

# Problem solving

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[0:00] ...the message of these chapters. It's a little bit of an ambitious thing to try because they're quite long.! But did you notice how many times the New Testament dips into these chapters?

! Lots of quotes! So they're obviously important chapters. Let's pray. Please help us, Lord, such as we are, to hear your word in such a way that you will be honoured and glorified and so that your purposes will be fulfilled for your people and so that you will be glorified, so that the things that you promise, the things that you have in your mind and heart to do will be done even in us here in Brighton in this day and age. For Jesus' sake, amen.

I think these chapters are about problem solving. We live lives in which we are faced with challenges and problems.

We live in a world created by God. The God who created everything is personal, infinite, and moral. We live in a world with order. We live in a world in which relationship with God is possible. And how do we solve problems?

[1:34] So how do people typically solve problems? How do people solve sexual problems? How do they solve this? How do you solve sexual problems? With God or without God?

So all around us we see sexual problems solved with pornography, immorality, etc. How do you solve mental problems?

Anxiety, fear, solved with God or some other way? Around us we see a society which solves problems like that with alcohol and with substances, which is a euphemism for drugs.

And 20 yards behind where you're sitting, there might even be a drug deal going on as we speak. This is the way our world solves problems.

Financial problems. Debt. How is that solved? How would you solve that? Short of money? Do you nick something? Cheat the system? Is that something smart?

[2:37] As I was once told. What about the way God wants us to solve problems? Through him. What about genuinely asking God for help?

If we look back into the chapters that we've been reading, they had problems. Their case was a bit more specific. They were a nation created and redeemed by God.

The same God, a personal, infinite, moral God. They were a nation who knew God's order of life, his justice. The Hebrew word is mishpat and it crops up quite a bit.

So forgive me mentioning that word. It was a nation which was in a relationship with God. There were clearly stated promises and commitments from their God. The word is covenant.

And how did they solve their problems? How did they solve their military problems and their political problems? Well, in the chapters that we've had read to us and we will look at, one way of solving them was by partying through alcohol.

[3:45] One way of attempting to solve those problems was by getting all the experts together. In the old days, they used to meet in smoke-filled rooms and have beer and sandwiches brought in to solve problems by intelligence and by experts.

Or sometimes they tried to solve the problems by just ignoring it and hoping it would go away. Or by rituals and superstition. But one thing they didn't do was listen to what God had to say, as we shall see.

And these chapters are chapters of woe. The word woe is mentioned and it says, isn't it a pity? Isn't this a terrible situation?

Isn't this a sad situation? Isn't this a sorry situation? It's a word of judgment. It has emotion to it and sympathy and sorrow. And these are chapters of woe, which you'll notice that word.

So let's take a little bit more of a look at their specific situation. This is back in history. It's a long, long time ago, before the time of Jesus, but in the land of Jesus. And it had split into two kingdoms. [4:54] The northern kingdom, which is that bit, called Ephraim, or sometimes called Israel. That's the bit that broke away from King David. And the temple of God.

And they adopted idol worship. They went off in a different religious direction. And as we gather from this text, it was a fruitful land.

There was lush farming. In the end, it was overrun by a big nation called Assyria. In the end, it was overrun by Assyria. I'll show you a map of Assyria in a moment.

We also have the southern kingdom. Headquarters Jerusalem, called Judah sometimes. Headquarters Jerusalem. Another word for Jerusalem is Zion. And that was where God, in those days, had his headquarters on earth.

It's not like that nowadays. Jerusalem doesn't have that significance nowadays. But in those days, it had the temple of the city of David, the king, and the temple where God met with people.

[5:57] So that's a little bit about, you just need that little bit of geography and history for the north and south kingdom. And you need this little bit of geography and history to see the problems they faced.

So let's put in Jerusalem. And let's put in Egypt. Egypt is a big power. It has a lot to offer. It used to be the place that imprisoned the Israelites.

And they were brought out into the promised land. But at the time that we're thinking of, they have a big power. And they're saying, we can help you. We can support you. We can be on your side. And there's an Egyptian person. Be on your side against Syria. This big, aggressive, hostile, militaristic empire.

And there's a picture of an Assyrian. So how to problem solve, how to survive in this particular historical and geographical situation?

[6:59] In the history of it, just give you a couple of snippets of this. The king of Israel marched against Jerusalem. Isaiah chapter 7, verse 1. So the northern kingdom, which I haven't put in there, attacked the southern kingdom.

And King Ahaz, we're told, who was the king of the southern kingdom. This is how he solved that problem. Look at it. Ahaz sent messengers to the king of Assyria.

He said, I am your servant. Come up and save me. And he took silver and gold from the temple. And sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. That's what happened. That was that way of solving problems. To take silver and gold from the temple of their god.

And give this to this foreign, hostile king. Say, just leave me alone if I give you this money. That's how they solved that problem. Okay. That gives you a bit of the background. Let's look at the text.

[8:04] Isaiah chapter 28. Woe to. Woe to the leaders of Ephraim.

So we're in the northern kingdom. The pride of Ephraim's drunkards. To the fading flower his glorious beauty set on the head of a fertile valley. And here they are.

Here are the leaders. I've given them crowns to show their leaders. And he says, you're like a garland. Like an arrangement of flowers. So beautiful.

And you live in a fertile valley. And I put the valley there. And the picture then begins to get complicated if I put too many things on it. There you are. In your lovely, lush, luxuriant kingdom.

And what do we do as leaders? Well, we party. We party. We party. And he says, I'll tell you what you are. You are laid low by wine.

[9:00] Chapter 28, verse 1. You are laid low by wine. There they are. And he says, against you, the Lord, verse 2, has one who is powerful and strong like a hailstorm and a destructive wind like a driving rain and a flooding downpour.

He will throw it forcefully to the ground. That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot. That fading flower, his glorious beauty set on the head of a fertile valley will be like a fig right before harvest.

As soon as somebody sees it, gone. That's what's going to happen. There will be a hailstorm and a wind and you're done for.

That's how they solve their problems. That's what God thought of it. The garland will be trampled. And in that day, it says, the Lord, the Redeemer, will be a glorious crown, a beautiful arrangement of flowers for the remnant of his people.

That's the ones who stuck with him. He will be a spirit of justice. That's the word mishpat, to him who sits in judgment and a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

[10:23] So this is what the Lord says he will do. We see this contrast all the way through. But we've seen the rulers of Ephraim, the party animals.

That's how they solve the problem. And let's look now at the spiritual leaders of Ephraim, verse 7. And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer.

Priests and prophets. Let's put some priests and prophets. I give them funny hats so you can tell that they're priests and prophets. They stagger from beer too. Have we got any beer coming?

Yeah. They're befuddled from wine. They reel from beer. They stagger when seeing visions. They stumble when rendering decisions. And all their tables are covered with vomit.

That's the leadership of the northern kingdom. That's how they solve their problems. And God says, where is this getting us?

[11:27] When God speaks, verse 9, they say, who is he trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message?

You think we're children? You think we're babies? Who does he think he's talking to? We're grown-ups. His, what he says is just, do-do-do, do-be-do-be-do, na-na-na-na-na, ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba, whatever you say to babies.

He says, that's what God's saying to us. It's just baby talk. And God says, I'm speaking to you.

I'm speaking to you. And you need to listen to what I say. I'm speaking to you clearly and plainly.

But you won't listen. It's too simple. It's too childish for you. You won't listen. And God says, if you won't listen when I speak clearly and plainly, then this is the way you'll get the message.

[12:42] With foreign lips and strange tongues, God will speak to this people. You won't listen when I speak clearly, straightforwardly, understandably, in your own language.

So what I will do is I will send those Assyrian soldiers, and you will see them marching up and down your streets, and they'll be talking to one another in their Assyrian language, and that's what you'll get.

That's going to be my message to you. There's the Assyrian soldiers, and this is what they're saying. No idea what it means. If you won't listen, when God speaks clearly and plainly, the message will be something.

In the end, you just can't understand at all. When people don't believe, God will send them gobbledygook, and it's a sign of his judgment.

And let me just ask you here, many of you have come along to a church where the Bible is explained regularly and clearly, and it is so important that you listen to what God says and do it.

[14:07] It is so important not to say, oh, it's just childish, or it doesn't fit me, or it doesn't, I want something a bit more sophisticated.

Listen to what God says. Believe what God says. Do what God says. or risk being put in this position that you no longer have a message that you can understand at all, which is a position where God withdraws his word, and you're in a place of judgment.

Interestingly, this passage is quoted in the New Testament. It's quoted in 1 Corinthians 14, and you might like to just flip over to that. What about incomprehensible language in the New Testament?

In 1 Corinthians 14, you may or may not be familiar with that chapter. It's really about the communication that goes on when the church of God is assembled together. And his point is that the church is built up when people talk truth from God in a way that people can understand.

That's how the church is built up. And let's see if I could find you a verse that says that. So in verse 11, in 1 Corinthians 14, 11, if I don't grasp the meaning of what someone says, I'm a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me, and it doesn't help me.

[15:44] Verse 13, if anyone speaks in a tongue, should pray with him, could interpret what he says. And I'm looking for verse 16.

If you're praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say amen to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you're saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other one is not edified. So the edification takes place when people can understand words that are being said. And Paul quotes the bit about the Assyrian soldiers.

I'm getting ahead of myself. The people of God are built up when truth is spoken that they can understand, when the outsider comes in and hears what is being said and understands it. Verse 24, if an unbeliever or someone who doesn't understand comes in, while everybody is prophesying, in other words, saying things that can be understood, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner, will be judged by all, the secrets of his heart will be laid bare, he will fall down and worship God, explaining God is really among you.

[17:01] And that's what happens when what goes on can be understood. But when what goes on is not understandable, Paul says, well, what that really is, is a judgment.

And he says in verse 22, these tongues, if spoken in the assembly like that, so that nobody could understand what's happening, it's a sign not for believers, but for unbelievers. In other words, it is judging people's unbelief. They might have come in and think, I don't really think I'm going to, I'm not really trusting this.

And they hear nonsense and they go away saying, yeah, I told you it was a load of nonsense. The sad thing is that so many churches with the label Christian, if somebody goes in, what they hear either isn't true or can't possibly be understood, and somebody inquiring goes in and goes away, it was nonsense.

Judgment, when the word of God can't be understood. Let's move on, let's go back to chapter 28. The rulers had said, the word of God is just baby talk.

[18:33] And in verse 14, they tell us a bit more about their problem solving. What we have done, they said, in our smoke-filled rooms, we have got a treaty.

We have got a covenant that will keep us safe. And Isaiah says, oh yes, who have we got a covenant with? And actually later on, it's reasonably clear that they're talking about the covenant with Egypt.

And Isaiah says, you've made a covenant with Egypt. You already had a covenant with God. You've made a covenant with Egypt. That's not a covenant with Egypt. That's a covenant with death. And that's what he, that's the words he puts in their mouths in verse 14.

Hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. You boast, we've made a covenant. We've made a covenant with death. Well, actually we made it with Egypt, but in effect, it's with death.

With the grave, we have made an agreement. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it won't touch us. We'll be safe. This is how we're safe from enemies, from judgment, from threats.

[19:44] This is how we solve this problem. We've made a covenant with death. We've made a lie our refuge, and falsehood our hiding place. And God, I mean, the way Isaiah describes it, shows what he thinks of it.

How foolish, how foolish to seal your lives over, and seal your security over, to this political power, which is actually going to let you down so badly.

And God says, I've got a much, much better solution. And this is God's problem-solving method, and it's in verse 16. This is what the sovereign Lord says.

I've got a stone, which I lay in Zion. I've got a building plan.

I've got a defensive plan. I've got a moving forward plan. And it rests on this stone. I have a stone in Zion, verse 16. It's a tested stone.

[20:50] It's a precious cornerstone. It's a sure foundation. And this is my promise. There's the Zion.

Let's see, am I going to get a stone? There's the stone. Whoever trusts, will never be dismayed. That's my solution, says God. That's where I want, where I say, security and refuge are to be found, in this stone.

And this stone has got justice. That's the word mishpat again, I think. The measuring line, so you've got all sorts of geometrical bits and bobs there.

That's my solution, says God, in this chapter. And let's pause and think what the implications of this are. Who or what is this stone?

[21:47] Well, as we were thinking about earlier with the boys and girls, it's actually Jesus. And Peter says, I lay, he's quoting, do you want to look at it?

It's in 1 Peter chapter 2. This is in the New Testament. The apostle Peter looks back, and he's talking about Jesus, and he quotes this exact passage.

And he says, this is it. See, I lay in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone. It's 1 Peter chapter 2, around verse 6.

And the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. That's the stone, he says. That's the stone that he was talking about in Isaiah. And just in the sentences before, he says, you've tasted that the Lord is good.

And now you come to him, the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him. And you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual, house, to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[23:05] He says, if you're a Christian, this is where they build their lives, on this stone. This stone, which is, what does he say?

Chosen and precious. God says, this is the most precious stone. And then he says to the people, is he precious to you? And then he says, this stone is, I should look, a cornerstone.

It's true and exact. Is that the stone that you build your life on? And then he says, it's like a foundation stone.

It's strong enough to build on. And he says, that's the way to solve these problems, by building on that stone. That's God's, if you like, his secret weapon or his secret plan.

It all comes down to this stone. And so I'm going to ask you, what do you build your life on? How do you solve your problems? Do you do it the way that they did?

[24:16] With alcohol or pretending it's not going to happen or trying to plan it all out or by building on Jesus? As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God, you are built up.

Let's move on. In Isaiah 28, God says, that's the stone, the covenant with death will be annulled and all those, that false basis for living and trusting will be knocked out.

It says it will be beaten down. Your uphale will sweep away your refuge, water will overflow your hiding place, your covenant with death will be annulled.

It says it will all be smashed down. You know, Jesus had a similar thing, didn't he, when he said, the wise man builds his house on the rock.

The rock that he spoke of there was obedience to the words of Jesus but the principle is the same. For each of us, there's just two ways to build our lives. On Christ and his word or not.

[25:44] And when the floods came and the rain beats, if it's not built on Christ and his words, it all falls down. I lay a stone.

The last bit of the chapter, which I just stopped to mention briefly, is about the peasant farmer who knows how to do his farming. He knows what to plant and in verse 26, his God instructs him and teaches him the right way.

Teaches him mishpat. Teaches him the right way. Even the peasant farmer knows how to treat his harvest which bits you thresh with what and how long you do it for.

And he says, the Lord teaches him that. Verse 29, all this comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel, magnificent in wisdom. He says, even Farmer George, even Farmer George knows about that.

He says, but you are supposed to be privileged. You've heard things and you don't know. You haven't got a clue how to live your life. That's what he says. Woe to these people.

[26:52] Please don't let that woe apply to you. You've heard God's word. Don't reject it. You've heard God's word about the stone. Build your life on that.

But these kings and priests haven't got a clue. Let's move over and we'll dip into the next chapter. Not completely, but we'll dip into it because it follows on.

This is about Ariel. Now, who or what is Ariel? Well, it turns out that Ariel is Jerusalem and it's there in verse 8. He references Mount Zion.

And here is another way of approaching the problems of life as represented not by Ephraim but by Jerusalem in this case. this is a way of life where it says chapter 21 verse 1 the city where David settled add year to year let your cycle of festivals go on.

and this is a city that's full of rituals so they've got their yearly rituals and they've got all their probably ritual clothing and they probably have different clothing for different times of year and they have all these things to do with external religion and of course the world's full of that isn't it even now with all sorts of external things priests that dress up in funny clothes and shrines and monuments and processions and pilgrimages all sorts of external religion like this and they had that and God says Ariel actually sounds a little bit like altar hearth if you're burning a sacrifice you've presumably got a bit where all the ashes fall and Ariel sounds like that God sort of play on words with his city he says I'm going to make you an altar hearth he says that in verse 2 I will besiege Ariel she will mourn and lament she will be to me like an altar hearth

[28:55] I will encamp around you I will encircle you with towers I will set up my siege works against you brought low you will speak from the ground your speech will mumble out of the dust your voice will come ghost like from the earth he says I'm going to set up an attack against you that can't be right yes that's what I'm going to do because I am so sick and tired of you not hearing me not trusting me not turning to me woe to you I'm against you I'll make you into an altar hearth but I'm also for you your many enemies will become like fine dust your ruthless hordes like chaff suddenly in an instant the Lord Almighty will appear with thunder and earthquake and great noise and windstorm and tempest flames of devouring fire and the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel will be as it were in a dream they'll all disappear he says

I'm against you but I'm also for you and Zion 2 I have a problem of you not listening and understanding it's there in verse 9 which I've jumped over to be stunned and amazed blind yourselves and be sightless be drunk but not from wine stagger but not from beer for the Lord has brought over you a deep sleep he has sealed your eyes the prophets he has covered your heads the seers and for you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll which you can't read you got to that state too where you can't hear what God's saying the importance of God's word you're asleep you're blinded you're deaf you cannot hear God's voice and in verse 13 God says these people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me their fear of me is made up only of rules taught by men do you know who quoted that do you know who quoted that

Jesus did to the people that he was speaking to he said that's what happened to you you've got your rituals you've got your timetables you've got your diary but you don't listen to what I say and because of that you got into a situation where you seem to be doing the right things you seem even to be saying the right things but your heart is a long long way away from me what a terrible situation to be in I think Christian churches can get into this situation too that their response to God is they say the right things oh I'll pray for you I'll pray for you they say the right things they perhaps work out all the doctrines and can spot a false doctrine a mile away but something's gone wrong in the heart they honor me with their lips but their hearts are miles away and Jesus was scathing against his generation of religious people because their hearts were miles away and let's just hear that word and just check what's happening to our hearts you know you've got it you've got a church diary so you know exactly when to turn up and you've got the vocabulary you know exactly what to say but here's the question where's your heart what's really going on in there what do you really what do you really aspire to what are you really excited by what do you really long for are you really listening it's a very challenging passage isn't it and Jesus was not afraid to pick that up and say to the people around him who seem to be extremely religious well did Isaiah say of you this people honors me with their lips but their hearts are far far away and God says in verse 14 once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder the wisdom of the wise will perish the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish anybody know who quotes that in the New Testament Paul does actually well I was thinking of Paul maybe Jesus does as well I was thinking of Paul he does this in the beginning of Corinthians here it's saying all these people who tried to solve their problems by clever planning cunning plans arrangements with Egypt or with Assyria and cunning plans we've made without God we've got the best people together the wisest people most intelligent

and God says I'm going to just blow on that and just blow that away the wisdom of the wise will perish the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish and Paul takes that and he says actually that's capable of a very wide interpretation because our whole world uses intelligence without God as a means of just looking at everything as a means of solving every problem we'll look at the world whether it's psychology sociology anthropology physics chemistry we'll just look at the whole world without God and we'll build up a whole picture of that and that so now we've done it now we've got it and Paul says that is so short sighted because that is no place to build your life that is no place to give you refuge in a world made by God that does not help you understand the cross that's what Paul's point is the cross is the wisest thing that God has ever done and the most powerful thing that God has ever done and the wisdom of the wise and the intelligence of the intelligence says well crucifying a dead Jew on a cross that's wisdom and power no it isn't that doesn't get us anywhere and just completely discounts that and God says you are so short sighted the wisest thing I've ever done with a deep wisdom that goes back into eternity and goes forward to the last day and beyond that the wisest thing that I've ever done is send my son to die on the cross for your sins and the most powerful thing that I've ever done even more powerful than making the world the most powerful thing I've ever done is to put my son on the cross for him to bear the sins of his people for him to eradicate the sins of his people for him to get rid of the sins of his people by bearing it himself and setting his people free and setting up a new race of people that belong to him a new humanity that will go forward into eternity that is the most powerful thing that this world has ever seen and the wisdom of the wise and the intelligence of the intelligent just so let's just follow the passage on a little bit we've got another woe at the end of this passage verse 15 woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the law they do their work in darkness and say who sees us who will know so they're saying we'll solve this problem we've got

[37:23] Syria breathing down our necks we've got Egypt over here we've got all of that we'll get into our room we'll get our little spreadsheet of the number of soldiers that we've got and how we could deploy that over there and how we could rebuild that bit there and we'll sort that out and forget about God he doesn't see this he doesn't know about it and Isaiah says that is the most stupid stupid thing it's like the potter and the clay and the clay saying to the potter he doesn't know what he's doing he doesn't know anything I'm in charge of this whole process I'll sort this all out I'll work this out for myself just how ridiculous is that now Diane does pottery and she knows perfectly well if you leave it to the pot to decide anything you get rubbish it's the skill of the potter that makes the whole thing and for the pot to say oh you know the maker's got no idea it's just so perverse and God says that's what you're doing do you not think that the maker of the ends of the universe knows what he's doing do you not think he has the power to help you to help you in your particular situation in your particular challenge whether it is sexual financial mental whatever it might be do you think that he can't do that are you going to be so stupid as to say he doesn't know

I'll do it without him he has no knowledge Paul picks that up in Romans but we won't stop on that one the chapter ends with these recurring promises that God will bless his people he will give his people open eyes open ears verse 18 in that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see and once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord it gives a special significance to the days in which Jesus walked through that land in the Middle East and he spat on the ground and made mud and put it on somebody's eyes and they could see and when he touched somebody's ears and they could hear and it makes you think those all these prophecies are being fulfilled in the ministry of the

Lord Jesus and when he comes the stone when he comes the savior when he comes the eyes of the blind are opened are your eyes opened the ears of the deaf are unstopped do you hear his voice the humble poor believe do you trust in him that's what will happen and the ruthless will disappear and all God's plans will be fulfilled we've been looking at problem solving and as we stand here in our day we've got our problems and we look back at the problems that they had and how they tried to solve it we looked at the leaders the party animals of Ephraim God said you're so lush and luxuriant you're going to be trampled down underfoot and the priests and the prophets who

were supposed to be attuned to the word of God but they were drunk with alcohol and vomit and stupefied with wine because they couldn't hear what they wouldn't hear what God said and then they couldn't hear what God said and we've looked at the rulers in Jerusalem the covenant makers who made a covenant with death how ridiculous is that and that God is against them and I think I passed by the verse which said that's his strange work that God should be against his own people which is his strange strange work and even farmers know better than them and we looked at Ariel Jerusalem the place where their relationship with God was built on ritual sozzled by religion blind deaf their hearts far away and we've seen God's answer and he says this is my answer the stone I lay in Zion a stone and that stone that the builders rejected will become the head of the corner and that stone still stands that's still Jesus to trust him is the big lesson of these chapters to put our trust in him to build our lives on him that's the sensible thing to do it's far wiser than getting a PhD in cosmology or one of our

I stop to say Anthony was one of our church workers and he did get a PhD in cosmology nothing wrong with getting a PhD in cosmology but learning about the Lord Jesus is even better this stone and God says he's a precious stone so I ask again is this stone the stone on which you build your life and is he precious do you say he's the most precious thing his is the wisdom and the power the wisest thing that God has ever done it looks pointless but it's wise the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men and this cross looks so weak and the weakness of God is more powerful than the strength of men this is wisdom this is power in his cross and that's Jesus shall we make him the foundation of our lives shall we solve our problems through him shall we trust in him shall we want more of him shall we love him shall we come to him let's close by singing a song together

[43:56] Thank you.