

Hope for the Blind

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[0 : 0 0] The reading this evening is Isaiah 41, verse 21.

Is that correct, Martin? To Isaiah 42, verse 17. Present your case, says the Lord. Set forth your arguments, says Jacob's king.

Tell us, you idols, what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things that are to come. Tell us what the future holds, so that we may know you are gods.

Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing, and your works are utterly worthless. Whoever chooses you is detestable.

I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes, one from the rising sun who calls on my name. He treads on rulers as if they were mortar, as if he were a potter treading the clay.

[0 : 5 9] Who told of this from the beginning, so that we could know, or beforehand, so that we could say, he was right? No one told of this. No one foretold it. No one heard any words from you.

I was the first to tell Zion. Look, here they are. I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good news. I look, but there is no one. No one among the gods to give counsel.

No one to give answers when I ask them. See, they are all false. Their deeds amount to nothing. Their images are but wind and confusion. The servant of the Lord.

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness, he will bring forth justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.

[1 : 5 8] In his teachings, the islands will put their hope. This is what God the Lord says. The creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it.

Who gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on it. I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you, and I will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.

To open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not yield my glory to another, or my praise to idols.

See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare. Before they spring into being, I announce them to you. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth.

You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it. You islands, and all who live in them. Let the wilderness and its towns raise their voices. Let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy.

[3 : 03] Let them shout from the mountaintops. Let them give glory to the Lord, and proclaim his praise in the islands. The Lord will march out like a champion. Like a warrior, he will stir up with his zeal.

With a shout, he will raise the battle cry, and will triumph over his enemies. For a long time, I have kept silent. I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant.

I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation. I will turn rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind by the ways they have not known.

Along the unfamiliar paths, I will guide them. I will turn the darkness into light before them, and make the rough places smooth. There are things I will do. These are the things I will do.

I will not forsake them. But those who trust in idols, who say to images, you are our gods, will be turned back in utter shame. Amen. Cool.

[4 : 06] Thanks, Nuala, so much. What a good reading that was. Thank you so much. What a joy. Well, if you're new to St. Silas this evening, a big welcome to you. You're in the right place. I'm glad to see you.

We're all glad to see you. Let me open in prayer before we look at this wonderful passage. Father, we thank you for your word, and we pray that you would speak to us now through it.

May what I say that is helpful be remembered, and may what is unhelpful be forgotten. In Jesus' name, amen. Right.

Well, good evening. As Martin introduced earlier, we've been going through, in the evenings at St. Silas, a series in Isaiah's chapter 40 to 48, entitled, None Like Him.

Now, the book of Isaiah is sometimes called the Gospel of the Old Testament. That is, it points to Jesus more clearly than any other book in the Old Testament.

[5 : 11] Well, what do I mean? Isaiah tells us about Israel, that is, the Old Testament people of God, how they rejected God, how they followed idols, and how God judges them for this by sending the Babylonians to conquer them.

And then Isaiah tells us that despite all their deals and all the schemes that the Israelites do, that they try to do to get out of the judgment, that they can ultimately not save themselves, no matter how hard they try.

And then Isaiah tells us how God saves them, despite their rebellion, out of His great mercy and grace. So what happens is, when we come to Isaiah, when we read Isaiah, it's as if Isaiah is holding up a mirror for us to look at, that shows us how God sees us.

That we have rejected God and followed idols. That we cannot save ourselves. But also that God graciously and gently rescues us and gives us more than we deserve through Jesus, His Son.

Well, let me try and convince you of the truth of this. So imagine you want something. Maybe it's good grades. Maybe it's a job promotion. Maybe it's a special relationship with that boy or girl.

[6 : 39] And you do everything you can to get that thing. And you shape your life around getting that thing. So that whatever you do in your life is shaped by you trying to get that thing.

So say it's something trivial, like playing PlayStation. You rush home from work so you can get home and play PlayStation. And spend as much time as you can playing PlayStation.

PlayStation, the thing that determines what is good and bad is what's going to help you get that thing. The thing that determines good and bad, right and wrong in your life, is what's going to help you get that thing.

Even to the degree that you ignore truthful advice from others. So maybe your friends, they come to you and they have an intervention. And they tell you that that certain relationship that you're chasing, it's not a great thing to be chasing.

And you're like, no, no, no, I'm not going to listen to that. I know what's good. I know what's right. That thing is good for me. I'm going to go for that thing. And it's that thing that determines good and right.

[7 : 41] That thing becomes an idol to you. So what is an idol? An idol is anything that determines what's good and bad, right and wrong in your life other than the God of the Bible.

Now, because Israel chooses to follow idols, the Lord, and that's L-O-R-D, capital L-O-R-D. That's the special covenant, intimate name for God that the Bible uses.

Yahweh, that the translators put as L-O-R-D. Yahweh invites them and us into the heavenly courtroom to decide once and for all who is the real God.

So verse 21, Now, because Yahweh is the only God, Isaiah wants us to see the foolishness of idolatry.

And that's the first point. The things that Yahweh says makes them different to the idols is firstly, that unlike idols, He can tell the future.

[8 : 49] The idols can't and they don't. So verse 22, 23, Declare to us the things to us, the things to come. Tell us what the future holds so that we may know that you are God's.

And what follows? Silence. Silence. But God can and He does tell the future. I was the first to tell Zion.

Look, here they are. You see, God's foresight is 20-20. Secondly, the next thing that we notice is that God acts in history.

Verse 25, I have stirred up one from the north and he comes, one from the rising sun who calls on my name. And that's a reference to the Persian king Cyrus who conquered the Babylonians and sent the Israelites home from Babylon, which we looked at last week in depth.

But in contrast, God pleads out of exasperation with the idols to, well, just do something, anything. Just do something, whether it's good or bad.

[9 : 55] Do something that we may be dismayed and filled with fear. And He's just mocking them there, isn't He? Because the idols obviously can't do anything.

And because idols are so pitiable and so obviously false, verse 24, you are less than nothing and your works are utterly useless, God says whoever chooses to follow an idol, over him the true God of the universe is detestable.

That is, they let idols tell them what is good and bad and not letting God, the true God of the universe who created them, tell them what is good and bad.

Now because Yahweh is God, He restores those who are blinded by idols to Himself. And that's our second point. Now the issue with idolatry is not simply that you're following a false God, but that you're not glorifying the true God by being a light and leading the blind.

Well, what do I mean by that? So let's look down at chapter 42, verse 16, and we read there, I will lead the blind by ways they have not known and will turn darkness into light before them.

[11 : 14] You see, rather than leading the blind to God and being the light of God in the world, Israel is blind and needs to be restored and is in darkness and needs to be shown the light.

And that's the problem of sin, isn't it, really? So when we think, when we sin, when we do stuff that's wrong, we think, well, no one's going to find out about it. No one will know about my sin.

So long as I remain respectable, my sin doesn't matter, and God won't take it seriously. God takes all sin seriously because all sin robs Him of His glory.

So imagine you're sinning. Maybe you fantasize about someone in a way that you shouldn't, maybe an innocent way, perhaps, or maybe you go online and you look at something that you shouldn't look at.

Well, what happens? Does it stay there? Does it stay in the realm of your fantasies? Does it stay online? Well, no. Because what happens is you bring those fantasies into your daily life and it affects how you treat others around you and how you see them and how you relate to them.

[12 : 33] It stops you seeing them as people to be shown the glory of God and promotes you seeing them as people to be used for your own benefit.

So it stops you glorifying God and how you treat and relate to others. So instead of thinking about God, you're thinking about your own sin and your idol. That's the thing that you're thinking about and that you're upholding in your life.

And this is a big problem for God that we don't give Him the glory that He deserves. And because of this, Isaiah says that God will come down as a mighty warrior and wage war against sin and idolatry and rescue His people.

So look down at verse 13. The Lord will march out like a champion, like a warrior stirring up His zeal. With a shout, He will raise a battle cry and will triumph over His nations.

God comes as a warrior because we are incapable of saving ourselves. And notice the lengths that God goes to. He says, I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth.

[13 : 46] These are the things I will do. See, God is so committed to His people, to you and to me, and to His glory, that He will reorder creation and make it new only as the Creator can do to bring them home into His kingdom, that His glory might be seen from everywhere in creation.

Well, what does this mean for you and me here, sitting here today? Well, it means that if you're a girl sitting here today, it means that God is the bravest, strongest, most courageous man in your life.

He will never abandon you. He will never let you down. Everyone else will in life. He won't. He is a warrior who is zealous for you. Honor Him.

If you're a guy here tonight, maybe you struggled with a father figure in your life or a mentor figure, God is the wisest, strongest, most interested Father you'll ever have.

To have Him is to have a rock under your life. Find your rest in Him. Now, we have seen the foolishness of our idolatry.

[14 : 59] We have seen our need to be restored because of our spiritual blindness, that God says that He'll not forsake His people, but will come Himself as a warrior to rescue them, to lead them home.

And then, in the next bit, in Isaiah 42, 1-12, Isaiah introduces introduces the servant character who is different to servant Israel and different to us in that He does all the things that we fail to do.

And we notice there that He is marked by meekness, firstly, verses 1-4, and then secondly, by a power to restore in verses 5-9.

And that is the third point, the marks of the servant, chapter 42, 1-12. So, you see, what makes the servant so special and different from the idols is the servant's closeness to God the Father.

So, see what He says there. This is my servant. He's upheld by the Lord, verse 1. He is chosen by God. He's the one in whom the Father delights.

[16:07] He is the one on whom God has put His Spirit. The next thing that we notice about the servant is that this is the servant who will bring justice to the nations.

Well, that doesn't mean that at St. Silas all we are about is social justice and action work, although that is a good thing, but rather that God will undo all the bad things in the universe, all the things that make us so upset about the world that we see.

It is something that God does because we can't undo those things, because we're unjust and because we are blind. And next, the servant is also marked by teaching ministry.

Look down there at verse 4. In His teaching, the islands, that's the ends of the earth, will put their hope. And then we notice the servant is marked by gentleness and graciousness.

Verse 2, He will not shout or cry out or raise His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break. A soldering wick He will not snap out.

[17:14] That is, He's rather like a hippopotamus. Well, what do I mean by that? So, growing up, we had this set of photos in my house of this hippopotamus, right?

And there was this impala. Impala is a duck and a deer in South Africa goes down to the water hole and drinks water. And the crocodile came out the water and ate the impala, grabbed the impala.

And this hippopotamus came charging into the water and chased the crocodile away and nudged the impala back up onto the bank. And the impala is sitting there not very well.

And the hippopotamus comes up to it, opens up its mouth, lifts the impala's head into its mouth and does what looks like resuscitation.

It seems unreal. It seems unbelievable. I've seen the photos. I would have shown them. I've only got them on slides. And that is what this servant is like. He's courageous. He's strong.

[18:16] But he is gentle and is weak. And he'll do everything to get to you and rescue you to the last. And the second mark of the servant is that he has the power to restore.

So in verse 5 we have one of the most clearest statements of God as creator in the Bible. That he is the creator of the heavens who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth and all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on it.

And what I think he is saying is that because God made the world originally, he can do it again. He can restore all the goodness, all the green that has been lost from the world.

He can make it new again. And that this new creation, this recreation is going to begin with the spiritual restoration of his people, of you and me.

And that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is going to do this through his servants. So verse 6 and 7, I will keep you and I will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles to open the eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from dungeon those who are in darkness.

[19:38] And why will the Lord do this? Well, verse 8, I am Yahweh. That is my name. I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. God is going to do this for his glory.

And we notice then that this is going to be a new thing. Verse 9, Behold, the former things have taken place and new things I declare.

It's something that has never been seen before. Well, so to sum up, we've seen the foolishness of idolatry. We've noticed that God is the only God, that people are spiritually blind and are in need of being restored, that God, rather than abandoning us to our own devices, comes as a mighty warrior to rescue and to save us, as a new thing to restore us for his glory.

Well, in our final few moments, let me just show how Isaiah and the New Testament point to Jesus as the fulfillment of this. So in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew describes how the people were coming to Jesus from all over the place.

And Jesus healed them. And he made them better. And Matthew quotes from Isaiah, chapter 42, 1-4, and he says, what Jesus was doing is the fulfillment of the section in Isaiah that he was seeing.

[21 : 04] Except the last bit, Matthew quotes, he says, in his name, that is the name of Jesus, the nations will put their hope. And the nations there are you and me, everyone who is not Jewish.

So where Israel and we are blinded by our idolatry and fail to open blind eyes, Jesus sees perfectly throughout the Gospels. So we see all those stories of Jesus healing people who are spiritually blind, who are blind, physically blind, as a picture of them regaining their spiritual sight.

and then we see where we still walk in darkness and fail to be the light for the nations. Jesus is the true light of the nations. So you remember how Jesus goes to Gerasenes, that land that's completely Gentile region.

He heals that man who is demon-possessed. And what does he say to him after he's healed a man who is a Gentile from a different nation? He says, go home, and that is to the Gentile regions, and tell of all that God has done for you.

He's a light for the nations. And then verse 6 in our passage, God says about his servant, I will keep you and I'll make you to be a covenant for the people, a light for the Gentiles.

[22 : 27] Now, when the Bible normally talks about a covenant, it talks about something that's between two people. This is the only place in the Old Testament where he says, you are the covenant.

So the God says of the servant, you are the covenant for the people. You are the thing that goes between a holy God and the wayward people. What does he mean? He means that on the night that Jesus was betrayed and died, Matthew tells us, that Jesus shared a meal with his disciples.

And during that meal, he picked up a cup and he said, drink from this, from this cup, all of you. This is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

And he was speaking about his crucifixion that he was going to suffer the next day. because it was at Jesus' crucifixion where he died, where Jesus' body was broken and his blood was spilled for the forgiveness of sins, for all the times that we have rejected God and said, no, not your way, Lord, but mine, that his body and blood became the covenant between a holy God and a sinful people.

So when we go before God and the dirty rags of our lives and he says, all I see is my son and his perfect holiness and sacrifice.

[24 : 04] Jesus stands in the gap. And when we go to Jesus in our weakness and our shame and our failure and our defeats utterly broken, he knows and he cares because he was broken.

The weakest most tender bruised reed he will not break because he was broken. A smoldering wick he will not snuff out because his life was snuffed out on the cross for you.

So Father, we rejoice in the servant. We rejoice in this salvation, Father. We read there and as I sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea and all that is in it, you islands and all who live in them, let the wilderness and its town raise their voices.

Let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy. Let them shout from the mountaintops. Let them give glory to the Lord and proclaim his praise in the islands.

Father, we praise you for your son. We praise you for King Jesus. Amen.