

God calls people to salvation

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] Well good morning everybody and welcome to this pre-recorded meeting for Calvary Evangelical! Church in Brighton. We are a church of people who live in the area of Brighton in Sussex in the UK! And we believe in Jesus Christ. We're a church of 80 or so of us meeting together on Sunday mornings in normal times and we're just ordinary people from different nations and different backgrounds who believe that God has brought us together to love him and serve him and we're going to do our best to express that in this time together. We believe that the truth and meaning of life is found in Jesus and that he is to be found through and only through God's revelation of himself in the Bible which is God speaking to humankind. We believe that when we listen to God with an open mind and a seeking spirit no one will go away disappointed and we certainly pray that this will be the experience today of everyone who's tuning into this. So a particular welcome to everyone and a particular welcome to you if you've just dropped in, maybe looking for some spiritual guidance and comfort in this time of coronavirus and in the first 10 minutes or so I shall try and keep things very user-friendly for you and as we go on I'll be thinking more of regular attenders but don't think you have to tune out if you're not regular. Hopefully everything will be useful and helpful to everyone. So my name is Philip Wells, I'm one of a team of elders here at Calvary and I'll be leading this morning and no doubt other notices will appear on the screen just now.

There's also going to be a plan of what we are going to do this morning on the screen and even in these strange times we're just going to do the normal things that Christians do if they could meet together in the ordinary way. We're going to sing or at least have sung to us.

We're going to pray or have prayed for us, read the Bible and have a talk on the Bible and see how it applies to each of us. This is part of a series of four talks based on the book of the prophet Isaiah. We're looking at chapter 65 and 66 in the Old Testament and you'll find it really useful as we go on if you can see the words for yourself. So please grab a copy off your shelf if you've got a copy on your shelf or you might like to download it as a Bible app on your smart device. Anyway that's my introduction and let us pray together.

O Lord at your direction we come together today in this strange way to seek you and your truth and comfort. Please come and reveal yourself to every one of us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We're going to sing or have sung to us a song which gets to the heart of Christian faith. Where do we find solid ground in this uncertain world? And the Christian answer is that we find our basis, our root, our solid ground in God himself and in particular in Jesus Christ who died on the cross to pay the price for our sins. So the song is Beneath the Cross of Jesus I Find a Place to Stand.

[3 : 50] Words and Music by Keith and Christian, Christian Getty.densk Beneath the Cross of Jesus I Find a Place to Stand Beneath the Cross of Jesus I Find a Place to Stand And wonder at such mercy that cools me as I am.

For hands that should discard me hold wounds which tell me come. Beneath the cross of Jesus, my unworthy soul is one.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, His family is my own.

Once strangers chasing selfless dreams, now one through grace alone. How could I now dishonor the ones that you have loved?

Beneath the cross of Jesus, see the children called my God. Beneath the cross of Jesus, depart before the crown.

[5 : 42] We follow in His footsteps where promised hope is found. How great the joy before us, to me His perfect bride.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, we will gladly live our lives. Beneath the cross of Jesus, I find a place to stand.

I wonder at such mercy that cools me as I am. I am now going to read a couple of parts of the Bible that express the solid hope and comfort that God offers us.

First of all, some sentences from Isaiah chapter 40, verses 25 to 31. God says, Wonderful reading. Wonderful reading. God describes His own total uniqueness. There's no one in His league. He created the stars and knows all of them by name.

[8 : 30] Which in a way is a bigger statement in the 21st century than it was when people first tried to understand what was being said all those years ago.

He knows the stars. He knows the stars. And not one of them is missing. And how much more does He know His people? That they are not forgotten or overlooked.

God looks after His people. He does not get tired, weary, overwhelmed, anxious. Even though young men stumble and fall.

But He gives His strength to His people. And what it actually said more specifically was that He gives strength to those who wait for Him or wait on Him.

In other words, put their hope and trust in Him. In what He has said and what He has promised. And that of course is different from lots of other attitudes. It's not waiting on luck.

[9 : 33] Or trusting in the ultimate power of science and medicine. Even though those are good gifts from God. But it's trusting in God Himself. He is our dwelling place through all generations.

And He gives strength to those people who wait on Him. And what an enviable and wonderful position to be in. The second reading is Matthew 13, 28.

Just a couple of sentences that Jesus said. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. And I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart. And you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. This is Jesus inviting people to come to Him. And again we notice this is not an invitation to a spiritual technique.

[10 : 42] It's not an invitation to trying to be a better person or to try harder. It is an invitation to a very engaged relationship with Jesus Himself.

Come to me. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me. And He promises that He will give rest to the soul.

And those of you who know the history of God's dealings with His special historic people in what we call the Old Testament will know that they were offered rest and peace and security and a home where they could feel safe forever.

But they never found it. And Jesus Himself refocuses this promise and says that the giver of rest is He Himself.

Let us pray. O Lord, we come in this time of testing and uncertainty, when things that we thought were strong and could never be shaken have been shaken.

[11 : 46] We come at a time when death itself is a reality that we can no longer ignore. We seek some security deeper than that which science, economics or normality can offer.

Please show us how to find that security in you through Jesus Christ. Please, O Lord, be kind and merciful to our nation and our leaders.

Be particularly kind to those who are risking their lives to look after others. We think of health workers, NHS workers, care workers, together with all those who serve us in transport and retail and public services and so on.

Please protect them and give them courage and peace. Please, O Lord, be kind and merciful to our families. We also pray for our loved ones and families near and far. May each one be kept safe.

And more than that, may each one hear your message and your call to them in this current situation. And we pray in Jesus' name.

[12 : 49] Amen. Amen. And to bring to a conclusion this sort of introductory part of our time together, we're going to have another song which speaks about the steadfast love of the Lord.

He invites us to rest our lives in the promised love that is at the heart of a relationship with him. The song quotes one of the books of the Bible, Lamentations.

In that book, God's people took great comfort in him at a time of sadness and loss. If they could get comfort from that, then surely so can we.

The steadfast love of the Lord lasts forever. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

This is in the book of songs that we use in the church. The praise book. And for those of you who have the book, it's number 280. The steadfast love of the Lord ever says, The steadfast love of the Lord ever says, His mercies never come to an end.

[14:26] We are new every morning. We are new every morning. New every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

Great is your faithfulness. The steadfast love of the Lord. The steadfast love of the Lord ever says, The steadfast love of the Lord ever says, His mercies never come to an end.

The steadfast love of the Lord ever says, The steadfast love of the Lord ever says, Every morning, great is your faithfulness, your love, great is your faithfulness.

And now we have another song from a previous generation. It's still absolutely up to the minute in its meaning and relevance. Now I have found the ground wherein my soul's anchor shall remain.

Now I have found the ground wherein sure my soul's anchor shall remain.

[16:07] The wounds of Jesus for all my sin. Here for the world's foundation slain.

Whose mercy shall unshaketh stay. When heaven and heaven have fled away.

Father, your everlasting grace. A scanty thought surpasses far.

The earth who melts with tenderness. Your arms of love still open up.

Written in sinners to receive. At mercy they may taste and live.

[17:07] O Lord, your father and rest of this. Has drowned my sins eternally.

The word is my unrighteousness. No spot of guilt remains on me. No spot of guilt remains on me.

All Jesus blood through earth and skies. Mercy rebound. There's mercy cries.

Jesus I know who has died for me. Here is my hope.

My joy. My rest. To him when hell assails. I flee. In him alone.

[18:06] I shall be blessed. A waste of doubt and anxious fear. Mercy is all that's written there.

Though waves and storms break overhead. Though strength and health and friends are gone.

Though joys are withered all. And dead. And every comfort is withdrawn. Steadfast on this.

Thy soul relies. Father, your mercy never dies. Based on this ground I will remain.

Though heart will fail and flesh decay. This anger shall my soul sustain.

[19:17] When our foundations met away. Necessant by the man shall prove.

Love with an everlasting heart. To sin. To sin. Now we're going to have our Bible reading.

It's a lovely reading that Christopher is going to read to us from Isaiah chapter 65. Isaiah chapter 65 I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.

I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, Here am I, here am I. All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.

A people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick, who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil, who eat the flesh of pigs and whose pots hold broth of unclean meat.

[20:36] Who say, keep away, don't come near me, for I am too sacred for you. Such people are smoking my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day. See, it stands written before me.

I will not keep silent, but will pay back in full. I will pay it back into their laps, both your sins and the sins of your fathers, says the Lord. Because they burnt sacrifices on the mountains, and they defied me on the hills, I will measure into their laps the full payment for their former deeds.

This is what the Lord says. As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes, and men say, Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it, so will I do on behalf of my servants.

I will not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains. My chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live.

Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the valley of Acre a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me. But as for you, who forsake the Lord, and forget my holy mountain, who spread a table for fortune, and filled bowls of mixed wine for destiny, I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter.

[21:57] For I called, but you did not answer. I spoke, but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight, and chose what displeases me. Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says.

My servants will eat, but you will go hungry. My servants will drink, but you will go thirsty. My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame.
My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from the anguish of heart, and wail in brokenness of spirit. You will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse.
The Sovereign Lord will put you to death, but to his servants he will give another name. Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth. He who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth, for past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.
Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create.
[23 : 02] I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.
Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years. He who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth.
He who fails to reach a hundred will be considered a curse. They will build houses and dwell in them. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people. My chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune.
For there will be people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call, I will answer. While they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food.
[24 : 15] They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. Amen. Thank you very much, Christopher, for reading that to us.

And now we're going to have the contribution of a prayer from David. Thank you, David. Gracious Heavenly Father, we come to you remembering that you are far above the ins and outs of our daily routine.

We are so tempted to think that we are at the centre of things, but you are far above us. We acknowledge you as the great and almighty God.

Your ways are beyond question. Your character is good. And we come just recognising that and asking you for our nation, for our country, for your mercy at this time.

We acknowledge, Lord, that there are many grieving from bereavement. There are many who have been on the front line and who have witnessed things that they should never really see, almost like coming back from a war zone and are full of stress.

[25 : 32] We pray your help and comfort to them, your strengthening of them. We think of many who are isolated in our country, many who, for the sake of protecting their loved ones, are keeping a distance from them.

We pray, Lord, for your wisdom to be given to the government, as we are now in the process of easing restrictions, the when and how much can be lifted.

And above the emotional pain of all this distancing, there is the economic worries and many who have lost jobs, many who are not sure where they can find new employment.

Gracious God, there are so many people hurting, and yet we do wonder if they know in their hearts to turn to you. We fear that many do not.

And we ask you to instill a sense of your majesty above this thing, a sense that you are not a God to blame for these things, but that you call people to be humble before you.

[26 : 45] Pray for many teenagers and students who are isolated as well. And we pray that you'll give colleges wisdom, that where they can get people together as they need to relate, that you will soon lift these restrictions as well.

Pray, Lord, for our city. We thank you for the life and bustle of this time of year, but we still know there is a need for restraint. Too many photos of Brighton Beach as the place where distancing is being, social distancing is being ignored.

Give wisdom, give sense to the police in how they organise and restrain. And we pray also for the, there is a prevalence of drug culture, young people getting sucked into things that are very bad for them, evil people with no qualms about embroiling people.

Lord, have mercy on our city, the homeless people also, who have needs of shelter. Lord, we thank you for those who are working amongst them, providing for them.

But we pray that the long-term things, that they will find home, shelter, and a place to live for a longer term.

[28 : 10] So, Lord, we lift all these things to you. We thank you again that you are the God who is above it all, but we ask that you will turn hearts towards you and that in their need, whether it's in our city or in the nation, when people are in need, they will learn to look to you and to pray if they haven't prayed before.

So we lift all this to you in Jesus' name. Amen. This next song describes the wonder of God's call to human beings to come to him to wash away their sins.

And the writer is amazed that God should bother to call people like us. He is amazed that God is not put off by our stumblings, our false starts and our fickleness.

This is number 677 in our book. Today your mercy calls us to wash away our sin. However great our trespass, whatever we have been, however long from mercy our hearts have turned away, your blood, O Christ, can cleanse us and set us free today.

Today your mercy calls us to wash away our sin. However great our trespass, whatever we have been, however long from mercy our hearts have turned away, your blood, O Christ, can cleanse us and set us free today.

[30 : 09] Today your gate is open and all who enter in shall find a mother's welcome and pardon for their sin.

The pause shall be forgotten, a present joy begin. A future grace be promised, a glorious crown in heaven.

Today the Father calls us to wash away our sin.

For why we've always wondered, this is a Father's home. O embracing mercy, O ever-open door. What should we do with mercy? How can we ask a Lord? When all things seem against us, to drive us to despair, with open door.

[31 : 57] When all things seem against us, to drive us to despair, and you will hear our prayer. Now we're going to change gear and spend time thinking carefully about what God is saying to us in this chapter.

We're going to think together about this passage that was read to us in Isaiah 65. And let me pray. Lord, we ask that even though this is a strange method of communication to us, that you will nevertheless speak, and that we may hear your voice with great clarity and great power and great effect upon us.

This is a great miracle we ask of you, in your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. We're looking at Isaiah 65, and my introduction is...

Click. The random incoming phone call which says to me, This is the Microsoft Windows Technical Department.

I'm calling about your computer. Am I speaking to Mr Vels? And for a number of reasons, I'm very suspicious to respond to this call. Who is this really who's calling me?

[33 : 21] And what are their motives? And in order to know how to respond, I want to ask, What sort of person is calling me? And in this passage, God calls people to salvation, and we want to know what sort of person is God.

I'm not going to stop to debate or prove that there is a God. That is simply a given. And everybody knows that deep within them.

The Bible says, and I'm not going to stop on that point. But is this God powerful or weak? Is he caring or indifferent?

Is he far away or is he near? Is he strict and judging or kind and forgiving?

Is he the sort of God who is for us or against us? Is he a God who is in any sense personal or impersonal?

[34 : 23] Or if we want to bring it down, is he nice or nasty? Now, in asking these questions, and I want to ask them with seriousness, not with facetiousness, it's impossible to keep ourselves outside of this issue because in making judgments about God, in fact, he is making judgments about us.

He's showing us something about ourselves. And hopefully, as we come to this part of the Bible, we will do him the honour of listening to what he has to say on this subject.

It's very easy for us to make up our own minds ahead of time. And we usually do that, in all honesty, to make ourselves look good. So let's actually listen to him.

And if we do listen, we find that God is far greater than we could have imagined. And we come out of it, actually, far worse than we would ever have thought, but with the potential of being far more blessed than we could ever have dreamed of.

So what sort of person is God? And as with finding out about any person, the thing to do is to engage with what they say and to observe what they do.

[35 : 36] And these chapters in Isaiah are a case study, an ideal place to do this. We can overhear God himself talking about the way he does things.

Now, we need a little bit of context. We need to know what's happened so far. We've been following the thoughts and words of the prophet Isaiah in ancient Israel.

And he knew that way, way back, God had promised to Abraham to bless all the nations through his seed, through his offspring. And he knew that Abraham's nation or the nation that had come from Abraham, the nation Israel, was God's servant to spread this light.

But he also saw that Israel had failed morally and spiritually. And yet God would fulfill this promise, definitely.

And this fulfillment is focused in three figures or agents and one city. And the three figures are the king in the line of David in the first few chapters, the suffering servant who is like a sacrificial lamb in Isaiah 52, 53 and around there, and the anointed conqueror who will fight single-handed to defeat all the enemies of God and the enemies of his people.

[36 : 56] And that's the figure in the chapters we've been looking at recently. And the city is Zion, the city of God, the place where God lives, the place where he will build his community, and the whole earth will be blessed in this new, holy, glorious community called the city of God.

So these are definite promises. And the question hangs over all of this. How will they be fulfilled? And the answer of the whole Bible is that these promises are fulfilled.

They are yes and amen through one person. And that person is Jesus, Jesus Christ himself. He's the centre of the whole of the Bible. So what's the context of this passage in the Bible?

You could think of it as a part of the prophecy of Isaiah, which has in mind the people who have been expelled from the promised land, as Isaiah prophesied they surely will be, and taken into exile in Babylon.

And they're taken there for their sin, for their failure of heart and life. And this passage, the section we're looking at now, could well envisage them being back in the land.

[38 : 12] And yet the failure, their original failure is rooted in, deep in the heart. That's deep in human nature.

And coming back from exile doesn't change that. The failure of heart and life are unchanged. So these chapters have extremities in them. They lament movingly the extreme and intractable problem of human sin.

Our offences are many in your sight, Isaiah 58, 12. All our righteous acts are like filthy rags, Isaiah 64, 6.

And this is matched by their extreme and utter need for God himself to rescue, above and beyond what human beings can do for themselves. And here God is depicted as the saviour, the rescuer, the one who takes it upon himself to do for his people what they couldn't do for himself.

And you get these prayers. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, Isaiah 64, 1. We are the clay, you are the potter, 64, 8. And so you get the spiritual truth of the deep problem of all human nature, of the estrangement that we all have from God by birth, and the fact that we are blameworthy for this, and do not have the power to save ourselves.

[39 : 40] So what does God say in this passage? Well, I'm going to pick on four things. Number one, I show myself to people who weren't looking.

This is God's goodness. Number two, I call to people who don't respond but think they're doing me a favour. And that describes their fault.

I repay people exactly what they deserve. That's God's justice. And I bless the people who are my servants. That's God's generosity.

So those three things. I show myself to people who weren't looking. I call to people who don't respond but think they're doing me a favour. I repay people exactly what they deserve. And I bless people who are my servants.

Showing God's goodness and people's blameworthiness, his justice and his generosity. A little bit like what Paul says in Romans 11.22, the kindness and sternness of God, or, old translation, the

goodness and severity of God.

[40 : 46] God is kind and he is stern. He is good and he is severe. So let's take number one. I show myself to people who weren't looking.

This is God's goodness. And that's in 65 verse 1. Surely referring to the teeming hordes of the foreign nations.

They're the people who, to our great surprise, God will bless and gather and bring and to whom he will show himself.

You get this as a theme which pops up in lots of places. You've got it in 66.18. I am about to gather all nations and tongues and they will come and see my glory.

It's a sovereign thing. By a sovereign I mean something that God does in this wonderful way of his, single-handedly, with his single initiative.

[41 : 48] No one else thought of this. And in an unstoppable way that nothing will prevent this from happening. A single-handed, single initiative, unstoppable act of God. Short-hand theological world.

His sovereignty. Sovereign act of God. In other words, if God had waited for the nations to seek him, he would have been waiting forever. So he decides to show himself to those who did not ask. And this business of being, people finding God who had not asked to find God, this actually goes back to the root of Israel's being herself.

She's chosen. She did not apply to God for the status of being chosen nation. But God sovereignly said, well, I'm going to bless these people. They don't deserve it. But that's what I'm going to do.

So God's goodness in showing himself to people who weren't looking. And truth be told, this is the only reason why anyone belongs truly to the people of God.

[42 : 56] It is a product of his goodness and grace. And if you're one of his people, that's the reason why you're one of his people.

Because he showed himself to you when you weren't that bothered. When left to yourself, you would have gone your own way. And he decided he would show himself to you in such a way that you couldn't ignore it.

And he breathed life into you and brought you to himself. And what a good reason to be enormously thankful. Enormous amazed thankfulness from God's people.

You could write a song about it, couldn't you? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found.

Was blind, but now I see. Second thing from these chapters. I call to people who don't respond, but think they're doing me a favour.

[43 : 54] And this shows something of their fault. So Isaiah 65, 2. All day long I've held out my hands to an obstinate people who walk in ways that are not good, pursuing their own imaginations.

And in this God describes his experience with Israel over hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years. Now these people are in a different situation.

They're not far away from God. They're near. They're not ignorant of God's ways, but very familiar. And yet this sad truth that familiarity breeds contempt.

And God calls to them and they deliberately and continually say no. In the past chapter they were saying, why are you silent?

Why keep silent and punish us beyond measure? And God says, well actually, I'm not silent. I've been calling to you. It's just you haven't been able to hear me. They deliberately and continually say no.

[44 : 53] All day long I've held out my hands to an obstinate people. Isn't God very patient? And he describes them in those next verses.

People who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens, burning incense on altars of brick. Now I doubt that this is, I could be wrong, but I doubt that this is a literal description of what they were doing.

They probably thought that they were keeping God's commands very adequately. And this, I suggest, is actually a description of how their sin seems to God.

It didn't seem like this to them. Or maybe they were actually doing these things. Or maybe they weren't. But they might as well have been. And God describes their contaminated offerings.

They offer sacrifices in gardens, burning incense on altars of brick. Well, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with monte don and gardens. Nothing wrong with brick. But in this context, this was a contaminated offering.

[46 : 01] Not offered in the way that pleased God. And their disgusting devotions. They sit among the graves, spending their nights keeping secret vigil. So something abominable, abhorrent about their devotions.

They might as well be sitting in a graveyard with corpses, says God, spending their nights in that unclean way.

Their repulsive diet. Well, I guess they were probably quite scrupulous about diet. But God says, well, you might as well be eating the flesh of pigs. And you might as well be those, verse 4, whose pots hold broth of unclean meat.

It's as repellent as that to me. And then their ridiculous religious pride. They say, keep away, don't come near me. I'm too sacred for you.

Somehow they've got it into their heads that all this stuff that they're doing is so advanced and so clever, so perfect, that they can say to people, this is making me really holy.

[47 : 12] And God says, absolutely not. If only you could see how ridiculous and how completely wrong you've got this in your ridiculous religious pride.

So God finds their moral and spiritual situation abhorrent. Such people as smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day.

It's coming smoke stuffed up your nose. God says, I just find that just totally out of order. So I call to people who don't respond, but they think they're doing me a favour.

Did they realise this? Well, no, they probably thought they were doing very well. Maybe we should ask God to show us our lives as he sees them.

And those things in which we think we're doing him a favour or are doing not bad, allow God to say, well, I don't quite see it that way. He calls to people who don't respond, but thinks they're doing him a favour.

[48 : 18] And he does call to them. These are the people to whom God holds out his hands. All day long I've held out my hands to an obstinate people. And he still does.

He's a remarkably patient and persistent God. Maybe he's doing that to you today. And he's been doing this for a long time.

And today might be the time in which you say, I get this. I get this. And I will respond to this God who calls people to salvation. Number three.

This God is the sort of person who repays people exactly what they deserve. This is his justice. And I'm thinking that sometimes people say God is not fair.

There's the parable of the servants in the vineyard who all got paid the same, whether they worked long hours or few hours. And the owner of the vineyard said, isn't this money not mine to do with as I see fit?

[49 : 21] Do you despise my goodness or my generosity? In his very nature, God is more than fair. I choose those words carefully.

God is more than fair. And I'm thinking in this text of the words repay. So we've got it in verse 6. I will not keep silent, but will repay in full.

It's one of those Hebrew places where the word is said twice to mean I will definitely do it.

Repaying, I will repay. Or something like that. In verse 7.

I will measure into their laps full payment for their former deeds. An absolute fairness in what God is going to do. Sometimes people have a complaint against God for his unfairness.

And they say things like, well, you can imagine. Why didn't you give me a husband? You gave her a husband. You haven't given me a husband. A woman might say. Why did you take away from me X, Y, Z?

[50 : 22] Other people have X, Y, Z. You've taken this away from me. You can. This is the human condition, isn't it? We say these things to God. And the problem with this complaint is that it assumes that we deserve good things from God at all.

We forget that this is all his generosity and all his grace. It's a very dangerous assumption to go to God and say, this is what I deserve. You're letting me down.

And I say that, I hope, with respect and with reverence. But also, it is true. So, God repays people exactly what they deserve.

In 65, verse 11, these people, what does it say about them? Well, verse 11, they forsake the Lord. They forget his holy mountain. They fill bowls of mixed wine for destiny.

They trust in fortune, spread a table for fortune. And these are the people to whom God called, but they wouldn't answer. They got so used to the noise, as it were, of God calling that they didn't notice it anymore.

[51 : 34] I spoke, says God, but you didn't listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me. You did evil and chose what I did not delight in.

And God says, I will give you what you deserve. I will destine you to the sword. We're not wise to ask God to give us what we deserve.

We are far wiser to ask him to give us what we don't deserve. To give us mercy that we don't deserve. To give us blessing that we don't deserve.

That's a much better place to be in. And he calls to us so that we might listen. Third thing. He blesses the people who are his servants.

This is his generosity. Excuse me. So what about those who by grace do seek him and are found and do turn and do listen?

[52 : 41] And there are such people. Left to ourselves there wouldn't be such people. But because God has determined that there will be people living in Zion, there will be those who seek and are found and turn and listen.

There will be such people by God's grace. Now what about these people? In this passage they're referred to as his servants. I'm sure that is chosen well. They're like the servant who is the figure in the background of my PowerPoint up at the top there.

The three servants from Isaiah 53 and around there. And here are the people who constitute his newly formed servant.

They are his servants. Humbly under God's kind and gracious authority. And the blessings are promised to them.

Verse 9. I will bring forth seed from Jacob and from Judah. Those who possess my mountains. My chosen will inherit them and there will my servants live.

[53 : 49] Sharon will become a pasture for flocks and the valley of Achor a resting place for herds for my people who seek me. So a place of security. A pasture for flocks.

The valley of Achor a resting place for herds. A place of richness. Verse 10. Where the pasture is. And in verse 13. A place of food and drink and satisfaction. My servants will eat but others go hungry. My servants will drink but others remain thirsty.

A place of joy and goodness as distinct and as opposed to wretchedness. My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail and brokenness of spirit. And the servants have a new name. A name is always to do with character and status and life really. And a new name is given to his servants.

[54 : 52] Verse 15. You will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse. The sovereign Lord will put you to death but to his servants he will give another name.

And to these servants in his generosity the past is forgiven. Verse 16. The former troubles, the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.

We have a God who is capable of remembering. But we also have a God who is capable of forgetting. Isn't that wonderful? And he says I forget those past things.

They're hidden from my eyes. And surely he's including in that not just troubles but sins. He puts, he takes, he removes our sins as far as the east is from the west.

So far does he remove our sins from us. And if he's taken them away and if he's forgotten the sins of the past, what right do we have to dig them up?

[55 : 55] Eh? What right do we have to dig them up again? He says he's taken them away and forgotten them. What a wonderful blessing for the people who are his servants. So we started by asking what sort of person God is and how that related to us.

And those four points were that I show myself to people who weren't looking. That is sheer goodness. If he hadn't done that there would be no one who would find him.

Number two. I call to people who don't respond but think they're doing me a favour. Please don't say God has never tried to make contact with you. The sound of the coronavirus if you like is God's phone call to our world.

And the phone is ringing right now. Don't be too busy to answer it. I repay people exactly what they deserve. This is his justice. We shouldn't think that God is unfair.

Now may grace, mercy and peace be with us all from God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forevermore. Amen.

[62 : 54] Amen. So this is goodbye from me and hope to see you soon. Bye bye.