

The book of the conqueror

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[0:00] What does God really want? What does God really want?! What does God really want?!

Does he want us to come to a place of worship, to say the words, to stand up, to sit down, to sing? Does he want us to take the communion or the mass, say the prayers, do prayer, do the rosary, make religious smoke and smells?

Does he want that sort of stuff? Does he want us to do religious acts? Is God actually interested on the outside?

So if we give to charity, does God say, that's it, that's what I wanted? If we help the homeless, God say, yeah, that's exactly what I wanted, no more, no less.

Or is there more to it than that? Is he looking on the inside as well? Is he only interested on the inside?

[1:42] Is the only thing that he wants is us to feel things very strongly when we worship and when we sing, things like that? Or that we pray and we feel a sense of calm in the sort of mindfulness manner?

What does he want? What is it so that he would look at us and be satisfied and say, that's what I want?

And how could I ever be that? And the more you think about it, the more searching and in fact impossible the question is.

We've been looking in the book of Isaiah. It talks about a certain period of history and the events of that and the people in that age.

And it ends up thinking of God's people being taken as exiles, captives into Babylon. And I think those sorts of questions would have exercised them.

[3:00] They sit by the rivers of Babylon and they hang their harps on the willows and weep when they remember Zion.

And there they are in this metropolis, this huge, impressive city of Babylon which dwarfs Jerusalem for magnificence. And they're sitting thinking, here we are in exile.

We never thought it would come to that. God said that if we were sinful people, he'd take us here. We didn't believe him. And he did exactly what he said.

It proves we're as sinful as God said we are. We've been brought from Babylon, sorry, to Babylon from the city Jerusalem which is destroyed.

He promises us that we will go back to a glorious city of Jerusalem. How can that be? How can that be?

[4:08] Can God do that? Can he bring us back? Would he ever want to bring us back? What does he want of us so that we should be saved?

What does he want of us that we should be the sort of people that he would bring back to his glorious city? And how can that ever happen?

Sort of questions that the exiles would have asked and not that different to questions that we might ask. Just one little point here.

If you've looked up the book of Isaiah and Wikipedia, the three sections that I've mentioned, it says on Wikipedia that nobody with any intelligence, words to that effect, nobody with any intelligence thinks it's written by one author.

It's got three sections. It must have three different authors. Well, I beg to differ. There's lots of believing commentators who say it's written in three sections.

[5:19] It doesn't mean there's three different authors. So it just goes to show you don't believe everything you read on Wikipedia. I'll just remind you of the cheese.

The end bit there. The middle bit there. The front bit there. And we've looked at all of those.

And the one that we're going to look at today is right at the end. Click there. And I'll just put a summary of the things that we've seen in the previous sections which I won't stop to enlarge upon. Just need a little bit of geography but not too much. That's the map. And you just need to know that there's Jerusalem and the exiles were taken to Babylon.

Jerusalem, Babylon. Babylon, the enemy who will take all the people to exile. And what's being promised and has always been promised is that God will destroy Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem and bring the people back.

[6:30] That's all the geography you need to know. Let's summarize the chapters. Now has anybody actually read? Would anybody like to be prepared to own up to having read 56 to 66?

I've read them. Anybody ever got as far as that? Yeah, Ross has read them. Yeah, well done.

Okay. Everybody else ran out of energy before they got to that.

Or perhaps you're still on the way. Chapters 56 to 66 worth reading. Maybe more helpful to read them after you've had this little introduction to them which is what we're looking at today.

There's a line. 56 through to 66. If you read them they swirl around all over the place and some people say it's just a rag bag of things put together.

I think it isn't really a rag bag. It's got a theme and it works I think about like this. So it is looking forward now. Isaiah is looking forward and speaking to really a generation that's yet to come.

[7:39] They've been taken into exile and they're perhaps thinking what does this mean for us now and they're going to come back from exile and he's speaking to that situation ahead.

So we're thinking of I don't know why I did that. We're thinking of this situation. Chapter 56 talks about the city and the people in the city.

and chapter 66 talks about the city and the people in the city. Chapter 56 talks about foreigners coming in. If you just are prepared to look at chapter 56 you'll see that it says verse 3 let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord say the Lord will surely exclude me from his people and let not any eunuch complain I am only a dry tree.

So let me just remind you that in in the law of Moses foreigners don't come in to the Lord and eunuchs because they're they're not what they were made to be sort of imperfect in that sense they wouldn't be included either but chapter 56 begins with saying foreigners will come in and eunuchs will come in.

The chapters there also talk about the deep failure and sinful inability of the people and we've read some of that and it also re-emphasizes the promised holy glory and the chapters at the end do a similar thing.

[9:22] If you look right at the end in chapter 66 you get foreigners coming in. Where would it say that for example? like in 66 19 it talks about I will send to those who survive to the nations to Tarshish Libyans Lydians and so on I will proclaim my glory among the nations.

So it goes back to the nations and the foreigners and those latter chapters are also asking how can we be saved? The latter chapters also emphasize there will be salvation a new heaven and a new earth.

Right in the middle of that is what I think answers the question how can that happen? The middle bit contains something about the Lord who conquers.

So if you look in chapter 59 which was read to us verse 15 end of 15 it says the Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

he saw that there was no one and he was appalled that there was no one to intervene so his own arm worked salvation for him.

[10:58] His own righteousness sustained him and it's a picture of God saying this situation needs to be sorted no one else is able to do it no one else is doing it I'll do it myself.

So we get the indignant Lord who conquers and we also get another person in chapter 61 who is very like the servant but it's in chapter 61 where he says the spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor he sent me to bind up the broken hearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness to the prisoners so we've got this person as well in the middle of the descriptions of look out look at our sin this is what God's

going to do how's it going to happen look at our sin this is what God's going to do how's it going to happen in the middle the Lord says I'm going to go to war on this and we have this person who says the spirit of the Lord is on me and has anointed me so we're going to look at that in detail but I think we've got that sort of sandwich arrangement with the core of it being the

Lord and the servant who step in to this situation to make it happen and who might that be well we'll find out in a minute so I'm going to tease out those individual themes and look at them together so the first one is the sinful inability of the people so the Jews are either thinking of being back in the land or are back in the land and they have these questions what does God require of us are we up to it or will we get kicked out again you know what was the there we are in the city and we we've got a certain sort of thoughtfulness perhaps tears being shed we we're back but you know the problem was never geography the problem by which we got kicked out of the promised land to go to Babylon wasn't just politics it was our sin that was the problem and now we're back has that problem actually been solved you don't solve the problem of sin by moving somebody from one country to another do you so look let's look at 56 1 where the Lord speaks and says maintain justice do what is right for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed so that justice there is this word mishpat meaning order and things being right in the society and in the community maintain that and it's drawn out in a couple of ways so I've put first of all 58 verse 7 which is part of a long section on how they treat one another and in 58 7 it says this is what I want they say we do fasting and God says okay we're going without food what's the point of that what does that achieve and he says the sort of fasting that I'm looking for is in chapter 58 verse 6 to loose the chains of injustice to untie the cords of the yoke to set the oppressed free and break every yoke isn't it to share your food with the hungry to provide the poor wanderer with shelter when you see the naked to clothe him and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear then your righteousness will go before you so he says

I'm looking for that relationship with your neighbor in the new testament we'll probably summarize that and saying love for your neighbor that's what we need to have and he also in these this first part of the sandwich says quite a bit about the Jewish sabbath so 56 verse 7 for example he says have I got the right verse 56 verse 7 foreigners this includes verse 6 who keep the sabbath without desecrating it who hold fast to my covenant these I will bring to my holy mountain I will give them joy in my house of prayer and it says it somewhere else which I can't quite find let's just read on from verse 7 their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar and my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations sovereign lord declares who gathers the exiles of [16:26] Israel I will gather still others to them beside those already gathered and where is the other verse 2 thank you very much blessed is the man who does this the man who holds it fast who keeps the sabbath without desecrating it who keeps his hand from doing an evil well it's all put in old testament terms isn't it eunuchs foreigners temples and of course the sabbath is a Jewish thing isn't it it's the Jewish sabbath the Saturday and he's saying that the sabbath is the thing that if you like is put there as an instance of what it is to be devoted to the Lord compared with business and pleasure because he says where the Jewish sabbath would be built into their week as the time and space for the Lord you could be doing business you could be having fun but you give time and space to the

Lord and he says on the one hand I want to see you loving your neighbour and I want to see you really loving the Lord those you've got two aspects of what he's looking for in those people and I had 58 14 didn't I if you call the sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honourable if you honour it by not going your own way not doing as you please or speaking idle words you will see joy in the Lord and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob so that sacred space in the Jewish lifestyle representing time and space for God love for the Lord finding him the best thing he says that's what I want to see love for people love for the Lord but where are the people at well 59 1 to 6 is what we had read sorry 59 6 to 9 where he says where are we at actually where is the heart by nature what are we about by nature 59 verse 6 their deeds are evil deeds acts of violence are in their hands they rush into sin they are swift to shed innocent blood their thoughts are evil thoughts ruin and destruction mark their ways the way of

peace they do not know there is no justice in their paths they have turned them into crooked roads no one who walks in them will find peace he says this is our problem we can see what God wants but we can't produce that there is no health in us there is no help in us we can't heal ourselves in this and he will say in 64 verse 6 at the produce it and this is what the favoured people are saying maybe in the time of Jesus things hadn't changed very much people had moved well they were back in the land and yet they were asking themselves is this really what God wants are we where God wants us to be what are we missing here and this confession of sin is highly appropriate we're stuck without God's grace working in us just moving us from one place to another just going without food doesn't do what God wants we're stuck in our sin and if the favoured people the people that God blessed by bringing them back from exile bringing them back to the promised land were thinking and saying that how much more we how much more we who haven't had that sort of favour we're just people how much more would we say we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts we've offended against your holy laws we have done the things that we ought not to have done we have left undone the things that we ought to have done and the help isn't in us Jesus told a story about two people who went up to the tabernacle two people went up to the temple one of them was a religious expert he didn't get it he said I thank you that I'm not as bad as other people do lots of religious things I pray give my money and the other man who went up to the temple and said this is it God be merciful to me a sinner and Jesus says which of those two people got the point it was this one who said God be merciful to me a sinner so first of all is that sinful inability and the apostle Paul would later pick on these passages to describe the human condition and to say things like this no one will be declared righteous by the works of the law all have sinned and fall short of the glory of

[22:54] God I've talked to people in this room who have said well I'm not a sinner maybe you're thinking that I'm not a sinner the Bible says you don't understand yourself you don't understand your situation without Jesus Christ you are lost in your sin and you cannot stand before God number one the sinful inability of his people contrast this then with the definite promises of glory will God ever have a people who he is satisfied to bring to his holy city or will the holy city be empty well God says there will be people so if you look for example 62 1 to 5 just as an example there's lots of passages like this in this section but an emphasis the

Lord's project will not fail chapter 62 for Zion sake I will not keep silent for Jerusalem sake I will not remain quiet till her righteousness shines out like the dawn her salvation like a blazing torch the nations will see your righteousness all kings your glory you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow you will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand a royal diadem in the hand of God no longer will they call you desolate deserted or your land desolate but you will be called Hezibah and your land Beulah and the Lord will take delight in you and your land will be married and as a young man marries a maid and so your sons will marry you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride so will God rejoice over you he says it will be there will be people your righteousness will shine the nations will see you'll be a glorious crown you won't be deserted you'll be married you won't be barren but fruitful and that's another metaphor he uses of the fruitfulness that will be so we've got this huge tension of the people saying to be honest about us there's no help in us we can't heal ourselves and

God saying this is what it will be there will be a glorious people there will be a holy people the nations will see it you'll be not a disgrace but a crown you'll not be deserted but you'll be married if you'll be fruitful to use that metaphor God will have a saved people in a glorious city under a forever king who is the son of David and God said I'm going to do that and he will not be prevented by the Babylonian powers and their gods you might look at the situation interpret it and say God was supposed to save that holy city Jerusalem but he didn't he was defeated by Babylon and God said no that's not to understand it correctly and the opposing nations ebbing and flowing and attacking and whatever will they defeat God and his purpose and the answer is no says God no no no no I am planning all this it serves my purposes will the sin of his people defeat his purposes apparently not will anything defeat his purposes apparently not God says I am going to save my people I am going to glorify Jerusalem this project of mine to have my people from all the different ethnic groups

will succeed and you say how on earth is that all going to happen which brings us to the figures in the middle of the sandwich how do we get from sinfully unable to holy and fruitful and there are two figures described here which

I think are the same person in the end but they're described in two different connections so let's look at the first figure which is the Lord this intervening conqueror so let's look at 59 verse 15 which was read to us where the Lord looks and is displeased this is Isaiah 59 15 that there was no justice there is no mishpat there's no order and he looks verse 16 there was no one he was appalled there was no one to intervene so his own arm intervened for him his own arm worked salvation for him his own righteousness sustained him and you have this wonderful description of the Lord as a warrior it's picked up in the

[28:54] New Testament isn't it but let's not go down that route at the moment it describes God as equipped for battle he puts on righteousness as his helmet of salvation on his head he puts on the garments of vengeance and wraps himself in zeal as in a cloak and he says I am going to do battle against whatever enemy it is that stops my plan happening and I am going to completely destroy any enemy that's in my way and I am going to have victory and I am going to succeed and I will do it and you get that sense of his zeal and it says that he will repay his and if we follow it through to verse 20 it's put in alongside redemption you get the same thing in chapter 63 which also speaks about the person on his own in battle conquering chapter 63 verse 2 why are your garments red like one of those of one treading the wine press

I have trodden the wine press alone from the nations no one was with me I trampled them in my anger I trod them down in my wrath blood spattered my garments I stained all my clothing for the day of vengeance was in my heart and the year of redemption has come I looked there was no one to help I was appalled that no one gave me support so my own arm worked salvation for me my own wrath sustained me I trampled the nations in my anger in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground so it includes judgment but it also includes redemption and God is saying my enemies I will tread them down until I win do his enemies include sin and death now from the bits of Isaiah that I read I think it would be another half step to say that that's explicitly stated but the

New Testament would take that step and would say yeah when God went out to war to judge to defeat the real enemies sin and death were included in his agenda he defeated sin he destroyed death and in fact in the 1 Corinthians 15 passage it specifically says in verse 26 it says the last enemy to be destroyed is death he will reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet the last enemy to be destroyed is death and we are beginning to see an answer to this question how can we get from sinfully unable people to a glorious city free and holy and the answer is that God intervenes and says I will destroy everything that stands in my way I will work so powerfully that no enemy is left to stand I will do that no one else is going to do it my people can't do it I'll do it myself I suppose the thing that we find difficult to get well we find difficult to get a lot of this don't we we find it difficult to get what our sin is like find it difficult to get how much God has promised and we also find it difficult to get how determined God is to achieve this and the lengths to which he's prepared to go to achieve this even the lengths of coming down from heaven to earth taking human flesh dying on a cross bearing our sin and conquering sin by taking the worst that its consequences are in himself in his body on the tree taking it and then shrugging it all off as done and then rising from the dead in victory saying on the cross it is finished and rising breaking the chains of sin and death and defeating

Satan thine be the glory risen conquering son endless is the victory you are death hath won in the resurrection Jesus conquers those things and then the second person that is in this passage is the one in verse is the one in chapter 61 and this person says as follows the spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me he's anointed you see that's the Christ the Messiah to preach good news to the poor he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted to proclaim freedom for the captives to release from darkness the prisoners to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in [34:58] Zion to bestow on them a crown of beauty! instead of a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair they will be called oaks of

righteousness a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor here's this person who is a bit like the branch who was in chapter 11 he brings good news and he says it's done he heals the broken he doesn't just bring good news he heals!

the broken hearted he applies the victory to the people who need it he applies deliverance to the captives he transforms their grief into beautiful joy and what a key figure he is he is right at the center of all this that's going on in these chapters!

It's went into the synagogue he was asked to read he took actually this book the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and he read this bit this man did the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor and sent me to proclaim freedom of the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to release the oppressed them today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing and the whole synagogue ought to faint or something because what a claim this man is making he's saying you know what it all said about the exiles and how they would get back to where they really ought to be that there was a key person who would accomplish it and it was Jesus of course stands there in a synagogue and well that's me actually today this is fulfilled in your very hearing you're looking at the person that Isaiah was talking about all those years ago and perhaps they said you could have knocked me down with a feather but what a statement for Jesus to make he claims this text for himself he's the redeeming king he's the one who makes all this happen the conquering lord who defeated Satan sin and death so we've seen the inability of the people to save themselves which I think many of us would agree with we've seen that the promises still stand God will have a people it is possible but it's only possible through God and then we've seen the key people in this the lord himself and the king the lord who says I'm going to do this!

[38:37] the king the anointed one who says I've come and I'm going to bring this to you myself with my own hands and Jesus says that's me so what sort of people are we talking about what are the people who in whom this actually happens what's the picture of these blessed ones and the people in the synagogue that Jesus was talking to would have probably asked ourselves are we the blessed ones we're here in the promised land but is that it present day Israel might say we're the blessed ones we're in the promised land and many Christians I think incorrectly think yeah that's the logic of it they're in the promised land they must be blessed we should think!

talking about in the Bible but I don't think they are is it the ethically pure people like Paul the Pharisee would have said I'm the blessed one because I work so hard at all the laws I do the fasting I do the sacred days I do circumcision I do all that sort of thing sorry that should be ethnically I'm a proper Jewish Jew you can count my lineage back and Paul would say neither my ethnicity nor my religiosity counts for anything in this look at what it does say are the people who are the blessed ones well they are the ones who are aware of their sin and they say things like this our offences are many in your sight and our sins testify against us our offences are ever with us we acknowledge our iniquities they're painfully aware of their sin are you ever painfully aware of your sin or have you got to the point where that doesn't bother you anymore are you painfully aware of your sin when you come to the

Lord's table do you say I need this I need shed blood I can't live without shed blood because my sin needs to be covered here's another picture of those that the Lord is with the blessed ones 66 verse 2 where it says this is the one I esteem who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word that's chapter 66 verse 2 this is the one I'm looking for it's a little bit like Jesus when he gave the beatitudes blessed are the poor in spirit blessed are the pure in heart I can't remember the other ones blessed are the peacemakers the same people blessed here in

Isaiah the contrite the lowly the ones who are aware of their sin and look in faith to the Lord the people who put faith into operation just it's put into operation in regard to our neighbour Christian and non Christian Jesus will say this is the command love one another and the person who puts earnestly into operation love for God and gives time and space in their week for God it wasn't assumed that the nations would have the same timetable as the Jews it was understood if you go out to the nations they are going to have different days but it's time and space for God so

I'll just close by asking is this us when it comes down to the heart of the matter have we got it that we're sinners we can't heal ourselves we need a saviour we need a divine saviour we need Jesus and in humility and in wonder and in appreciation we look to him we put our trust in him for what he can do for us and in us what he alone can do by his grace and for his glory and ending
[43:58] Thank you.