

Jubilee Thanksgiving

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from Isaiah chapter 14, starting at verse 3, which you can find on page 697 of the Church Bibles.

When the Lord has given you rest from your pain and turmoil, and the hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon.

How the oppressor has ceased, the insolent fury ceased. The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution.

The whole earth is at rest and quiet. They break forth into singing. The cypresses rejoice at you, the cedars of Lebanon saying, since you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us.

Shale beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come. It rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth. It raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations.

[1 : 13] All of them will answer and say to you, you too have become as weak as we. You have become like us. Your pomp is brought down to shale, the sound of your harps.

Maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers. How you are fallen from heaven, O day star, sun of dawn. How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low.

You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven above the stars of God. I will set my throne on high. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north.

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the most high. But you are brought down to shale, to the far reaches of the pit.

Those who see you will stare at you and ponder over you. Is this the man who made the earth tremble? Who shook kingdoms? Who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities?

[2 : 16] Who did not let his prisoners go home? All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb. But you are cast out, away from your grave, like a loathed branch, clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword.

Who go down to the stones of the pit, like a dead body trampled underfoot. You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land.

You have slain your people. May the offspring of evildoers nevermore be named. Prepare slaughter for his sons because of the guilt of their fathers, lest they rise and possess the earth and fill the face of the world with cities.

I will rise up against them, declares the Lord of hosts, and will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, descendants and posterity, declares the Lord.

And I will make it a possession of the hedgehog and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, declares the Lord of hosts. The Lord of hosts has sworn, as I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot, and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder.

[3 : 40] This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?

His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? Good morning. My name is Andy, one of the assistant ministers here at Grace Church.

Everything you need should be on the back of the handout there. At one point during her coronation, the Queen was given a Bible in all her finery, and the Archbishop of Canterbury said this, we present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords.

Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for your precious word to us, the most valuable thing in the world. Please speak to us now, we pray.

Amen. As Benji alluded to earlier, I have the delicate task this morning of preaching on a passage that celebrates the downfall of a ruthless leader on the Queen's Jubilee weekend.

[4 : 50] It's no surprise this passage wasn't chosen on Friday for the Thanksgiving service, and it's not like I can censor the lyrics like George Ezra did last night at the concert when he was singing a song about death.

He left those words out. If I left those words out, there'd be nothing in the chapter left to look at. Just to say, this is not the church's official view of the Queen or my own personal view.

We are going through Isaiah chapters 13 to 27, and this is the point we are up to. I personally think we've been blessed to live under Her Majesty's reign for so long.

My dad turned 70 in April, and it's amazing to think the Queen has been reigning for all of his life, and we have enjoyed relative peace and security here in the UK, haven't we?

But that is not the experience of many across the world and across history. If we were born to a different family at a different place, different time in history, well, that wouldn't be our experience.

[6 : 00] History is full of its tyrants and ruthless powers running amok, which continues today. We think of the Uyghurs in China, those who have fled Ukraine, Christians in North Korean forced labour camps, and we don't have to look far in history to find leaders who have trampled others underfoot.

And so although we live here in relative safety in the UK, seeing an oppression and injustice across the world can leave us thinking, well, how can we trust God with the future when anti-God rulers run amok?

Is God really in charge? Does he really have our best interests at heart? Maybe you've had those discussions with your children about whether World War III is around the corner.

How can we trust God with the future when anti-God leaders, rulers run amok? Well, chapters 13 to 27, as a block in Isaiah, are given to us to strengthen our faith in the Lord of the nations.

Last week, we saw how Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, they were staring down the barrel at Assyria, the global superpower of the day, knocking on the door.

[7 : 22] Well, not so much knocking as about to smash the door in. And so this was a big question for them. Can we trust the Lord in a world where Assyria and later Babylon run amok?

God told his people through Isaiah not to form those alliances with other nations to deal with Assyria, trust in the Lord because of what he was going to do. And we thought also last week that Babylon in the Bible is more than just a historical city.

It's a symbol representing human opposition to God. The attitude of, we don't want you, God. We're fine without you. And so all anti-God rulers and powers in the world are in view here.

rulers who set themselves up essentially as gods, defying the Lord God of the Bible. For little Judah at this point, that meant proud, haughty Assyria and her king who left nations trembling in his wake.

And later on, it would be the actual place of Babylon he will take over from Assyria. But we saw last week, God will punish the pride of the world.

[8 : 42] Humanity's proud defiance of God will come to an end when the day of the Lord comes. When the Lord Jesus comes to judge.

Now in chapter 14, we zoom in on God's people's reaction to God's judgment on the downfall of an anti-God, ruthless ruler. And this is the big thing to learn, that the Lord will bring anti-God rulers crashing down to the pit.

Have a look down at verse 3 with me. When the Lord has given you rest from your pain and turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon.

How the oppressor has ceased, the incident fury ceased. The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution.

I think we're not supposed to have a specific ruler in view here, but just as Babylon is a symbol of anti-God defiance, the king of Babylon is a symbol of the one in charge of these anti-God regimes.

[9 : 55] This is a celebration of their downfall. On VE Day, 8th of May 1945, 19-year-old Princess Elizabeth joined her family on the balcony as hordes gathered to celebrate the end of the Second World War and the fall of Nazi Germany.

After official duties, she and Princess Margaret slipped into the crowds to join in those celebrations with the people. even, as I read this week, doing the hokey-cokey in the conga with members of the public.

That is the tone of this chapter. It's celebration and taunting. Like the munchkins in Wizard of Oz singing ding-dong, the witch is dead.

Football fans chanting, you're not singing anymore. Why is Babylon not singing anymore? Because verse 5, the Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers.

Those who oppressed others in fury have suffered under the fury of the Lord. The Lord steps in to judge this ruler. And the language is very striking, isn't it?

[11 : 06] Let's pick out some of it. We can't look at it all, but let's pick out some of it under a few subheadings. Firstly, see how glory rots away. The picture here is the king being greeted in the place of the dead.

by a welcoming committee. Look at verse 9. Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come. It rouses the shades to greet you, all who are leaders of the earth.

It raises from their thrones all who are kings of the nations. All of them will answer and say to you, you too have become as weak as we. You have become like us.

Your pomp is brought down to Sheol. The sound of your harps, maggots, are laid as a bed beneath you and worms are your covers. Now, we shouldn't draw our theology of the afterlife from these verses.

Remember, it's a poem. It's a taunt, a satirical poem. And so, it's a picture of dead rulers greeting another ruler down to the grave. It's like Genghis Khan saying, oh, Mussolini, welcome.

[12 : 11] We've been expecting you. Don't worry, I think Adolf will join us very soon too. No need for your finery, no need for your fine clothes. We've got maggots for you to sleep on.

And here are some worms for a duvet. It's poking fun. It's saying all powerful rulers become weak rulers. throughout history, people have conspired and fought to gain power and every one of them loses that power when they die.

Glory always rots away. And also, status tumbles down verses 12 to 15. The king's lofty aspirations are seen in verse 13 and 14.

In verse 13, you have said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven above the stars of God. I will set my throne on high. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north.

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the most high. This anti-God ruler, all anti-God rulers, seek to take the place of God, ascending to God's throne in charge.

[13 : 22] We thought last week how that started with the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. A humanity wanting to make a name for itself, trying to oust God, grasping at power, essentially attempting a coup.

And yet, these verses are bracketed by the reality. Verse 12, how you are fallen from heaven, O day star, son of dawn, how you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low.

But verse 15, you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. There are plenty of TV programmes, aren't there, that are made about the rise and fall of particular people or organisations.

The rise and fall of the Third Reich, the rise and fall of the European Super League, the rise and fall of Harvey Weinstein. Well, here we have the rise and fall of all rulers, all anti-God rulers.

No matter how far their star rises, no matter how high they climb in the end, they are brought down to the depths of the pit. And that is true, really, of all human leaders.

[14 : 42] The Queen has had 14 prime ministers during her reign. Some came and went fairly quickly, some cling to power, but they all lose it in the end.

And ultimately, death gives a definitive end. Status tumbles down. And thirdly, Isaiah speaks of how success is turned upside down.

In verse 16, people will say to the fallen king, is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home.

In 1983, Saddam Hussein started to rebuild the city of Babylon in modern-day Iraq, portraying himself as the new King Nebuchadnezzar. He had his name inscribed on the bricks, just like King Nebuchadnezzar used to do.

He had a large portrait of himself hung alongside Nebuchadnezzar, put up at the entrance. Signs throughout the city declared, this was built by Saddam Hussein, son of Nebuchadnezzar, to glorify Iraq.

[16 : 00] Fast forward 20 years to the year 2003, and do you remember those pictures of Saddam Hussein finally emerging from a bunker? Totally disheveled. Is this the man who terrified everyone?

who had global superpowers, worrying about what he'd do next? Look at him now. And Babylon is still a ruin in the desert.

This king made the nations tremble, but it's God who will make him and the whole earth tremble. And verse 18 to 23 go on to show the complete reversal of what he'd expected.

Not a state funeral, but a trampled corpse, verse 19 and 20. Not a glorious succession, but the end of a dynasty, verse 21.

This king wanted to rise up against heaven, making himself like the most high, and yet, verse 22, it is the Lord who will rise up against him and decimate the land.

[17 : 09] And verse 23, he will sweep away the nations, just like sweeping up the kitchen floor. Empires do fall. For some, it takes decades.

Others, almost overnight. But they all fall because God brings them crashing down to the pit. And so God's people then, and God's people now can be certain that anti-God powers won't get away with it.

The Lord sees what is happening and he will bring justice. As the late, great Johnny Cash once sung, you can run on for a long time.

Sooner or later, God will cut you down. But can we really believe this? Can little Judah really believe this?

At the start of chapter 14, Isaiah told God people, they are the heart of his plans. To show compassion on them, to settle them in safety. But that seems a long way from the situation.

[18 : 18] Has God really got them at the heart of his plans? Is he really the world ruler? Can he master world superpowers? In answer to these questions, Isaiah in effect replies, watch this space.

For in 701 BC, within the experience of the original hearers, they will see the hand of God in their own deliverance and the overthrow of the great Assyria.

all because, secondly, the Lord is in control over all the nations. The Lord is in control over all the nations.

All that the symbolic king of Babylon in this chapter represents can be first applied to the king of Assyria. Last autumn, we looked at these words in chapter 10, verse 13, describing his proud attitude.

They're on the outline. For he says, by the strength of my hand I have done it and by my wisdom for I have understanding.

[19 : 26] I remove the boundaries of peoples and plunder their treasures like a bull. I bring those who stand, those who sit on thrones. Here is the ruthless ruler, the anti-God ruler, and the immediate threat to God's people.

But coming back to Isaiah 14, we see in verse 24 what God will do to him. Have a look at verse 24. The Lord of hosts has sworn, as I have planned, so it shall be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land.

And on my mountains trample him underfoot, and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder. God is going to conquer Assyria, and that happened.

Well, later on, Assyria got right up to the gates of Jerusalem, and the Lord wiped them out. He swept them away with the broom of destruction.

I put the verse there on the handout, Isaiah 37, and the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

[20 : 43] These prophecies were spoken to Judah for them to have complete trust that the powers they fear are under God's control. He's got the whole world in his hands.

We might teach children, but it does have a profound truth to grasp. And so when they see what the Lord would do to Assyria, they can then trust what he will do to Babylon, and beyond Babylon, the ultimate day of the Lord to come.

Because the Lord is in control over all the nations, even the really scary ones. verse 26 and 27 spell that out to us.

This is the purpose that is purpose concerning the whole earth. And this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purpose, and who will annul it?

His hand is stretched out. Who will turn it back? Just as when the day of the Lord comes, God's hand will beckon forces to gather.

[21 : 57] So in every movement of history, every foreshadowing of that day to come, it is the Lord's outstretched hand that rules earth's experience.

And he directs everything with his people at the heart of his plans. Is that our view of history? That the Lord has an unstoppable plan, that he stretches out his mighty hand across the nations, that he is in the control room directing everything towards the day of the Lord to come.

Verse 7 in our passage says that after the king of Babylon falls, the whole earth is at rest and quiet. They break forth into singing.

in life now when one bad ruler tumbles down, often another takes their place. Ding dong, the witch is dead, what comes next?

The wicked witch of the west. But there will come a point in the future when all of earth will be at rest. king.

[23 : 10] And so for them then and for us now, Isaiah says don't trust in these nations, don't trust the king of Babylon, don't trust in the world for security and don't fear the world.

The Lord will bring them all crashing down in the end because he is in complete control over all the nations. Instead Isaiah has already told God's people which king to put their trust in.

Turn back to me last few minutes, let's turn back to Isaiah chapter 9. Familiar verses we read at Christmas about the Lord Jesus.

Verses 6 and 7. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and a government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forever more.

[24 : 31] The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. This king Isaiah promised is very different to the king of Assyria and Babylon that we looked at in chapter 13 and 14.

The king of Babylon wanted to be like God. King Jesus is the mighty God. Assyria brought destruction and injustice, King Jesus brings peace and perfect justice.

The king of Babylon tumbled down to the grave. King Jesus rose from the grave. The king of Babylon's rule was temporary. King Jesus will rule forever.

We will even run out of names for the jubilee celebration. I don't know what comes next after platinum. And so it's certain, it's so certain, that God's people only need a victory speech.

The celebration is already planned in the new creation to come. As we close then, Queen Elizabeth gave her first radio broadcast as a young princess on October 13th, 1940, during World War II, on the BBC Children's Hour.

[25 : 50] Like other children, she was sent away from the city and she said this to the children and adults listening, we know every one of us that in the end all will be well.

God will care for us and give us victory and peace. That in essence is what Isaiah tells God's people in these chapters.

How can we trust God with the future when we see rulers running amok around the world today? Because the Lord is in control over all the nations and he will bring all anti-God ruthless rulers crashing down to the pit.

Where we will either share in the humiliation with that king of Babylon or share in the compassion along with all of God's people. So however big the threat against God's people, all will be well in the end for God cares for his people.

He shows compassion on us ultimately through King Jesus and his death for us on the cross. And he will gather his people in victory and the whole earth will be at rest.

[27 : 06] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we praise you that you are the Lord of history, that you are the Lord who is in control over all nations, that no one will get away with it, that you will bring leaders crashing down to the pit with perfect justice to come.

Please give us confidence in that future. Amen.