

# Lord of the nations: a beautiful day

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Preacher: Benji Cook

[ 0 : 0 0 ] In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah. We have a strong city. He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.

Open the gates that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. You keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. For he has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city. He lays it low, lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust.

The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy. The path of the righteous is level. You make level the way of the righteous. In the path of your judgments, O Lord, we wait for you.

Your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for you in the night. My spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

[ 1 : 0 5 ] If favour is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness. In the land of uprightness, he deals corruptly and does not see the majesty of the Lord. O Lord, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see it.

Let them see your zeal for your people and be ashamed. Let the fire for your adversaries consume them. O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, for you have indeed done for us all our works.

O Lord, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone we bring to remembrance. They are dead. They will not live. They are shades.

They will not arise. To that end, you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them. But you have increased the nation, O Lord.

You have increased the nation. You are glorified. You have enlarged all the borders of the land. O Lord, in distress they sought you. They poured out a whispered prayer when your discipline was upon them.

[ 2 : 0 6 ] Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord. We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind.

We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy.

For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. Come, my people, enter your chambers and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by.

For behold, the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain.

In that day, the Lord, with his hard and great and strong sword, will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent.

[ 3 : 09 ] Leviathan, the twisting serpent. And he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. In that day, a pleasant vineyard, sing of it.

I, the Lord, am its keeper. Every moment I water it, lest anyone punish it. I keep it night and day. I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briars to battle.

I would march against them. I would burn them up together. Or let them lay hold of my protection. Let them make peace with me. Let them make peace with me.

In days to come, Jacob shall take root. Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit. Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them?

Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain? Measure by measure, by exile you contended with them. He removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the east wind.

[ 4 : 16 ] Therefore, by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for. And this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin, when he makes all the stones of the altars, like chalk stones crushed to pieces.

No asherim or incense altars will remain standing. For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness. There the calf grazes.

There it lies down and strips its branches. When its boughs are dry, they are broken. Women come and make a fire of them. For this is a people without discernment.

Therefore, he who made them will not have compassion on them. He who formed them will show them no favour. In that day, from the river Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, the Lord will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel.

And in that day, a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria, and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt, will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

[ 5 : 30 ] When will Christians be victorious? That's the question we're going to be thinking about this morning. When will Christians be victorious? I was speaking to one member of the church family this week, and they were telling me about just how discouraged and difficult they were finding sharing their faith and being a Christian.

People ignoring them at the school gates, a joy of which I've not had yet, but I'm sure will come. On rejecting their invitations to Christian things again and again, and just a general anxiety on how much to push or say or do.

I imagine this is common for many of us. I know that this is common, actually, for many of us. The workplace encouraging you not to share your faith. The family member who turns away from believing in Jesus, or perhaps never believed in Jesus to begin with.

The Lord who we follow and love, yet we see so many people with everything, particularly in a place like Dulwich, living in ignorance of him, and happy to be doing so.

We might be left thinking, how on earth can God win in a situation like this? The gods of materialism, secularism, tick-tock and personal spirituality, well, they're just so powerful, aren't they?

[ 6 : 45 ] And we and our God in our little school, we feel so very helpless. So perhaps this morning, as a Christian, you're feeling tired. Very, very tired.

And I can actually see people's faces from here this morning, so because of the heat, I'm sure some of you are feeling tired for other reasons. But perhaps you're tired of seeing the world ignore God. Tired of feeling impotent.

Tired of feeling far from him in your own walk. The world seems to do very, very well, Benji, thank you very much, ignoring God. And we can be left thinking, when will God be victorious?

When will we be victorious? And this question, when will God's people and God be victorious, would have been highly pertinent to God's people. We've been seeing, haven't we, over and over, that Assyria, the war juggernaut, is barreling towards them, and not a single nation has stood against them.

In fact, even the northern kingdom, gone forever. So, Isaiah is making absolutely clear, does not matter if you are Jewish, does not matter if you are God's people, you are not exempt from this judgment.

[ 7 : 52 ] And as Assyria draws closer and closer, annihilating every nation as it does, you can well imagine God's people looking out from the walls, and thinking to themselves, when?

When on earth will God do something? Our section 13 to 27 has been building to this great day, this great day of the Lord, and here we finally come to its climax.

This day is the day when God will be victorious, and when the world will be put to judgment. And notice with me that this day is all over these verses. So, 26 verse 1, in that day, the song will be sung in the land of Judah.

27 verse 1, in that day, the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish the Leviathan and fleeing servant. Chapter 2, 27 verse 2, again, in that day, 27 verse 6, 27 verse 12, 27 verse 13, in that day, in that day, in that day.

And these two chapters that come at the end of our section, 26 and 27, well, they straddle that day. 26 is before, 27 is after. Just to show you that, have a look with me at 26 verse 9.

[ 9 : 03 ] My soul yearns for you in the night. My spirit within me earnestly seeks you. In other words, I'm waiting, Lord. I want you to act.

And 27 verse 12 to 13, in that day, from the river Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, the Lord will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel.

And this is in, this is afterwards. So here, Isaiah gives us his answer. When God will be victorious finally, chapter 27, and what are we supposed to do as God's people in the meantime?

Chapter 26. And that leads me to my first point, long for God to act in judgment. Long for God to act in judgment.

Do you mind just going to the next slide? Is that okay? Long for God to act in judgment. Isaiah wants to make absolutely clear, right from the off in these verses, that God's victory is certain and coming.

[ 10 : 02 ] He begins with a victory song. Do you see that? In 26 verse 1, in that day, this song will be sung in the land of Judah. And it's a victory song. Verse 5, he's humbled the inhabitants of the height.

Verse 6, the foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy. This is a song celebrating the strength of Jerusalem, their city, in the face of Assyria. And it's a plucky song.

We as the English, we actually have a song like this. I wonder if that came to mind, the English in the room. So this is a cultural experience of those of us who aren't English. We have a song. It's the 1996 classic, Football's Coming Home.

Blank Faces. I think it's probably Blank Faces because football actually has never come home. So even though there are jam members and eagle members I know are in the room today, this song is older than you.

And sadly, this song has never become true. Football has never come home. But it is a plucky song, isn't it? One day I'm sure it will be true. But it is sort of, in a bizarre way, exactly like that.

[ 11 : 00 ] Isaiah wants us to know, he gives us a song, a victory song, that one day, we will be victorious. One day, we will win. And we can long for that victory in absolute certainty because this Christian, this Jew, and the face of Assyria is the song you will sing when that happens.

You can be certain. And I wonder if we believe this, that God will certainly be victorious. If we return to that conversation with my friends that I was talking, that I mentioned, the temptation for him, I think, I imagine, is to give up living distinctly for the Lord in the workplace or at school, to give up telling people about him or going on in the Christian faith.

Or perhaps, for the mother with the non-Christian children here, we might be thinking, is God really actually in control? Is he really if my son or daughter doesn't believe in Jesus?

Many of us in the church family have been going through bereavement and illness, and we might be left thinking, really, is God going to win? Really, is God victorious?

Or yet, we might have had just another rejection of evangelism at school or in the workplace and that age-old tiredness sets in, doesn't it? Is God really all-powerful when I keep getting rejected?

[ 12 : 26 ] Well, here, Christians, is your victory anthem. We will all sing it. Every interaction we go into, we can have absolute assurance of his victory.

So let us long for that day of victory. Verse 1 again, we have a strong city. He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. And we're going to be rattling quite quickly through these verses.

You notice, they're probably two very big readings, they're probably slightly daunted, so we're going to move on to 7 to 15. So we've seen that God is going to be victorious, and in 7 to 15, we see why we can have assurance of this because of what God's judgment will achieve.

And we see the problem of our world beautifully encapsulated in verse 10. I was struck immensely by this verse in prep. Verse 10 of 26, if favour is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness.

In the land of uprightness, he deals corruptly and does not see the majesty of the Lord. I don't think I could come up with a better verse in one verse that encapsulates the mindset of many of my friends and much of my family.

[ 13 : 34 ] In other words, if man does well in this life, if man is prospering whilst living for themselves, why on earth would they ever acknowledge God? Why on earth would they acknowledge God?

What does God have to offer them? And it can be so frustrating, can't it? We have many of us around us, very successful friends and family who don't live for the Lord Jesus and we long for God.

We long for God to show them what their actual state is before them and we see Isaiah longing for that himself in verse 9. Have a look with me. My soul yearns for you in the night.

My spirit within me earnestly seeks you for when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. In other words, Isaiah is saying, God, please come and judge.

Please come and judge. I am so tired of seeing the world ignore you. I want them to wake up. Please come and judge. And again, you can think about the Assyrians putting hundreds of thousands of people to the sword and you can well imagine empathising with Isaiah and thinking, yes, actually, I would like you to come and judge.

[ 14 : 48 ] Open Doors recently released some statistics about Christian persecution in the world. 360 million of our brothers and sisters in Christ live in highly persecuted areas.

5,898 Christians were killed last year for their faith. That's well over 20 a day. 5,000 Christians at the moment are being held without trial and without cause in prisons all over the world.

And over 5,100 churches were completely destroyed last year in terrorist attacks. Very easy for us, I think, in that situation to long for God to come in judgment, isn't it?

Please, God, when will you come and save our persecuted brothers and sisters? But I wonder if we think the same way of our non-believing friends and family here in Dulwich.

I can imagine we might feel very, very uncomfortable at the idea of longing for their judgment. Much easier, I think, to long for the judgment of dictators out there.

[ 15 : 49 ] Very difficult to long for the judgment of people here. But I want to suggest that it is a comfort for the Christian. It is a comfort for the Christian to know that God will not leave the mocking of his name and people unpunished.

He won't. Those that prosper in this life yet ignore their creator, those that mock the Christian for wasting their Sundays at church, those that label us bigoted and hateful for teaching sexual purity and right to life, those that roll their eyes at us when we try to mention Jesus, those that use the name of our Lord as a swear word, and those that encourage teaching sin and vile worldviews to our children, one day, one day, they will see the Lord in judgment.

They will. Verse 14 and 15. They are dead. They will not live. They are shades. They will not arise. To that end, you have visited them with destruction and wiped out all remembrance of them.

But you have increased the nation, O Lord. You have increased the nation. You are glorified. You have enlarged all the borders of the land. We should long for that coming judgment. That is a picture of what every Christian wants.

That is a great comfort. And finally, 16 to 21 in chapter 26 brings home that really this needs to be God's work. This can't be our own. This can't be our own.

[ 17 : 15 ] 16 to 18. O Lord, in distress they sought you. They poured out a whispered prayer when your discipline was upon them. This is God's people being spoken about. Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord.

We were pregnant, we'd write, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. In other words, we are helpless as God's people.

We can't do this. We can't bring deliverance in the world. We can't make people worship the one true God. And I think anyone who's tried to tell their friends at school about Jesus or their work colleagues knows that.

So Isaiah wants to make absolutely clear that all the Christian can do is wait and long for that judgment to come. Have a look with me at 20 and 21.

Come, my people, enter your chambers and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by. For behold, the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity and the earth will disclose the bloodshed on it and will no more cover its slain.

[ 18 : 26 ] Humanity has failed to bring deliverance but God won't. And the illustration, one of a pregnant woman giving birth, I'm not going to pretend to know what that's like. Don't worry.

I'm not going to start trying to patronize all the women here. But many of you know that I am about to become a father which is very exciting and last week I felt the baby kick for the first time which is very, very exciting.

And because I'm not very good with emotion I was kind of like oh my gosh huge existential crisis. I really want to meet my child. I really want to hold my child and see them and suddenly you feel this immense sense of love for someone you've never met and you don't know how to process it and it's all very terrifying.

But the problem is I can't do anything. I can massage my wife's feet which I've not done yet. I can help her out. I can do the house chores etc. But I am utterly helpless until this baby is born.

Utterly helpless. All I can do is long for the day when I finally get to meet my child. And that's exactly the image here. All that the Christian can do is long for the day when God will finally come and redeem them.

[ 19 : 32 ] And now we're going to move on to my second and final point. Long for the coming judgment of God because only then only then will Christians be victorious and we're going to be in chapter 27 now for the rest of our time.

Why is it now that we need that day? Well have a look with me at verse 1-2 we're going to rattle through the things that God will provide for his people. Verse 1-2 Finally in that day Assyria will be defeated.

In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent Leviathan the twisting serpent and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. Verse 1 Assyria will be gone.

Verse 2-6 We get another vineyard song but a very different one. In that day a pleasant vineyard sing of it I the Lord am its keeper every moment I water it lest anyone punish it I keep it night and day I have no wrath would that I had thorns and briers to battle I would march against them I would burn them up together or let them lay hold of my protection or let them make peace with me let them make peace with me In days to come Jacob shall take root Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruits In other words there are no enemies anymore would that God would be able to defend his people would that they need to ask him for help they won't there won't be any enemies anymore And verse 9 Finally we will see that all the false gods will be destroyed Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob oh no sorry measure by sorry 9b When he makes all the stone of the altars like chalk stones crushed to pieces no asherim or incense altars will remain standing for the fortified city is solitary

In other words there won't be a need anymore for a defence budget There won't be a need anymore for false gods I was doing a bit of research this week and I found out that the world last year spent 2 trillion dollars on defence Now I don't know how big a number a trillion is I'm sure there's some jam maths nerds here that can tell me how big a trillion is Is it a thousand billion?

[ 21 : 34 ] I'm looking at it is a thousand billion okay it's a lot I'm getting a lot of blank faces back yeah no idea a thousand billion we'll go with a thousand billion it's a lot and last year the whole world spent 2 trillion on defence but then I was also intrigued to think I wonder how much the world spent on aid and it was 178 billion which is less than 5% I think if my maths is right it's a lot less but the point that God wants to make here is that one day there won't be any need for defence or actually aid spending either that one day when God rises in the world all false gods all threats to God's people completely gone and all God's people will be able to return to him in perfect peace verse 12 and 13 in that day from the river Euphrates to the brook of Egypt the Lord will thresh out the grain and you will be gleaned one by one on people of Israel and in that day a great trumpet will be blown and those who are lost in the land of Assyria and those who are driven out of the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem in other words the picture of Isaiah 2 will finally have been achieved when the Lord rises in judgement

Assyria gone false gods gone fear of invasion gone finally surely God's people will worship in perfect peace when God does this to Assyria surely they will and I think we know this to be true when we take a look at how missionaries have operated throughout the years one of my favourite biographies of all time is by a man called Joseph Fraser who wrote a book called Beyond the Ranges Joseph Fraser was an Englishman and he wanted to reach the Lisu tribe in China they were 0.0% Christian wasn't a single Christian over 3 million of them and by the time by the end of Joseph Fraser's ministry Christianity was Lisu's official religion to say that there will be hundreds of thousands of people in heaven because of this man is an understatement but what was striking I found as I was reading his account was that he said that the Lisu who converted from their religion and they worshipped animism which is spirits devils and angels and every single one of them had a little altar to spirits in their home and every day they would give food and money and burn it in front of the altar to appease the gods so that they wouldn't be mistreated and what Fraser found was that only the Lisu who destroyed the altar in their home would go on being a Christian that every single other Lisu family that wouldn't destroy the altar upon conversion would within a year renege on their faith in other words we need a solution where every single false god is utterly destroyed and Isaiah is suggesting that perhaps that's Assyria perhaps that's Assyria perhaps that will achieve it except we know that's not true don't we

I wonder how many of you before we started this Assyria series and Isaiah series sorry even knew that Assyria was a thing in the Bible I didn't before I started studying Isaiah so don't worry we don't celebrate Assyria day as Christians we're not like yeah can't wait for the Assyria holidays as opposed to Christmas holidays that is not what Christians do because what we're seeing is Isaiah is making the point that the picture in 27 if it's just about Assyria was not enough that's not enough to achieve the picture that God wants we need something far far bigger we need something even bigger than Assyria we need a bigger judgement the astute among you will notice that I skipped verses 7 to 9a because here Isaiah gives us a glimpse into the kind of judgement that the world needs have a look with me at 7 to 9a this is God talking about his people

Isaiah talking about his people has he God struck them Israel as he struck those who struck them or have they been slain as their slaves were slain measure by measure by exile you contended with them he removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the east wind therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin it is the judgement of the Lord Jesus Christ that Isaiah is longing for in these verses because has the Lord struck them as he who those has he struck them as he struck those who struck them in other words has God treated his people as he treated Assyria no because he struck the Lord Jesus Christ instead has the Christian verse 7 again been slain as the slayers were slain no because in Christ we live move and have our being was Assyria enough to destroy all the false gods that we see being destroyed in verse 9 be like chalk stones crushed to pieces no

Assyria or incense altars will remain standing no only in the Lord Jesus Christ will all false gods be destroyed and was Assyria judgment enough to atone for people's sin no only in the Lord Jesus Christ will the guilt of Jacob be atoned for we long for judgment because then the Christian will be victorious and in a sense we know don't we as Christians that that judgment has already happened in the Lord Jesus Christ we rejoice that he is vindicated sins atoned for world defeated so when we're tempted as Christians to feel discouraged in this walk and there are many many reasons for us to feel discouraged remember remember the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross because he is the guarantee that one day the picture of 27 will come to full fruition when Jesus returns again so if I was to return as we close to my conversation with my friend that I had this week the one that's feeling immensely discouraged

[ 27 : 43 ] I would want him to know that my prayer for him is to see Jesus and not in the classic Sunday school just Jesus is the answer kind of way but specifically that the judgment of Jesus on the cross is the guarantee of Isaiah 27 in the future just like the judgment of Assyria is the guarantee of Isaiah 27 so too is the Lord Jesus Christ one day for the Christian the striving the battle the rejection the suffering will all be over one day it will all be over and the Lord and his people will be victorious now in terms of application I think first it's important to address those here who wouldn't call themselves a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ because I want to say that these verses they're not for you they're not even close actually to being for you in fact I was grieved to think of my friends and family who don't know the

Lord Jesus given that these verses are true I want us to return to 26 verse 21 for behold the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity and the earth will disclose the bloodshed on it and will no more cover its slain non Christians in the room those who wouldn't call themselves a follower of Jesus I want you to note the certainty in these words the Lord is coming he will punish the earth will no more cover its slain there is a reality that if you go your whole life ignoring the Lord Jesus Christ if you use his name as a swear word if you live in a world that he made in his image with the good things that he has given you and you mock or ignore Christians and the message that they bring you there will be a day when the Lord will rise against you in judgment that is certain utterly certain and if you want certainty for it look at

Assyria look at the cross God's judgment is coming please take seriously the claims of Jesus to those of us who are struggling in the Christian faith and I know that there are many of us in this room who are struggling whether or not it's with friends and family turning away from Jesus struggling with whether or not it's suffering in this life through illness or rejection it will one day be over it will one day be over the picture in 27 is ours and it is coming and finally to us just as a Christian family in the room I want you to know that you can't lose you can't lose there are no risks with our God one day this picture of the world being brought to account and God's people being protected forever that is our heritage that is ours so that should hopefully give us great confidence that as we find the peaks and troughs of

Christian experience and there are some very big troughs and hopefully some even greater peaks we can know with absolute certainty what our future holds and that is a great comfort for us why don't I lead us in prayer dear lord i thank you that one day you will rise in judgment i thank you that you won't let the world continue to ignore you father please bring sinners home please convict their hearts of this coming judgment and would they throw themselves on the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and would you sustain us Christians in our love and adoration of you so that we can make it until the end Amen