

Isaiah - Talk 7

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[0 : 00] First, let me pray for us. We've just sung, strong deliverer, beginning and end. All within me falls at your throne. I lay my all before you now.

Our loving God, as the Bible is read and explained, please help us to lay our all before you now. Help us to see Jesus' kingship and live rightly in response.

And we ask it for Jesus' namesake. Amen. So over to Rosalie for this morning's reading. Today's reading comes from Isaiah, starting in chapter 8, verse 11, and going to chapter 9, verse 7.

This can be found on page 691 of the Church Bibles. So that's Isaiah, starting at chapter 8, verse 11.

Let him be your fear.

[1 : 16] Let him be your fear. Let him be your dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honour as holy. Let him be your fear. And let him be your dread.

And he will become a sanctuary. And a stone of a fence. And a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel. A trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken. They shall be snared and taken. Bind up the testimony.

Seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. And I will hope in him.

Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel for the Lord of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion. And when they say to you, inquire of the mediums and necromancers who chirp and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God?

[2 : 25] Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony, I will not speak according... If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged. And will speak contemptuously against their king and their God.

And they will turn their faces upwards. And they will look to the earth. But behold, distress and darkness. The gloom of anguish.

And they will be thrust into thick darkness. But there will be no gloom for her who is in anguish. In the former time, he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

But in the latter time, he has made glorious the way of the sea and the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

[3 : 36] Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness. On them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation. You have increased its joy.

They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest. As they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden. And the staff of his shoulder.

And the rod of his oppressor. You have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult.

And every garment rolled in blood. Will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born. To us a son is given.

And the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God.

[4 : 36] Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government. And of peace. There will be no end.

On the throne of David. And over his kingdom. To establish it. And to uphold it. With justice. And righteousness. From this time forth.

And forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts. Will do this. Good morning everyone. If you don't know me. I'm Andy. I'm one of the assistant ministers here. At Grace Church. Bruce has already prayed. As we'll get going. And everything you'll. The points. And the run through of the talk.

Will be on the screen. Behind me. In 1951. A series of experiments. Was conducted. On university students.

[5 : 38] Studying the extent. To which social pressures. Affect a person. To conform. Eight students. Were in a room. They viewed a card. With a line on it. Followed by another.

With three lines. Labelled A, B and C. One of the lines. Was the same as that. On the first card. And the other two. Were longer. Or shorter. Each participant.

Was then asked. To say aloud. Which line matched. The length of that. On the first card. Except. All but one of them. Were actors. In the first two trials.

Both the subject. The real participant. And the actors. Gave the obvious. Correct answer. On the third trial. The actors. Would all give. The same.

Wrong answer. So you can imagine. The scene. The cards were held up. Line C. Was clearly. The matching line. But one by one. The actors said. That line B.

[6 : 35] Was the match. The real participant. Was always last. And you can see. That confused face. And it gets round to them. And they have a choice. Do they follow the crowd.

Or do they stand. Apart. And you can imagine. The scene. That sheepishly. They put their hand up. And say line C. Was the. Line B.

Was the match. In fact. 5% of the real participants. Always went with the crowd. And 75% of the participants.

Gave at least one. Incorrect answer. That shows us. I guess. What we already know. It's hard to live. In the minority.

It's hard. To stand out. From the crowd. It's costly. And particularly. Hard. When it comes to living. As a Christian. In this country.

[7 : 31] We might not be greeted. By government raids. And bomb blasts. As we attend church. But living as a Christian. In the world. Is hard. Maybe we feel.

Minority life. At school. Were you the only Christian. In your class. Or at work. The only Christian. In the office. Or in our family. Or neighbourhood.

Beliefs. Despised. And we feel. Isolated. Well. Isaiah. The prophet. Too felt. The pain. And pressure. Of minority life.

Just to set the scene again. As we are in Isaiah 8. The enemy troops. Are massing. On Judah's border. Syria. And Israel. Are about to invade Judah.

And then there's the warning. That they got. Of Assyria. Coming. You see. Ahaz was giving the warning. In chapter 7. Verse 9. If you're not firm in faith. You will not be firm at all.

[8 : 29] He didn't heed the warning. He was faithless. And now the Assyrians. The superpower to the north. Are on the march. An invasion is coming.

Isaiah is one of the remnant. A cluster. A small cluster. Of believing people. Amongst the unbelieving nation. People who remain faithful to God. And so he's surrounded.

By a faithless people. How should Isaiah. And God's faithful people live? Well the answer is. In chapter 8. Verse 11. If you look down with me.

For the Lord spoke thus to me. With his strong hand upon me. And warned me not to walk. In the way of this people. So we're eavesdropping. On a message from God.

To Isaiah. Is an important message. The hand of the Lord. Is pressing down on him. We can imagine. A strong father. Putting his big hands. On the shoulders of his son.

[9 : 28] Saying son. What I'm about to tell you. Is hard. But you need to hear it. Don't walk in their way. You be different.

So how will God's faithful people. Cope with minority life. Back then. And us today. Well three things. Firstly. Fear the Lord.

And nothing else. Have a look at verse 12. Do not call conspiracy. All that this people. Calls conspiracy. And do not fear.

What they fear. Nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts. Him you shall honour as holy. Let him be your fear. Let him be your dread. God is saying.

That the ultimate threat. In Isaiah 7 and 8. Isn't political oppression. Or war. But God himself. His holiness.

[10:26] And his justice. You see the real issue. Is not where Ephraim. Syria. Judah. Or Assyria. Had the biggest army. The real issue. Was God himself. Because behind all the ancient geopolitics.

God was judging the nations. And what happened to these nations nearly three millennia ago. Is a sign and a pointer. To the judgment facing all humanity.

To come. We live in a world of fear. Don't we? Of conspiracies. Half truths. And fake news. All fed by internet rumours.

There's the very real fear of Covid. And its ongoing effects on our health. Our lives. And our jobs. We fear for our children's future. Nationally.

We fear Russian interference. And North Korean missiles. And the point of Isaiah 8. Is not that it's wrong. To take wise precautions. Or that we should have.

[11:27] A *hakuna matata* approach to life. That means no worries. But that these things. Are not the ultimate fear. They're not the ultimate threat. Isaiah says.

The Lord of hosts. Him you shall honour as holy. Let him be your fear. Let him be your dread. As we saw in Isaiah chapter 6.

A few weeks ago. It is God's holiness. That threatens ruin. God is the mighty and majestic king. Who will judge the nations.

And Isaiah spells out. How the attitude to the Lord. Will affect our experience of him. He will be a sanctuary. Or a snare. Verse 14.

And he will become a sanctuary. And a stone of offence. And a rock of stumbling. To both houses of Israel. A trap and a snare. To the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it.

[12:27] They shall fall and be broken. They shall be snared and taken. If we fear the Lord. Then he will be a sanctuary. Now we're not supposed to think of spa days.

Or beauty treatments. Sanctuary is the temple words. Symbolising God dwelling with his people. To protect them. And to provide for them. And so if we fear him.

God will be with us for our goods. Whatever the trial. However isolated we feel. Still he's there. Emmanuel. God with us.

But it's also spelled out. The consequences of not fearing the Lord. Verses 14 and 15. Stumble. Broken. Snared.

I wonder if you've seen the film. Hundred and twenty seven hours. It released a few years ago now. It tells a true story of Aaron Ralston. In 2003. He was hiking.

[13:24] In Utah. And he was climbing down. And he fell. And a 360 kilogram boulder. Crushed his forearm. And pinned him down. Unable to move.

He stayed there for five and a half days. And he finally escaped. By taking his blunt pen knife. To amputate his own arm. I'm sorry. And he abseiled down.

And walked to safety. It's an astonishing story. But Isaiah chapter eight. Gets us to picture us in his shoes. Except for without the happy ending.

Trapped. Snared. Entirely alone. No future but agony. Or desperation. Now these verses. Verse 14 and 15.

Are quoted in 1 Peter. Of those who refuse to believe. And trust in the Lord Jesus. And fear him. And they are a real warning. For us this morning.

[14:24] How we respond to Jesus now. Will determine our experience of him. In the future. He will either be a sanctuary. Where his warm presence is there. And we experience his love.

Or he's a snare. Where we are trapped. And broken. Under his justice. What does it mean then. To fear the Lord. Well as the mighty and majestic king.

We are to respond to him. In repentance. And faith. As Isaiah did. In chapter six. And then treat him. As the one we most want to please. In life. The one we least want to.

Displease. 500 years ago or so. There was a preacher called Hugh Latimer. And he was preaching. Before King Henry VIII. And as he went up to the pulpit.

Apparently he was heard to say. Latimer Latimer. You are speaking before the high and mighty. King Henry VIII. Who has the power to send you to prison. And have your head cut off.

[15:25] Be careful what you say. Wise words aren't they? King Henry VIII. Who beheaded his wives. But after pausing for a moment. The preacher said to himself.

Latimer Latimer. You are speaking before the king of kings. And lord of lords. At whose throne. Henry VIII will stand. To whom one day. You will have to give an account yourself. Latimer Latimer. Be faithful. And declare all of God's word. Latimer feared the Lord. More than he feared anything else. And God calls his true people. To fear him. And nothing else. The one we most. The least we want to displease. The one we most want to please. As our majestic. And mighty king. The ruler. Of all. And so there are big national fears. And threats. That perhaps weigh heavy on our minds this morning. Other fears are more subtle. [16:23] The fear of losing respect. The fear of missing out. The fear of rejection. Or ridicule for our beliefs. But fearing the Lord.

Means looking beyond our circumstances. To the Lord. Who is in charge. In control. Of our circumstances. And fearing him instead. Which then leads to not following the crowd. But standing apart. In the minority. Well unlike Ahaz. Isaiah responds well. And through his response.

We get another lesson on life. In the minority. What it looks like. To fear the Lord. And nothing else. And that's our second thing this morning. Trust in the Lord's word.

And nothing else. Isaiah now speaks in verse 16. Have a look down. Bind up the testimony. Seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord.

[17:19] Who is hiding his face. From the house of Jacob. And I will hope in him. Behold. I and the children. Whom the Lord has given me. Are signs and portents in Israel.

From the Lord of hosts. Who dwells in Mount Zion. It's no longer Isaiah in the frame now. It's Isaiah and his small group of believers.

The remnant. His disciples amongst this unbelieving nation. He's telling them. Be people of the word. Bind it up. Seal it up. Preserve it for future generations.

But God's word is also to shape them. And govern them now. As there was obviously a clamor for other words. Of guidance. Verse 19.

Isaiah. When they say to you. Inquire of the mediums and necromancers. Who chirp and mutter. Should not a people inquire of their God. Should they inquire of the dead. On behalf of the living.

[18:16] G.K. Chesterton wrote. When people stop believing in God. They don't believe in nothing. They believe in everything.

And that is Isaiah's experience here. Ahaz and the people reject God. But they still want a word. About the future. And so. Well apparently.

Without any hint of irony. They approach the spokesperson. Of the Lord they rejected. And ask him if he wouldn't mind. Consulting the dead. For guidance. Now today.

There are some. Die hard atheists. But nominal Christianity. In this country. Hasn't been replaced by atheism. But by superstition. Spiritism.

And vague spirituality. For example. For this afternoon. For a large fee. You could visit Jane Wallace. And the psychic sisters. In Selfridges. Now horoscopes.

[19:12] Are still printed. In newspapers. I'm old enough. To remember. Mystic Meg. On the national lottery. With her crystal ball. And whatever. The appeal.

Of mediums. And spiritualists. Isaiah. Doesn't have much time. For them. Verse 20. To the teaching. And to the testimony. Get back to the word.

I've given you. If they don't want the word. Don't give them anything else. It won't. Help them. And verse 20. To 22.

Spell out the future. Of those who don't trust God's word. Verse 20. They have no dawn. Verse 22. Distress. And darkness.

The gloom. Of anguish. And they are thrust. Into thick darkness. When God is taken out of the picture. And people turn to other things.

[20:06] For hope. And security. Instead. The result. Is distress. And gloom. There is no light of revelation. And no hope of redemption.

Humanity. Is left to itself. And that is not. A happy. Prospect. Darkness. Darkness. We tend to spend. Most of November.

Don't we. Commenting to each other. How dark it is outside. It's only 4.30. And it's pitch black. As if each year. We are surprised. But spare a thought.

For the people of Tromsø. In Norway. They know what it's like. To live in complete darkness. From 26th of November. That's this Friday. To the 15th of January.

The sun doesn't rise at all. The polar night. Lasts all winter. Electricity usage soars. Sunglasses sales plummet. There is no dawn.

[21 : 02] And God warns us. And lets us know. That those who don't put their trust. In his words. Well there will be no spirit. There will be spiritual darkness.

And no dawn. In 2021. It might not be horoscopes. And palm reading. That the majority. Put their trust in. For the future. But maybe looking.

To the governor. Of the Bank of England. Or to politicians. And for assurances. For the future. Or our bank balances. Career paths.

Intellect and abilities. But God. Calls us to trust. In his word. For the future. And nothing else. When participants.

Of the social pressure. Experiment. Experiment. Were interviewed. Afterwards. And told about. The true study. One of those. Who followed the crowd. Said. Well I suspect. That the middle line.

[21 : 57] Was the right answer. But try to push it. Out of my mind. And we have a real temptation. To do that. When it comes to God's word.

To push it. Out of our minds. And follow the crowd. Especially. When our friends. And colleagues. Think the Bible. Is out of date. But God.

Calls his faithful people. To honor him. By living. Distinctively. And trusting. His word. Each day. Even. When our circumstances. Scream.

Otherwise. Amazingly. Isaiah. Is not all about. Commands. And warnings. Chapter 9. Verses 1 to 7. Give the ultimate motivation.

Not to walk. In the way of others. Because into this distress. Darkness. And gloom. Light. Is coming. There is a better future.

[22 : 53] So lastly. Wait for the Lord. To come. To reign. Chapter 9. Verse 1. But there will be no gloom. For her. Who is in anguish. In the former time.

He brought into contempt. The land of Zebulun. And the land of Naphtali. But in the latter time. He has made glorious. The way of the sea. The land beyond the Jordan. Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness. Have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in the land. Of deep darkness. On them has light shined. We have known days of darkness.

In our own lives. Haven't we? At times of illness. Anxiety. Unemployment. Loneliness. Particularly through COVID. And one of the things.

I think that keeps us going. In the darkness. Is hope. Hope that the world. Won't be like this.

Forever. Well here is the great. Promise of Isaiah 9.

[23 : 49] The world. Won't be like this. Forever. There will be complete reversal. Verse 2. Darkness to light. Verse 3.

Fear to joy. Verse 4. Oppression to freedom. Verse 5. War to peace. As all military hardware. Is burned up. In a great bonfire. The people of Tromsø.

Live through months of darkness. And they look forward. To the light to come. Knowing that it will come. In fact from May to July. It does come. And the sun never sets.

It is a complete reversal. And God's faithful people. In Judah. Are to wait through the darkness. Of God hiding his face.

In hope of the dawn of salvation. Joy and freedom. And peace to come. A complete reversal. How will this come about?

[24 : 48] Amazingly. Through the birth of a child. In those familiar words. We read every December. I won't sing them. Verse 6. For to us a child is born.

To us a son is given. And the government shall be on his shoulder. And his name shall be wonderful counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of peace.

Of the increase of his government. And of peace. There will be no end. On the throne of David. And over his kingdom. To establish it. And to uphold it. With justice. And with righteousness.

From this time forth. And forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts. Will do this. We know the frustration. Of failed human governments.

Well Isaiah and the remnant. Knew that very well. King Ahaz. Hadn't broken the rules. On having a second job. He brought God's judgment. And an Assyrian invasion. To wipe out the nation.

[25 : 47] And so if God promised another human ruler. I'd imagine there'd be a cynical groan. Wouldn't there? Oh. Another one. But this is not just another human ruler.

Verse 6. He'll be called wonderful counselor. Unlike Ahaz. This king will be wise. He'll be called mighty God. He'll be divine. He'll be divine. And strong enough to deal with the enemies.

That Ahaz couldn't. Everlasting father. A tender and loving ruler. Protecting and providing for his people. And prince of peace. Things will be restored to their happy state.

For us that means no more sirens. No more car bombers. No more goodbyes to the people we love. No more corruption. No more abuse. This kingdom is perfect.

And it's coming. The Lord himself is coming to reign. Matthew chapter 4. Verses 12 to 17. Make clear that Jesus came to fulfill Isaiah 9.

[26 : 53] Verses 1 and 2 are quoted there. That you can look up later. The dawn of salvation arrived. And throughout his ministry. He showed himself to be the wonderful counselor.

As crowds flocked to hear his wisdom. The mighty God who raised the dead. The everlasting father. Who showed compassion. And embraced the outcast.

And supremely the prince of peace. Dying to take our punishment. So we can be restored to a right relationship with God. And enjoy his perfect kingdom.

Of peace to come. And when we are enjoying. That perfect everlasting kingdom. How will we feel. About these years now.

Living in the minority. Feeling hard pressed. Tolerated by some. Ignored by others. Despised by a few. Will there be regret. Of course not.

[27 : 51] There will be no trace of regret. When we are enjoying that perfect kingdom. With God himself. Reigning over us. And so with that. Ahead of us.

God's people are to resolve. To live in the minority. However hard it is. And to echo the words of Isaiah. I will wait for the Lord. And put my hope in him.

Let's pray together. Amen. Heavenly Father. We thank you again. For King Jesus.

Who came as a child. To die for us. To be mighty God. The Prince of Peace. We thank you that he is coming again.

To inaugurate this kingdom forever. A kingdom of everlasting. Goodness and peace. Please help us now in our dark times.

[28 : 51] To look forward to that. And resolve to live your way. Amen. Amen. Thank you.