

God's Glorious Plan

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[0 : 00] Please take your bulletins and turn to the last page. On the last page there is this side that says God's glorious plan.

I decided I don't want to take any chances this morning that some of you may have not had enough coffee and therefore you are feeling drowsy and sleepy.

This is such a wonderful passage that if you ignore other sermons you're not going to hurt my feelings, but not this one.

This is really a magnificent passage. There are certain chapters in the Old Testament and in the New Testament that stand out. So for example, if I'm thinking about the subject of faith I would naturally turn to Hebrews chapter 11 which deals with the topic of faith.

If I wanted to think about love, agape love, the love that exists between Christians of course I would turn to 1 Corinthians 13. If I wanted to think about God's love for us I would turn to Romans 8.

[1 : 12] If I wanted to think about the kingdom of God I might turn to Matthew chapter 13 which has seven parables about the kingdom. This is one of the greatest chapters in the Old Testament.

It is a chapter that helps us understand what God is up to and where we fit in that plan. That is, we are turning from 2014 to 2015.

Is there nothing more to it than just the passing of days? Or is there something going on here? I had a heart attack ten years ago and almost passed away contrary to the prayers of my students.

But ten years later I'm still here reminding them that their prayers are weak. And I ask myself, why did God give me ten more years?

Why didn't he just take me? I mean, it would be fun to be in glory. Why am I here? Was it just for time? Or does God want me to understand something or see something?

[2 : 25] What is God really up to? Well, there are hardly any chapters that explain that better than Isaiah chapter 40.

It is one of those magnificent chapters that opens the doors and we have access to the mind of God as few chapters do. In addition to that, please look at this.

I want you to look at that. In addition to that, the first 20 verses are a superb poem. If you notice, every stanza is three verses.

Six, three, four, five. Six, seven, eight. Nine, ten, eleven. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Every stanza is three verses.

That's a magnificent poetic device which, thank God, the translators captured. So, what is God up to? Oh, God, before that, God wants us to dismiss children.

[3 : 32] Sorry. No? Are we not? Children have been dismissed?

No? Well, children, you are dismissed. Check with your parents to see about the rest of the sermon. I'm sorry. Children, this is your time to be dismissed.

I wish I had accepted the Lord when I was their age.

Life would have been so much different. But in any case, may God watch over them and bless them. As I was saying, every three verses is a stanza.

And so, let's take a look at the main point. What does God really want to do? Look at verses three, four, and five. I want you to follow as I read.

[4 : 39] So, a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord. If it sounds familiar, it should.

That's a passage applied to John the Baptist in the New Testament. A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

Every valley will be raised up. Every mountain and hill made low. The rough ground shall become level. The rugged places a plain. And look at verse five.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed. And all mankind will see it together. There are other times in the Bible when God did reveal his glory.

So, for example, in Exodus chapter 19 at Mount Sinai, God revealed his glory to Moses and the Hebrews. He does it again when the glory of God fills the tabernacle at the end of Exodus.

[5 : 47] He does it when Solomon finished building the temple and the glory of God revealed. But in all of these cases, it was God revealing his glory to the Hebrews.

Here, it's a lot more than just the Hebrews. The glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind will see it. All mankind will see it.

The whole human race, everybody. If you're a human being, you will see it.

You will see it. All mankind will see the glory of God. This is not about them. This is about us.

Because we are part of mankind. And we are going to see the glory of God. Now, we have to figure out what that glory looks like and when and how and where and all these other issues.

[6 : 52] But what God wants to do is to show his glory to the whole world. And the verse ends with, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

I read this verse and I think, oh, come on, Isaiah, you know, this is really big. This is major. This is fantastic. This is not a minor project.

This is something really huge. You're telling me all mankind will see the glory of God? How do I know that you're telling the truth? Maybe you're just boasting.

Maybe you're saying something grand to give discouraged people some hope. It's like this month we're going to win the lottery and we're going to be rich.

How do I know, Isaiah, that this is really true? How do I know that this is not just wishful thinking on your part?

[7 : 55] You know, I mean, I hope the Packers win. But I really have nothing to do with it and it doesn't really ultimately matter that much. Apologies to Packer fans.

But, you know, it would be nice if they win. But maybe it's just wishful thinking. How do I know that Isaiah is serious? That God is serious?

Because the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all humanity, all mankind will see it together. He says, because the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

So what if God has spoken? Why should that be important? Verses 6, 7, and 8 are dealing with the fact that God has spoken.

That it is God who has made this incredible promise. A voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry out? All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

[9 : 01] The grass withers, the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely, the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

But the word of God stands forever. We know it will happen because God's word stands forever. Grass is transient.

It comes and goes. Flowers are transient. They come and go. But God's word is forever. So if God says, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

If God says that that's what he's going to do, then that's what he's going to do. Anybody can boast. But not anybody can make the boasting come and take place.

You may not believe this. But I'm in my 60s. And I'm physically unfit. I'm really out of shape. But I can dunk on LeBron James any day.

[10 : 04] I decide to play him one-on-one. And not only that. He can also have two other players. You know. And I can beat all three of them.

How many naive, gullible people are in this church who are going to believe me? Yeah, I can brag about all kinds of things.

But God is not bragging. God is saying that he has said it and therefore it will happen.

Because the word of the Lord stands forever. That is what gives us assurance. This is what convinces me. Not because Isaiah is polite or nice or has a good name or wears good clothes.

Not because of that. But because God has said it. And that is what God is going to do. So, the glory of the Lord is going to be revealed.

[11 : 05] And all flesh will see it together. The next question I have in mind. Is that good news or bad news? Is that really good news or bad news?

The last time that God showed his glory was at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. God decided to show them his glory.

The glory of God was so powerful. So overwhelming. So great. So fantastic. That they all started to shake with fear.

They all became terrified at the sight of how great God is. So much so that they even begged Moses to become as a mediator.

So they were saying to God, you speak to Moses. Moses will speak to us. Don't speak to us directly because God is scary and we can't handle his glory.

[12:06] The text says, even Moses was filled with fear and trembling. This is the same Moses who saw God at the burning bush.

The same Moses who confronted Pharaoh. The same Moses who performed the ten plagues and was used by God to part the Red Sea.

If anybody had seen God in his power, Moses had. But Hebrews says, Moses was filled with fear and trembling. So if Moses was scared of seeing God in his glory, why should that look like good news to me?

It looks like bad news. I don't want to be terrified like that. I don't want to be scared like that. If God wants to show all of his glory, my request is please don't.

You know, tune it down. You know, turn off the bright lights. But God's glory is going to be revealed. And we are going to see it.

[13:12] And it is not bad news. It is good news. There is something going to be different here. That rather than being terrified to death from seeing God in all of his glory, we are going to be excited about seeing God in all of his glory.

What is he going to do this time that is different, that is going to make us be eager to see it, rather than to be afraid of his presence?

Look at verse 9 and following. You who bring good tidings to Zion. That's the Hebrew word that the Septuagint translates as the gospel.

That's where we get the word gospel from, the good tidings or good news. You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout. Lift it up and don't be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, here is your God.

[14:21] So God has arrived and he says, here is your God. When he says, here is your God, what are we going to see?

What terrifying sight are we going to see? Look at verse 10. See, the sovereign Lord comes with power.

Well, that's what I dreaded to begin with, that he's going to come with great power and scare me to death. See, the sovereign Lord comes with power. His arm rules for him over all the nations.

See, his reward is with him. And his recompense accompanies him. But look at verse 11. When the announcer of the good news says, here is your God, and I look to see God, what is it that I will see? Look at verse 11. What is God going to do with all of his power?

[15:35] He is going to use all of his power, all of his glory, to be the good shepherd that carries the lamb. He tends his flock like a shepherd.

He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that are young. God is going to use his power to be the good shepherd that takes care of the flock of God.

That is what God is going to do with all of his power. not to terrify us, but to carry those who are tiny and small.

One of the blessings of this church is that there are several mothers who have tiny children, and it is so wonderful to see the parents carrying the babies around. It's just a beautiful sight.

And God is going to do the same thing. Those of us who are weak and tired and small and exhausted, God is going to carry us and carry us close to his heart.

[16:52] God is going to show us his glory by showing us how much he loves us. His glory is going to be revealed in the great amount of love that he has for us.

That is what God wants to do. Well, this is fantastic. I mean, this is wonderful. This is all is well that ends well. I started being dreadful of this meeting.

I don't want to be terrified. And I find out that he's the good shepherd who's going to carry the weak and the young and the babies. But aren't there obstacles?

Last time God said to Pharaoh, let my people go. Pharaoh said, no way. What if there are obstacles to God? Well, the first obstacle is this.

The first question that one would ask is, does God know how to do something like this? It's one thing to promise to do something like this. It's one thing to say, the glory of God will be revealed.

[17 : 59] But does he know how to do it? Look, we have just gone through the most dysfunctional Congress in so many years.

The Republicans have a plan. The Democrats have a plan. This group has a plan. That group has a plan. And nothing gets done. And it's hard to get things accomplished.

There are so many different issues that we face. One of them, for example, is ISIS. This genocide that is happening to Christians.

In the Middle East. What is the best way to deal with ISIS? Let me give you several alternative plans. Well, one plan is to arm our friendly Arab countries.

Saudi Arabia, Jordan. Give them the best airplanes, the best technology, the best rockets. Maybe that's what we should do. Or maybe we should send our own soldiers.

[19 : 08] The same way we sent it to Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan. Or maybe we should arm Turkey. Or maybe we should make a deal with Iran.

There are so many plans. How do we know which plan works and which plan doesn't work? What if the plans fail? The same thing with helping the economy.

Should we follow the Republicans? Should we follow the Democrats? Should we follow the Tea Party? Should we follow all of them? Should we follow none of them? Does God know what he is doing?

Is God wise enough to be able to develop a plan that works? Let me tell you what will not work. I am hoping to visit my family in England in March.

I happen to have a grandson whom I love very much who happens to be six years old. I am not going to go to my six-year-old son and say to him, hey, look, grandpa wants to go to England.

[20 : 21] Can you arrange, can you make the plans for my two-week visit to England? You take care of all of the details? No, thanks, I am not stupid. I mean, he may be cute and lovable, but he lacks something that six years old are not capable of doing, namely, plans for visiting England.

What he lacks is wisdom and knowledge and understanding and how to make things work and fit together. Well, does God have those talents?

Does he? Look at verses 12 through 14. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or with the breath of his hand marked of the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket and weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Look at verse 13.

Who has understood the mind of the Lord or instructed him as his counselor? Who? Who? Who? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him?

[21 : 36] Whom did God ask for advice when he was creating the world? When God was creating the universe, did God say, Oh, gee, I wish Einstein was here.

He'd help me with this plan. Did God say, I wish Newton was here. Boy, Newton understands these things. I don't. Did God ask for anybody's advice when he was creating the world?

Does anybody understand God's wisdom? When my students ask me, Why do we have to take Gen Ed courses in biology or chemistry?

I have a standard answer. It's to remind them that God is very smart and that they're not. God is smart.

You know what I find wonderful about God, but it's a little bit annoying. I mean, some of us are smart in one area, on a very, very small scale, you know. I mean, I know a little bit about languages.

[22 : 48] But good heavens, he is smart in everything. Biology, physics, chemistry, art, music. You know. He knows everything.

How can anybody so smart? And does God need advice? No. He's got enough wisdom to be able to carry this plan.

Who has consulted God? Whom did God consult? And from whom did he ask advice? Well, let's look at verses 15, 16, and 17.

Another obstacle. Surely the nations are like a drop from a bucket. They are regarded as dust on the scales.

He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. He mentions nations in verse 15. He mentions Lebanon, my own country, in verse 16.

[23 : 47] Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing. Nations, Lebanon, nations.

He mentions nations three times in three verses. Verse 17. Before him all the nations are as nothing. They are regarded by him as worthless.

As less than nothing. Somebody may be thinking, okay God, you want to do this. But let me remind you.

There are the Babylonians who are around. What if the Babylonians say no? What if the Assyrians say no? What if Egypt opposes God?

So God says to Moses, go tell Pharaoh, let my people go. And Pharaoh says no. What does God do when nations oppose him? What does God do when ISIS persecutes his people?

[24 : 54] Is God afraid of nations? Is he saying, well, of course I can take LeBron James, but can I take on everybody who plays for the NBA?

I mean, that's hundreds of people. And God is not afraid of the nations. Look at verse 17.

Before him all the nations are as nothing. They are regarded by him as worthless. Even less than nothing.

They're not just zero. They're minus. They're even below zero. Look at verse 15. Surely the nations are like a drop from a bucket.

If you're carrying water in a bucket and you're walking and you're not steady, drops of water starts to fall off. Does that matter?

[25 : 55] No. Is anybody, you know, mourning because a couple drops of water dropped from the bucket? No. No. Nations are like nothing.

Nations are like nothing. And we have enough examples in the Old Testament to know that God confronts the nations. Edom and Nineveh.

Let's say Assyria. Just as a starter. And Egypt too. So, nations aren't going to stop him.

But what about the gods of the nations? The gods of the nations must be stronger than the nations because the nations worship them and they're afraid of them. Maybe the gods are stronger.

Well, let's look at the gods of the nations. Look at verse 15. I'm sorry.

[26 : 55] I'm sorry. Look at verse 18. To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?

As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that doesn't rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple.

Let me give you two pieces of advice about making idols. If you're going to make an idol, make sure it's good wood. If it's rotten, you're going to have to make another one in two years.

If the wood is bad, you're going to need new idols. They won't last long. Make sure it's built out of good wood. Second thing, let it have a flat base.

[28 : 03] Because if it keeps walking, it will topple. And you don't want idols that topple. You can hear the sarcasm in Isaiah's voice.

Idols can't even make themselves. Somebody has to carve them. Idols can't close themselves. Somebody has to put decorations on them.

Idols can't walk. They can't talk. They can't eat. They can't give advice. They can't do nothing. So why on earth should God be afraid of the idols?

The idols are not greater than people. They are even lesser than people. They depend on people for their very existence. So human beings will not stop God.

Nations will not stop God. And idols will not stop God. So if I understand that.

[29 : 15] If I understand that God is good. Because he is the good shepherd. And that God is wise.

Because he doesn't need human advice. And God is powerful. Because the nations are like nothing. If I understand clearly.

That God is good. And wise. And powerful. How shall I respond to God? He gives us two responses. One is a bad response.

The other one is the right response. Let's look at the bad response. Verse 27. Why do you say, O Jacob?

And complain, O Israel. My way is hidden from the Lord. My God. My cause is disregarded by my God.

[30 : 19] One thing we can do is to complain. God doesn't see. And God doesn't care. I am in this situation.

I am in this bind. I am in this hard situation. I am an exile in Babylon. I am an exile in Assyria.

And God doesn't see. And God doesn't care. And I can sit and complain about this. And complain and complain.

And somehow think that by complaining I can change things. If I understand that God is good. And wise.

And powerful. Complaining is not the right response. It's the wrong response. God doesn't see. God doesn't care.

[31 : 17] God doesn't care. God doesn't care. What is the right response? The right response is verse 31. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

Let me explain something. In Hebrew, the word to hope and the word to wait is the same word. It's the same verb.

So you can translate it hope. Or you can translate it wait. Or if you want to catch both sides of the meaning. Perhaps you should translate it while I wait in hope.

Or hope while I'm waiting. But it is both. Regretted. Regrettably in English, hope and wait have different meanings. Where do I wait?

I wait. I wait. I wait. I wait. I wait. I wait. I wait. When we have bumper to bumper traffic on I-94. And we're not moving.

[32 : 23] And they're trying to move a wreck. And I'm in a hurry to get to school. And I'm supposed to be there at 8 and it's already 9.

And the traffic is still stuck. Where do I? Where do I wait? When I'm at O'Hare.

And it has snowed. And O'Hare is shut down. And I may have to stay in a hotel. Before they clear the airplanes.

And the airport. Where do I wait? When I'm at the doctor. Waiting for my appointment. Or when you're waiting for a letter to arrive.

Waiting in English doesn't suggest good things. We use it negatively. That's why it's better perhaps to translate it.

[33 : 29] Those who hope. Those who put their hope in God while waiting for him. Those who hope in the Lord. Will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. I've always thought about this verse.

Why doesn't he say. They will soar on wings like chicken. Chicken do not soar. Chicken are lucky if they can fly one foot above the ground.

Chicken doesn't soar. But we soar like eagles. Above our circumstances.

Above our problems. We soar like eagles. They will soar on wings like eagles.

[34 : 35] They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. I remember a game. I saw it once. Trinity was playing.

It's arch enemy in soccer. And we wanted to win. And they wanted to win. And we were both determined to win. And the captain of our team was in his senior year.

And that was his last game of the season. And the last game against that team. And he wanted to win. And he was going to do everything he could to win.

He played so hard. He played so hard. That at half time. The athletic trainer says. You can't go back. You can't go back.

He was so exhausted. He collapsed. He literally collapsed. On the side. But he wanted to win so badly. And he is 22 years old.

[35 : 37] He's not 60s like me. And out of shape. He runs a mile to warm up. You know. I want to mile when I flirt with heart attacks.

A young guy who is as athletic as he can be. Great shape. Excellent condition. Played so hard.

And physically collapsed. And God says. They will run. And not go weary. They will walk. And not faint.

God is the good shepherd. Who will prevent us. From falling. Who will prevent us. From fainting. And if we are that tired.

He will use his strong arms. To carry us. God will show his glory. As the good shepherd. Who will take care of us.

[36 : 40] And if you are a human being. God's glory. God's glory. God's glory. Will be revealed. And all mankind. Will see it together. But on top of seeing it.

