

An inescapable day

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Preacher: Andy Meadows

[0 : 00] The reading today is on page 706 in the Church Bibles. It's Isaiah 24. Behold, the Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.

And it shall be as with the people, so with the priest, as with the slave, so with his master, as with the maid, so with her mistress, as with the buyer, so with the seller, as with the lender, so with the borrower, as with the creditor, so with the debtor.

The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered, for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the highest people of the earth languish. The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.

Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left. The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. The mirth of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased.

[1 : 20] The mirth of the lyre is stilled. No more do they drink wine with singing. Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The wasted city is broken down.

Every house is shut up so that no one can enter. There's an outcry in the streets for lack of wine. All joy has grown dark. The gladness of the earth is banished.

Desolation is left in the city. The gates are battered into ruins. For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done.

They lift up their voices. They sing for joy. Over the majesty of the Lord they shout from the west. Therefore in the east, give glory to the Lord. In the coastlands of the sea, give glory to the name of the Lord, the God of Israel.

From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the righteous one. But I say, I waste away, I waste away, woe is me.

[2 : 22] For the traitors have betrayed. With betrayal the traitors have betrayed. Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth. He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit.

And he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken.

The earth is split apart. The earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man. It sways like a hut. Its transgressions lie heavy upon it and it falls and will not rise again.

On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven and the kings of the earth on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit. They will be shut up in a prison.

And after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed. For the Lord of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem. And his glory will be before his elders.

[3 : 24] Good morning everyone. My name is Andy. I'm one of the assistant ministers here. You should have a handout with where we're going on the back.

If you could look at that, that would be great. One of the reasons why at Grace Church we preach consecutively through books of the Bible is so we don't duck chapters like Isaiah 24.

It's a tough chapter, but we need God to speak to us through his words on his terms, however hard it is to hear. With that in mind, let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, please be with us now. Please help us to listen to what you have to say to us. Amen.

Amen. Let me start with a cliché. If you can't beat them, join them. It's a phrase that expresses many people's response to life's challenges.

[4 : 33] When pressure mounts from an opponent, so does the pressure to give up and to join the crowd rather than sticking out. That is particularly true, I think, for Christians experiencing persecution.

Now, the views of the Bible are increasingly unpopular. Whether you talk to our friends or you open a newspaper and we'll find the most balanced of opinions is often opposed to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Now, the news is littered with occasions where Christians do experience persecution, whether that's the more obvious and violent form that we see overseas, or the more subtle kind of legal battles that Christians who want to live and work according to their conscience face.

And so we can feel the light pressure of friends who disagree with us on certain issues. Or the heavier pressure of public bodies vilifying Christians for holding to the teaching of the Bible.

The pressure comes in lots of areas. One of them is on posters behind me, like gender and sexuality. And opposition to Christians who hold biblical views is leading to some to give up on those views and the Christian faith altogether.

[6 : 01] Being a Christian means standing out as a nail with a hammer hurtling towards us.

And so we can hear that nagging voice in our heads. If I can't beat them, join them. Well, that attitude was also dominant when Isaiah spoke.

His prophecy came at a time in the history of God's people when they looked like they were about to be snuffed out. And they're a tiny little nation called Judah, surrounded by the big bullies of the other nations.

The king of God's people at the time, King Ahaz, he had a choice. Trust the Lord or turn elsewhere. And he thinks, if I can't beat them, I'll join them.

And he looks to form an alliance with the mighty Assyria to get rid of the pressure of the surrounding nations. But then he's told Assyria are actually going to turn on you and give you a hard time yourself, leading the people to diverge of extinction.

[7 : 09] And as we've been going through this series, in chapter 13 and 23, they contain prophecies about the surrounding nations. We didn't look at all of them. But essentially, the message is similar each time.

Over and over, God told his people, trust in me. Trust in me for the future. Don't fear the nations. Don't turn to the world for security and hope for the future.

Because I will destroy them. These nations will be defeated. And these empires will collapse. And we've seen that in history. Nobody's booking their holiday to Babylon.

It doesn't exist. And so now in chapter 24, we see these localized judgments. Well, they're the trailer of what's ultimately to come.

A future of universal judgment on the whole earth. And really, this chapter is making one big point on the handout. The Lord will destroy the earth under his righteous judgment.

[8 : 14] It's like in this chapter, Isaiah has put together a little art exhibition. Several word paintings, each one a variation on the theme of God's final judgment.

And by dwelling on each picture individually, we turn and feel the full force of all of them altogether. The whole chapter. And so we're wandering through.

The first picture in the exhibition is of everything desolate. Everything desolate. Have a look at verse one. Behold, the Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate.

And he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. The painting is of a picturesque valley, perhaps your holiday destination.

Picture that place you're going to lifted up and twisted, mangled, destroyed. Inhabitants scattered like crumbs flung from a picnic rug.

[9 : 19] It is complete devastation. Verse three says this. The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered. For the Lord has spoken his word.

Before we allow this to become an imaginary Hollywood middle earth type place. Isaiah's vision is of the real world we inhabit.

Planet earth mentioned 18 times in this chapter. So picture Dulwich. Utterly empty. Utterly plundered.

God twisting the surface of Dulwich Park. Pub in a park gone. Twisting the surface of Lordship Lane. Scattering everyone walking down.

Picture your roads. Your route into school or work. Lifted and turned into a wave of concrete. Emptied and plundered.

[10:21] And just as though everything is included. Everyone is included. Have a look at verse two. And it shall be. As with the people. So with the priest.

As with the slave. So with his master. As with the maid. So with her mistress. As with the buyer. So with the seller. As with the lender.

So with the borrower. As with the creditor. So with the debtor. From the highest. To the lowest.

From the banker. To the busker. The business owner.

To the unemployed. There's no distinction. No favoritism. Now when the Lord decides to act in this way. No one will be able to appeal to their social standing.

Their wealth. Or their career. To save them. Now on this final day in history. No one will be able to stand up and say. I'm a successful businessman. Oh my social media.

[11:17] Spans millions across the world. I've headlined the pyramid stage. Instead verse two. It will be the same. For everyone. And before.

This judgment. On this. In this chapter. Feels disproportionate. God on some. Wrecking ball. Falling down. Rampage. See the cause of it. In verse five.

The earth lies defiled. Under its inhabitants. For they have transgressed the laws. Violated the statutes. Broken. The everlasting covenant.

The chapter is not altogether. Dominated. By the cause of this judgment. But it is clear that this is a judgment. A final reckoning. For the evil of humanity.

Now the Bible is abundantly clear. That we live in a world. That has rejected God. We not lived. In the world he created. In obedience to him.

[12:17] That we've chosen. Instead to rebel against him. As verse five puts it. Transgressed laws. Violated his statutes. Broken. The everlasting covenant.

His promise. His agreement. With all people on the earth. We live our life. Our own way. And the judgment is universal. Because sin.

Is universal. Like dust in the house. It is everywhere. This whole section. Has given us a tour. Of the whole of the Middle East.

And we get a mention of the nations. In verse 13. But now. The whole world is in view. Because the whole world is guilty. Everything. Will be desolate.

And that's the first picture. This we wander through. The second picture. In the gallery. Is of all enjoyment. Stopped. Verse seven to 13. Describes the end.

[13:15] Of a world. That has been out. To enjoy itself. Ignoring God. The picture of wine. Is used throughout. It's a picture here.

Of mourning. So verse seven. The wine mourns. The vine languishes. All the merry hearted sigh. The mirth of the tambourines. Is stilled. The noise.

Of the jubilant. Has ceased. The mirth of the lyre. Is stilled. No more. Do they drink wine. With singing. Strong drink. Is bitter. To those who drink it. The wasted city. Is broken down.

Every house. Is shut up. So that none. Can enter. There is an outcry. In the streets. For the lack of wine. All joy. Has grown dark. The gladness. Of the earth. Is banished.

We saw a little. A small picture. Of this. When all the pubs. And clubs. Were closed. Because of covid. And yet. This goes. Infinitely. Further. All joy.

[14:11] Has grown dark. The gladness. Of the earth. Is banished. A picture. Of judgment. On a world. That has turned. It's back. On God. Living to excess. But when the lord.

Comes. The party's over. Everything is bare. Empty. Mournful. And just in case. It hasn't come through.

Already. Isaiah is. Painfully explicit. That there is no escape. That's the third picture. In Isaiah's exhibition. Escape. Impossible.

Verse 17. Terror. And the pit. And the snare. Are upon you. O inhabitants. Of the earth. He who flees. At the sound.

Of the terror. Shall fall. Into the pit. And he who climbs. Out of the pit. Shall be caught. In the snare. For the windows. Of heaven. Are opened. And the foundations.

[15:04] Of the earth. Tremble. The earth. Is utterly broken. The earth. Is split. Apart. The earth. Is violently shaken. The earth. Staggers. Like a drunken man.

It sways. Like a hut. Its transgression. Lies heavy. Upon it. And it falls. And will not rise. Again. There is no escape.

As we've. As thought about. Already. In this service. No escape. From the judgment. To come. Those who hear the terror. Will make her run. For it. When 18.

Says. They will fall. Into a pit. And those who manage. To get themselves. Out of the pit. What happens to them? They get caught. In a snare. No escape. Perhaps we can.

Remember. The rescue. Of the. The Thai football team. Trapped in the cave. In 2018. It was an amazingly. Complex operation. But. Imagine. If it was. Already harder.

[15:59] Than it was. Imagine. At the edge. Of the case system. There was an active volcano. So lava. And fumes. To contend with. And then on top of that.

An earthquake. Going on. Those who survived. The cave system. Well. They would have been taken out. By the volcano. Now those who survived. The volcano. Would surely have been taken out.

By the earthquake. That is the picture here. In verses 17 and 18. Escape. Impossible. And verse 18. Then carries us.

To the time of Noah. To the. The flood. That buried the whole earth. With the phrase. That the windows of heaven. That Isaiah speaks of. It's deliberately evocative.

Of that downpour. Recorded in Genesis. But Isaiah goes further. Because he just doesn't. Talk about. A flood. But the foundations.

[16:54] Of the earth. Trembling. It's like Noah's flood. Has a big brother. And he comes. Rocketing through the earth. With flood and earthquake. And there is no. Escape.

Why do we need to hear this? I guess. Because for many. The challenge is to simply believe. This day is actually.

Coming. How rarely. We let these. Realities feature. Into our thinking. Life is busy. So we need to keep.

Hearing it. We need to hear this. Because we can. Just. Can struggle. To believe this judgment. Is warranted. And we have nice friends.

We have lovely neighbors. Are we as humanity. Really. In such dire straits. That this judgment. Is coming. Or indeed necessary.

[17:53] Yet. That is exactly. How God. Sees things. Everyone is guilty. Verse six. And so everyone. Must suffer.

For their guilt. And so we need. To see the world. How God. Sees the world. Yes. There is still beauty. Yes. Most people. Aren't as bad. As they could be.

But it is defiled. Verse five. All because. We have turned. Our backs. On the righteous. And loving God. Maybe we struggle.

To believe. What Isaiah says. Because it does. Feel like something. Out of a Hollywood movie. The film industry. Has produced. Many. Doomsday scenarios.

As how the world. May end. Massive. Meteors. Like in the film. Armageddon. Nuclear. Annihilation. Like Dr. Strangelove.

[18:48] Pandemic. Mutant viruses. Like I am legend. Global warming. Like the day after tomorrow. Robots from the future. Like Terminator. But. And not. But not. And last of all.

Manilevant aliens. Like War of the Worlds. And Independence Day. And because of these. Overabundance. Of films. Perhaps.

We just don't. Think. The Bible's message. Is real. It gets drowned out. Seen as far fetched. Put firmly. In the fiction category.

And ignored. As anything more. But the Bible is very clear. Isaiah is not talking about a fictional middle earth. But the actual. Planet earth.

We need to keep hearing this. Because perhaps we. We struggle to believe it. Because it hasn't happened yet. It's now been. 2,700 years.

[19:46] Since Isaiah's prophecy. And that's not a new problem. The Apostle Peter. Wrote about it. To the church. In his day. I'll put the verses on the handout.

And they. Hopefully be on the screen. To Peter 3. And they will say. Where is the promise. Of this coming. For ever since the fathers. Fell asleep. All things are continuing.

As they were. From the beginning. Of creation. Maybe we have encountered. Similar thinking from others. Or think this. Way ourselves. Where is this judgment? Life is just going on as normal. It's just going round and round. Isn't it? In fact. With Top Gun. In the cinema. Kate Bush. At number one. And rising tensions. With Russia. It feels like we're back to 1986. Again. Life just goes round. And round. Where is this coming? But verse five. Of 2 Peter. For they deliberately.

[20 : 44] Overlooked this fact. That the heavens existed long ago. And the earth was formed out of water. And through water. By the word of God. And that by means of these. The world. That then existed.

Was deluged with water. And perished. But by the same word. The heavens and the earth. That now exist. Are stored up for fire. Being kept until the day of judgment. And destruction of the ungodly.

Both Isaiah and Peter. Allude to the floods. Back in the time of Noah. The last time. Judgment was experienced. By everyone. And everything. And so.

Isaiah and Peter. Say look at God's actions. In the past. He has done it before. He will certainly do it. Again. All those nations.

We spoke about. Chapter 13 and 23. They were destroyed. So we can be sure. Chapter 24. Will. Happen. We also need to hear this.

[21 : 45] Because. The less we believe. This day is coming. The more vulnerable. We are to feel intimidated. By the opposition around us. The more vulnerable.

We are to the rising tide. Of public opposition. Towards Christians. The closer we then get to. If I can't beat them. Join them. Giving up.

On God. Altogether. You see. The powers. In Isaiah's day. Looked very powerful. Very intimidating. And it is the same.

For us today. The powers of nations. Secularism. Are people higher up. In a company. You can end your career. For saying the wrong thing. But as we've seen.

Over the past few weeks. Everything. Will all come crashing down. Like a demolition job. And when we see afresh. Where this world is headed. We see that God's opponents.

[22 : 44] Are not powerful opponents. To be feared. And joined. But those destined for judgment. For whom we must pray. And so as we look around.

Isaiah's. Art exhibition. We are in effect. Hearing a loving warning. From the Lord God. Every time we pull up. In a car park. And our children get out of the car.

We say to them. Hold my hand. Be careful of the cars. I don't say that to scare them. But to warn them. Of a very real danger. That could ruin their lives.

Or potentially end their lives. Well God. The father. He's a better father. Than any of us. He's repeated that message. To his children. Israel. Over and over again.

Just as I warn. My children. Over and over again. The same thing. God says. Don't put your. To put your trust in me. Don't look elsewhere.

[23 : 43] Because everything. Is being stored up for fire. That is the consistent message. Of the Bible. With the prophets. The apostles. And as Ben said earlier.

The Lord Jesus himself. Speaking about this. And for those of us. Who wouldn't call ourselves. Christians. Followers of Jesus. It may feel. That the world is.

Stuck on repeat. Going round. And round. With not a lot changing. But Isaiah 24. Screams at us. That history is not a circle. But a straight line.

And it has. An end point. The earth. Is headed. For destruction. Under God's judgment. And everyone is included. The buyer. The seller. The maid.

The mistress. Because we have all. Broken God's laws. And although we don't like. Thinking about that. We need to keep hearing. The warning.

[24 : 37] But there is hope. There is hope. And we get a hint of it. In verse 13 to 16. Have a look at verse 13 with me.

For thus it shall be. In the midst of the earth. Among the nations. As when an olive tree. Is beaten. As at the gleaning. When the grape harvest. Is done. Now I've never.

Harvested. Olives. But I'm told you do it. By beating a tree. With a stick. To make the olives. Fall. By the end. Of the harvesting. The olives.

Are falling off the tree. But serve many of the leaves. And they said. The tree looks like. In a sorry state. But as with. Any harvest. Some are left over. And some olives.

Are left on the tree. And some grapes. Are left over. After the vintage. Is over. And the ones. Left. When this harvest. At the end of time.

[25 : 31] Happens. When the Lord. Comes to judge. Are those who have remained. Faithful. To God. And it's those. Their voices. We hear. In verse 14 to 16. Verse 14.

They lift up their voices. They sing for joy. Over the majesty. Of the Lord. They shout from the west. Therefore in the east. Give glory to the Lord. In the coastlands. Of the sea. Give glory.

To the name of the Lord. The God of Israel. From the ends. Of the earth. We hear songs. Of praise. Of glory. To the righteous one. There will be some people.

Who survive the judgment. Who sing the praises. Of the God of Israel. And did you spot. What they're singing about. Verse 14. God's majesty. Verse 15.

God's glory. Verse 16. His righteousness. While we. See. This destruction. Across the earth. Actually from the perspective. Of those who God has rescued.

[26 : 30] They strikingly say. How wonderful. This is good. Over the next two weeks. We'll explore. Explore that more. In chapters 25 and 26. Please do.

Come back. But for now. When someone. And someone. Something terrible. Happens in the world. We often wonder. Why didn't God. Do anything about it.

Why doesn't he do something. And we want God. To put wrongs right. This chapter says. He will. And sometimes people say. Well I can't believe in a God.

He doesn't care about evil. And we want God. To be righteous. This chapter. Says he is. He won't just ignore.

All the evil. That's going on in the world. He is the good. Loving judge. That we thought about. With the children. Earlier in the service. That's the good news.

[27 : 25] Of these verses. Justice will be done. That is why. Some are rejoicing on that day. When it happens. There. Will be a world. That rises from the ashes.

Of this one. And it will be a world. Full of people. Who sing praises. To this good. Righteous. Holy God. Who could not. And will not. Tolerate.

Evil. In the world. That he made. How then do people. Escape this destruction. This chapter points to. After all.

Verse six is clear. People must bear their guilt. Unless. There is someone. Who can bear our guilt. For us. That is actually. The brilliant news.

Of the book. Of Isaiah. Later. On. Isaiah. We'll go on. To speak. Of someone. Who will bear our guilt. Who he calls. The servant.

[28 : 16] Of the Lord. And we know him. As the Lord Jesus. The one who served the Lord. And served his people. Bearing our guilt. As he died on the cross.

Taking our punishment. We deserve. For transgressing his laws. Breaking. The eternal covenant. Not living God's ways. And. Through putting our trust.

In his death. We have. A glorious prospect. To look forward to. Let's end on. Verse 23. Then the moon.

Will be confounded. The sun. Ashamed. For the Lord. Of hosts. Reigns on Mount Zion. And in Jerusalem. And his glory.

Will be before his elders. Here is then. Is the. The poetic description. Of the Lord God. Ruling his restored people. And with such glory. And brightness. That the sun.

[29 : 11] And moon. Blush. How feeble they are. In comparison. And so. In the face of opposition. When the world. Feels big. And intimidating.

For those following Jesus. Having this. Future. Fixed in our minds. Will keep us. At firmly. Trusting. In the Lord.

Until he comes. Let's pray together. Father. Father. We confess. That we don't like.

Hearing. Often. The words of. Chapters like Isaiah 24. Please. Strike us afresh. With what you have just said to us. Please convince us.

Of this future. And help us to trust. In you alone. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.