

The City of God

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[0:00] We're going to look back this evening for a little while before celebrating the Lord Supper at Isaiah chapter 26, an ongoing study of this great prophecy.

The last scene or the last chapter in a book or the last scene in a film is always really important. It's always kind of in that sense, I suppose, the highlight because it usually, well, you hope to find conclusion, you hope that it will bring the whole story together.

And sometimes there's nothing worse than you've really enjoyed a book all the way through until you get to the last chapter and it's a really rubbish ending or the same with a film. There's nothing worse than the disappointment of a poor ending.

But I think generally we're optimists and generally we choose books that finish well or we use books and films that are recommended to us. We look for resolution, we're disappointed because we look for resolution, don't we?

We look for a good ending, we look for something that's satisfying. A happy ending is usually pretty good as well. And that's true generally, it's true of our lives, it's true that maybe we're just seeking for our dreams to come true in life.

[1:09] We're looking for a good ending to a situation we find ourselves in, we're looking for encouraging days. And maybe we're in our Christian lives or in our lives generally, we're just asking, God, well when are things going to get better?

When are things going to improve? And that's a natural thing. It's something we're all aware of in our lives to one degree or another. But there's an incredible claim in Isaiah, in the prophecy of Isaiah later on in Isaiah 46 where God says again, he says, remember the former things those of long ago.

He says, listen, I am God, there is no other. I'm God, there is no one like me. I make known, it's very famous phrase, I make known the end from the beginning.

From ancient times, what is still to come, I say, my purpose will stand and I will do all that I please. So there's an incredible reality for us as we gather in worship, as we think about our lives and our relationship to the living God is that actually he already knows.

He already knows our end. And he already knows the end of the story and the end of the reality of the world in which we live. And this is one of these passages that's moving.

[2:26] Looking beyond today, it's not prophetic of Jesus coming or prophetic of the New Testament, it's looking beyond that. As Cori looked at last week, it's a continuation of this prophecy of the end time.

And it's a progression. And we see that, don't we, in the Bible. It is a progression. It does have an end of the story and revelation in a sense, but it's an end that is prophesied, it's predicted, hasn't yet come.

So we've got from Eden to Calvary right through to Revelation. And in this chapter, we've got a tale of two cities. The original tale of two cities, as it were, in this chapter, two communities.

And we see the different way that these two communities in God's eyes come to an end of their existence, as it were. In that day, he says in the beginning of verse one of chapter 26, is that recognition for us that he's speaking about a future time, he's speaking about a time that is still to come.

And he's saying to the people of God, because remember, this are people who have gotten into all kinds of mess and all kinds of trouble because they've turned away from the living God and that some of them have been exiled and there's more to be exiled and they've got all kinds of pressure from outside and they're tempted just to make all kinds of wrong alliances.

[3:59] And this is written in this context of God speaking to them through Isaiah, calling them back. Calling them back to trust in God and to believe in His future for them, to believe what He has got planned for them and for all of His people.

And he's saying, come back to me rather than trusting and believing in their own judgment, on their own futures and recognizing the importance of not trusting in human alliances, whether it be Babylon or with Assyria or Egypt or any of these great nations, who seem so powerful, but he says, look, I know you're weak, he says, but keep putting your trust in me.

And in a sense, what we're doing tonight is we're sitting down, as it were, you've got to visualize this, we're sitting down with them.

We're sitting down with the people of the Old Testament to whom this book was written. And we're sitting down with them together and we're looking forward, all of us, to what God's future plans are.

The future for all who will entrust themselves to the living God in salvation and in truth. It's further down God's timeline. Now, this is maybe a bit of a weak example, but it would be a bit like Charles Lindberg and Amelia Earhart, who were the first male and female to fly solo across the Atlantic.

[5:24] They were sitting there with Neil Armstrong, who was the first man on the moon. And all of them were watching a future story of people landing on Mars.

You see that progression, the two different kind of time scales as they all look forward to something that they couldn't possibly have imagined in their time. And it's as if we're sitting with the Old Testament people of God and we're the New Testament people who have got the crucifixion, the resurrection ascension behind us.

But we're all looking forward to what God is revealing about the future. And Corrie last week spoke about the mountain of God and all the beautiful symbolic pictures that we have there.

Well, this is the city of God that's on the mountain of God that we're being described here. In that day, a song will be sung in the land of Judah, we have a strong city.

He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. And that's really what Isaiah is speaking about, your God through Isaiah is talking about our destination as believers.

[6:31] Our last chapter, a real page turner, but there's no the end at the end of it because it's an ongoing state, it's an ongoing relationship we have with the living God eternally.

And the city is the picture of the Bible very often about the new heavens and the new earth is described symbolically as a city, we sung about it.

It is sung about in Psalm 48, the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great king. Psalm 46 where we sung God is in her, God's in the center of this, a river of gladness is running through it.

It's described in Ezekiel as a city temple. It's described in Hebrews 11 as the city which Abraham was looking for whose architecture and builder is God, but it says that none of these Old Testament saints received the thing that was promised.

Again in Hebrews it talks about us here we have no enduring city because we're looking for a city that is to come. And of course Revelation finishes with that fantastic picture in Revelation 21 and 22 of the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven out of God with God in the midst, which links us to what Corey was saying last week about wiping away of all the tears because there's that reference in chapter 25 Isaiah and also in Revelation about this amazing day and this amazing city where we will be with the living God eternally.

[8:04] Now I wonder for some of you, if that's a bit of a disappointment, is it a bit of a disappointment that the future is going to be a city?

Are you intuitively people who think that cities are dark places, dangerous, a dark underbelly, ungodly, full of people? Oog, God forbid.

And when you think of spiritual intimacy you think of skipping around the hills alone, looking at creation and the mountain tops and the solitude and you think, ah, the new heavens and the new earth are a city.

Ah, it's a bit of a disappointment. Well, I hope not because there's a reason for it being described in this way and it's primarily, it's not so much about architecture as about community and about a king.

And the city of our God that is represented in the symbolism of the Old Testament, it represents a people with a king. There's a new Jerusalem that's spoken of, it's coming down from heaven, represents a new cosmos.

[9:10] It represents a whole new existence and it blows away any concept that we would have of a city and any of the real struggles sometimes that we do have with cities which are genuine of course and real in some ways in one way or another.

But the biblical language and imagery is symbolic and it's speaking of, it's really trying to describe a reality that can't be described.

It's beyond our wildest dreams. You know, we say that often here, don't we? First Corinthians 2nd, however, as it is written, what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no human mind has conceived, the things God has prepared for those who love Him.

These are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit. It's unbelievable for us and it's trying to put it into language that we have some conception of what it will be because we know that revelation, and I think what he mentioned this morning, it's also, it's a garden city.

It's a city with a tree of life in it and with a river flowing through it in its symbolic reality. It's eaten, improved and restored and glorified and made perfect.

[10:19] It's the place that gives expression to the deepest desires and the deepest longings for fulfillment that we have as human beings.

We see it only in shadows, even in the beauty of creation, if you walk up in the mountains, which are very beautiful, or in the beauty of the best community in the city.

We see shadows. But what I would say is that the gospel community, this small city here, St. Columbus City, should point towards the light and should point towards Jesus Christ and should point towards the community, the new community of those in whom Christ dwells by faith.

So in our relationships with Christ and with one another, we are to image, we are to mirror this celestial city as it were.

And that's a high standard and it's one for which we need the living God in our hearts and our souls. So there's many things that are written in the New Testament and in the Old Testament about this city of God.

[11:34] There's one or two things here that I just want to pick out this evening. The first is that our future in this community with our King is a place of joy.

In that day, in that day as it looks forward, the song will be sung in the land of Judah. It's going to be a place of singing, a place of worship.

That's one of the reasons we sing in our worship. It's a reflection of the praise that we bring to the living God. Sometimes I think we marginalize singing as if it's kind of the preparatory bit before the sermon.

It would be like that at all for us. We shouldn't marginalize it because it's the expressions of our hearts together in presumably very powerful about singing together in praise to the living God.

It's one thing, singing in the shower, but it's another thing of singing to the living God and to do it in unison and to do it as a reflection of the heart music of our lives that we are praising the living God.

[12:43] We sing because we have reasons so to do. And it's a city of joy, a place of joy, and we seek to reflect that in our lives, not slapstick smiles, but deep seated and inner joy in knowing the living God.

And it's a city of God, with God at the very foundation. We sung that, God in Psalm 46, God in the midst of her shall dwell.

But also it speaks here in verse 4 of Trust in the Lord, Forever for the Lord God. He is the everlasting rock. It's this community of God's people that we look forward to, a city, a people of God, with God at the very foundation.

And we see that in Revelation that He dwells in the midst of His people. And He is the picture. He is the foundation. He's the rock in what is built. And there's this lovely picture of, it's a place where the bulwarks are the pillars, the towers, and the walls are salvation, are called salvation.

He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. So it's as if God is the very foundation. And Jesus Christ is the protection through His salvation that He worked in the cross that we were looking at this morning.

[14:05] That's where its strength comes from. It comes from the resurrected Christ, the one who defeated evil and defeated the power of death. We have a strong city.

Everlasting God is the foundation. The bulwarks, the walls are salvation itself for what Jesus Christ has done. So salvation, the work that Jesus has done for you and I is in its very DNA.

It's in its very architecture as a city. It breathes redemption. This place, this future that we have with God. The Lamb as if slain as its heartbeat at the very center of this place.

It's a community, we're told in verse 2, of the righteous. Open the gates at the righteous nation that keeps faith, may enter in. Reminder that salvation, covering in the righteousness of Christ, taking Christ as our Lord and Savior, is all critical and central to our belonging, our citizenship in this future.

As a new Israel, a new Jerusalem, the church of the redeemed, racially, ethnically, socially diverse, filled with everyone who puts their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

[15:20] Do you still want to run to the hills? Is that where we still need to go to that place of isolation? But we're called, we're called now.

We're called now, whether it's urban or rural. We're called now to be committed to building a godly, a molding, a godly community that reflects what we will one day be by His grace and His strength.

We're to be a community where salvation is the walls. We're to be a community where the everlasting God is the rock to whom we go to and to whom we trust at all times.

Being that relationship with Christ and His people, such a messy thing to do. But that's what we're called to by His grace, to reflect what one day we will be perfected in, in glory.

So it's the city of God with God as the everlasting rock. It's a place of joy. It's also a city of perfect peace. Verse 3, I'm not going to go through the whole chapter.

[16:28] I'm just focusing on the first bit really. You keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed in you because He trusts in you. It's that great concept. Again, we saw it this morning.

Great concept of Shalom. Jesus said, my peace I give to you. It's the powerful description of what life should be, everything as it should be.

That's the peace that Christ offers and will perfect in glory for us. Where there's that, not just where evil is defeated as it has been on the cross, but destroyed entirely, where sin is eradicated, which is why all the wiping away of the tears comes from and will be covenantally communal together with the King.

Now I think the reason sometimes we recoil from the idea of the city and we want to run to the hills quite understandable because the cities here so often reflect the opposite, don't they?

They often reflect division, exacerbated in the city, fear, evil, the opposition of other people.

[17:53] And so we sometimes transpose that into our idea of the city and the future. But the city that we will belong to is a community of reconciled believers with the Prince of Peace on the throne and who gifts us that spiritual everything as it should be because of the war that he has already fought on our behalf.

It is an unimaginable wholeness that we are granted by the living God. And that is, if you're a believer this evening, if you will participate in the Lord's Supper and if you trust in Jesus, that is your trajectory and mine.

That's where we're going. The older we get, the more comforting that is. Maybe you don't think about it so much when you're younger, but it's a tremendous trajectory.

We might be getting old and looking old outside, but inside we're getting younger. We're being renewed day by day because of the living God and the future that we have in Him.

We will join and we join the crowd of Hebrews 11 who welcome these things at a distance. But today in St. Columbus, Shalom matters.

[19:16] It matters how we think about one another, how we speak to one another. It matters our response to division, to opposition, to isolation.

Loneliness should not mark the local church. Cleavishness, separation, all of these things that so often bring bruising and disappointment in life and make us recoil from the idea of the city.

And our experience of that should not be the case in our life as a church. We have much work to do in His kingdom and much of it is very plain and very everyday, but very significant as we relate to one another and as we share in the trajectory that is ours in Christ.

So the city of God represents a people with a King, joy. God at the center, perfect peace. But we also notice because it's a tale of two cities and briefly just want to finish with this that He also speaks about the city of man in verses 5 and 6.

He gives us this picture of the future, but then He also contrasts it with another image, another symbol of really, it's the whole Babylon picture again that Cori's been talking about over the last couple of weeks.

[20:39] All that Babylon symbolizes that is life without God. For He is humble the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city. So that's the city of man, the lofty city.

He lays it low, lays it to the ground, casts it to the dust, the foot trample it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy. So He's pointing forward again to this trajectory and He's reminding us that there's a last chapter for everyone.

And it might be very different from the present reality for some people. Might be very different because there's a complete role reversal really what we have. So in this lofty city, this powerful city, you may be reflected by Babylon or Assyria or Egypt or any of these powerful nations that didn't worship the living God and didn't follow the living God and could be personalized into individuals as well.

Sorry, that's me I think. Just to recognize and remember that there will be a complete role reversal. Things are going to be turned on the head completely.

So we see that power and pride will be worthless. The lofty city, He lays it low, He lays it to the ground. We've seen that over and over again in what God is speaking about in Isaiah.

[22:00] He's saying that there is something that's going to change and those who desperately grasp onto permanence and power and life that they can never attain to will lose that if they keep their backs turned on the living God.

Verse 14 speaks about these powerful leaders, the lords that have ruled over us. They are dead. They will not live.

They are shades. They will not arise. To that end, you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them.

Any who grab God's goodness and claim it as their own, any who reject His Lordship and His salvation, who mould their own confused standards and live as independent city dwellers as it were, spending lives, easily spending lives on, because we all do it on our own thrones, kicking others off their thrones, making self-serving alliances that we think will give us security and friendship and power and control, people living as if their own lives and their own thoughts and their own philosophies are strong and lofty, will if they reject God, be brought to humility and be brought to judgment.

It does remind me a little bit, I'm not sure particularly why, in this case of a bit of graffiti somewhere allegedly. It's probably fabled in many ways, but someone graffiti is saying, God is dead, Nietzsche, 1883.

[24:03] It was the end. God has gone. We've gone beyond Him. He's finished. There's no place for Him. And then a few years later, someone scrolled, Nietzsche is dead, God, 1900.

So it's the reality, you know, that the greatest powers, the greatest strengths, the greatest atheists, if they will not recognize and understand their mortality, and if we will not, and if you will not, then there is always a living God to recognize and to face up to.

Pride and power will be worthless, and the last will be first. It's interesting, isn't it? The foot that tramples on the lofty city is the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy.

Jesus says in Mark 11, many who are first will be last, and the last will be first. Justice will be done by the living God.

Followers of Christ, we might feel rejected, oppressed, regarded as weak and poor and insignificant, and sometimes increasingly, maybe regarded as dangerous, who ought to be silenced.

[25:23] We will be the ones that will stand in that day, hiding in the strength and the love and the grace of Jesus Christ through nothing that we have earned, nothing we've done on our own, but simply through trusting in His living name, because He enables us to become overcomers.

And we will have status, and we will be joint heirs. On that day, God says to a small church in Corinth who are bickering and fighting among themselves and bringing each other to the courts of the land for judgment, He says, Do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world?

And you are to judge the world? And are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? He's talking about a complete role reversal and reminding us of our future in Him and the importance of recognizing this trajectory that He speaks about right in the belly of the Old Testament.

He talks beyond even Calvary in the ascension to what we have to enjoy. So I'm going to finish there, just want to say a couple more things just as we, before we celebrate the Lord's Supper, but we're going to sing before we do that in a minute.

But so what we're going to do is we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. And if you're a visitor here, you might not know what we do. What we tend to do is, what we do do is that we come forward, most of you come to the front and take a cup and the bread and go back to your seat and we wait and we take it all, we eat it and drink it together as a symbol of unity and the recognition of our oneness in Jesus Christ.

[27:11] And before we do that, I'll read, I want to read from Mark's Gospel chapter 14 because it links in with a lot of what we've been talking about in different ways over the last week or two.

Mark chapter 14, linking the Old Testament Passover with the New Testament Lord's Supper. Mark 14 and verse 12 tells us, on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, where will you have us go and prepare us to eat the Passover?

And then in verses 22 says, after they were eating, he took bread and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them and said, take, this is my body.

And he took a cup and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them and they all drank of it and he said to them, this is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many. I say to you, I will not drink it again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it in you in the kingdom of God.

So we're going to pray and give thanks at this point. Lord God, we pray and give thanks for the Lord's Supper. We give thanks for the link between the Passover, between being covered in the, the lentils being covered in the blood of the sacrificial lamb that saved them from the angel of death and the link between that and Jesus Christ and the lamb of God as we saw recently, who takes away the sin of the world.

[28:52] Reminders of these truths, by faith, Lord, we believe, help our unbelief, help us to grasp it more clearly. Thank you for the bread and the wine which symbolizes Jesus' body and blood.

And we pray and ask that you would enable us to consider what you have done on our behalf as we celebrate together. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.