

I will praise you

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[0 : 00] Please have your Bible open at Isaiah chapter 9. This week I think it was Professor Stephen Hawking passed away.

! There's a picture of him against the background of the earth seen from space and perhaps the moon or another planet. The whole cosmos there in the background.

The Cambridge University website says of him, Professor Hawking was a unique individual who will be remembered with warmth and affection, not only in Cambridge but all over the world. His exceptional contributions to scientific knowledge and the popularisation of science and mathematics have left an indelible legacy.

His character was an inspiration to millions. He will be much missed. He was a remarkable human being, wasn't he? In many, many ways displayed a lot of courage, fortitude and a very, very clever man.

He had all sorts of equations about space and time and black holes. He was determined, courageous and clever. But he was limited. Even though he was, let's say, the cleverest scientist.

[1 : 15] Could he tell us what the universe was made for? Could he tell us what the final aim of the universe is?

And the answer is no. Could he tell us what the triumph of the universe's maker will look like? In other words, could he tell us who wins in the end? No. No clever person can tell us that. Could he inspire us to live every second of life now in enthusiastic confidence about the hope that is in store, not just for the universe, but for us as individual people?

Could he inspire us with promises like that? And the answer is no, I'm sorry, he couldn't. Could he even tell us really what we're meant to be afraid of?

No. For all his brilliance, he would be limited in that. Today we're going to look at a piece of literature which spoke powerfully to a whole nation two and a half thousand years ago when they had no hope, when they didn't know where they were going, they didn't know what the future held.

[2 : 39] This literature spoke powerfully to Jesus, who submitted himself to its teaching and built his life on such teachings.

If it was good enough for him, it's good enough for me. This literature claims to be the very voice of God, speaking not only as in the historical past, but speaking to us now in the 21st century to tell us what learned professors cannot tell us, where the future is heading, and to inspire us now to know how God will win.

That's what this literature is about, and I hope and pray I'll be able to communicate at least some of the power of that. We're going to go back into the history and geography, and you might say, well, why do history and geography?

And the answer is because it's true, and it's real, and it's relevant. If I were to stand up here and tell you something like this, once upon a time an old woman lived in the woods, and then I started like that, you would say, I'm not going to listen to the rest of what you say, because that's going to be a fairy story, and you'd be quite right not to do that.

If I were to stand up and tell you here, 59% of people believe something about be truthful, cure baldness, or something like that, you'd say, well, 59% of people can be wrong.

[4 : 13] That's just populism. I don't want to know what most people think, because most people can be wrong. If I were to stand up here and say, all religions are equal, that would simply be an assertion.

I'm just saying that. Who am I? Who am I to tell you something like that? But if we look into the Bible and say, this is what Israel's God said. This is how he reacted.

This is what he promised. This is how he showed himself. And to say that this Israel's God, about whom we read these very actions and his fingerprints on history, and then to say this God is the same God who runs the history now, and is here now, and is speaking now, then that would be something worth listening to.

That's what I'm promising to, or intending to do. So as we come to this text, let us meet this God as we listen to the prophet Isaiah.

So we will do the history and geography, and there is the geography. There's the Egypt, Cyprus, Mediterranean, Red Sea, Persian Gulf there.

[5 : 27] You need to know where Jerusalem was. This was God's headquarters on earth. Nowadays, his focus is not limited to a particular ethnic group or geographical city.

That's how it was. It's put in those terms in the Old Testament. And he was concerned about the royal family of King David, and Jerusalem was their base. That's Egypt, the place where they were rescued from slavery in the time of the Exodus.

If you've ever seen the video prints of Egypt, it's really good, nice songs in it. That's all about Exodus. I recommend that. Assyria was the big superpower, like Mrs. May is apparently squaring up to Vladimir Putin, the Russian superpower.

Assyria would have been the power that you were worried about in those days. It was getting aggressive. It was rising. Would it help little Judah here, this nation, or would it be their enemy? The name of the king of Assyria, who was leading them on this aggressive course, was Tiglath-Pileser III.

[6 : 52] So there were two other Tiglath-Pileasers, and this was a third of them. So there's Assyria trying to expand. And there's the northern kingdom. God's people had split into two, wrongly, badly, sadly.

And the northern kingdom is sometimes referred to as Israel, sometimes referred to as Ephraim, sometimes referred to as Jacob.

And you have to bear in mind that these two kingdoms are not the same. And the Assyria, eventually this kingdom is going to get wiped out, leaving this kingdom all on its own.

Aram, or Syria, not to be confused with Assyria, is up there. And there is the stage set, and you can think about all the pressures, and worries, and fears of the people in that unstable political and military situation.

And that's the situation in which God's people are called to live by faith. They're called to live trusting in God's promises, not trusting in military power, not trusting in strategies, not trusting in clever plans, but trusting in God.

[8 : 03] And I have to say, that is pretty much the situation that we're in, isn't it? We have pressures on us, those pressures were real, the pressures that we live under are real. And they were meant to show, in that arena, how God's people live by faith in Israel's God.

That's what they were meant to show. They were meant to show everybody else that that could be done. They were meant to show that it was a better way. They were meant to show that the God who told them to live like this answered prayer and showed his wonder through the way his people trusted him.

And that's the same for us. Christian people are supposed to do exactly that. We're under the same pressures and the same possibilities as they were. So there's Tiglath Pileser.

Tiglath Pileser III. It's not a photograph. It wouldn't be a photograph, would it? It's a carving. And it is apparently in the British Museum. I've credited the photographer there, as I'm supposed to do, because that's off Wikipedia.

And you admire his hairstyle and his beard. And presumably, the stick that he's got in his hand is some indication of his royal majesty.

[9 : 24] But he's a real person. Tiglath Pileser III. As real as Vladimir Putin. As real as Donald Trump. As real as your next door neighbour. Etc. There he is. So let's follow through in Isaiah 9 as we see how this whole thing plays out.

So we've got now in Isaiah 9, verse 8. And into this situation, God fires a word. A message. That's what God does.

He speaks. His words have sort of explosive power. The Lord has sent a word, chapter 9, verse 8, against Jacob.

It will fall on Israel. All the people will know it. Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria who say with pride and arrogance of heart, the bricks have fallen down.

We will rebuild with dressed stone. So let's imagine that the Assyrian power has come and invaded a bit. Knocked things down. And they say, no problem. It's just a temporary blip.

[10:30] We will rebuild with dressed stone. Do that. Our power is sufficient to do that. A refrain is repeated.

Verse 12. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away. His hand is still raised. And the people in this northern kingdom are saying, we can, you know, whatever God throws at us, we can withstand it.

And God says, actually, you can't. I'm still angry. I haven't stopped. There's more to come. Verse 13 says, the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the Almighty.

So the Lord will cut off from Israel, that northern kingdom, head and tail, palm, branch, and reed in a single day. They have not turned to the one who struck them.

Do you see what's being said? That as God allowed the pressure to be built up, he was saying to them, this pressure is there to remind you to turn to me, to turn back to me, and it's called repentance.

[11:57] And this is God's characteristic way of the way he deals with the world. that he speaks to us and says, turn to me, and we don't listen.

And he nudges us and says, turn to me, and we don't listen. And when pain and suffering comes, that is God shouting to us, turn to me. But they didn't turn.

Suffering, says C.S. Lewis, is God's megaphone to bring a deaf world to repentance. But they didn't listen. Let's move on to verse 17. For all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

And the result, as they continue to not take notice, not listen to what he says, nor to the loud call of the pressure of their circumstances, the result is in verse 18.

Surely wickedness burns like it consumes briars and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, it rolls upwards in a column of smoke.

[13:11] And it goes on to describe the way that God's judgment is going to operate in that society. It talks about verse 20, they will devour and still be hungry.

so there's a deprivation and then it talks about them turning on one another, so there's mutual destruction and he says, for all this, end of verse 21, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

That was the way God's wrath operated on that society. God is still demonstrating his wrath because people are still not listening to him, people still make idols, people still commit sin and we're told, my apostle Paul, that God's wrath is now, in our society, being revealed against ungodliness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth.

That fearful, real anger of God that they experienced in that society, all those years ago, is at work in our society now.

And God is still saying to our nations, turn to me, repent, turn to the God who only can save you.

[14:36] And they didn't. And for all this repeated refrain, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. And he might ask, does this demonstrate a God who is just brutal and ruthless, or does it actually demonstrate a God who is patient, who gives people lots of opportunities, lots of time, hundreds of years worth of time, or a lifetime, saying, turn to me, turn to me.

I think there's a good reason to say that God is a God of patience, actually. he, in chapter 10, the theme goes on, woe to those who make unjust laws, who issue oppressive decrees, who deprive the poor of their rights, and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey, robbing the fatherless.

God was not in favour of exploitation of the vulnerable then any more than he is now. And the question comes, what will you do on the day of reckoning?

Of course, that is a totally up-to-date question. What will you do on the day of reckoning? Because the message of the Bible says, history goes on, it goes on as God patiently, patiently gives people opportunity after opportunity, but it won't go on forever.

One day there will be a day of reckoning. One day there will be a day when God says, right, that's it, now then, I want to find out, you've had all these chances, you've had all these gifts, what have you done with them?

[16:23] We'll count it up, there will be a day of reckoning. And Isaiah says, what will you do on the day of reckoning? And of course, that's a contemporary question, what will you do on the day of

reckoning?

on the day of reckoning, what will you say to God? There's a Christianity explored course, a little bit like the alpha course, in which one of the questions at the beginning is, if you were to get to heaven, and knock on the door, say, let me in, what would you say was the reason?

Let me in because, what would you say? It's a good question, because we're all going to be there at some point, what would you say? And the person who concocted the course comments, if your answer goes something like, because I, it's almost certainly a bad answer, because I have been good, because I have tried my best, because I'm not as bad as people, none of those answers is a good answer.

The only answer that is going to work is because Jesus, because Jesus died, that's the reason. Let me in, not because of anything I've done, but because of what the Lord Jesus did.

What will you do on the day of reckoning, he says to these people. And chapter 10, verse 4, ends this section with the threat still out standing, for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

[18:02] John the Baptist, just before Jesus, said to the nation in his day, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? And it's still, it's a very uncomfortable question.

It's a very uncomfortable question. question. And it's not being asked with any sort of glee or superiority, but it's like the question, you get into that sea full of sharks, who's going to rescue you? Don't spoil my fun, but it's a life saving question. What will you do on the day of reckoning? How will you escape the wrath to come?

Let's move on now into chapter 10 where God changes his focus now to the Assyrian oppressor. So Tiglath Pileser, there he is, with his vast military machine, if it was today it would be tanks and rockets, it would be a big display of all their power, but they had expanded and come and attacked the northern kingdom, and God has something to say to the Assyrian.

So he's said woe to his own people, and now he says woe, not in the sense of stop the horses, but in the sense of oh dear, this is awful, woe.

[19:33] Chapter 10, verse 5, woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand of my wrath. I send him against a godless nation, I send him against the people who anger me to loot and snatch plunder, to trample them down in the streets.

And you see what God is saying, he's saying, actually, the person who's masterminded this whole thing, see, Tiglath Pileser thinks it's me, Tiglath Pileser thinks he has cleverly and brilliantly constructed this strategy, built up this army and had the idea of attacking these people.

And God said, well, actually, think again, because the person behind all this is me, and you, Tiglath Pileser, are a stick in my hand.

You, Tiglath Pileser, you're doing my work, my wrath, you're going because I sent you and I dispatch you. And God is making a huge claim about what we would call technically his sovereignty. Not in the sense of Brexit, but it's sort of more than that, that he rules, he decides what happens and he's in charge of everything. There isn't a single department or person or atom which is not under his direction.

[21:01] And Assyria, he says to Assyria, you thought you were doing your plan, actually you were doing my work. And he sort of puts words into the mouth, or this is what Tiglath Pileser's saying, verse 8, are not all my commanders but kings.

Look at how brilliant all my army commanders are, we're super powerful. And we've gone through that area, we knocked out this country, this country, this country, this country, and we knocked down their temple, their temple, their temple, and we knocked down their idols, their idols, their idols, and when we came to Israel, it was no different, and if we get as far as Jerusalem, it'll be no different there either.

And God says, you're making a very big mistake, because although my people have wrongly erected idols, I am not an idol.

I am not a concoction made of wood or stone. They are lifeless artifacts, they're just made by a person. I, says God, I'm the maker of everything.

I am not an idol. If you come up against me, it's a completely different thing. And in verse 12, it says, that when the Lord has finished his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he says, I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

[22 : 30] I will punish his pride because he says, verse 13, by the strength of my hand I have done this. By my wisdom, because I have understanding, I did all this.

I pushed back the boundaries. It was just like stealing eggs from a bird's nest. You just reach in, birds aren't going to attack you, are they? They don't even chirp or squawk.

You just take the eggs. That's what I was doing. And he says, actually, you are an instrument in my hand. And one thing I cannot stand, says God, is you thinking that you are in charge because actually I'm in charge.

Does the axe, he says, raise itself above him who swings it? Or does the saw boast against him who uses it? As if the rod were to wield him who lived him or the club brandished him who's not the wood?

Who's in charge? The person who holds the axe, not the axe. You're the axe. I'm the person who holds it, says God. And so he says to Assyria, you will be destroyed in all your power and pride.

[23 : 40] You will be destroyed. Verse 19, you will become few like remaining trees of the forest, so few that a child could write them down. Now, Israel, my people, he says, in verse 20, they're not going to be wiped out.

They will turn in part. Verse 20, in that day, the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down, that's the Assyrians, but they will rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant will return. Do you remember that phrase from last week? A remnant will return? It was the name of one of the children, wasn't it? She'er jashub. A remnant will return, God says, a remnant will return.

That's why I came up with that funny name, because a remnant will return, and you'll see it happen. They will return to the mighty God, verse 21. Now, it's only a remnant, even if the people are like the sand on the seashore, so there are millions of them, only a remnant will return, verse 22, because God is serious about his judgment.

And it says in verse 25, in verse 25, my people who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians who beat you with a rod and lift up a club against you as Egypt did.

[25 : 04] Very soon my anger against you will end, and my wrath will be directed to their destruction. So, God is speaking to these nations as the one who's in charge of them, as the one who is using them for his purposes.

And let's just reflect on that. God is still the sovereign God. And today's politics and nations are still tools in the Lord's hands.

Now, in those days, we had a particular explanation as to why he was doing certain things with certain nations. And that's what the Bible is. We don't have a running commentary on how God is using the nations today, but we do believe that he is working out his purposes.

And we can see from this example here that his sovereignty doesn't make people puppets for the Tiglath-Pileser, made real choices, thought he was, as far as he was concerned, these are ideas he were coming up with himself, taking real responsibility for them and real blame for his cruelty, but the Lord has them in his hands for his purposes.

So there's a children's song, he's got the whole world in his hands. Do you know that one? He's got the whole world in his hands, etc. That's quite simple, but it's profoundly true.

[26 : 40] he's got the whole world in his hands. He had Assyria in his hands, he's got the whole world in his hands. And there's a particular instance of this.

When two nations conspired together, it looked as as completely out of control to kill a man who had done nothing wrong.

They wanted him to be a casualty. in order for the greater good of peace in an unstable political situation. The two nations were Israel and Rome, and the person who was in the focus of this was Jesus of Nazareth.

And he was killed wrongly as the leaders of the people and the nations conspired together against the Lord and his anointed. And it is said about this, this was done by wicked hands.

And it's also said this was done by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. That God, in that particular instance, perhaps the centre of his sovereignty, if you can think of it like that, the thing that seemed to be most out of control, most senseless, most unjust, was actually at the very centre of God's purposes, of wisdom, power, justice, redemption.

[28 : 09] Jesus died on the cross wrongly, cruelly, unjustly, according to the set purpose and knowledge of God for our salvation. He's got the whole world in his hand.

He's got you and me in his hand. He's got salvation in his hand. Let's go on into chapter 10.

So in verse 24 it says, Zion, do not fear the Assyrians because God has them in his hands. I'll finish being angry with you and turn on Assyria.

And I will work in the same way that I did back in history when I redeemed you from Egypt. It's in verse 27, 26. He will raise his staff over the waters as he did in Egypt.

In that day their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, their yoke from your neck. He says, I'm going to set you free. I will remove their yoke and their slavery.

[29 : 21] And that's what God does. He sets people free. He takes away the yoke and the burden. He sets his people free.

And he goes on to say, I'm going to chop down the nations. It's in verse 33. I will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled.

The tall ones will be brought low. He will cut down the forest thickets with an axe. Lebanon will fall before the mighty one. And do you remember, I don't know whether you do remember this, but one of the things in the early chapters was that God said, there's so many human things that set themselves up high, as high towers, and high trees, and high vessels, and high buildings, and they all say, you know, we're God.

And God says, I'm against that. I will chop that down and bring you down to size and show you that I am the high and mighty one. I am the one who is lifted up. And so God takes the trees, the nations as it were, and chops them down.

And all you're left with is those stumps because the Lord is against arrogant pride. It's a matter of God's policy that when people get into the territory, not of thanking God for what he's given them, but of saying, we're almost like gods ourselves, so clever, so wise, so powerful.

[30 : 44] Look at us, that God is against that. It's an act of insult to him, and he says, I'm against that. That's a message to President Trump, to say, you don't rule the world.

You yourself are under orders. It's a message to Comrade Putin. You don't rule the world. You are a man under orders.

It's a message to states which say, you give your heart and soul to the state because you belong to us. And God says, no you don't.

I have the whole world in my hands. People belong to me. It's a message to the human worshipping Western democracies that think we've got it so well organised!

We don't need God at all. We can push him out of our thinking, push him out of our society. He's given us stuff like marriage and we say, we can redefine that.

[31 : 51] He's given us stuff like sex and gender and we say, we can change that. And God says, no you can't, it's not yours to mess about with. Who do you think you are? God has a message against that which is high and lifted up and says, we're like gods.

And it's a message to each of us. if we for a moment think that we are on the throne of the universe. The moment we begin to say to other people, bow down and worship me, we've become false gods ourselves.

And God says, no, the only person who says bow down and worship me is God. Everyone else bows down and worships him. and the Lord says, I will cut down with an axe.

All those things that lift themselves up and produce no fruit for me. John the Baptist, again going back to John the Baptist, had the same message just at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus when he said, an axe is laid to the root of the tree and every tree that produces no fruit will be cut down. It's very powerful. confrontational message, actually, isn't it? That's what John the Baptist came saying. And it's still true.

[33 : 17] Jesus said the same thing in a more, what shall I say, almost in a more domestic way when he said, I am the true vine, you are the branches.

Every branch that stays in me produces fruit. But he did say, every branch that produces no fruit is cut off and burned.

He said that. I once preached it and somebody said, you can't possibly preach that, it's very unfriendly. But it's what Jesus said. there's a challenge here for our lives, for our humility, for where we put ourselves in the universe.

And if we go on now into chapter 11, we have this remarkable thing that one of these stumps branches out again.

that's the particular thing about God's work with his people, that even though he knocks them down, he picks them up again. Chapter 11, a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.

[34 : 32] All the other trees are knocked down, they stay knocked down. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse. I don't need to explain, Jesse was the name of David's father, father, so this is to do with the royal family of Israel, this is to do with David's line, you will remember from Christmas carols, you sung Christmas carols, that Jesus is exactly in that line, once in royal David's city, etc.

So we're into very important territory here. And here in chapter 11 is described this shoot that comes up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots, a branch will bear fruit.

Isn't that great? This is where fruit happens. And we have these descriptions of him, the spirit of the Lord will rest on him.

Well, what sort of spirit is that? Well, it's a spirit of wisdom and understanding. And you remember that Tiglath Pileser said, I've got wisdom and understanding. And God said, well, no, you don't, you're just stupid, because you don't even realise where you are in the world.

This stump of Jesse, this king, will have the spirit of wisdom and understanding. He will know, he will understand, he will understand the deep truths. And do you remember that Isaiah had been saying to the people, don't, don't be fearful about the threats that are around you, trust in the Lord, if you're going to, you should fear the Lord.

[36 : 11] That's the right person to fear, and that's what this stump, this shoot excels at. This person has the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of counsel and of power, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

He will delight in the fear of the Lord. And all the things that were lacking in the city of his day. They didn't have, do you remember, justice, they didn't have righteousness, they didn't have faithfulness, and there's some wonderful Hebrew words for these things.

And this person has all of that stuff in abundance. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears, but with righteousness he will judge the meek or the lowly or the needy.

With justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. So he brings chafat, mishpat, tzedek, he brings these wonderful rich themes.

And he also is a judge in a negative sense that the wicked he will not tolerate. He will give them lots of chances, but if in the end they still want to do their own thing, they have the consequences.

[37 : 32] He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. With the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. And he has clothing. It says righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist.

And I think how to explain the idea of clothing. I think if you missed off the CLO you'd get the idea. What's going to be his clothing or what's going to be his thing?

He clothes himself over what his thing is. If you were a gardener if your thing was gardening then you'd wear your gardening gear. If you were a doctor your thing would be you'd have a white coat and a stethoscope.

His thing, the thing he clothes himself with, his thing is righteousness righteousness and faithfulness. What a great king to have.

A king whose thing is righteousness, faithfulness, son of David. One of the short prayers I was thinking of doing was the prayer of the blind man outside Jericho.

[38 : 45] Lots of people are following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. The blind man, who being blind, can't see, is the one person who says to Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

And everybody else says, shut up, he's too busy for people like you. But he was the one person who could see who Jesus really was and he was the one person who could make the appeal to him that Jesus would really listen to.

And Jesus stopped everything and said, who's that guy talking? Come here, what do you want? Son of David, have mercy on me. That's exactly the right perception of who Jesus is, exactly the right prayer and Jesus gave him his sight.

Actually, he could see better than anybody else already. This description is, I would say, an inspiring manifesto for the task of Jesus.

The son of David, equipped with the spirit, the spirit of the Lord, whose job it is to make everything right. he comes to bring mishpat, tzedek, justice, righteousness.

[39 : 54] That's what he comes to do. He does it in a way nobody would ever have imagined. But that's what he comes to do, to make things right. And interestingly, in the book of Ephesians, Paul quotes this passage to say, Christians ought to be dressed like this too.

This ought to be our thing, our clothing, the belt of truth, the blessed plate of righteousness. Our mission follows on the mission of our saviour.

And what happens when David's son reigns? What happens when the shoot comes up from the stump of Jesse? Well, that's in verse 6 and onwards.

And he describes, the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, and a little child will lead them.

I've got a lamb and a lion. Let's do with that. The lion will lie down with the lamb. That's what happens when the king reigns. When the king reigns, the whole ecosystem is changed.

[41 : 06] There's a place in the Bible where God says, I'm making everything new. I'm giving this world lots of chances as it is, but there will be a time when I say, stop, remake this, to make everything new, where there won't be an ecosystem based on conflict and killing and danger.

But the lion will lie down with the lamb, the infant will play near the hole of the cobra, the young child will put his hand into the viper's nest, they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.

Now what that's going to look like, I've no idea. But I can understand the picture and the picture is mind-boggling, isn't it, of our world but made in a way where you still have lions and lambs but they don't attack each other, where God's providence so overrules that it's not possible to have harm and destruction.

on the holy mountain, this is the place where God rules, it's parallel between the holy mountain and the earth, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

And how much do the waters cover the sea? Up to the brim. And how full will the earth be of the knowledge of the Lord? absolutely bring full.

[42 : 40] In this new world there will be no place where the presence of God is not intensely present. We've come a long way, haven't we, from ancient Assyria, we've shot forward into the distant future and Isaiah says this is what it's like but I want you to understand what it's going to be like.

surely as God has orchestrated Assyria and Egypt and worked all that to happen, just as he said it would, so surely will he work everything so in the distant future the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

this is the Old Testament vision of what New Testament Christians would call the coming of Jesus, the final coming.

This transition doesn't happen all at one go. The king and his kingdom doesn't all come at one go. When Jesus came it didn't suddenly have lions lying down with lambs.

There were various things that Jesus did, like taking flesh, like dying on the cross, like being raised from the dead, like being ascended into heaven, and one day he will come and finish the plan off.

[44 : 05] This is the Old Testament vision of it. And it is a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, isn't it, with lions and lambs. Please don't think, people get this idea that what we are looking forward to is wafting around and playing harps and wearing nighties, and that's what the Christian hope is.

And nothing could be further from the truth. What God is promising us is proper humanness, being what he always made us to be, with resurrection bodies, able, we presume, to do the things that Jesus did in his resurrection body.

I don't know what it will be like, but I know it won't be wafting, it will be a new heaven and a new earth. And he says, if you want to think about it, think about a lion lying down with a lamb, that will give you the right idea.

You know that that's subject to change when you actually get there, but that will give you the right idea. He will give us resurrection bodies in a new ecosystem, a new heavens and a new earth.

And nothing less than that is the hope for the Christian. We had, we've known of a couple of Christian funerals, at least in the last just a few weeks.

[45 : 28] And when that brother or sister was lowered into the grave, the words that are said over at that funeral are ensure a certain hope of the resurrection.

That's a hard thing to believe when you see somebody lowered into the ground and the earth covered over them. But Jesus says, believe me on this, you have not seen the last of that person. They will be raised on the last day. Jesus says, that's the very task I've been given, to raise on the last day, for you to see my face, for us to be together in a new heaven and a new earth.

It's the Christian hope. And I just want to emphasize, hope does not mean a wishy-washy hope. It means a definite assurance. That's what I'm looking forward to.

That's what makes life on this worth living. Because that's where I'm going. That's what he's promised. That's what he's going to do. Now, chapter 11 carries on.

[46 : 40] In that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for all the peoples. The nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious. So I want to put up that flag as it were.

I think that's what it's talking about. And this bit is saying about the multinational! nature nature of the kingdom of the kingdom in that day. He will raise a banner for the nations and the nations will flow to it.

We've had this from chapter two, haven't we? And it talks about reclaiming the remnant. It says that in verse 11. And then there's a whole list of nations which would have been what they would have been talking about in those days.

To us, we think, oh, I don't know where those places are. I'll have to look them up on Google. But Assyria, Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt, Cush, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath, Islands of the Sea, they're all going to be brought into this kingdom.

It's going to be a multinational kingdom. And I suppose we could add our nationalities, you know, Italy, Russia, Ukraine. You know, I can never do it fast enough.

[47 : 43] But he says this is Chinese, Singapore, Ethiopia, before I get into trouble. he's going to bring in all these nations, which is what he's doing.

Jesus spoke, he's going to remove the disunity between Ephraim and Judah. There's going to be like a new exodus. That's in verse 16.

There will be a highway for the remnant left from Assyria, as there was for Israel, when they came up from Egypt. He's going to do the whole thing like he did with Egypt and the exodus.

He's going to do that whole thing again. In a bigger scale, including the nations that are on the agenda now. It's the vision that Jesus had. There's a section in the three of the four gospels where Jesus is asked about the future.

He uses rather mysterious language about it. One of the things he consistently says, the son of man, that's him, will send his angels to gather his elect from the four winds.

[48 : 48] And here it talks about the four corners, doesn't it? This gathering of the son of man to gather his people internationally. What a mission.

What a vision. the book of revelation in Greek is apocalypsis. Apocalypsis doesn't mean awful thing.

It means revelation. That's the reason I put that up there. In the book of revelation it says this is what we're looking forward to. And the way it spells it out there is it says there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

What a world to look forward to. What a world to look forward to. No more hip replacements. No more cataract operations. No more losses and crosses.

No more tears. all these things will be passed away says Jesus. And Jesus, sorry the book of revelation.

[50 : 00] The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into the holy city and in the world to come there will be a place where the Chinese bring their particular Chinese contribution to the world to come.

There will be a place where the Germans bring their particular contribution the music of Bach most likely. There will be a place where the glory of each nation is brought in.

The English will bring gardening. And heaven will just be full of all the things that God has in his goodness allowed the human project to come up with.

And that will all be in the world to come. The glory of the nations will be brought into the holy city. And I think this is an inspiring vision. It's what it's meant to be.

Isaiah as he wrote this had his little group around him his theological students and his family and what they said was even though the rest of our nation is going to Assyria for help they're worshipping idols they're going off in all directions we will wait for the Lord.

[51 : 13] And that's what we're meant to do. We've got to hang on and wait for the Lord. I mean hanging on is a thing. It's not giving up. It's not saying oh I can't be bothered with this.

It's pressing on saying this is the project. This is the venture. This is what I want to invest my life in. This is the thing. And in the book of Revelation it says hold on.

Let no one take your crown. And in each of the seven churches there is an address which you will know to him who overcomes I will give a place in that city.

He says keep fighting. To him who overcomes don't stop fighting. Don't fall over and then stop getting up again.

Keep fighting. Keep going. Keep pressing on. I think that's an inspiring vision. chapter 12 is the response of the people.

[52 : 22] Chapter 12 sort of ends this section and it's the reading that Julia read to us. In that day you will say I will praise you O Lord although you were angry with me your anger has turned away and you have comforted me.

Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. the Lord is my strength and my song and has become my salvation.

In that day you will say give thanks to the Lord. Call on his name. Make known among the nations what he has done. Proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord for he has done glorious things.

Shout aloud and sing. Sing for joy O people of Zion for great is the Holy One in the midst of you.

And that's the sort of thing you might say amen to because that is an amen isn't it?

That's the song of the redeemed. That's the song of the people who put their trust in the Lord through thick and thin. That's the people who haven't been taken in by the pretensions of the nations but have put their trust in the saviour and have fought their way through and arrived at the heavenly city.

[53 : 35] And I think that that is inspiring in a way that Professor Hawking, bless him, could never be. But this does tell us what it's all about, where it's heading, how to get there.

And I want to say please be one of the people on that day singing to the Lord. Great is the Holy One in the midst.

Make sure now. That's what he's given us now for, to get so that we understand how we can be there then. That's what time is for. Don't say I haven't got time for this.

That's what time is for. Time is given so that we know how to get there on the last day. And we can be singing, Great is the Holy One of Israel.

Let's close with a song.