in a small way, pursue peace in our great city.

If you want Edinburgh to truly become a great place, a great city, more and more all the time, he's saying pursue righteousness. And in pursuing righteousness, you pursue the peace and prosperity of your city, of your society.

[ 32 : 30 ] Let's pray together. Father, we ask that you would help us long for the transformed society that is to come, the kingdom of God. And until then, motivate us as salt and light.

We pray now, Father, that you would make us into people who care so deeply about loving you publicly and loving other people publicly so that as our light shines, you might get the glory as Jesus

tells us in Matthew 5.

So this is ultimately Lord, a passage about becoming salt and light. And we ask for help as we go out tonight into our great city and long for it to become better and tell Jesus comes again, give us a real heart for righteousness that we might love well like Jesus loves.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.