

Judgement and Salvation

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[0 : 00] So the reading is from Isaiah chapter 19, which is on page 702. An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight each against another, and each against his neighbour, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.

And the spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out, and I will confound their counsel.

And they will inquire of the idols, and the sorcerers, and the mediums, and the necromancers.

And I will give over to the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master, and a fierce king will rule over them, declares the Lord God of hosts. And the waters of the sea will be dried up, and the river will be dry and parched, and its canals will become foul, and the branches of Egypt's Nile will diminish and dry up.

Reeds and rushes will rot away. There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile, and all that is sown by the Nile will be parched, will be driven away, and will be no more.

[1 : 20] The fishermen will mourn and lament, all who cast a hook in the Nile, and they will languish, who spread nets on the water. The workers in combed flax will be in despair, and the weavers of white cotton.

Those who are the pillars of the land will be crushed, and all who work for pay will be grieved. The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish. The wisest counsellors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel.

How can you say to Pharaoh, I am a son of the wise, a son of ancient kings? Where then are your wise men? Let them tell you that they might know what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt.

The princes of Zoan have become fools, and the princes of Memphis are deluded. Those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have made Egypt stagger. The Lord has mingled within her a spirit of confusion, and they will make Egypt stagger in all its deeds, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit.

And there will be nothing for Egypt that head or tail, palm branch or reed may do. In that day the Egyptians will be like women and tremble with fear before the hand that the Lord of hosts shakes over them, and the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians.

[2 : 39] Everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose that the Lord of hosts has purposed against them. In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts.

One of these will be called the City of Destruction. In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt and a pillar to the Lord at its border.

It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender and deliver them.

And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them.

And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

[3 : 50] In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria, the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.

The second reading is in two parts. The first is starting at chapter 52, starting at verse 13, and that can be found on page 742, and then we're just moving across the page to chapter 53, starting at verse 10.

So Isaiah 52, verse 13. Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.

As many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. So shall he sprinkle many nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. For that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

[5 : 07] And then 53, starting at verse 10. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring.

He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. Thanks very much. Can I encourage you to have sight of the handout, which will be on the back of your service sheets.

They are always useful, but I think for a passage like Isaiah 19, which might not be so familiar to us, I think it will be even more useful for our time together. But before we start, allow me to lead us in prayer.

[6 : 24] Oh Lord, the unsearchable riches of your wisdom and majesty. Father, please would you give us such a huge view of your son, your cross, your wisdom, and your glory from these verses.

Amen. Amen. Self-awareness, of which I have much, I assure you, seems like it's lacking at the moment. Without making any particular comment on the verdict, all of us, I think, have been shocked by the complete lack of self-awareness that Amber Heard has managed to demonstrate. From bizarre facial expressions, like my dog stepped on a bee, to speaking directly to the jury and pretending to write notes right in front of the camera, there seemed, at least from my point of view, a complete lack of any idea about how she comes across.

But if we just limit ourselves for a moment to thinking of the things of Christ and how many people we know, friends and family alike, who lived their entire lives in ignorance of him, well, I think we can be left appalled with the lack of self-awareness that we see on a daily basis.

And I mean specifically the ignorance of man in the face of Jesus. Now, because if you stop for a moment, stop for a moment and think of your friends or family or colleagues and what they live for, what it is that motivates them, gets them out of bed in the morning, and you can realize immediately the immensity of the lack of self-knowledge, self-awareness that we see all around us.

[7 : 57] Living for comfort, how bizarre, given that soon you will be old, frail and ill. Living for wealth, how bizarre, when death is so close for us all. Living for family, how strange, given that in a few generations' time they will not remember you.

Living for self-betterment and improvement, how odd, when you cannot go a week without lying. But this ignorance pales into insignificance, I think, in comparison to their denial of God and Jesus.

Every time, they look in the mirror, they see God's image. Every time, when they're brushing their teeth. Every time, they see the beauty of creation when they wake.

They see the fingerprints of the God who knows them and loved them. In fact, every single good thing that they have, friendship, love, joy, peace, sleep, food, family, rest, is all, even down to the breath in their lungs as they deny him a gift from God.

The God supremely known in the Lord Jesus Christ who sustains them down to that very heartbeat. They live in his world, in his image, in his goodness, completely ignorant of him.

[9 : 14] The ignorance would be breathtaking, wouldn't it, were it not for the fact that it's so mind-numbingly ordinary. Because we see it, and if we're honest with ourselves, we're tempted to join in with it every day.

And so it begs the question, what on earth would it take for man to finally see the one true God?

What on earth would it take for man to finally see the one true God?

Now the world of Isaiah was perhaps even more ignorant of God than ours. Our section is answering the question, how is it the world, including God's sinful people, going to see the one true

God?

How? Assyria and the God-killer king, as we've heard about in previous sermons, is coming to conquer. The world is terrified as all are in the firing line.

And even God's people are seeking desperately a solution anywhere outside of God. Anywhere outside of God. It seems that both pagan and Jew alike, none of them, are seeking after or trusting in God.

[10:22] None of them. So again, the question is pertinent, isn't it? What would it take for sinful man, sinful world, to see, know, finally recognize the one true God?

What would it take? And Isaiah presents us with a strange, very strange, answer. Judgment in two parts.

So point one, judgment that takes everything away. Judgment that takes everything away. Here we see the focus of the oracles against the nation shift to Egypt.

Verse one, an oracle concerning Egypt. And Egypt was one of those nations that Israel thought, maybe I can form an alliance with them. Maybe they can protect me from the judgment to come.

And here, Isaiah gives us a picture of the judgment that is going to come to Egypt.

First of all, it's a judgment that removes all national unity. This is one to four. Have a look down with me. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

[11:32] And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians and they will fight each against another and each against his neighbor. City against city. Kingdom against kingdom.

This is a poetic picture of Assyria coming to destroy. An army that God directs and leads. And imagine, for a second, you're back in that 7th century BC and you're looking out from the walls and you're seeing thousands upon thousands of soldiers with only one aim, your destruction.

Or to go back to an illustration that we've used in the past, imagine being a French soldier on the walls as you see the German horde line up around the walls of Paris. Imagine the terror.

So much so that verse 2, man will turn against man in terror. Man will attack his neighbor. Man will attack one another. Desperate to escape, city will turn on city.

No national loyalty will last because of the certainty of this annihilation. And then it continues, Egypt desperate for some way out, some kind of guidance.

[12:39] Well how about their false gods? How about their idols? Maybe they can save them.

Verse 3, and the spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out and I will confound their counsel and they will inquire of the idols and sorcerers and the mediums and necromancers and I will give them over the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master.

You can imagine them, can't you? Bowing down in front of their fake gods made by their own hands and the gods staring back at them dumb, deaf and mute because they're nothing more than wood and stone.

And they will be given over to slavery when the Lord's judgment comes and those who don't die in the conquest well they're no better off. Verse 4, and I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a hard master and a fierce king who will rule over them declares the Lord God of hosts.

Wilhelm, I don't know his last name, not even sure if that is his first name but I just chose a general generic German name was a German medical student who was drafted in to fight in World War I and he describes the moment that he jumps into a French trench terrified and he sees a young boy probably 16 or 17 French soldier right in front of him and there's this kind of moment of deer in the headlights where they're both staring at each other realising that only one of them is getting out of this and the French soldier begins to fumble with his bayonet and so Wilhelm runs him through and Wilhelm when he was interviewed spoke about how at that moment he realised to himself what is the point of this?

What is German? What is French? What is war? What are we fighting for? Who am I? This is just a boy. I am just a boy. Why is this happening? Why are we fighting?

[14:25] In other words it's a moment isn't it where only at the extremity of human experience does he finally come to his senses. I'm just a boy. He's just a boy. Why am I doing this?

And just like here when the judgement of the Lord finally comes in terror and destruction it will strip back all alliances all semblance of loyalty to one another.

the judgement of Assyria the judgement of the Lord will be so vast so terrifying man will be left with no one to turn to all national unity.

Second all economic structures. So not only will the Lord's judgement strip and destroy all loyalties to one another it will also remove all economic reliance or self-reliance all of it. the coming army verse 5 first will cut off water supply and the waters of the sea will be dried up and the river will be dry and parched and its canals will become foul and the branches of Egypt's Nile will diminish and dry up reeds and rushes will wash away.

[15 : 30] The most essential element for human survival in other words gone and with it obviously food verse 7 there will be bare places by the Nile on the brink of the Nile and all that is sown by the Nile will be parched will be driven away and will be no more the fishermen will mourn and lament all who cast a hook in the Nile and they will languish who spreads nets on the water.

The banks of the Nile was the only place you could grow food in Egypt gone water gone food gone and if the water and food being gone are not enough well of course the whole economy collapses with it too verse 9 and 10 the workers therefore in combed flax will be in despair and the weavers of white cotton those who are the pillars of the land will be crushed and all who work for pay will be grieved all who work for pay will be grieved.

Now the Great Depression which I had the great joy of being forced to study during GCSE history marked perhaps the worst economic collapse in Western history just a few facts between 1929 and 1939 the stock market lost 90% of its value savings gone out the window around 11,000 banks also collapsed financial security gone and by 1933 only four years after it began one in four were unemployed hundreds of thousands in America were evicted from their homes security gone one commentator noted that at the height of the depression that quote an entire nation it seemed was standing in one long bread line desperate for even the barest essentials it was a crisis of monumental proportions it was known as the Great Depression well here is the judgment of God national unity gone economic structures and self-reliance gone and finally a judgment that removes all trust in leadership we're used to

I think if we're honest the idea of a hero or leader saving us we all love the idea of you know dad is the best dad or the voice of the captain in turbulence if you're me don't like flying or marvel superheroes or Winston Churchill or Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair depending on your particular political persuasion we like the idea of a safe pair of hands we're comforted by the idea of it well God wants to take that away and will take that away too verse 11 Zoan is a city in Egypt the princes of Zoan are utterly foolish the wisest counsellors of Pharaoh give stupid counsel in other words the royalty of Egypt have nothing to offer in the face of God's coming judgment counsellors men of industry top intellectual pedigree degrees coming out of every orifice it is worthless their advice is worthless whether you know you're thinking in terms of Amber Heard's lawyers calling objection to their own questions or talking about a bit of makeup that hadn't even come out by the time of the trial or Boris drinking and lying in courts you don't have to go very far to realise that actually having a leader who doesn't know what they're doing is not a pleasant place to be even more so when the greatest army of the ancient age is at your doorstep they have nothing they can offer you nothing the people you want to make an alliance to well they are stupid and so this presents us with a very bleak picture

Benji I thought you started by saying that the question is how are people going to come to know the one true God and so far you've said well by destroying everyone how does that answer the question well this turns me to my second and final point but also a judgement that saves how will the world come to finally see the one true God judgement that takes away everything but also a judgement that saves now I wonder if you felt the jarring nature of these verses when Megan was reading them to us because it sounded like it sounded like Isaiah you were saying that Egypt and Assyria the great enemies of God are going to be saved it sounded like that's what you were saying verse 24 in that day Israel will be a third with Egypt and Assyria a blessing in the midst of the earth whom the Lord of hosts has blessed saying blessed be Egypt my people and Assyria the work of my hands and Israel my inheritance how can that be somehow this coming judgement that takes everything away will somehow result in the nations turning to

[20 : 37] God somehow some way the Lord will not only be the saviour of Israel but also Egypt and Assyria it's so jarring isn't it it makes no sense the nation who put countless of God's people to death the nation that you've just told us you are going to utterly destroy will one day worship that same God as part of that same people how God's judgement will strip everything away but somehow it will also turn blind arrogant man towards the one true God now one of the greatest philosophers of the 21st century an icon of music industry commerce famous for bringing back the

fleece I am of course talking about Kanye West or as he likes to now be called Ye he has no last name now so I apologise for dead naming him he has a very famous quote in one of his songs which is that that don't kill me can only make me stronger and I assure you that the teleological use of the word that wasn't a stammer on my part it is double use of that and it's a very insightful comment that don't kill me can only make me stronger but I guess I would want to ask

Ye as he's now commonly known whilst that might be true Kanye what happens if it does kill you what happens if it does surely then you're not stronger but you're just dead what happens if it does kill you yet here somehow some way that is the case Kanye has been usurped Egypt you will be dead the judgment will take everything away but somehow you'll be stronger I didn't think Kanye would ever get into a sermon there we go so we're left with a problem how can God both save and judge to this extent how can God both save and judge to this extent well we started by noting that the world of Isaiah was unbelievably ignorant of God and here somehow we've stumbled on a solution apparently vicious inescapable humbling judgment what would it take for Isaiah's people in the world to finally see

God well judgment only complete judgment will bring man out of their shocking ignorance of God however this is an answer though that Isaiah doesn't quite spell out for us in this section but he does in the second reading that we had in 52 and 53 so I want us to turn there now Isaiah 52 verse 13 Isaiah 52 verse 13 verses that hopefully will be familiar to many of us Isaiah 52 verse 13 behold my servant shall act wisely he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted as many were astonished at you his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind so shall he sprinkle many nations kings shall shut their mouths because of him for that which has not been told them they see and that which they have not heard they understand

Isaiah's answer how do you judge and yet save at the same time is that you can only do it through the Lord Jesus Christ the servant of God the problem is an ignorant people the solution is judgment but if God judges them how can he also be merciful well because here in Isaiah 52 we see the inescapable vicious all encompassing judgment of God a judgment so devastating that verse 14 kings will shut their mouths because they finally see God as he crushes his servant in their place there that is how God both judges completely and saves completely there and there alone is the Lord God finally seen by arrogant man the cross of Christ is the final picture of God's judgment and salvation now this has so many glorious and desperate implications for us this morning and I want us to just focus in on three although there are only two on your handout but I've added a third the first implication is I want us to think on just the wisdom of our God that God himself because he wants to save us would crush his son in our place he has to pour out judgment that's the only thing that will turn man to see but he also wants to save what a majestic

God we serve but second implication and the first on your handout for the world who does not know God and this is our friends and family well this passage has a lot to say about them but I think it can be summarized in the fact that they are impossibly lost as far as we are concerned it does not matter how good they are moral neighborly kind charitable they are absolutely and completely blind to the one true God in other words friends I just want us to think what does it say about man what does it say about us here that the only thing that could take them from blindness to sight is seeing the one true God crucified on a tree a judgment that removes everything man might put their trust in where are idols when you're looking at Jesus Christ nailed to a piece of wood worthless where is our self sufficiency when you're looking at the Lord

[26 : 37] Jesus Christ nailed to a piece of wood nowhere and where ultimately is any leader that can save us when you are looking at Jesus Christ nailed to a piece of wood nowhere before the cross of Christ there is no longer any excuses one look at our Lord the most beautiful and precious thing to walk this planet and our own bloodstained hands is enough to tell us that no before the cross of Christ there are no excuses all of us before we were saved by the Lord Jesus Christ are arrogant courses walking around thinking we're gods our friends and family are beyond lost in our strength we need the Lord Jesus Christ to unblind them to see the cross only that can show them the one true God I was struck by I like to use this particular book that some of you might have heard of the Valley of Vision it's a beautiful collection of prayers but it has one prayer in it which is all about the blood of the Lord

Jesus Christ and I think it encapsulates what this point is trying to make far better than I ever could so I'd like to share it with you before thy cross I kneel and see the heinousness of my sin my iniquity

that caused thee to be made a curse the evil that excites the severity of divine wrath show me the enormity of my guilt by the crown of thorns the pierced hands and feet the bruised body the dying cries thy blood is the blood of incarnate God it's worth infinite its value beyond all thought yet thy compassions yearn over me thy heart hastens to my rescue thy love endured my curse thy mercy bore my deserved stripes let me walk humbly in the lowest depths of humiliation bathed in thy blood tender of thy conscience triumphing gloriously glory as an heir of salvation it's beautiful isn't it that before the cross you see the wretchedness of your sin yet the glory of Christ that's implication number one for the world that does not know God but finally for us and I think there is a major encouragement here I don't know about you but in those kind of cold moments of the night when you when you're left to think is my Christian faith really true or you might think you know when suffering hits is this really true or when a Christian brother or sister mistreats you or when a loved one walks away and you think is this really true can I really believe this this chapter I think explains to us man's natural state in this fallen world which is complete blindness in other words you are not neutral all of us tend towards blindness doubt and unbelief if the only thing that would save you the only thing that would turn you from blindness to sight is seeing the Lord Jesus Christ crucified well then you and I are very very susceptible to doubt you need you need a miracle of impossible magnitude to have any faith whatsoever seeing the judgment of Christ on your behalf so in those moments that you doubt well know that that is normal very very normal very very human and the best thing that we can look at is the Lord Jesus Christ the judgment of God and our salvation why don't I lead us in prayer father I thank you for these precious verses that show us the state of man's sin that show us the extent that you have to go to for us to see you father thank you that you poured that judgment out on Jesus and not us please would that give us great comfort to know that we truly are saved and reassure us in the waves of doubt amen