

Isaiah - Talk 3

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Date: 24 October 2021

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[0 : 00] O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. For you have rejected your people and the house of Jacob, because they are full of things from the east, and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of foreigners.

Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures. Their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols.

They bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. So man is humbled, and each one is brought low. Do not forgive them.

Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord and from the splendor of his majesty. The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low, against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up, and against all the oaks of Bashan, against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills, against every high tower, and against every fortified wall, against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft.

[1 : 28] And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

And the idol to the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground from before the terror of the Lord and from the splendor of his majesty when he rises to terrify the earth.

In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the Lord and from the earth.

Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? The Lord has taken his place to contend.

He stands to judge peoples. The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people. It is you who have devoured the vineyard.

[2 : 32] The spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor, declares the Lord God of hosts. The Lord said, because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet.

Therefore, the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. In that day, the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands and the crescents, the pendants, the bracelets and the scarves, the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes and the amulets, the signet rings and nose rings, the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks and the handbags, the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans and the veils. Instead of perfume, there will be rotteness, and instead of a belt, a rope, and instead of well-set hair, baldness, and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth, and branding instead of beauty. Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty men in battle, and her gates shall lament and mourn, empty she shall sit on the ground. And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name, take away our reproach.

In that day, the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honour of the survivors of Israel. And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy.

[4 : 16] Everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst, by

a spirit of judgment, and by a spirit of burning.

Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud by day, and smoke, and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a canopy, there will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

L. Ron Hubbard, as some of you know, is the founder of Scientology. In one of his many, many, many written works, had this to say about human potential.

Your potential as a human being is far greater than anyone has ever permitted you to believe. Now I'm sure you're nervous that I've started a sermon in church with a quote from the founder of Scientology, which is fair, but I think his quote about humanity's potential isn't really uniquely his idea at all.

A Christian prosperity gospel preacher, and I use that title Christian loosely, Miles Monroe states that every human being is born with unlimited potential.

[5 : 34] You come into the world, and you really can achieve anything. Your wildest dreams. Seems rather similar, I think, in terms of two ideas, Monroe and Hubbard.

A strange pair, I suppose. But yet, again, I don't think this idea is reserved even for those who claim to be religious. The idea that human beings are exceptional creatures and can overcome any obstacle is everywhere.

Christy Bowman is a self-help author, and you're probably thinking at this stage, Benji, like, what are we paying you to read? But don't worry. She had this to say about human potential. Human potential is amazing.

We have the capacity to create a world that is peaceful, one that spreads kindness and love rather than hatred. If we believe it to be so, it will be our truth, and we will create it.

So, secular and religious alike, I hope we can see, have an astounding amount of belief in human potential. And maybe not without reason, I think this belief, it even stretches to the reaches of how long human beings can live for.

[6 : 45] Whether that's working on AI in order to create a means by which we can upload our consciences, or splicing the DNA of invertebrates like Hydra, which apparently seem to have done away with aging, to basically roll back the process of human deterioration.

It seems that whoever you are, religious or otherwise, there is an unbelievable amount of self-belief, and if we're honest, probably arrogance, about what human beings can achieve.

So, certainly, if you're a Christian here today, it's probably obvious that the idea that Christ is Lord, and that humanity is in need of saving from itself by a holy God, is something that is fundamentally, deeply offensive to all areas of our society.

In a world of billionaire space races, TikTok plans about achieving retirement by the age of 35, Elon Musk taking humanity to Mars, and surgery that, in theory, can make you look any age you want, human scorn at the idea of needing God is everywhere.

And Dulwich, I think, is probably an excellent example of this. I've met quite a few of you. You all are pretty intelligent, well-educated, and incredibly self-sufficient. And so, telling the outside world here in Dulwich that there is a God who made them and has demands on their life is immensely difficult, and I'm sure we can all relate to that difficulty.

[8 : 15] Humanity is, if we're honest, so far from recognising God as their king, and the idea of worshipping a God who they cannot do without is seen as a ridiculous one.

Yet, if you were here last week or had a chance to catch up on it online, we see for God to humble the whole world and be seen as king alone. What would it take for God to humble the whole world and be seen as king alone?

As mentioned last week, our initial readers too have an arrogance problem. Have a look with me at chapter 1, verse 3, if you can remember. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. Israel is compared to an animal. Animals know their owners, yet Israel somehow is more gone than a donkey or an ox.

So Israel does not know their owner. They are utterly clueless. But it is worse than that because we also mentioned last week that Israel are on the verge of Assyrian invasion.

[9 : 26] And for a view into the Assyrian king's mindset, have a look with me at chapter 14, verse 13. Let's just flick on a few pages. Isaiah 14, and verse 13.

This is the king of Assyria being mocked by God's people. You said, king of Assyria, in your heart, I will ascend to heaven above the stars of God. I will set my throne on high.

I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north. So Israel is sinful from head to foot. They are as ignorant as an ass and at the same time, the king of Assyria fancies himself a god.

It hopefully goes without saying then that the world that Isaiah finds himself in is very, very arrogant. And so it begs the question, what would it take for God to humble sinful Israel and arrogant Assyria?

What would it take for God to humble the whole world and be seen as king alone? And this brings me on to my first point, the problem, and we're going to deal with this in a kind of problem and solution, the problem, man has forgotten God and worship themselves.

[10:41] Now as many of you will have noticed and are probably relieved, we're not covering every verse of our section although well read, which stretches from chapter 2 all the way through to chapter 5 and chapter 5 we're looking at next week.

But for the sake of our question, what would it take for God to humble man and be seen alone as king? I'm going to outline the problem and then the solution. So first the problem, man has forgotten God and worship themselves.

We saw last week that God intends for his house to be the place that all of the nations run to. Have a look with me again at chapter 2 verse 3. And many people shall come and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.

The future will look like all nations flowing to the throne of God to hear what he has to say, to learn to walk in his ways.

However, as we heard from our reading, when God looks at the city in its current state, he sees the exact opposite. Instead of the nations coming to the city of God, it is the city of God that has filled itself with the things of the nations.

[12:02] Have a look with me chapter 2, verse 6. For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of things from the east and of fortune tellers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of foreigners.

Jerusalem is indistinguishable from the nations around them, and instead of the nations coming to hear about God from them, they've decided to be just like the world.

And being just like the nations means ultimately worshipping something other than God. Have a look with me at 2, verse 8. Their land is filled with idols.

They bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made. Now I was trying to think of an illustration, I'm very bad at illustrations by the way, so my wife told me, Ben I think you've said that three times now in your sermons.

I was trying to think of an illustration and I was struggling. But then I remembered that I think we have a brilliant example of this right here in the city of London. Now I don't know if any of you have been to St. Paul's, I haven't been able to cough up the £15 yet to go inside, but it is estimated that the St. Paul's Cathedral, the pride and joy of the Church of England, cost well in excess of £8 million a year to run, half of which is funded by the taxpayer, don't know how you feel about that, and the rest by the church itself through admissions.

[13:31] Alongside that, the church has over 3,000 objects of value in something it calls imaginatively the object collection, which is valued as essentially invaluable.

The wealth within that building and to maintain that building is astronomical. Now having a cathedral is in one sense fine, except that St. Paul's routinely ignores the Bible's teachings on marriage and leadership roles, and not only that, goes out of its way to persuade our denomination to do the same.

St. Paul's Cathedral, the great hope of Christopher Wren, actually, was that it would be the mothership of the Church of England and a light to the country and gospel, is a worldly house full of money and spouting the secular narratives.

And this is exactly how God would have felt about his city, supposed to be the light and hope to the world. Instead, completely indistinguishable from it.

Man has completely forgotten God. Jerusalem, the place that is supposed to be the light to the nations, has turned instead to worship things that their hands have made.

[14:47] And perhaps even worse than this, not only have they forgotten God, they are worshipping themselves. Have a look with me at chapter 2, verse 22. Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

Now, I have another confession. When I was preparing this part of the passage, I really struggled with verse 22. I thought I got the problem that this was addressing. God's people, instead of worshipping him, they're worshipping idols.

Fake gods. I couldn't understand though, for the longest time, how that had anything to do with verse 22, which seems to be saying that man is ultimately worshipping themselves.

But I think it makes sense when we realise that for Isaiah and for God, and I really need us to hear this, there are only two types of worship.

Only two. Things that man has made, all worship God. things that man has made, all worship God. You see, things that the Israelites are worshipping, the idols, are things made by human hands.

[16:01] In fact, everything that isn't God himself is created by God or man. And so really, for Israel and for us, there are only two choices in what you worship.

We've created, or to worship God himself. to worship something we've created, or to worship God himself. And sadly, Israel have forgotten God and chosen to worship things made by man.

Things they've made themselves, they've chosen to worship themselves. Now, this is massive, I think, to how we think about our world and our non-Christian friends.

For example, take the world's religions. Often, I wonder if we think in terms of competing religions. I'm told to conceptualise that when you hear it for the first time.

Do we see it as two religions competing with one another for the belief of their followers? Or, do we see it how God sees it?

[17:07] That you are either worshipping him, or you're worshipping yourself? Islam is man-made and man-centred. It is not, in one sense, any different from a life spent pursuing material wealth or the perfect physique.

And when we pause to think about it, that should make sense. Islam was invented by Muhammad, a man. Its fundamental doctrine of salvation is works-based.

You must earn your way to paradise, and the better you do, the better Muslim you are, and the happier Ali is with you. It is no different whatsoever to working your whole life to accumulate a large bank balance or the perfect physique.

It means, fundamentally, that like Israel, all of our non-Christian friends and family are worshipping themselves. They are worshipping man.

There is no difference between giving your life to worshipping the pursuit of providing exceptional education to your kids, accumulating generational wealth, serving the gods of the new age, or following Hinduism.

[18:14] They are all man-made. They are all forms of worshipping things our hands have made, of worshipping ourselves. And I hope this is starting to paint the picture of the scale of the problem we have before us.

In a world like this, when there is only two types of worship, ourselves or God, and so, so many people are worshipping themselves, how will God humble man and alone be seen as king?

And this brings me on to my second and final point, is in judgment. The solution, God will rise in judgment. I think on the face of it, this should be a relatively simple but potentially painful point.

Have a look with me at chapter 2, verse 20 to 22. In that day, mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendor of the nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?

God's answer to arrogant humanity is that it will not always be like this, that there is a day coming when he will rise, be seen, and humanity will see the worthlessness of their idols.

[19:51] Now, this judgment took the form of Assyria, and I want us to think back to our illustration from last week, put your beret back on and your wine glasses out and cheese, whatever, you're being a French soldier as you see the German war machine approaching you.

Imagine the terror as you know that Germany has smashed everyone before you and that you are next. And we know from later in Isaiah that Assyria is the means of judgment that God chooses to use on Israel and Judah.

And I think it's an appropriate form, too, because have a look with me at the idols they are specifically worshipping in 2, verse 6 and 7. Verse 6, because they are full of things from the east, fortune tellers like the Philistines.

Verse 7, their land is filled with silver and gold, there is no end to their treasures, their land is filled with horses and there is no end to their chariots, their land is filled with idols.

They are all idols which in one way or another help with war, fortune tellers to help them predict what the enemy army is going to do, silver and gold to pay their army for food for a siege, horses and chariots for defending themselves from the oncoming horde.

[21 : 07] They were building as best as they could, strength to withstand the Assyrian invasion all the while refusing to trust in God. And God's response is to show how utterly worthless those idols are when he rises in judgment.

Verse 20 again, in that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold which they made for themselves to worship.

because you see when Assyria comes, God will make absolutely sure their army will not stand. He will make sure that their walls fall and their supplies run out and then they will see that their idols are completely useless from before the judgment of God.

How can they go on trusting in gold to pay their army if they have no army left? How can they trust in chariots when their soldiers have fallen to the invader? They will have nowhere left to turn.

Their idols will fail them. And this I think is really significant point for us to think about together. I wonder what you think judgment achieves when you hear judgment spoken about in the Bible or from the pulpit.

[22 : 30] Yes, we know that sin deserves punishment and so judgment is partly at least God punishing our sins. But here I think we see that judgment serves another purpose as well.

Humanity will do all that it can to worship themselves, to put confidence in their own strength. But here we see however that when God judges all the things that humanity has put their worship into and their belief into will fail.

God will finally be seen to be the one true God because he will make absolutely sure the whole world sees how useless idols are in comparison to him.

Sam Harris on his blog which I'm really racking up some pretty horrendous reading material in this talk but I wouldn't recommend reading had this to say about death. Death makes a mockery of almost everything we spend our lives doing because the truth is none of us know how much time we have in this life and taking that fact to heart brings a kind of moral and emotional clarity and it can bring a resolve to not suffer over stupid things.

You see one of the ways God is judging already is steadily judging the world through death and Sam Harris is right isn't he? It really isn't worth spending our life suffering over stupid things which means spending our life suffering over worshipping anything other than God because yes you can get an exceptional education and job but death makes a mockery of that in the end you can have a wonderful relationship and marriage but death will one day separate it true you can have a big family which will hopefully span many generations but how many of us here can remember the names of our great grandparents the solution to proud man God will rise in judgment God will rise in judgment to begin to close for the original readers as mentioned this judgment would take the form of Assyria they had pushed God far enough with worshipping their idols and worshipping themselves and God's solution is to use judgment to show how useless those idols are

[24 : 56] God God raised himself up in the form of Assyria and as we will see in later weeks him doing so show the complete futility of trusting in the idols of man however for us where does that leave us we're not hopefully about to be invaded by medieval Assyria where does that leave us this side of Assyria and this side of Jesus how will God humble proud man today and exalt himself alone as king how will God raise himself up today to show the stupidity of idols well again I don't want to take too much away from the punchlines that Isaiah brings us later in his book and he answers this in a number of ways some of them that we'll come on to in chapter 6 but I wanted to point us to one of them in particular John where he quotes Isaiah for us to think about as we close so I want us to look at John chapter 12 verse 27 to 33 which is the reference on your handout John chapter 12 verse 27 to 33 now is my soul troubled and what shall I say father save me from this hour but for this purpose I have come to this hour father glorify your name then a voice came from heaven

I have glorified it and I will glorify it again the crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered others said an angel had spoken to him Jesus answered this voice has come for your sake not mine now is the judgment of this world now will the ruler of this world be cast out and when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself he said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die you see wonderfully outrageously stunningly in one sense God has already humbled and raised himself up as king I'm going to repeat that because it's outrageous God has already humbled humanity and raised himself up as king in classic John irony Jesus will be raised up on the cross verse 32 and I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself that is Jesus being raised on the cross in shame and death but the shameful brutal death of a slave on the cross is also verse 31 now is the judgment of this world now will the ruler of this world be cast out how is that possible how is Jesus being crucified on one hand as a slave him being raised up as king in judgment you see for John

Jesus on the cross is a shameful execution but it is also the moment God as king is lifted up and glorified for the whole world to see it is the moment that the whole world is judged and God alone in the person of Jesus Christ is seen as king and I really need us to understand how this works what does it say about humanity and their idols and their worship of themselves that the only thing that could save them the only thing that provides enough grace enough salvation enough of a vision of God's saving power is the murdering of the son of God as a slave on a tree Elon Musk can take us to Mars we can provide cosmetic surgery to keep us looking young we can defeat Covid theoretically with a vaccine in 18 months we can accumulate enough wealth to provide for our family for generations to come and yet we are so desperately lost so without answers that despite all of those wonderful things we still need the death of the son of

God on the cross how will God humble humanity and raise himself up as king well in one sense he already has Jesus on the cross how can humanity boast how can we boast when the only thing that would save us is not the things we make with our hands but is the death of someone who does not deserve it in our place and so for us as a believer that is such wonderful wonderful news humanity has already been shown to be foolish they have already been humbled the king has already been raised on his cross shaped throne no matter who you meet no matter how impressive they may seem or the works of their hands seem powerful they have all every last one been humbled by the death of our lord because if they are not following the crucified Jesus as king they are a fool because they need his death but are instead trusting in the things their hands have made but for those who are following Christ our king has humbled the world he has done it and this should give us such confidence to boast in the work of our Lord Jesus on the cross and such confidence to go on trusting that it is the worship of him and him alone that saves humanity friends I say again as I did last week rejoice the world has nothing to offer you it has already been shown to be worthless at the raising up of our savior on the cross why don't I close us in prayer dear Lord we thank you that Jesus is king already and that he was raised king on the cross thank you Lord that that humbles all the world and gives us such confidence to go on trusting in him as Lord and King Amen