

Two futures

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Date: 20 August 2017

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[0 : 00] I put down the clicker and I can't find where I put it. Is it? Okay, right. Thank you.

We're going to look at the book of the prophet Isaiah, so please can you turn to it if you have that? Let's pray. We praise you, Lord God, the Holy One upon your throne. What right anywhere near your throne? And yet you call us to draw near to you. We come to hear the law of the Lord, the word of God. Grant by your supernatural grace, by the working of your Holy Spirit, that we might hear not as human words and thoughts, but hear the voice of God coming through.

We can't live by bread alone, but by the words that you say. So please come and speak to us. Open our ears and our hearts. May our lives be exposed before you to live as we should to your honor and glory. Help me as the speaker. Help us as listeners. Help us together by your great grace and mercy. Amen. Amen. Okay, I have an introduction with this uncontroversial statement. Probably not everyone here is thinking about being pregnant. Probably not everyone here is thinking about being pregnant. But if you were, your life would be very different, wouldn't it? Your life would be about...

Yeah, your life would, Steve, but...

A little exercise to the imagination here. If you were a pregnant lady, your life would be taking on a whole new meaning. You would be thinking about the future. You would be thinking about the joy of what the future held in store. You would be thinking about the whole new possibilities and love that would be awaiting in the future. And it would start having an effect on you. You would think about your diet.

You would be looking frantically on the internet to find what vitamins you're supposed to take and what vitamins you're not supposed to take. You would start to change your behavior. You would think of all the things you needed to avoid, like alcohol and smoking. And depending on what you're used to doing anyway, you might well be obliged to change and put up with some discomfort. You also might think about driving and how do you manage to drive. And you've got a steering wheel there and you've got a baby on board there. All sorts of things that you would say, I now have to think about. Never had to think about those before.

[3 : 33] I have to change my behavior. Some of the things are going to be uncomfortable. And what I wouldn't have chosen to do, but because of what I am expecting, I'm happy to do that.

In fact, I will deliberately decide to do that because of the future. You might go to training classes with your partner. There's the bit where you have to go like that. And your wife has to do that as well.

How you live, this is a very prime example of how you live now depends very much on your expectancy of the future. And Christians are expectant people. They are expectant of a holy city, a hope of the glory of God, the renewal of all things, a coming Savior Jesus who will be revealed from heaven. And Christians are to live in the light of that future destiny. If we don't believe of what's coming, we don't believe the promises of the future, we will find it very difficult to live now as we're supposed to live. That's certainly the view that the book of the prophet Isaiah takes. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. We're going to take a nibble at it.

You may remember that we said it's a big book. And looking at the book of Isaiah, it's like a tiny mouse trying to eat a huge but nourishing cheese. And I believe it was Alec Mateer, the wonderful Bible scholar who said that. And remember the last time we thought about that. What I'd like to try and do this morning is divide up the cheese and have a nibble at it in bits. So I remember Alec Mateer saying this as well. He says, the book of Isaiah divides into three pieces. So there's the bit in the beginning, the bit in the middle, and the bit at the end. There's a wonderful, insightful description of how to divide the book of the prophet Isaiah. So taking his divisions, the bit at the end, around about chapters 55 to 66, he would say is about the anointed conqueror, which seems fair enough. He knows a lot more about it than I do. If we take another division with the middle, he would say

between chapters 40 to 55 is the book of the servant. And that leaves the bit at the beginning, which we will chop in two. He would say that the beginning is the book of the king.

And I'd like to chop that one in two and look at the first part of the beginning. And that's what we'd like to do this morning. And we're all conscious of the difficulties of nibbling away at a big book, because unless you really, really understand it well, it's difficult to know where to nibble.

[6 : 44] And of course, we don't really, really understand it well, because we're only starting. So we'll do the best we can. We're nibbling, we're going to nibble at this bit here. So I hope that's okay with you. You might have read it. We're thinking about the first 12 chapters. So if you've got the book of Isaiah in front of you, you might like to leaf through. There does seem to be a division between chapter 12 and chapter 13. Chapter 13 is a prophecy against Babylon. Up till that point, it's all been about Judah and Jerusalem. So there does seem to be a natural division at the end of chapter 12. And has anybody read those 12 chapters over the past week? Oh, you are good. Yes, well done.

Well done. What, I mean, I read that through. And I thought, what have we actually read? What have we found in there? And it seemed to me that I made a little chart of the sorts of things that were cropping up. And I think we would have read in those first 12 chapters, there's a lot about God's city, the ongoing theme of God's plan and project of God's people in God's city, which is the headquarters of the new cosmos. A lot about the city. That's all the way through. It's certainly there in those 12 chapters. Would you like to turn to chapter 65? This is a bit of a Bible studying time this morning.

Chapter 65, verses 17 to 19. Let me just read those to you. This is at the end. This is beyond the scope of our nibble this morning. But it shows us, Isaiah 65, verse 17, behold, I will create a 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. For 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. Remarkable statement, isn't it, about the future.

A new heaven and a new earth, a new city. And this city will be the place where there is no weeping and there is no crying. Actually, there is no death. That theme goes all the way through. So that theme is also in the chunk that we are thinking about this morning. I also thought there are a few little biographical bits in the first 12 chapters where real people's lives are impacted by the plans of God.

So Isaiah gets called in chapter 6. And you might have read that bit or remember that bit. In the year that King Isaiah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.

[10 : 09] And the train of his robe filled the temple. So that encounter with God for Isaiah himself. There's also a biographical bit in chapter 7 where the king Ahaz, remember there were a number of kings through whose reign Isaiah prophesied, where King Ahaz faced this crisis of the nearby nations ganging up to push him out of the throne. The nations had split to north and south, a little bit like Korea, north and south. And there was an antagonism between them and the north was threatening to take over the south. And it says in chapter 7 verse 2, now the house of David was told, Aram has allied itself with Ephraim. And the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. So there's a crisis situation and how the purposes of God impact on us or on them and therefore on us in crisis situations. So you get a little bit of that. But I think there's two things that if you'd read it through, as I read it through, struck me, there's a whole swathes, lots and lots of words of threats from the holy God of future judgment. And that's part of the chapter, the chapter that David read to us contains some of that. We'll look at that in a moment.

A lot of that. To be honest, I don't think I got to grips with that. There's a lot about judgment.

There are also several promises from the redeeming God of future blessings. So in my little chart, I've got a line of the chapters that we've got judgment. So you've got judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment. And then you've got promises, promise, promise, promise. And you get that mixture. And as we have our little nibble at this this morning, I'd just like to nibble at those two thoughts. And if anything, I think I'm not going to do justice to the threat one because I haven't got my head around that. But let's proceed. So I'm saying, I think perhaps we could have in our mind this morning that this part of Isaiah presents two futures, presents two futures to the people of God. One of them represented by the judgment and one of them represented by the promises.

Two ways to live. You could make up an evangelistic program using that name, couldn't you? Two ways to live. There is. So let's have a little nibble at this subject of the big threat that is disclosed

and pronounced in these chapters. So I use the word threat. A threat is when you tell somebody, if you don't do something, I'm going to do something unpleasant to you. And I think these are threats. I think that's a correct word. There are warnings. Perhaps that's a more respectable and middle class word to use.

A warning. If you don't, such and such, then these are the consequences. And I was going to say criticisms. But that is too weak a word. So I've used the word indictment. And I looked up what indictment was to make sure I was using the right long word. And it says an indictment is a formal charge or accusation of a serious crime. And that's what these chapters have. A formal charge or accusation of a serious crime. The chapters are serious. And they are serious, it seems to me, because the God who says them is a holy God. If you turn to chapter 1.

[14:34] What have I picked out here? Well, I put verses 1 to 31. That's the whole of chapter 1. It says things like this. Chapter 1, verse 2.

Hear, O heavens, listen, O earth, for the Lord has spoken. I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but my people, Israel, do not know. My people do not understand. It begins with God calling heaven on earth. Look at what's happened. Look at these people. Look at what's going on. Can this be right? It's like a courtroom. Look at this. And it's strong stuff. Verse 10. Hear the word of the Lord. And he's addressing his own people, Jerusalem. And he says, as far as I'm concerned, you're like the worst immoral city that our culture knows about, Sodom.

Hear the word of the Lord. You rulers of Sodom. Hear the, listen to the Lord of our God. You people of Gomorrah. And then he goes on about the indictment against them.

Chapter 2. What did I put? Chapter 2, 6 to 4, 1. Well, it's a long stretch there, isn't there, of indictment, of threat. For example, just at random, chapter 2, verse 10.

[16:17] Go into the rocks, hide in the ground from the dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty. The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled. The pride of men will be brought low and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. It's strong stuff, isn't it?

There's a lot of it. What have I got? Chapter 4, 58. Chapter 4. Can that be right? No, I think I've done that wrong. I've got 58 to 30. Chapter 5, 8 to 30. Yeah, that's, I missed out a colon.

So there's a whole spread there of woes. Woe, I think, is saying, it's either saying, I'm sorry bad things are going to happen to you, or it's just saying bad things are going to happen to you. But it's, I think it comes under this heading, threat, warning, indictment. Chapter 5, verse 8.

Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field, till no space is left and you live alone in the land. The Lord Almighty has declared in my hearing, surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks. So there's a whole lot of indictment. If we go back to chapter 1, we can just perhaps see a little bit of the way this is working. It's only a little bit, just a lick of this cheese, really. Chapter 1, verses 2 to 4, is accusing Israel of being perverse and ungrateful children.

I, going back so to chapter 1, verse 2, I reared children and brought them up, but they've rebelled against me. This is another child theme, but it's saying that these children have been ungrateful and perverse. And although as a parent, God has done so much good and caring and loving and providing for them, they've turned around and spat in his face. That's a very unpleasant experience of parenting.

[18:35] Some parents have that experience. God says, I've had that experience. It's wrong, isn't it? Ungrateful and perverse children. Verse 5, it talks about the damage that they are experiencing. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart is afflicted. It's a little bit like somebody who's being beaten up in a fight, and instead of running away and saying, no, hang on, I've got this wrong, can we just talk about this? Just goes back in there to get pulverized even more. And he's saying, this is what you are like, my people.

Instead of coming to terms with me, instead of saying, let's talk about it, you just come back for more and more aggressively, stupidly. Why should you be beaten anymore? There's damage, verse 5. There's desolation, verse 7. Your country is desolate, your city's burned with fire. There's abandonment, verse 8. The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons.

And he put this in the context of the military things that were happening through the course of Isaiah's ministry. Armies came right up to the gates of Jerusalem. And you could, depending on

which time he wrote this, because he doesn't tell us the exact time he wrote it, they might be saying, you know, why are we losing in battle? Why have we lost this city and that city and that city?

And Isaiah says, because you've turned away from the Lord. He's so stupid, don't realize that. And we get a city on fire, a city smoking, a city ruined. He indicts them for their religion.

Verse 11. The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me, says the Lord? You've got loads of religion. You do loads of stuff religiously. But it's completely separate from any reverence for the Lord. And it's completely separated from the way you treat other people.

[20 : 52] You seem to be able to come and offer your sacrifices. I don't know what they did, whether they had, I mean, in modern terms, you have fantastic music. And you do all that and you think it's great.

And in the heart, there's no reverence for the Lord. And you immediately go outside and are just cruel and selfish towards your brothers and sisters. So this is just appalling. This is just appalling. I've just fed up with this, says God. Verse 14. Your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. It's hated. It's very strong stuff, isn't it? And it talks about verses 28, 29, them being broken. Rebels and sinners will be broken. Verse 29. You will be ashamed.

And it talks about this idea of the fire. The mighty man, verse 31, will become tinder. His work is spark. Both will burn together with no one to quench the fire. A fire that can't be stopped. A fire that keeps on.

So it really is strong stuff. And if you read it or if you think, well, maybe I'll have a go at reading it this week, you come across that. It's there. The threats from a holy God against these rebellious and perverse and ungrateful people. And you know, we shouldn't think that Israel is a particularly, they're a particularly poor example of human beings. We shouldn't think that. What they are is an example of human beings. Put, as it were, under the microscope, put with a spotlight on them.

[22 : 48] Because all they're doing is showing what's in the heart of every ethnic group. That given the privileges from God, by nature, we are ungrateful, we are rebellious, we are antagonistic towards God. That's the truth about the human heart. That's what's being shown to us.

The truth about the holiness of God. And I notice that God is not inhibited about threatening his people. I'd be inhibited. I feel, I would feel a little uneasy.

Standing here and just threatening everybody who came. You say, that's not Christian. God doesn't mind doing it. He can be quite straight with people.

And he is in these chapters. So, that's about as far as I can get with that aspect of the chapters. But I'm going to say, please take note.

Please take note. God warns people. God threatens people.

[24 : 01] Not to be nasty, but to say there are two futures, and one future is the future represented by that birth of the city.

One future is a future of disaster and desolation and damage and abandonment, and it hardly bears thinking about it, but we need to think about it.

That's one future. And unless something changes in the human heart, that's the future that people are headed to. Giving that warning, God always says, I'm giving you the warning so that you can turn.

That's why he says in the middle of that chapter, come, let's reason together, or whatever. How did you read it out? Come, let's settle the matter. That's what God is saying this morning. Let's settle this.

Maybe you know in your heart there is a God, but you don't know too much about him. Maybe you know in your heart that you're not right with God, and you're not right with God's world.

[25 : 13] And God says, you're absolutely spot on, and it's worse than you think, but come, let's settle the matter. God is an inviting God. Come, let's settle the matter.

Talk to me about it. Hear what I have to say. Let's engage in a conversation. And the conversation of what God says is in this book. So, to engage with God is to engage with the things that he says. Get somebody to explain it to you. Ask a bit more about it. Just, let's settle it, says God. Jesus Christ himself invites people to settle things through him.

And I have to say that the warnings that Jesus Christ gives are even more fearsome than the warnings that Isaiah gives. That's hard to imagine, but it's true.

So, here's the threats and the warnings and the indictments that we find in this book. And they are mighty, and they are fearsome.

[26 : 20] And they're fearsome because God is holy. He's the holy one of Israel. And we sang, holy, holy, holy is the Lord. Probably we shouldn't sing it too, too automatically.

See what I mean? Let's look at the second thing that we would have found in those chapters as we sort of scan through them.

And these are the attractive bits, if you like. The promises from the redeeming God of the second future. The blessings of the future.

It's interesting. What shape does he promise these blessings in? And it seems to me that there's a holy city, which I think in those 12 chapters is mentioned about four times. There's the future of an upspringing branch, which is mentioned a couple of times.

There's the future of a royal baby, a royal child mentioned a couple of times. And there's the future of a return of a remnant, which is mentioned about four times, roughly speaking.

[27 : 24] So let's look at each of those in turn without getting too bogged down in the detail of them. So the first one was the promise of a holy city.

So you find the holy city in verse, in chapter one. For example, in verse 25. You see, verse 21 was the indictment.

See how the faithful city has become a prostitute, whatever it was, a harlot. And then verse 26 says, afterwards you will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.

And then we have that in chapter two, verse one, that we looked at before. The mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief. What does it say? As chief among the mountains and all the nations will stream to it.

So we have this theme of the holy city. Now, city isn't the only way God describes his people.

[28 : 32] He doesn't only use architectural metaphors. He does use agricultural metaphors because chapter five talks about a vineyard. So it isn't all architectural, but this is architectural.

I work from home, so occasionally I can see daytime television. And many of you have spared that exotic luxury.

One of the things that comes on daytime television, it might come on nighttime television as well, build a new life in the country. You ever heard of that? No. There's loads and loads of these programs where a couple are offered, do you want to live here or live there?

Do you want to live in this house or that house? And the presenter takes them around. And one of the attractive proposals, one of the proposals that seem to be attractive is build a new life in the country.

Get away from the city with its noise and smoke and busyness. Get away from it all and go and live in the Lake District or in Yorkshire or Cornwall or somewhere.

[29 : 40] And it's interesting that God obviously doesn't go for that TV program because he doesn't say the way to go is to build a new life in the country, away from as many people as possible, as quiet as possible.

He says, what I'm preparing for you is a city. Because a city is the place where all the important people are. It's an interesting thought, isn't it?

That's why people come to cities, because the other important people are there. More important people are there, so more and more important people are there. All the important people are in the city. That's the way cities work. That's why Brighton manages to have these huge house prices because there's a demand, because more people who can afford those house prices are here, etc., etc.

The city is the place where all the important people are and where it all happens. And God said, yeah, that's right. Building a city. As far as I'm concerned, the important people are going to be there and it all happens in the city.

That's what I'm building. And I'm only going to do this, I'm going to just try and touch on this without getting bogged down. But Christians, the book of Philippians says, our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus.

[31 : 02] We are citizens of that city, so we belong. We're not going to build a new life in the country eternally. We're going to the heavenly city where the important people are, where it's all happening.

The most important person is God. God is. The book of Hebrews says, in a sense, we've already come there. In a sense, we have already come there.

That's not the totality of it. In a sense, we have come. You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. So let us be thankful and worship God with reverence and awe, he says.

That's a fantastic thing, to be members of this city, to belong to this city. That is such great. It would make you grateful to belong to that.

And now what does John Newton write in his song? Saviour, since of Zion's city, I through grace a member am. Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in your name.

[32 : 03] What happens after that? Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show, solid joys and lasting treasure. None but Zion's children know.

John Newton wrote that. Some of us knew it. Some of us didn't. I didn't. But that's where the Bible would put us. Solid joys and lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know.

So number one, a holy city. Number two, the upspringing branch. It's in chapter 10, 33. And chapter 10, verse 33, says that the Lord Almighty 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.

But a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse. From his roots, a branch will bear fruit. So God is chopping down the nations here and the leaders there and chopping them down and chopping them down.

[33 : 13] And it includes chopping down his own people. But a shoot shoots up from that stump. And in chapter 11, it speaks about the shoot.

This is obviously a person because it says, chapter 11, a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse. From his roots, a branch will bear fruit. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him.

The spirit of wisdom and of understanding. 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 this person bears fruit.

This person, the spirit of the Lord, rests upon him. It says he will savor. He will delight in the fear of the Lord. And it goes on to say, and the wolf will lie down with the lamb.

Without getting into too much detail. This person is key to the future when, in some sense, the wolf will lie down.

[34 : 14] They don't normally do that, do they? Wolves normally eat lambs. I'll just tell you that.

That's what they normally do. Eat them. In this world to come, when this branch person gets into the place where he ought to be, things will change so much that the wolf will lie down with the lamb.

Well, that's a big change, isn't it? That's going well beyond Israelite history into the world to come. The holy city, the upspringing branch, the royal child.

So let's just touch on that royal child. And in the chapters that we're thinking about, we would have read chapter 7, verse 14. The Lord himself will give you a sign.

A virgin will be with child and give birth to a son. And we will call him Emmanuel. The whole thing about pregnancy, about the possibilities, the wonderful.

Unless it happened all the time, you'd think pregnancy was a supernatural miracle, wouldn't you? Do you agree with me? Unless it happened all the time, you would think, that is just amazing.

[35 : 27] How can that possibly, how can a new life develop inside a grown person? That's amazing. The virgin will be with child. And we'll call his name Emmanuel.

That's something sort of full of promise for the future. In those chapters, the prophetess has a child as well. In chapter 8, Isaiah says, Here I am and the children you have given me.

New Testament quotes that as being significant. For unto us a child is born. Chapter 9, verse 6. And the government will, unto us a son is given.

And the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called. You could almost say it by heart, couldn't you? Wonderful counselor. The mighty God. The everlasting father.

The prince of peace. And it goes on to say, Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. We're getting into what we call Christmas, aren't we?

[36 : 23] We're getting into the coming of baby Jesus. The royal child is the future. And I think this is now the fourth thing, isn't it?

Holy city, up-springing branch, royal child. And a remnant returning. I think that's interesting. A remnant. Where have they been? And of course, the answer is that they've been in exile.

This is the way the story unfolds. That in this little vulnerable kingdom, and the great superpower Assyria comes, but they don't manage to overrun the kingdom.

They overrun the northern kingdom, but not the southern kingdom. And then, in due course, the Babylonian empire comes, and they do overrun the kingdom.

And all the warnings come true. And they get taken away. The city gets destroyed. The people are taken away. And all the things that God has promised about his city and everything else seems to have just come to a sticky end.

[37 : 29] It seems to have just stopped. It seems to have all gone wrong. But God says, A remnant will return. I will bring people back. I won't let my plans be thwarted by you lot, even though you're so stupid and sinful, terribly stupid and sinful.

But I'm going to overrule that. I'm going to make sure that I do build my city. And I will do it. And I won't let anything stop me. I won't even let the sinfulness of my people stop me.

I will build my city. And a remnant will return. And this is a little bit of a theme. We find it in 127, where it says, Zohar will be redeemed with justice.

And my translation says, The penitent ones with righteousness. But what it actually says is, The turning ones. The people who return. They turn back and come home.

And we have it in chapter 10, verse 20. One of the children is given a name. Which one is it?

[38 : 37] Which is the name that means a remnant will return? Jieh Hashub. Is it something like that? The shub bit is the return. Imagine calling your child.

So there's one child called Maher Shalal Hashbaz. So if anybody's thinking of what to name their grandchild, you can try that one. Maher Shalal Hashbaz.

Or, where's the other one? Shier Jashub, isn't it? Shier Jashub. A remnant will return. Try that.

Don't think your child would thank you for it when they went to primary school.

But anyway. Chapter 10, verse 20. In that day, the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Israel, will no longer rely on him who struck them down. They will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant will return. A remnant of Jacob will return to the mighty God. Even though your people are like the sand on the sea, only a remnant will return. You get the point. A remnant will return.

[39 : 39] Out of all that mass of people, so sinful and ungrateful and obnoxious, God will bring back some. And this some will be changed in their hearts and changed in their attitudes.

And they will have turned, literally and spiritually, if you like, and they will turn back. A remnant will return. And there they are, a remnant returning. They will have learned their lesson.

That's a way to come back to God, to learn your lesson. Sorry. I was wrong. I was well out of order. I was so wrong. Will you accept me back? Will you bring me back?

Can I turn back to you? God says, yes, of course. Turn to me. They put their trust in the right place. They will no longer rely on him who struck them down, but rely truly on the Lord.

It's a matter of faith, of turning to the Lord in trust. And in another place, which is outside the scope, the redeemed of the Lord will return, will return, and they sing songs as they return.

[40 : 47] And you know, there are some songs that only the redeemed can sing. And they sing these songs as they are coming back to Zion.

Now, we used to have a song that said, we're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion. We're marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God.

The tune wasn't fantastic, but the words were good. Because that's what we are doing. We're on our way to the heavenly city. So, when John Bunyan wrote his book, The Pilgrim's Progress, meaning the trek of the believer through this life to the heavenly city, he was absolutely right.

That was an insightful description. We are marching to Zion. That's what Christians are headed towards. And they sing as they journey home.

They sing along the way, which is what we've been doing this morning. That's us. So, that's what we've looked at this morning. A little nibble at the things that crop up in that first section of the book of Isaiah.

[42 : 04] The threats and indictments for a future of destruction. That's there. Can't get rid of it. God still says that. The city of destruction where there is fire.

John Bunyan could see that too. That's the city to avoid. And God warns so that we can escape from that city.

And then the promises. The promises of the redeeming God for the future blessings. He says it's a city. Put the city in there. He says it's an upspringing branch.

Did I put a branch? No, I didn't. The branch being Jesus, actually. The child who puts everything right. Unto us a child is born.

Unto us a son is given. That's Jesus. He's the key to this. The returning home. The spiritually, profoundly, us.

[43 : 12] No longer heading for the city of destruction. But by the grace of God turning around and saying, I don't want to go there. I want to go where Jesus Christ is.

I want to go where God is. I want to make all the preparations for that future. That expectation. These are our futures.

It's not just in the book of Isaiah. It's for everybody. For all humanity. And every day takes us one step further along one path or another.

Doesn't it? We're a day's march near a home or we're a day's march further away from it. So I would close by asking this simple question. of these two futures which future are you headed to? Let's sing to close number 506.