

Isaiah - Talk 4

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[0 : 00] Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines.

He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done for it?

When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured.

I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed and briars and thorns shall grow up.

[1 : 07] I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. David Fitzgerald in his book Ten Christian Myths That Show Jesus Never Existed had this to say about the Gospels.

So this is the state of the supposed Gospels, four contradictory, convoluted and reworked writings set down decades after the supposed events by unknown author or authors, falsely being passed off as eyewitnesses and all primarily derived from a single source, which, as we'll see, appears to be entirely literary fiction.

On the person of Jesus, the American Atheist Society published an article in 2019 stating that, and I quote, there is absolutely nothing to the evidence that Jesus ever existed.

We have not, of course, proved that Jesus did not exist. We've only showed that all evidence alleged to support such a claim is without substance. Now, whilst both of these statements are patently untrue and breathtaking in their arrogance, they do evidence a growing trend in Western society that mocks and scorns the idea of Jesus and the Bible.

But it isn't just in academic circles that this kind of ugly dismissal is growing. In popular music, I understand that taking the name of the Lord in vain has become the second most popular lyric behind, I suppose, ironically, the word love.

[2 : 54] And all of us know that for the majority of people, the name of Christ is not the sweet aroma of eternal life, but a swear word, reduced to simply a dirty word for when you're frustrated.

Now, it goes without saying, I hope, that for Christians, hearing the name of our Saviour and the primary love of our life used as a cuss word is distressing. But what will God do about it?

What is God's response to David Fitzgerald's book, the American Atheist Society's articles, or the mockery of Jesus' name that our society and friends and family find so easy?

But this, I really want to get across, and I think this is important, this is far more than just a fence. Because Jesus is the means by which God has offered his salvation to the whole world.

Jesus is Lord and King, yes, but he is also yours and mine only means of salvation. He is God's final word on how human beings can be saved and have a relationship with him.

[4 : 02] So it is much worse than simple offence to reject the Lord Jesus. Jesus is King, but he is also the only means to salvation.

God has declared once and for all to the whole world his salvation plan. He has literally raised Jesus from the dead on the cross, and he's given everyone the opportunity to be saved.

God has given humanity all the proof they need to be trusted, that he is trusted to save them. And so it begs the question, when God has done everything to save humanity, everything to the point of even offering his own son on the cross, and humanity still mocks and rejects him, what will God do about it?

What will he do? For our initial readers, they would have seen the salvation of God in a very visceral and obvious way. As mentioned over the last couple of weeks, Judah has been besieged by Assyria, and they've been defeated.

Two Kings records that the Lord slew 180,000 Assyrian warriors and turned them back at the gates of Jerusalem, defeating their enemy for them and giving them salvation.

[5 : 20] Imagine what it would have been like to be there and to see that work of salvation. Returning to our illustration that we've used to get this across, I want you to put your French berets back on, or your yellow jackets, as I think they wear probably more commonly now.

And you're looking out over the German army, you pray for God's deliverance, and suddenly you see half of the Nazi forces drop dead. And the rest turn in fear and flee from Paris, and the German nation disintegrates because of that one prayer.

That is the saving work that Judah would see that is predicted here in 4 and 5. They would be able to look out on the city walls and literally see the saving work of their God turning their enemy away before their very eyes.

It's worth saying as an aside, and I've actually gone and seen this myself, the British Museum has many artefacts that actually detail this very specific military campaign. If you're into history nerd stuff like me, you can actually go and see pictorial depictions of this war and all the different conquests that's outlined in the rest of Isaiah.

And you can also see historical evidence of Assyria being turned back at Jerusalem's walls. It's a fun outing. This was a real outrageous act of salvation in history that the initial readers would have seen with their own eyes.

[6 : 45] And can you imagine if they were still to reject God after such an act? How would God have felt about it? God has given them all the proof they need, and more, to trust in him.

Surely, the people on the walls of Judah would trust in the Lord. And what would God do if they did not? Now this brings me on to my first point.

God has done everything to save Jerusalem, but they still reject him. God has done everything to save Jerusalem, but they still reject him.

Now chapter 5 begins with a song, which spans from verse 1 to 7. This song is then explained in the rest of the verses of the chapter. For the sake of time, we're just going to focus on the song. You're probably grateful for that.

But do have a read of the rest of the chapter if you would like. The scene is set in verse 1. Have a look with me. Let me sing for my beloved, my love concerning his vineyard.

[7 : 47] My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. Isaiah is singing of his beloved, the Lord, and he describes how his Lord has a vineyard set on a very fertile hill.

If you remember from our time in the beginning of this series in chapter 2, hills and mountains are metaphors for nations. So here we see the nation of Israel, characterized as a vineyard that the Lord loves.

And the Lord has done everything for this vineyard. Have a look with me at verse 2. He dug it and cleared it up stones and planted it with choice vines.

He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. And he doubles down even more on this in verse 4. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?

As far as God is concerned, he's done everything he possibly can for his people. This is a poetic description of the salvation from Assyria.

[8 : 49] As we spoke about earlier, he has performed a miraculous work of salvation, slaying over 180,000 soldiers. Little Jerusalem is the city that fell to the greatest empire of the ancient era.

And it is absolutely clear. God did it. It was God that saved them. They were rescued and saved by God. He delivered them.

And yet, for some inexplicable reason, that saving work was not enough to persuade the people to trust in him. Have a look with me at verse 2 again.

Starting from the middle. He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it. And he looked for it to yield grapes. But it yielded wild grapes.

And verse 4 again. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

[9 : 51] When God looked to his people, would they now finally be humbled and cast away their idols and turn to him and trust him and love him?

And the answer is no. No, they would not. Salvation from Assyria was not enough. Now, I've been told that I was an incredibly stubborn infant.

Now, granted, some of that hasn't changed. The stubborn part, at least. Although, hopefully, I'm able to hide it a little bit better. You can ask my wife. But as some of you know, I spent my early years in Yorkshire. A wonderful place, but very, very cold.

And during my first few winters alive on this earth, I must have joined a commune or something. Because I hated wearing shoes and socks. Hated it. Couldn't cope. Probably felt like my inner creative was being suppressed.

Or that 30-pound baby shoes were an elaborate plot to extort parents out of money every three to six weeks. Whatever the case, it didn't matter the weather. I hated my socks and shoes. And so at every opportunity, off they would go.

[10 : 55] The issue is, though, I also hate the cold. So you're starting to see the dilemma. Almost as much, by the way, as I hate instant coffee. And I think my first sentence was death to Nescafe. And some of you on my holiday this week sent me many pictures of instant coffee.

It was upsetting. And it ruined my time. And Yorkshire is cold. So you can see the conundrum. I would take off my shoes and socks, hurl them away from me, and then scream at how cold my toes got.

My parents, because they are loving and long-suffering, would redress my feet. They did everything they could to protect the warmth of my little toes and help shelter me from the cold.

Yet again and again, inexplicably, I would ignore them. Even though I literally just felt my feet get warmer, once again, the shoes would find their way into the road. And once again, I would be screaming blue murder at the weather's audacity to hurt my feet.

Now on one level, some of you might be able to empathize, this refusal to accept help and security is perhaps understandable for an infant. Although rather, still stupid.

- [12 : 02] But here we see such immense stupidity on the part of Jerusalem that even my hippie two-year-old self would have probably been a little bit surprised at their lack of critical thinking.

Jerusalem had seen from their very walls the saving arm of the Lord at work to rescue them. You would think, surely, surely they would turn and place their trust in him.

Whilst we might forgive an infant for not realizing the foolishness of not accepting help from damaging behavior, this level of arrogance and blindness is breathtaking. Despite all the Lord had done for them, to save them, love them and protect them, they still, they still rejected him.

God has done everything to save Jerusalem, but they still reject him. And so my second point, point two, God will judge completely. God will judge completely.

So to return us to the question we began with, what will God do when his people still reject him, despite giving them salvation, the answer, I think, which is my point, may or may not shock you.

- [13 : 14] I don't know what you thought when you heard me read that point heading out. It might shock you, because here we see a complete reversal of the salvation picture we saw at the beginning of chapter two.

Have a look with me at verses five and six. And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it shall be devoured.

I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed. And briars and thorns shall grow up.

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. Notice again with me the repetition, just like in chapter two, verses one to four of that little word shall.

Shall remove its hedge. Shall be devoured. Shall be trampled down. Shall not be pruned or hoed. Briars and thorns shall grow up.

- [14 : 15] Just like in chapter two, there is absolute certainty that this will happen. But instead of certain salvation and a beautiful heavenly city, we see instead that there shall be destruction.

There shall be desertion. It's the complete opposite of what we saw in chapter two. Perhaps that's a shock. But perhaps some of you might not be shocked at all.

We've seen that God has turned Assyria back at the gate. He has killed 180,000 soldiers with a prayer. He has routinely delivered his people, despite their routine rejection of him.

And now, with a miracle as great as the exodus from Egypt, he finds his people still, they still do not worship him as God. And you may well be thinking that complete judgment is an entirely justified response.

You may even be thinking, why has it not come sooner? These people have been given every opportunity and they still, they still do not accept God as king.

- [15 : 26] Now, you might well be wondering where I'm getting complete judgment from in the passage. This is gardening imagery, after all. It hardly seems to be the kind of terrifying end-of-the-world language that we're used to from books like Revelation.

And in fairness, I don't blame you. I use Instagram, much to my shame. I don't yet use TikTok. I would advise that we all keep to that. But I recently discovered on these platforms the term plant dad, or for the more frivolous among you, plant daddy.

Now, for those of you who aren't familiar with the term plant daddy, I think from my extensive research, it means a man who is obsessed with plants. And so he refers to himself, refers to himself, that's important apparently, as a plant dad and or daddy.

So big has this trend become that there's a very successful podcast called Plant Daddy Podcast, which is hosted by, I assume, two plant daddies, who both boast a collection of well over 200 plants each.

They talk about things like their favourite plants, which for Matthew, the Seattle-based plant daddy is the, I will not pronounce this correctly, Philodendron gloriosum, because, quote, its combination of beauty, vigour, and easy growing make it a standout in my apartment.

[16 : 42] I'm told for reference that apparently Jake Tasker is part of this budding trend of the plant daddy. So when we read plant-based language in the Bible, we might be forgiven for thinking it's not that much of a big deal.

We might either think of a retirement hobby and garden centre or Instagram accounts with way too much time trying to make plant-based punny hashtags. However, I think it is no exaggeration to say that garden language in the Bible is possibly the most serious that God and his authors could ever use.

Why? Because garden language is fundamentally creation language. It's Eden language. Over and over in the Bible, whether it's the Garden of Eden, the flood, the Exodus plagues, or the true vine in John 15, returning to heaven is described as going to a perfectly kept garden.

It's no surprise that the image at the end of our Bibles in Revelation is a garden. So when we see verses like 5 and 6, have a look with me again.

I will remove its hedge. It shall be devoured. I will break down its wall. It shall be trampled down. I'll make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed. And briars and thorns shall grow up. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

[18 : 07] But we are seeing God say, I am done. I am bringing about de-creation. Genesis 1 and 2, reversal.

I will do the opposite of what I did in Eden. Instead of creating a beautiful place for my people to dwell and live in safety with me, I will destroy it.

I will make sure there is nowhere for them, that they will be cast out into the wilderness, that they will have no access to me anymore, no possible way of reaching me, no way of relating to one another in anything other than fear and exile, no place to call home, no place to worship, no place to commune together.

God is removing and destroying it all. It shall come to pass. It shall come to pass. So this is the most severe language God could use to describe what he will do to his people.

Any means of coming to him, being forgiven, dwelling in safety, gone. De-creation and Eden opposite. And so it answers our question, doesn't it?

[19 : 23] God has done everything to save Jerusalem, but they still reject him. So what will he do? Well, quite simply, he will destroy any means whatsoever of God's people relating to or coming to him.

He will judge completely. For our initial readers, this judgment would have been in the form of exile. Isaiah breaks into two halves. The first half, 1 to 39, is all about Assyria, which as we've seen, God will turn away from the walls of Jerusalem.

The second half, though, of the book, 40 to 66, is predicting the future. Jerusalem will fall to another empire, Babylon, and Israel will go into exile.

And this is exactly what happened 150 years after the Assyrian invasion. So for Isaiah's initial readers, chapter 5 is telling them they will experience complete judgment from God in the form of another invasion.

And they did. They were taken into exile. God, who saved them from Assyria, removed them completely from their land. He sent them into exile because they would not turn to him as God, even though they had seen such an incredible miracle from God by saving them from Assyria.

[20 : 45] As mentioned, I started this morning with a question for us. When God and his salvation work in the Lord Jesus is mocked, what will he do about it? Well, the answer from Isaiah 5 is that he will judge completely.

Now, many of you are probably thinking, but we saw last week, Benji, that God has already judged the world in Jesus on the cross, and that is true, but it's not the full picture of God's judgment because it leaves one very obvious question left unanswered.

What happens to those who ignore the Lord Jesus on the cross? What happens to those who ignore God's saving work now? The one implication I want us to take away this morning is this.

Praise God, he will not be mocked. Praise God, he will not be mocked. You see, humanity today is in an even more privileged position in many ways than Isaiah's initial readers.

Think of all the ways we've seen God's salvation here this morning. Just like the initial readers, we know of God's saving work to Abraham. Just like them, we've seen God's saving work in the Exodus.

[22 : 00] Just like them, we've seen God's saving work in Assyria. However, unlike Isaiah's initial readers, we now know all of us of the risen Lord Jesus.

We know of his miracles, his death on the cross, his resurrection. To echo the words of this song, verse 4, what more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?

What more could God have done for his people? The whole world is utterly without excuse. Utterly without excuse.

God has done everything, absolutely everything, to extend grace upon grace upon grace, even up to the death of his one and only beloved son.

The one thing you can never accuse God of is not giving us enough chances to come to him. And yet still, still the atheist society rages on.

[23 : 07] Authors like David Fitzgerald continue to churn out poisonous pseudo-history and society at large uses the name of our Lord as a swear word. But one day, that shall not be the case.

It shall not. There is a coming judgment. Just like the people saved from Assyria were taken into exile, once more, God will one day act in judgment again.

Only this time, the exile of the world will be spiritual and permanent. God will not be mocked. He has done everything for his people. The world has no excuse.

The hedges shall be removed, the garden shall be destroyed in a work of complete and utter creation. And God will withhold his grace forever.

So if you're here today as a visitor and you wouldn't call yourself a believer, you are so very welcome and thank you for coming. But Isaiah makes absolutely clear you have everything, everything you need and more to accept Christ as King.

[24 : 17] There isn't more evidence he can give. He has saved over and over and over again and supremely he has saved in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no excuse for you or anyone else in this room including myself. The chances, as breathtakingly numerous as they are, have run out.

Please accept the Lord Jesus before that certain permanent judgment comes. And so for us as Christians the one big implication I think this should leave us to, God not being mocked, is bringing us to our knees at the cross.

God will judge the world completely and only at the cross are we saved from it. Praise God that he saved us. Praise God that he will not let the sacrifice of his son be mocked.

Praise God that he will not be mocked. Why don't I lead us in prayer as we close. Dear Lord, I thank you that you have given the whole world every opportunity to be saved even to the point of giving your own son to death.

[25 : 31] Father, thank you for his death. Please, Father, would we not mock it as Christians by living for anything else and please help us all to put our trust in that death and resurrection for our own salvation.

Amen.