

Walking in Love

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[0 : 00] The last section that we read in Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 26 on page 586, where we read the first two verses of Isaiah 26 in that day, that day when God returns in his judgment, that day the 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. And we have a strong city.

Exactly a fortnight ago I was in the city of Berlin. Berlin, as they say there. A large city. A great city. It's a city in which almost every city, centre, street, speaks of certainly European, if not world history in the last 150 years.

And in Berlin, there are many churches, mostly restored, building wise, after the almost total destruction of World War II bombing.

But there's a little church just a few hundred yards from the Reichstag, from the German parliament. Just a few hundred yards. And situated in a place where at one time ruins, just probably destroyed ruins in that part, but now there's a strong church.

[1 : 25] Well, it's a little church. Maybe, what, 20 people were there last Sunday? But it's a strong church because the people there are strong in the Lord. The people there have a strong testimony in the Gospel.

One worshipper told me that he reckoned that that little church was the only Reformed church in the whole of that city. There's maybe, I think it was around about 20 people there.

20 faithful people in what, certainly when I was there, I thought to myself, this is an oasis in a city desert, a spiritual desert. A desert, even a city itself, and not just, of course, the city of Berlin.

We can look at any city, practically, in the whole of Europe. Confused. Wasted. Wasted spiritually. I suppose we could say so much of our, even Western civilized society.

And in that context, having been in that, yes, great, but confused city, my thoughts, you know, turn to the whole theme of the city that we find in Scripture.

[2 : 30] You know, the imagery, the imagery that we have in Scripture that speaks of the concentration of society. You know, people together who claim security security in what they believe in their sort of collective mindset.

Now, if you read about the city in the Bible, it can refer to that, either which is good or not good. You know, we, let's just focus on the good for a moment.

You know, turn to the book of Revelation, and we find there this city that speaks of the ingathering of God's people. When the Lord Jesus returns in His glory. The city, the New Jerusalem.

For God's people will know eternal security in the Lord Jesus Christ. But, of course, the city can also refer to these places of man's sort of self-perceived security apart from God.

And here in these chapters that we read in Isaiah, we see that contrast, just in this sort of concentrated part of Isaiah. We see the contrast between the city, the community that God blesses, that we read there in Isaiah 26, and the contrast with the city that God rejects, and God judges, that we saw in chapter 24, the wasted city of chapter 24, verse 10, or the lofty city of chapter 25.

[3 : 54] And it's really that contrast that we're going to explore this morning. In other words, on the one hand, the city that God blesses, the people whom God blesses, as opposed to the city, the people whom God rejects in His judgment.

And we do it not just as an interesting, you know, subject for our Lord's Day. That's not the purpose. In fact, that's not any help to worship.

No. We want to see that in what we read here in Isaiah, two, such a word, two statuses of mankind. Whether security in God through His great salvation, and that's what we see typified in chapter 26, or whether we see and know that false security in the world, the world that rejects the Lordship of the Lord Jesus, the world that rejects the one true God, typified in the wasted city of chapter 24 and chapter 25.

And, you know, in this time of seeking God's Word, seeking God's face, then ask yourself in the sincerity of your heart, which city to you is your desire?

Where is your heart? Is it with the Lord and His people as you look forward and even now know the strong city that's found knowing that the Lord Jesus is a Savior?

[5 : 35] Or, is your heart's desire still in the wasted city, the city, the lofty city, the city of pride without the Lord Jesus? And these are eternal questions that none of us can avoid.

So, three things to look at this one. Let's look at them. The wasted city against the strong city. And then as we progress and as we look through these verses, the city of fear as opposed to the city of faith.

And then the city of the proud as opposed to the city of the humble. And when we begin chapter 24, as we began reading in chapter 24, really chapter 24 begins a vision.

It's a vision of God's judgment on the whole earth. And that vision actually goes right through to chapter 27 where you see the final redemption of God's church. And this vision has symbolic imagery.

The symbolism of the city. As we said, the gathering of the peoples. On the one hand, God's judgment given against those who will not call on Him as Lord.

[6 : 42] And on the other hand, those who've entered the city of God, the people of God, the people whom God has blessed with salvation. And this is a vision that's been given by God to His prophet Isaiah for a reason.

For a reason. To reveal truth. To reveal the consequences of man's relationship to God and the eternal importance that have been found in Him.

to be found in Him by faith. And through that blessing. And while we have the blessing of the full revelation of God's Word that's been given to us, we know that faith, true faith is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus, the rock of your salvation.

So, in this vision, we're seeing the contrast between those who've caused judgment, God's judgment to fall upon themselves and the contrast between that situation and those who know salvation.

And this contrast is seen, is expressed in the city imagery. The wasted city against the strong city. Look back at verse 10 of chapter 24. The wasted city is broken down.

[7 : 55] Every city, every house is shut up so that no one can enter. Then, chapter 25, verse 2, the same city, this time referred to a slightly different way for you've made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin, the foreigner's palace is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt.

Then, the contrast, as we read in chapter 26, verse 1, in that day the song will be sung in the land of Judah. We have a strong city. He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.

Let's look at the first city again. chapter 24, verse 10, chapter 25, verse 2. This is the same city. This is the same world mindset.

This is the same category of all who've rejected the call of God to find refuge in Him. And look at the words, you know, the words that are used to describe that category.

Words of despair. Words of hopelessness. Words of emptiness. The words wasted. And then, chapter 25, a heap, a ruin. The wastes city of chapter 24, it's been compared to a wilderness.

[9 : 07] It's a moral and spiritual desert. It's confused as to what's truly right and acceptable to God. It's ruined. It's got no structure. There's no form of godliness.

There's nothing of any attraction that would point you to the true spiritual beauty found in the Lord. I mean, every time I go back to Berlin, I'm always reminded of the utter devastation of the city, certainly due to the early 1945 bombing raids.

I mean, the city was beautiful. Beautiful streets, beautiful buildings, and in a matter of seconds, just made into a heap of ruins. And then, of course, with the ruins, death, and destruction.

You go to the newsreels and you see that and you cannot even take in, even to this day, the contrast between what was once beautiful and then just made a heap of ruins, death, and destruction.

And isn't that, you know, the kind of picture we see here in chapter 24 and chapter 25? Ruins, structureless forms. In other words, this picture of spiritual emptiness, a desert, spiritual desert made by man's own choosing, man's own will, that desire to live a life without God.

[10 : 28] It's that confusion of a mind that, you know, tries to find peace and fulfillment in those things that bring no peace and no fulfillment, no lasting fulfillment.

And so what we see here in this vision is a vision of a people who by their very spiritual confusion are actually living wasted lives, seeking those things that are empty, worthless.

And don't we see that even in our own time and generation? Because don't we see around us, even within our own hearts, a confusion? You know, the confusion that tries to set standards, standards of fulfillment that are contrary to God, having a godless agenda, in fact, when that happens, even more confusion arises of what we might say is the legislation of fools, fools who claim there's no God.

It's that mindset that would remove the name of the Lord Jesus from every aspect of our land, of our education, of our government, and doing so in the name of man-centered progress, the wasted ruins of a secular structure that places man at the center and tries to fulfill man's every supposed need.

And in fact, when that happens, even more confusion that's, you know, sown in the lives of mankind, mankind that won't have God to rule over him. And you ask, is that all there is?

[12 : 07] Is the oasis city all that there is? Is there no refuge for God's people living in the midst of all this wasted confusion? Praise God, there is that strong city that Isaiah reveals as we've read at the start of chapter 26.

And we know then, and we've got that full assurance that the Christian isn't abandoned to somehow rot away in the wasted city. The Christian isn't condemned to live in the ruins of a culture that defies God.

The one whose faith and trust in the living God, you know, you know that you have that strong city as your place of security. It's our present reality now.

And of course, as God's Word tells us, it will be ultimately fulfilled when the Lord Jesus returns and brings in the new Jerusalem, the strong city, the place of eternal security. And that's the vision that Isaiah gives us of the future vision of the future security of God's people.

The strong city in contrast to the ruined wastelands of the condemned. But remember, the future security that you have as a Christian, that you know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, that is a present reality.

[13 : 28] Why? Because you know the salvation of the Lord. You know that security in Him. You know that the security you have of who you are is in Christ now. You know that now.

You're abiding in Him now. You have that promise of eternal life now. So you know that security now. But you know that what awaits you is a strong city that can never be breached.

It's never going to be a wasted city. It's never going to be a city that's seen in the ruins of confusion. And as Isaiah makes known here the security that God's people know now, you will know in the fullness and fullness when the Lord returns.

and you see what God's people know as blessing, the blessing of that strong city. Who makes that possible? It's God.

It's God the Lord who makes it possible for believers to dwell securely. And notice, notice there in these opening verses of chapter 26, notice what God has done and what God does in making that city secure.

[14 : 43] Notice, He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. He, notice the emphasis on God, He. Now, remember, much of this language is imagery, symbolic imagery.

So, we've got word pictures here, words that form the truth. What exactly blesses the believer? It's salvation. God sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks, walls and fortifications.

So, what God has initiated in salvation, that's what gives you your eternal security in Christ. And, of course, as we said, we have the fullness of God's revelation to us in the New Testament.

And you know that salvation is, is and only in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's His work of salvation that's made possible your eternal security.

As we said, that security that you know now, you know that you have that protection from the deceit of the evil one. You know that security that you have now as the promise awaits of the holy city, the new Jerusalem.

[15 : 52] It's that security that John the Apostle saw in his vision that we see in Revelation 21 of the new Jerusalem. As he saw in vision the new Jerusalem, as he said, with great high walls, solid foundations.

If you turn to Revelation 21 verses 12 to 14, you see the foundations that are described having the names of the twelve apostles, twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Again, symbolic language speaking of the security that God's people know through the truth of the gospel. The truth that the apostles declared that salvation is found in no one else, other, no one else than in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what city is your place of security, is your place of refuge? Is it the wasted city or is it the strong city?

Do you prefer the ruins of spiritual confusion or is your heart resting in the strong city, the city of strength? Are you content in a godless culture or is your contentment in the city where God dwells and God blesses?

[17 : 06] Let's look at that in more detail, the city of fear as opposed to the city of faith. Look at the city of fear in Isaiah 24 verses 10 to 12.

The city of fear. Look at the second line in verse 10. 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. The city of fear. But then there's the city of faith in Isaiah 26 verse 2.

Open the gates that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. Look at the contrast. The city of fear, the wasted city. How do we know this?

Well look at the language used. It's the language of confinement. It's the lack of freedom. Houses are shut up. Doors are bolted shut. It's a joyless place. Fear stops the streets.

[18 : 10] Because the city gates are now broken down and predators, intruders can now enter in and there's no resistance to them. And that's why the doors of the houses of the inhabitants are firmly locked.

And there's darkness instead of light. There's fear instead of faith. There's gloom instead of joy. It's a picture of the people who defied God.

There's a joyless existence of hopelessness, darkness, the consequence of rejecting God's long, of rejecting God's word, of rejecting God's truth.

It's that moral and spiritual catastrophe that Paul writes about in Romans 1 25, where he writes of those who have exchanged the truth about God for a lion, worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator.

See the contrast in chapter 26. See the city of faith. The city gates are open but there's no fear of intruders.

[19 : 15] There's freedom, there's free access to the strong city. This is the city of God where those who dwell there are the righteous, those who keep faith in the one true Lord.

And so who then have access to the strong city? Now we're told it's those who know the salvation of the Lord, those who know the reality of that great salvation through faith.

It's those who have been made righteous by the works of God. It's those who by grace have been enabled to exercise faith and to keep faith in the Savior. It's those who have been declared righteous not by their own merits, but by the merit, by the work of God.

You see that's the status of those who are there, those who keep faith may enter in. You who know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, doesn't your heart warm to the knowledge of that strong city, that strong city where the righteous abide, where that righteousness has been bestowed by God?

Do you know the Lord Jesus by faith? Do you know that faith that you exercise gifted? Yes. Do you have that promise of eternal security in that strong city and that you have been given that freedom to enter that strong city, a freedom won for you by the Lord Jesus?

[20 : 42] He's freed you from the power of sin. He's freed you to enter into His presence. He's freed you to enter into the city of God. And you know, we deserve nothing of that freedom.

It's all of grace. It's all of God and nothing of self. Again, we have to ask the question, where's your heart this morning? Is it with the Lord, God and His people?

Do you know that freedom that you have in Christ? Freedom, yes, from the power and clutches of sin? Are you still trapped, still shackled by the sin that keeps you from that freedom in Christ?

Are you still in the ruins of a confused heart? Are you dominated by fear? Or do you know the riches of the grace of the Lord Jesus, the grace of God that's freed you from sin's power and given you the promise of eternal life in that strong city, the city of faith, the strong city, and finally the city of the humble as opposed to the city of the proud?

Look at chapter 26 verse 5, look at the city of the proud, the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city, the lofty city, the proud city.

[22 : 05] But then notice the contrast in verse 3 of the humble, you keep him in perfect peace whose mind has stayed in you because he trusts in you. Then there's that call of those who are righteous in the Lord to continue to trust in the Lord in all humility.

Verse 4, trust in the Lord forever for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. You see the contrast? There's the wasted city, the city that's in ruins, and it's now got another description.

It's the lofty city, it's the arrogant city, the proud city. People who in their arrogant pride assumed that they could live without God.

They assumed that they could disregard God's word and God's laws. Those who had and have that arrogant pride who think and who thought that we can do it my way, do my own thing, go my own way, have man at the centre instead of God.

It's that kind of mindset we see so much today. And if you're a Christian, if you know the Lord of your heart, in the Lord Jesus Christ, it's a situation that should chill your heart.

[23 : 20] And when you see the pride of man that tries to demolish the structures of a God-ordained society, when you see God's laws breached in the name of secular progress, when God's word is rubbished, when God's truth is banned from our media, when God's law is abused and flagrantly abused and humour and disdain and now it seems that pride is this buzzword for everything that's self-righteous morality that flies in the face of God's righteous standards, God's standards of holiness and righteousness and justice.

And so there's a warning. God's word gives that warning of all who even now delight in the lofty city. You see that in verses 5 and 6, there's that warning of condemnation because we're told there that the lofty city, we're told of the arrogance of man, that will be destroyed.

We're told they laid low, cast down to the dust. This is, again, symbolic language. This is language of judgment. It's language of utter destruction. And these aren't empty warnings.

I mean, these are, yes, truths found in the Old Testament that we see repeated in the whole of Scripture, Old and New Testament because God's word gives us the gravity of the consequence of the proud and the arrogant, those who will not bow the knee to the Lord Jesus.

For example, you go to another part of the Old Testament in Malachi, chapter 4, verse 1, And that's echoed in the New Testament.

[25 : 18] Again, back to the book of Revelation. We're told of those who are outside of the Lord's people, outside of the strong city, outside the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 21, 27, nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false. And all that summarized in verse 15, of those who will not enter the strong city, everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

But the contrast, the contrast with those who are given that sentence of condemnation because of pride, the contrast seen in those who dwell in the strong city.

Who are they? Those who are humble in heart. Those who trust in the Lord. Those who are finding the strong city, it's absolutely clear. You who have your trust in the Lord.

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed in you because he trusts in you. That's who's finding the strong city. Those who are strong, strong in faith, strong in their wholehearted reliance and obedience to God.

[26 : 27] You who know the peace of God and you who know that peace with him because you place your whole, complete trust in God for your salvation. That's the character of the righteous, those who are in that strong city.

It's the city of those who are strong, those who are humble, those who rest not on any pride in self, that rest holy in the Lord our God.

Do you know that peace? Is your mind, is your heart fixed in the God of salvation? Are you trusting in the Lord God for your salvation? Are you living with that promise of eternal security in him through faith in the Savior?

Are you your eyes fixed in him who gave his life for you so that you might know that peace, that peace with God, that peace that can never be taken from you? If that's the case, then rejoice.

If you have that sure promise of an eternal city, which you'll know that everlasting peace with God, you have that promise of eternal fellowship with him and eternal fellowship with all who've trusted in him for salvation.

[27 : 37] And with that promise of future glory in the eternal city, well, there is a present responsibility. for you to continue to trust in the Lord.

That's why we read there in verse 4 of chapter 26, trust in the Lord forever, trust now, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. He is your rock.

He's the utterly reliable one. You have, in him you have that utter dependence. Yes, for all of your life, this side of eternity and the eternity to come.

Your salvation is sure, forever. But of course, you have to maintain your strong, sure faith in the one who never leaves you, never forsakes you. And in that abiding in him, you know that he's your rock, that he's your strength.

He's the one who makes you secure. He's the one who keeps you secure in his love. You know, in the original language of verse 4, it reads something like this, trust in the Lord forever.

[28 : 46] For in the Lord, the Lord is an everlasting rock. In the original language, the Lord, the name of the Lord is actually mentioned three times. That's important because you see the focus here.

It's the Lord God Almighty, the covenant God of his people, the God who binds his people in that secure relationship with him. That's who gives you, he who gives you that security, that eternal security in the strong city.

And you who are in Christ by faith, you have that assurance that the Lord God who's your strength. He's made it possible for you to dwell in that strong city.

He's taken you from the wasted city, the lofty city, the city of confusion, the city of ruins. He's taken you from that city and he's brought you through the gate.

Of course, the open gate, the gate, it's the Lord Jesus. He's brought you into his eternal home. So give glory, give thanks, give praise, give glory to God for your great salvation.

[29 : 53] Give thanks to the Lord Jesus who's made it possible for you to know that salvation by his death, by making it the way open for you to come into that great city, that strong city.

And remember here, this will close. Remember here in this life, as we're told in Hebrews 13. We have no abiding, no lasting, no continuing city.

What are we told? We seek the city that's to come. And so it's for you and for me, for all of us, to continue to trust in the rock of our salvation, to continue to put your trust in a Redeemer.

And know that he will bring you home, into that strong city, for you'll know the joy of the Lord forever. Amen. Let us pray.

Lord, we give praise and thanks for that vision of the strong city. And we pray, Lord, that all here this morning and all who read these words, that will know the reality of that eternal security in their hearts.

[31 : 05] May it be that there be nobody here who remains in the wasted city, the ruined city, the lofty city. May it be, Lord, that all who are gathered here and elsewhere who are worshipping you in spirit and truth, that they will know the joy of the promise of the strong city in our strong Lord.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue to wait upon you now in song and go before us in all things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close in some.