

Invitation Into the Only Bright Future

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Okay, so we're going to go back this evening for a little while to this chapter, Isaiah chapter 2. Now, when I was growing up, particularly when I, maybe I was growing up, maybe even occasionally now, I used to get missionary talks in church quite often.

And when I was younger, we used to, we kind of had a, it was something we always thought would happen at a missionary talk.

The missionary would always say at some point, and we used to clock this as young people because young cynical people would always clock that they, at some point they would say the land that I'm in or the land that I'm going to is a land of contrasts.

It just seemed to be the classic mission of these statements, that every land they went to was a land of contrasts and they were completely genuine in writing what they were saying, but you would always get, you would always be quite happy if they said that because you knew they were going to say that in their talk.

Well, I'm going to say it tonight, I've got to that age, and I'm going to say the same, that this chapter is a chapter of contrasts, okay? And there's an invitation in the chapter and there's a warning in the chapter and it's very clear and it's very contrasting and it's very powerful.

[1 : 1 4] And as we work through this chapter, which we know that Isaiah is difficult and it's written a long time ago in a different context and it's in a different language, it's poetic and there's all kinds of difficulties with it, but the message is very, ultimately is very clear because we know that Israel and Judah, God's people in the Old Testament, who he writes to and who he prophesies to and who he speaks to, who he's led, who he's redeemed and who he's chosen, by this time in their history are walking in spiritual darkness.

So they've turned their backs on their God and they're refusing really as God's people to hold God's hand. They were forgetting who they were and instead they were, as a nation as it were, they were stubbornly choosing to find their own way to prosperity.

They didn't need God anymore. He'd taken them as it were into the promised land from the slavery in Egypt and rather than keep looking to God, they just were looking to the nations around them and starting to copy how they lived without reference to God.

So primarily this prophecy speaks into that context. And the challenge for us today, I think, is when we read something like this, who is God speaking to now, or who is God speaking to?

And what is the message? Because that's when we read this Bible, we've always got to find that because it's a living word. Now we know it's an Old Testament truth and Corey unpacked that beautifully last Sunday night, the context and how it was significant then and it continues to be significant.

[3 : 0 4] So the really interesting thing is that God is speaking to humanity, not just to His covenant people and people are the same and have always been the same.

But He is speaking especially to His covenant people in the Old Testament. In other words, when we think of applying this to ourselves, we need to recognize that the covenant people of the Old Testament are mirrored by the believer, the church in the New Testament.

So basically when Isaiah speaks to the Old Testament people, primarily not unbelievers, but primarily those who at least are covenant believers, then as we apply it, we recognize this is a message to people like us, who are part of the New Testament covenant people of God as those who are believers, who trust in Jesus, or who are baptized and who belong to the church.

So it's a relevant message at that level. And the message is, again, by way of introduction, is primarily the importance of feeding our faith and walking in the light of the Lord.

Verse 5 is the end of the first section and it says, Oh, House of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord. And in other words, He's saying, you have to recognize that God is so good that we walk in the light of the Lord.

[4 : 33] And the challenge sometimes for us is we don't think God is that good. When we don't follow God, in Christ, it's because we actually don't think He's that good and He's that much light.

But it's also to expose the addictive nature, sinful nature and reliance that often comes from within ourselves. And the temptation to choose to ignore God and live on our own terms because we don't think we're that bad.

So it's a contrasting picture we have here. We don't follow God because we don't think He's that good. And we just trust in ourselves because we don't think we're that bad and we don't really need God in our lives.

And the problem that we are tempted with today as Christians is exactly the same issue that God was speaking to the Old Testament believers about. So the invitation this evening, particularly in verses 1 to 6, there's an invitation and there's a warning.

So the invitation, particularly in verses 1 to 6 is trust me, trust God. That's what He's saying to the people. They've turned away from Him and so now He's inviting them to trust Him in the first six verses of chapter 2.

[5 : 49] Go house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Judah and Jerusalem that He is speaking to here, particularly the southern kingdom of Judah.

He's saying, listen, you are my promised people. You're my covenant people. You're at the center of my purposes. And I'm calling you to remember who you are, to remember the promises that I've given to you, to remember how I've already redeemed you, to remember what you're called to be and what the future holds for you.

You're the cradle, He says, as a nation of the Messiah that is to come. The Savior of the world will come through you, through you as a people. And I want you, He says, to be a blessing to the world.

You're called to be, as it were, my ambassadors in the world, to the nations around you. That's what I'm calling you to be like, to reflect the love of God and to reflect the way of God to the nations around you.

And to know that there is a great future that you are part of. As you continue to trust and as you continue to walk in the light, that you are part of this great future in being in God's covenant people.

[7 : 10] And He's saying that to Judean Jerusalem, and He's encouraging them and reminding them, particularly to think about who they are and what they have as believers.

And especially, this is a prophetic section. That means it's looking forward, not so much looking back to the rescue, not so much looking back to the current situation or looking at the current situation as to the future, the future that is theirs if they will continue with the Lord.

And He speaks about a future, and He foretells a future that therefore involves us, because we are the future, compared with the time in which this was written.

And because there is a future for us that we are a part of as believers also. So what future is being foretold? Well, He says in verse 2, it shall come to pass in the latter days.

Now when are the latter days of Isaiah that's spoken of here? Well interestingly, when we speak of the latter days in Isaiah, we can link it to the book of Mark, as we saw last week, that there's a lot of similarities between Mark and Isaiah, Mark quotes Isaiah at the very beginning of the chapter.

[8 : 30] And it's really the latter days are the times of Christ's first coming onwards. The coming of the Kingdom of Christ, the revelation of the King Jesus is the beginning of the latter days.

Now in Acts chapter 2, there's one or two references to make today in the New Testament. In Acts chapter 2 and verse 17, Peter, when he's preaching at Pentecost at the beginning of the New Testament, he says, in quoting an Old Testament prophet, Joel, he says, And in the latter days, it shall be, God declares that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters will prosper and your young men shall see visions, your own men shall see dreams.

And so we recognize that from the moment that Christ was crucified and resurrected and ascended, we have entered into the latter days, the future that is promised here.

And it's a day when he goes on to speak about various things. He says that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains that should be lifted above the hills.

All the nations shall flow to it and many people shall come to it. And it's an interesting picture of Mount Zion, and Mount Zion is not the highest of mountains in Israel, but it is to be regarded symbolically and seen as the most significant place.

[10 : 05] And Mount Zion, of course, is where Jerusalem is, and Jerusalem is rising to the most significant place. It shall be lifted up above the hills. Now, it's very interesting in John chapter 12 and verse 32, when Jesus speaks about the crucifixion, he speaks about himself being lifted up and all peoples looking to him, drawing all peoples to himself.

And what we have here is very much a prophecy of Mount Zion, Jerusalem, Calvary, Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified, and it becomes the center of the world in terms of the spiritual reality of what Jesus has done.

And all the nations shall flow to it. It's a picture of the symbolic centrality of Jerusalem, because that is where Jesus was crucified.

And also in the Pentecost sermon, we're given a list of all the different nations of the world that are represented at Pentecost, as the nations come to Jerusalem and come to hear the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways that we must walk in his path. It's the place, therefore, and it's speaking forward to the latter days when the work of Jesus Christ is what every believer looks to.

[11 : 36] We all look to, not the physical Jerusalem, we don't look to Zion physically, but we look to the Savior who was crucified in that geographical place 2,000 years ago, and recognize that His laws of love, as He teaches us His ways and that we might walk in His path, and from out of Him goes this great law, a new commandment I give to you, He says, that you will love one another as I have loved you.

And He's the one who comes and He speaks the word as the Savior, and He's the one who's the judge between the nations. And we've got that great verse which speaks about Him deciding the disputes of many peoples, they shall beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning forks, and it's a message, therefore, of peace at the ending of hostility, the ending of division and war, and they will learn war no more.

Oh, house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord. Now that prophecy of the Jerusalem on which Jesus was crucified goes beyond that further because we recognize in Revelation chapter 21, just look at this for a moment to see the continuity between the whole picture of the city, this great new city that is spoken of and prophesied of here to the people, reminding them of who they belong to and the future that is theirs and ours as believers.

And in Revelation 21 He says, I saw the new heavens and the new earth, so the prophecy goes right to the end of time and it says the first earth, first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Behold the dwell in place of God was with man, he will dwell with them and they will be his people.

[13 : 36] So we've got this great gentle prophecy that the people of Jerusalem and Judah are reminded of and are reminded that they have a part in that as they keep trusting and walking in the light of the Lord.

And it's a prophecy that just like a tidal wave also overflows us and takes into the future for our future as well in the new Jerusalem, an idealized city, a society, a new heaven and a new earth that we belong to as Christians as believers, marked by God's presence and by God's glory.

And all who dwell in there are those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life. So we recognize that as he seeks to encourage and invite them to walk in the light, that in Christ that is our future also and that is the encouragement that we have.

His kingdom as it was then and it is now is being established. It might not look like it then, it sometimes doesn't look like it now.

But all over the world there are millions of believers and there are people coming to faith in King Jesus all the time. His kingdom is being established throughout the world.

[14 : 58] And the local church is His Jerusalem in miniature, it's His society in miniature, it's His idealized city in miniature, pointing towards the kind of future that there will be in Christ.

Even with all our failings and faults, we are to reflect the light of Jesus by the way we live. We are to take that invitation, oh house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord.

And we are encouraged to do that and we're reminded from this passage and from elsewhere that this is the only future that there is.

And we're called to live in the light of God and His love and in His truth and never let Him go. It may be that this evening there's someone who desperately needs to hear that call to renew their trust in the God that they have drifted from in the same way that the Old Testament people had drifted from their relationship with their Savior God.

And it may be they're just clinging on this evening and I would call you to recognize the great future, the great present that you have in Christ, the great light that He brings into your life, but the great future that is prophesied right from the belly of the Old Testament and encompasses us and encompasses us in the future to which we belong as citizens of this great Jerusalem, this great city, this great society of those of the redeemed.

[16 : 39] So be encouraged by that this evening and briefly also there's a warning in verses 6 to 22. There's the contrast, there's the other side of it and it's a really solemn warning and the warning goes out to Judea in these verses, particularly initially in verses 6 to 9.

And he gives a picture of a people who have rejected God, therefore God has rejected it, for you have rejected your people, Isaiah says, to God and at the end he says, do not forgive them and what he means by that he's saying, look, unless they turn, unless they come back to you, there's no place of forgiveness and they will be rejected because he gives a picture of what they're like and how they're living.

They've turned their backs on God completely and they've mimicked all the pagan nations around them, they're ensnared by superstitions, fortune tellers like the Philistines, we're told they're very materialistic, it's interesting, they're kind of poetic, like the land that says the land, the land, the land, so if that's all they hold on to, the world and the physical ground in which they stand, they've lost sight of that whole spiritual reality.

They're in relationship with the children of foreigners, their land is filled with silver and gold, in other words, they're chasing after wealth, they're seeking power and military wealth, their land is filled with horses, there's no end to their chariots and they're worshiping idols, they're not even worshiping the living God, their land is filled with idols, they bow down to the work of their hands, what their own fingers have made and it's a kind of really, it's a real picture of judgment on the fact that this chosen people with all the privileges, with all the love that's been showered on them and with the fact that they're in the promised land, they've completely turned their backs and they're living as if there's no God whatsoever, they've abandoned Him and there's no hope for them unless they return and unless they hear that invitation to walk in the light of the Lord, they've entirely apostatised from Him.

So it gives that picture and any kind of broad, Isaiah broadens it out in prophetic vision, really to a future day of the Lord from verse 10 really and maybe more specifically from verse 12, for the Lord of hosts has a day and He goes on to explain as the way I read it, you know, it was very repetitive, wasn't it?

[19 : 19] Against this, against, against, against, against, against, against, and it speaks out of this, it foreshadows a greater judgment, not only for the people of God who reject their Savior but for all who reject Christ the light of the world because we know the way that Christ describes Himself as the light of the world in the New Testament.

And He therefore just explains what that greater judgment is, the pride of self-reliance will be humbled, we see it in verse 11, the hotty looks of man shall be brought low and the lofty pride of men will be humbled and it's repeated again in verse 17, the hottyness of man shall be humbled, the lofty pride of men shall be brought low.

So that kind of whole repetitive engine going on reminding us that this, also the splendour in contrast to that judgment, the splendour of God's glory will be revealed as He exposes who they are and what they're doing.

And He speaks about this day of reckoning in verse 12, the Lord of hosts has a day and in verse 20, in that day mankind will be cast away.

And He exposes all this same kind of rebellion and rejection that was evident in Judah in their lives, outward religious observance that hid the heart from God, all the power and glory that people seek that's exalted above God, the pride of every heart that says, I reject God and my own creation, I'll make my own way in life.

[21 : 05] With all its blindness and with all its selfishness and with all its inability to see and to recognise our own mortality and on that day it will be exposed.

Now it's impossible to ignore and to hide from this picture of God's splendour and God's glory and God's judgment and the terror of the Lord and from the splendour of His Majesty that's spoken of.

And it's a judgment that speaks of death and eternal separation from the good and from life. And how can we know?

How can we know this day will come? How can we? Because the Son of Man, because Jesus was lifted up, that's spoken of here, because on Calvary's Mount, on that mountain, on that hill, He faced divine justice and stood in the dock to take the judgment from this glorious splendour of the Majesty of the Father and to take it in our place, to take away our guilt and our blindness and our death and our sin now.

We know that. We at least know that theoretically. It's hard to live in the light of it in many ways, isn't it? And interestingly, when Corey was preaching this morning, it struck me that there was a lot of similarities in some ways between the truths that were being looked at because it speaks also here about the terrifying reality of God and of that, the terror of the Lord when He rises to terrify the earth.

[23 : 08] And it's that contrast between the splendour of the invisible God and the earthiness of the earth and the natural facing, the supernatural, which we struggle with in so many ways.

But why do we find this truth terrifying? This truth of a God to whom we all have to give account. Every living soul has to give account.

And a God who says, there's only one way we can stand on that day. It's when we're covered in the righteousness of Jesus, which is why the significance of the call to the light is so great to trust in Him.

Not just a passing phase. It's not just a comfortable side interest of our lives. It is that, as we were reminded this morning, the giving of everything because He's worth it.

But why does it terrify us? Why does God as judge terrify us? Because I think it's because we know that it's the cry of every single heart is for justice.

[24 : 20] We all cry out for justice. We all cry out for right to be done. It's our deepest longing. Our deepest longing is for evil and death to be banished completely.

But what we often ignore is that sin is what blinds us to our own culpability. We only ever want to blame others for the wrongs in the world and declare ourselves not Jesus, the only innocent one.

But we were given a magnificent picture this morning of the majesty and the authority and the glory of Jesus.

None of us can stand on our own when we see that that is the standard that the Father requires. And so there's a terror within us because, in a sense, because we know it's true.

But it's a terror that must drive us away from trusting in ourselves and draws us towards the light of Jesus who has open arms and who loves us.

[25 : 28] So the two summaries of this passage, at the end of verse 5, you've got O House of Jacob, you're part of this great future. It's a future that goes to the New Jerusalem and he says, come let us walk in the light of the Lord.

We're called to walk in the light of the Lord. You're called, and I'm called just as much, to that great invitation. But the warning is at the end of the chapter, at the end of this section which speaks about God's judgment, not just His direct judgment and Judah because of their sin, but this future judgment.

And so, we're called to stop regarding humanity in whose nostrils is breath of what is count as He. In other words, He's saying to Judah and He's saying to us, don't just look to yourself, don't trust in yourself for the answers, you know?

Last night I went to bed and I go to bed and I always line my side with my hand on the side of the bed. And last night for some reason, I never noticed it before.

I could feel every single breath I breathed on my hand. I never noticed that before. But it was just a reminder to me that that breath that we breathe in and out is a gift from the living God.

[26 : 49] It's not our own, it's His gift. Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath. You know, we are mortal and He is the one who gifts His life and it comes from Him and He ends it when He wills.

And we are no place to stand and be the rock for our own salvation. We're not worth, we're not able, we're not capable.

The material world, the land, the land, the land, that is God's gift to us. But if you're living for power, for money, for prestige, for longevity and health, and turn your back on the living God, it's such a huge picture of folly and the temptation as we do it all the time.

And we're called back. We're to take warning from the living God who wants us always to walk in the light so often we choose the darkness.

And always remember His intrinsic worth and His glory and don't live as if all, this is all there is, the material universe.

[28 : 11] Because you know what? The universe doesn't care. It's no interest in you whatsoever. Your life or death is of no consequence to this material universe in which we live.

But the living God loves you. The living God has made you. Living God is the one too and we will all give account. And He calls you if you're not a believer this evening, to come and to trust in this beautiful Savior Jesus, who is the light of the world.

And as Christians, He calls us back to Himself and to warn us against leaning on our own understanding. And trusting in ourselves.

And may that be what we do and remind ourselves that your involvement as a citizen of the kingdom of God, as it is outworked in being a member of sins, sees that this is a prototype of the city of God.

The local church is a prototype of the city of God. And therefore we're to live as a people, just as the Old Testament people were called to live that are a light to the world around them that shine for Christ and that live together in a way that shows our love for Christ and our love for one another.

[29 : 26] What a great challenge, yet what a great privilege. And that's what we're called to do this evening. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Thank you Lord for who you are. I pray that you would take a difficult passage like that and apply it to our lives and hearts.

And that we would see that there's this one picture that goes right through Scripture that speaks either before the coming of Jesus or after the coming of Jesus that speaks about your covenantal love and your purposes and your promises.

And that we live in these latter days between your first and second coming. And that yet there are many promises to look forward to. And remind us of that, help us to live in your light, forgive us when we think better, that we know better than you and we trust in ourselves and don't heed your warnings and don't obey you out of love and think that we are more sophisticated and maybe wiser.

Forgive us for our folly and we thank you that you treat us with a fatherly love and you understand our weaknesses and failings and you simply want us to be honest and come back constantly to you in trust and with seeking forgiveness and seeking your help and guidance and love.

May that be our experience. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.