

He's God of All the Nations Isaiah 21:1-17

Our text this morning is the book of Isaiah, chapter 21, the whole chapter, verses 1 to 17. Before we read that text, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Our Father in heaven, as we come now to worship you, as we hear your word read, as I undertake to preach from that word, I pray, Lord, that you would help me as I speak. I pray, Lord, that you would help us all as we listen. Father, I pray we would be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand and to obey. And all of these things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 21, starting at verse 1: ¹“The oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea. As whirlwinds in the Negeb sweep on, it comes from the wilderness, from a terrible land. ²A stern vision is told to me; the traitor betrays, and the destroyer destroys. Go up, O Elam; lay siege, O Media; all the sighing she has caused I bring to an end. ³Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in labor; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear; I am dismayed so that I cannot see. ⁴My heart staggers; horror has appalled me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling. ⁵They prepare the table, they spread the rugs, they eat, they drink. Arise, O princes; oil the shield! ⁶For thus the Lord said to me: ‘Go, set a watchman; let him announce what he sees. ⁷When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently.’ ⁸Then he who saw cried out: ‘Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord, continually by day, and at my post I am stationed whole nights. ⁹And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!’ And he answered, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground.’ ¹⁰O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you.

¹¹“The oracle concerning Dumah. One is calling to me from Seir, ‘Watchman, what time of the night? Watchman, what time of the night?’ ¹²The watchman says: ‘Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again.’

¹³“The oracle concerning Arabia. In the thickets in Arabia you will lodge, O caravans of Dedanites. ¹⁴To the thirsty bring water; meet the fugitive with bread, O inhabitants of the land of Tema. ¹⁵For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the press of battle.

¹⁶“For thus the Lord said to me, ‘Within a year, according to the years of a hired worker, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end. ¹⁷And the remainder of the archers of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.’” Amen.

Well, it's a difficult text before us this morning, to say the least. Visions, images, and furthermore, the visions and the images are being expressed to us as poetry. It's really very hard to literally bring some kind of interpretation of this into the present day. And so I tell you honestly, I'm not going to try and bring some kind of literal presentation into the present day. I've got a bit of an illustration in mind that might help you get a picture of what we're seeing here. I hope it helps, at least.

It's somewhat anachronistic, but set yourself in something like the 1880s, and imagine that you are an Old Testament prophet in the 1880s, and let's put you in a country—Great Britain. You're an Old Testament prophet, you have visions of the Lord, you have visions of the future. God speaks to you in that way, but you're not actually in Old Testament times, you're in 1880 in Great Britain.

You look at the world around you, and you see, for example, that Charles Darwin has published his *Theory of Evolution*. And you see that Karl Marx has published his *Communist Manifesto*. And you see that in Europe, in Germany, philosophers like Nietzsche publishing philosophy that is basically nihilistic, a philosophy that basically recommends death. Life is useless, you are only going to die, you might as well face death with courage. That's their message.

You see that the academy the world over, both the Christian and non-Christian academy, have basically sold out to these latest ideas, these latest philosophies of mankind. Christianity, the church itself, has surrendered the ground. Most of the leading men of the church, most of the leading men of the seminaries of the church, have basically surrendered without fight or argument to the theory of evolution. They've surrendered the accuracy of the Scriptures to German higher criticism.

And you, this prophet back in that time, you see industrial capacity coming on line. You see great ability to kill being produced *en masse*. Ships are no longer wood and driven by sail, ships are becoming made of iron and steel, and they're driven by steam turbines. They no longer shoot little round cannon balls, and even big round cannon balls, which are of somewhat limited power. They're now carrying genuine artillery, firing explosive fused shells that explode on impact and kill in a way that's never been seen before. Now the most dangerous thing for an infantryman is not a man with a rifle, it's a machinegun behind sand bags, in a pit. And the machinegun has the ability to wipe people out in their thousands and thousands.

And you look at your society, and you see that though it appears well, and though the churches appear full, and though you could imagine that you're a Christian in a Christian society and all is well, the Lord is telling you other things. You're a prophet, remember, in this little picture. You're a prophet in that time and that age, and the Lord is telling you other things. And the Lord says to you, in the visions of the night, "There's a price to be paid for this apostasy. There's a price to be paid for this turning away. There's a price to be paid for the way people are chasing after the wisdom of men." And you're given visions, and you see visions of World War I, slaughter in the millions—men cut down like hay cut for the drying.

But then, as though that's not enough, God says, "This is not the only fruit of your turning away." And you see World War II, and once again, you see death in the millions. You see gas chambers, you see cities being fire-bombed. And then God says, "And that's not enough. There's still a harvest to be drawn. There's still a harvest to be drawn from this apostasy and this turning away." And you see Soviet Russia under Stalin, and the death camps. What most of us tend to forget is that Stalin actually made Hitler look like a kindergarten teacher—the millions and the millions killed, slaughtered for the glory of humanity. Then you see Chairman Mao in China following the same path—millions killed. And you're that prophet.

Now you know that God, in amongst all this chaos and slaughter, has His church; and you know that in amongst all this chaos and slaughter, God will preserve His people; and you know from His word that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church; and you know that God is judging the wickedness of humanity; and you know that God is doing right.

But you see this vision, and it just about makes you vomit. It just about makes your heart stop beating. The pain makes you fall to the ground, doubled over. The tears fall from your eyes. You sob, even though many of those who are dying are your enemies. You sob, you cry, you weep—the slaughter. That’s what’s happened to Isaiah. We just need to go back into Isaiah’s day to see what Isaiah has seen.

Isaiah knows that his nation, for the most part, though it appears very religious, is actually apostate. He knows that their worship is shallow. He knows that he’s speaking mainly to a faithful remnant within the nation of Judah. And he knows that Judah is under the threat of the judgment of God, and that that judgment is coming. He’s already seen the Northern Kingdom dragged off into captivity, and the smaller nations around it taken over by the Assyrians. Isaiah knows, prophetically, that Assyria is going to become Babylon. And he knows that Babylon is going to take Judah, and the people of Judah will be taken captive, and Jerusalem will be burned almost to the ground—thousands upon thousands killed, as the judgment of God is expressed.

Isaiah knows that among those taken captive is the seed, or the remnant of the church—the true faithful worshippers. And he knows that they will be protected by God, and God’s promise, in Deuteronomy 28, is that after a time, God will call them back from a foreign land, back into Judah, back into the promised land, back to the city of Jerusalem. God will call them back. He knows that’s going to happen.

Isaiah also sees prophetically that these nations that have taken his nation captive, particularly the Babylonians, are going to be destroyed. He sees the judgment of God falling upon the enemies of Judah—destruction, death, bloodshed. And what does he say? ³“Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in labor; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear; I am dismayed so that I cannot see. ⁴My heart staggers; horror has appalled me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling.”

Now what did he mean by “the twilight I longed for”? He’s looking for the end of the day of Babylon. That’s what he meant when he said “the twilight I longed for.” He was longing for the end of the enemies of the people of God. He was longing for God to judge Babylon, because that was God’s promise, remember, from earlier in the book. Babylon would be used to judge Judah, and then God Himself would judge Babylon because they took such delight in doing the evil that they did to punish God’s people. Well, he now sees the twilight of Babylon, and he sees the judgment of God, and he sobs. He’s racked with pangs for the death of his enemies.

My Christian friends, often when we pray, and you’ve heard me pray, that God would do what is right. I pray that God would put down the enemies of the church. I pray that God would indeed strike fear into the hearts of the wicked. When it comes, it may well break our hearts. We should be sad. We should be compassionate.

You know, what's the picture of a Christian? Those who go into those prisons where you have prisoners on death row, prisoners who deserve to be on death row—they're guilty, they are murderers, they are rapists, they are mass murderers—Christians go in there and try to preach the gospel and minister to those people who are under that death sentence.

That's the church in the world. That's the church in the midst of the peoples around us. We're in a world that's under the death sentence of God. And we are God's ministers to those who live on death row. This town is filled with people on death row. Our nation—filled with people on death row. They might refuse to acknowledge it, but they'll do anything they can to numb the pain. They'll do anything they can to ignore the coming future.

I'm reminded of a picture in a C.S. Lewis book. In this book, you've got an apostate theologian, a supposed minister of the gospel, and he's in a place where there's darkness and half-light. And he keeps telling the people, "That light!" Remember, this man's apostate. He keeps telling the people, "That light! It's the light of coming morning!" But the truth is, that light is actually fading light. It's the light of coming darkness. It's not morning, it's twilight.

And people in this world will pretend the darkness, that half-light they live in, is the half-light of the coming morning. But the truth is, the darkness that they live in is the half-light of coming destruction, and to help them in their pretending, we know what they turn to. They turn to alcohol, they turn to various other kinds of drugs. One way or another, they want to be stimulated or they want to be let down. They go for uppers or downers, whatever their flavour may be. They go for whatever kind of sin and distraction they can bury their head in, rather than face the reality.

You notice the society we live in. No one wants to think a serious thought. No one wants to think things through to their ends and their conclusions. Everyone wants to think about today, and only today. So you get things like the supposed move for marriage equality. "Today! Those poor people should feel happy today! They should feel joy today! They should feel acceptance today!" And the half-light we live in is the half-light of approaching darkness. The church has a prophetic role, just as Isaiah had a prophetic role, don't we? We have a message to a world that suffers and dies. And the message is, Salvation is to be found in God, and in God alone.

Let's try and set this a little more in its time. Turn to the book of Second Kings, chapter 20. I'm particularly interested in verses 12 to 19. Just to give you a quick background of this chapter, King Hezekiah is sick, and Isaiah is sent to the king to tell him, "It's a sickness unto death. Prepare to die." Hezekiah prays that he would recover, and Isaiah is sent back to him to say, "Okay, your prayer has been heard. You will recover, and you've been granted fifteen more years of life." And then we see what happens to Hezekiah after that sickness. Does he use his time well? We're going to start reading at verse 12:

¹² At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. ¹³ And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. ¹⁴ Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and

said to him, ‘What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?’ And Hezekiah said, ‘They have come from a far country, from Babylon.’¹⁵ He said, ‘What have they seen in your house?’ And Hezekiah answered, ‘They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.’

“¹⁶ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, ‘Hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁷ Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. ¹⁸ And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’ ¹⁹ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, ‘The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good’. For he thought, ‘Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?’”

Hezekiah was one of the great kings of Israel. He was one of the kings that led the nation to repentance and revival. Yet he was a man. You know, I always remember that. Every man in the line of David, who was a son of David and who was an honest servant of God—and they were not all, but even the good kings—in the end, they were nothing but types pointing to Jesus Christ, and none of them was the Saviour. Though they were in some ways saviour-type figures, there’s only one Saviour, and that’s the Saviour to come.

Hezekiah shows them all that’s in his storehouse. What’s he doing? Why does he do that? It would seem that he’s hoping to establish an alliance. Remember now, we’ve got to try and keep the big picture of what’s happening politically. The Northern Kingdom is gone, there’s a nation called Assyria that has taken over the Northern Kingdom, and Assyria is on Judah’s doorstep, so to speak. Babylon is to the other side of Assyria, so you go further north, further east, you get Babylon. And it would appear that Hezekiah is thinking, “Well, if I can impress these envoys from Babylon, perhaps I’ll have an ally in the coming war against Assyria.”

Hezekiah didn’t apparently pay too much attention to the prophecies of Isaiah, unless they actually spoke directly to him. Because if he had been paying attention to the things that Isaiah had been saying and writing, he would have known that sooner or later, Babylon would actually defeat Assyria, and Babylon would become the enemy at his doorstep.

Remember that progression: Assyria becomes Babylon, which becomes Persia—all of which are the enemy of God. And Babylon in Scripture, that picture as we read in the book of Revelation, Babylon becomes that picture of nations organized in rebellion against God. “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great”—religious-political powers that are in rebellion against God.

Remember at the end of the book of First Peter, Peter signs off, and he says, “She who is in Babylon greets you.” What was he talking about there, when he said “She who is in Babylon”? Well, the “she” is the church. And the Babylon that he wrote from was Rome. You see how Peter picked up that picture of Babylon from the Old Testament, and used it, applied it, to earthly powers and kingdoms in rebellion against God.

So if you’ll turn back to Isaiah chapter 21, that’s the picture that we’re dealing with. You’ve got the people of Judah still trying to think of some way of wrangling their way out of the

providence of God, wrangling their way out of the words of the prophet. God has told them, “Your sins will be judged. You’ve taken me for granted. Your worship is shallow. You’re idolaters in your hearts. You think you can’t be touched because you’ve got the temple in the middle of the city.” That gets even more explicit in the book of Jeremiah, doesn’t it? “You think you can’t be touched because you’ve got the temple in the city. No. I will judge your sins, and I will use a nation called Babylon and/or Assyria to judge you”—as I said, they sort of meld together and become the one big problem.

And the people of Judah are still trying to wrangle their way out of it. They’re still hoping, somehow or other, with the wisdom of man and the plans of humanity, they can change God’s mind and they can change the way things unfold, and that there can be some kind of advantage in it for them. But, no. Isaiah says, “No. The things in which you hope will be destroyed. God will destroy those things that have become idols in your heart.”

What’s God’s demand of His people? “Trust in the Lord alone. Trust in the Lord alone, whatever happens. Whatever’s coming your way, trust in the Lord alone. Trust not in alliances, trust not in political parties, trust not in governments, trust not in soldiers, trust not in chariots.” Who are we to trust in? The Lord alone. Whatever comes our way, God’s call is always to His people, “Trust in the Lord alone.” So Isaiah has this vision of Babylon being destroyed. It staggers him. It makes him mourn.

Let’s look at a few more parts of our chapter. As I said, poetic imagery is hard to translate, or hard to interpret. Looking at verses 9 to 10: “⁹ And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!’ And he answered, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground.’” That’s speaking of the judgment of Babylon. But now look at verse 10: “O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you.” Who is he speaking to? He’s speaking to the people of Judah, to his own people. Who were the threshed and the winnowed ones? Well, to get some idea, turn back to Isaiah chapter 6. Remember, Isaiah’s just had his commissioning from the Lord—the great vision of God, which humbled him, and the Lord calls for a volunteer. Reading verses 9 to 13:

“⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me.’ ⁹ And he said, ‘Go, and say to this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand.”’” This is God’s message to His people. ““Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.’ ¹¹ Then I said, ‘How long, O Lord?’ And he said: ‘Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹² and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.’” And here’s what I want us to see, verse 13: “¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.’ The holy seed is its stump.” Now what’s he saying there? “Though a tenth remain in it.” A tenth of what? Though a tenth of the people remain in this land, the fires will go over it again. It’s speaking of the reduction, the reduction to a remnant. The judgment falls upon the land; a number of people are left behind, and yet judgment falls on them again. It will be burned again, judged again and again.

Move forward in the book of Isaiah to chapter 10, verse 20, speaking about the return from Babylon. “²⁰ In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. ²¹ A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. ²² For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. ²³ For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.”

Now just turn back to Isaiah chapter 21, and look at verse 10. Who are the threshed and winnowed ones? Who are the ones who’ve been through, what we used to call, the “cyclone”? I used to live on wheat/sheep property. I worked there for a while, and it was one of the few farms that re-sowed its own wheat, year by year. We had a particular strain of wheat growing on that farm, and we would re-sow the wheat year by year. Every year after the harvest, a contractor would come in and we used to call his truck the “cyclone truck.” He’d come in, and the truck was basically a massive semi-trailer, and on the back of the semi-trailer was a machine that was run by its own very powerful diesel motor.

What you’d do is, you’d pour your grain in at the top, and using turbines and stuff inside this great big barrel on the semi-trailer, on the body of this semi-trailer, it’d spin the grain out—spin it out, spin it out, then grade it. So in the end, the only grain that would come through at the other end, which you would bag for next year’s sowing, was the heaviest, plumpest grain. You were sowing the best grain. So the cyclone truck would sort the wheat so that you got the very best grain at the end, for the purpose of sowing the following year. That was winnowing—using the wind, this time in a closed environment and with mechanical power, using the wind and using screens or filters to sort the grain and get the very best, plumpest grain.

Well, God is now speaking of His nation as a nation that’s being winnowed and threshed. I’m sure you’ve seen the old-fashioned picture of winnowing and threshing. The people would toss the grain into the air, and the wind would blow across and blow the chaff away, and the grain would fall back to the ground. And that’s what God, through Isaiah, is calling the nation of Israel—“O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you.”

So Isaiah is speaking to God’s people, the winnowed ones, the remnant, the ones left behind, the faithful ones. “I’m announcing to you, to anyone who will hear and understand.” What’s he announcing to them? He’s announcing to them that Babylon will fall. He’s announcing to them that Babylon will be destroyed.

What else do I want us to get from this chapter today? I’m sorry we’re sort of bouncing around, but I’m trying to draw pictures from this passage, and as I’ve said, poetic imagery is very hard to literally interpret. Have a look back now from verse 6:

“⁶ For thus the Lord said to me: ‘Go, set a watchman; let him announce what he sees. ⁷ When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently.’ ⁸ Then he who saw cried out:”—now those of you who are reading the ESV, the

footnote says it might say, “Then a lion cried out,” or, “Then he cried out like a lion,” and they’re not quite sure how to go with the word translated there, but it seems someone may be crying or roaring like a lion, or a lion may be coming—“Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord, continually by day, and at my post I am stationed whole nights.⁹ And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!’ And he answered, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground.’”

What’s going on here? What’s God doing with Isaiah? What’s He speaking to Isaiah about? He’s saying to Isaiah, “Look. Look to the coming, look for the fulfillment, look for my work in the world. Isaiah, you’re being set up as a watchman. Look and see what’s happening. Look and see I’m at work. Look and see—the things that I tell you are the things that will happen.” That’s the message to the church. That’s God’s message to His people. He’s spoken to us of what the world will be like.

Are you surprised that the world’s in rebellion against the Lord Jesus? Are you surprised that the world hates the authority and the sovereignty of God, and hates His righteousness, hates His law, hates His word? Weren’t we told to expect that? Weren’t we told to look and to see that? This is a theme from the Old Testament into the New. Psalm 2: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed.” We’re told in the gospel of John, “The world will hate you because it first of all hated me.”

We’re told to expect these things. We’re told to expect that the world will imagine that it can overpower God. And God says to Isaiah, “Here, I’m giving you a sign. When the sign comes, when you see riders, horsemen in pairs, listen diligently. Listen very diligently.” And then at verse 9, “‘Here come riders, horsemen in pairs!’ And he answered, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground.’”

This reminds me of the Lord’s words Luke’s gospel. Turn to Luke chapter 21. This is the Olivet Discourse, as recorded in the gospel of Luke. We’ll start reading at verse 20: “²⁰ ‘But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people.²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.’”

“²⁵ ‘And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’”

What's the Lord Jesus saying to us? What's He saying to His church? Set yourself as a watchman upon the walls. Watch and wait. Proclaim. Don't be afraid to proclaim that you see these things happening. "Behold," says Isaiah, "here come riders, horsemen in pairs." And then what's his proclamation? And he answered, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground."

Look at the world, my friends, and reside in calm confidence. Look at the destruction that seems imminent, and reside in calm confidence. We're told to expect these things. We're told to expect the world to run, it would appear in human terms, out of control. But is it running out of control? I don't think so. I don't think God's having a holiday. I don't think God's forgotten the world. I don't think God's forgotten His church. I don't think God's forgotten the people of His church. I don't think God's forgotten His plans for the world. I don't think God's forgotten the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning death upon the cross of Calvary. I don't think God's forgotten any of those things.

The world *is* being consigned to the destruction for which it seeks. And even at the same time as the world is being consigned to the destruction that it seeks, God is saving His people from out of that destruction. He's drawing His people out from behind the gates of hell, to use another picture that Jesus gave us in the gospels—Against His church, the gates of hell will not prevail.

And so what are we being told? We're being told, "Look—Be confident. Be calm. See the fulfillment of God's plan. See the salvation of God's people. See the destruction of the world. And yet, see the preservation of the church. See God's plans being fulfilled." It's actually good news. It may well break our heart. We're not to be bloodthirsty bigots. We all know that. What's the commandment to the church? Love your enemies. Love your neighbour. Leave vengeance unto God. Be gracious, be merciful, be calling people to salvation—always and ever. God's word to the world is, "Repent! Repent! Seek forgiveness and you will be saved." That's His message from the church.

Let's look a bit more at this. Verse 11: "The oracle concerning Dumah." Now that's an interesting play on words. There's a place called Dumah, and Dumah also means "silence."¹¹ The oracle concerning Dumah. One is calling to me from Seir, 'Watchman, what time of the night? Watchman, what time of the night?'¹² The watchman says: 'Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again.'"

The oracle concerning Dumah, the place of silence—You see, there's no word of the Lord for them where they are. There's no word of the Lord for them in their place. They live in a place of silence. Where have they got to come for their word from God? Who do they approach? Who do they call out to in this picture of words? Isaiah. Why? Because Isaiah is the prophet of God. Only Isaiah has the wisdom of God to share with the nations.

So they call out to Isaiah, "'Watchman, what time of the night? Watchman, what time of the night?' The watchman says: 'Morning comes'"—morning comes, light's coming—"and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again.'" And as I've said, it's poetic. There are pictures here. I'm simply going to say that it would be consistent with the things that Isaiah has said so far in the first twenty chapters to read there an invitation to the peoples of the world.

“Come and inquire of the living God. Come and inquire of someone like Isaiah, who has a message from God for the world.”

Morning comes. Light comes. So does the night. Light and darkness. That’s the message of the church to the world, isn’t it? “There’s salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. There’s condemnation in sin. It’s as simple as that. Morning comes; so does darkness. If you will inquire, inquire. Keep coming! Come back again. Ask me for more.” The passage finishes off with the Lord speaking about the people of Kedar, verses 16 and 17. He gives them a year. “¹⁶For thus the Lord said to me, ‘Within a year, according to the years of a hired worker, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end. ¹⁷And the remainder of the archers of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few, for the LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.’”

I’ll just draw a few general points from our chapter this morning. God is the God of all the nations. He’s the God of all nations, though they don’t know Him, though they don’t worship Him, though they worship idols, though they’re given over to darkness—even so, God reigns over all. He rules over all.

All things are happening according to His will. All things are being unfolded according to His planning. The word “random” doesn’t actually occur in the purview of God’s providence. He’s running the show. He’s arranging the nations. He’s preparing the field, so to speak, for what? Well ultimately, Isaiah is always looking for what? He’s looking for the Saviour. He’s spoken of the Saviour. He’s spoken of the faithful remnant. He’s spoken of the mountain of the Lord. Who’s coming? The shoot from the stump of Jesse, the branch of his roots that will bear fruit.

Who’s coming? “Unto us a Son is given. Unto us a child is born.” Who’s coming? One who judges with righteousness, one who’s clothed in righteousness, one who’s empowered by the Holy Spirit, to do what is right and to do what is pleasing to God. Who’s coming? The Saviour. In the end, the Saviour is coming.

Isaiah, though he speaks to the people of Judah, though he’s of the nation of Judah, though he’s based in Jerusalem, though he’s dealing with kings, he’s got a vision that’s bigger than just the city of Jerusalem on a hill in ancient times, doesn’t he? Isaiah’s got a message to all the world: “Come and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come and seek repentance. Come and worship the one, true, living God.” All the nations answer to Him.

There’s evil in the world today. You say, North Korea seems like a crazy, out-of-control place—mad, dangerous, wicked, evil. Yep. And God has raised them up for His own purposes. And when God says it’s time that they be taken down, God will take them down, for His own purposes. All the nations of the world are as nothing before Him. Turn to Isaiah chapter 40. This is the passage which John the Baptist started to preach from in the gospels. Isaiah chapter 40, starting at verse 1:

“¹Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.

“³ A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’

“⁶ A voice says, ‘Cry!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

“⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’ ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

“¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? ¹⁴ Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. ¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.” And we’ll leave it there.

The Lord is coming. His reward is with Him. John the Baptist picked this up and preached from that passage when he knew that the ministry of Jesus was about to start. “Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” And what does it say concerning the Lord and His salvation, and the things that He’s going to work? “To him,” to God, “the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales.”

“Lebanon would not suffice for fuel.” What’s that saying? Lebanon had these great cedar trees—the cedars of Lebanon. And he’s saying, you take all those trees and put them in a great pyre—an enormous bonfire—and it’s not enough fuel for God. Its beasts are not enough for a burnt offering. All the beasts of the whole country, slaughter them, shed their blood—it’s not enough for God. It can’t turn aside the purposes of God. All the nations are nothing before God. They are accounted by Him as less than nothing, and emptiness.

All the nations of this world are nothing before God. God really only sees one kingdom—His kingdom. He really only sees one people—His people. He’s not judging by race, He’s not judging by wealth, He’s not judging by strength or by power, is He? He sees one kingdom, the kingdom of God. He sees one people, His people. He sees one nation, His nation—one holy nation, saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Saved by the grace of God. One holy nation, set apart for God. To do what? To inherit the earth.

All these things that are as nothing to God are His reward for the saints. In the eschaton, in the new heavens and the new earth, we have an inheritance, my friends. You've got a good block of land somewhere—a really good block of land. It's coming! It's going to be really good, better than anything you could hope for, better than we can imagine. And you know, they say real estate is about “location, location, location”? I'm telling you, this is in the best possible location.

There's a line in the Psalms where David says, “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” What does he mean when he says that? The boundaries—the boundaries of my inheritance, the boundaries of my farm—the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. He's saying, I've got an inheritance coming to me that is wonderful—wonderful!

My friends, don't put your eyes on the nations, other than to see the fulfillment of God's will. Don't fear the nations, don't fear the countries, don't fear the politics, don't fear the politicians, don't fear the laws. If we suffer in this world, we suffer in this world. We're here to obey God and to glorify God. Take part in the politics of this world to your ability. We're in a democracy. We should be taking part in the politics of our nation. We're still here, free to express our opinion. Let's express it. Let's exert the influence that we can.

But in the end—understand this—this nation? It's like dust on the scales. This nation is like a drop on the ocean. If Australia rises or falls, that's in the hands of God. For the time being, I pray that He preserves it. I pray not only that He preserves it, but that He blesses it, that He strengthens His church, that He uses us to call the people to repentance.

I pray that great things will happen in Australia. And at the same time, I know something: We're dust on the scales. It's a drop in the bucket. My inheritance is not here. My inheritance is in the future. That's where the location, location, location is. That's where the good block of land is. That's God's promise for His people. That's God's promise for His saints. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do indeed know that you have a plan for all the earth, that you are God over all the nations, that your will will be done, that you will be glorified, that your church—the meek—will inherit the earth, and there we will live in eternity in the presence of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Father, we give you glory and praise for these things. We give you glory and praise for the promises of God, upon which we can build our lives. I pray, Father, that rejoicing in these things, we would be used greatly by you for the advancement of your kingdom, and I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.