God's verdict on his people

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 April 2025

Preacher: Rev Dave Brown

[0:00] What I want to do this morning is to give you two sermons. They won't all be the same length as a usual one. So don't worry that when you've had the first chunk that you think, well, there's still another 25 minutes to go.

It's going to be two even chunks split with a Bible reading, which Lynn will bring us shortly. But what I want to do today is to give us a kind of a framework for our next five weeks and the time that we'll spend later in the year and more time next year on this immense book.
There is a wonderful scene towards the end of the book of Genesis. For the first time in many years, Joseph, who is now second in the kingdom only to Pharaoh, has met all his brothers.
They are all there with him. They don't yet know who he is, but he knows who they are. And he invites them to sit down for a meal. As you can imagine, the portions are and the food is lavish and it's great and it's all the riches of Egypt are thrown out.
But Benjamin, who is Joseph's only full brother, share the same mother together. His portion is five times the size of everyone else's.
[1:14] You can imagine the size of the plate and the food that was stacked up on it. I don't know how you would react if that happened to you. Maybe you'd look at it and you'd see it as a challenge like man versus food.

And you go, right, I can deal with this. Or maybe you'd look at it and go, well, it's just so big. I just don't know where to start. I'm never going to manage it. And it would put you off even diving in.
Maybe that's how some people feel about the book of Isaiah. It is a huge book. At 66 chapters and 1,288 verses. It's only shorter than Genesis and Psalms and only a little shorter than Jeremiah.
But it feels huge as well. The contents are daunting. As someone said earlier, it is full of strong prophetic condemnations. It's full of references to nations and situations that we know little, if anything, about.
But in the midst of it, there are also passages of such staggering beauty that they find their way into glorious bits of music like the Messiah and Christian bookmarks and posters.
[2:19] And there are glimpses of glory and hope that leave our hearts stirred. And I hope that's how you'll find it. Isaiah's book has all of those. I like the Bible as a whole.

Well, actually, it contains a whole different kind of sorts of writing. There is prophecy. There is poetry. There is narrative. And that switching between the three of those can make it quite hard to grab hold of.
But it is almost impossible to underestimate this book's importance. As someone said, apart from the Psalms, Isaiah's words are quoted by New Testament authors more than any other book in the Old Testament.
And that's not surprising because Isaiah spends a lot of time pointing us forward to Jesus. And also because the major themes of the book are those with which the whole Bible is interested.
So before we come to our reading in chapter one today, what I want to do is to pick out some of the structure and some of the flavours of the book. So that when we dive in together, you're not left floundering and thinking, oh gosh, I can't manage this.
[3:23] It's too big. Now, although the first few chapters seem to function as an overview of the whole book, I think Isaiah can be structured into or split up into three distinct chunks.

One commentator is called the first 39 chapters, the book of the king. Book of the king who reigns in Zion and who rules the world. From the way Isaiah is writing, it's clear that he is writing to the people of his own day and slightly after those who would eventually go into exile, but before the exile happened.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:52:12

So the king is looking at his own people and looking at the surrounding nations and giving Isaiah words of judgment and hope, calling people to repent and to live as they should.
And whilst most of that section is prophetic messages, in the last three chapters, we get to a key bit of narrative, a bit of narrative that will have a huge impact on what comes next in the story of God's people.
Then we get to chapters 40 to 55, sometimes called the book of the servants. The tone of the book changes in these chapters.
[4:37] It becomes dominated by messages of hope and redemption, particularly through the coming of the person who becomes known as the suffering servant. Some of the most famous passages in Isaiah are in this section.

And although there are still calls for God's people to turn from their sin and turn back to him, to be faithful to God in how they are living, these chapters are far more optimistic and encouraging.
That's why it kind of fits with a setting now of the people being thrown out of the land in exile, but God is speaking to them and saying, I haven't deserted you. There is still hope and salvation is coming.
Wait and see what I will do. Then we get to chapters 56 to 66. The same commentator calls these the book of the anointed conqueror.
And it feels as if Isaiah was writing these chapters a long way ahead of time for those who would come back from exile and be back in the land again. That movement of God's people had been prophesied already, that they would be out of the land for 70 years and then come back to the land again.
[5:47] And the exiles found that although they were now back in the land that God had given, life was still tough. It wasn't as if they had returned from Babylon and come back and everything was rosy.

No, no, no. The other nations were still a threat. Life was still hard. These chapters, however, remind them of God's ultimate victory and his perfect rule.
Several chapters sound as if actually they have come straight from the end of Revelation as they speak of God's eternal kingdom. So now as they wait, God's rescued people again.
Isaiah has encouraged them to remain firm in their faith as they wait with confidence for the day when God will finally establish his kingdom and return as the conquering king of all the world.
That's the theme of that last chunk. Given that kind of structure of repentance, of salvation and of ultimate redemption, maybe it's not surprised that as we read the book of Isaiah, the theology that we find in the New Testament is very much there in Isaiah as well.
[6:56] Let me pick out six aspects for you. When we read Isaiah, we find a lot about the character and actions of God. As someone mentioned a few moments ago, there is a glorious vision in Isaiah chapter 6 of the holiness and might and glory of God because the God of Isaiah is holy and righteous.

He is a God who judges sin and calls people and nations to account. But at the same time, as in that chapter, he is also a God of grace and mercy.
A God who is patient with his wayward people, faithful to his covenants with them. It's the same God in Isaiah as we see in the New Testament. Of course it is because the whole Bible speaks of him.
Then we find out about the nature of people because if God is the same, then people are the same. We don't change, do we? The people who received Isaiah's messages were loved and cherished by God, yet fickle in their faith, often wayward in their worship, disobedient to God's commands, with hearts that are often cold and idolatrous.
That doesn't change across Bible history and it hasn't changed today. The seriousness of sin comes across loud and clear in Isaiah's book. It's impossible to read Isaiah and think that how we live doesn't matter to God.
[8:17] Of course it does. But Isaiah also makes it clear that salvation is possible. Our sin, however deep it is, can be washed clean.

People can be changed. Even nations can be restored. But we'll find that this is always God's work. And Isaiah's prophecies about Jesus point to how God will ultimately save his people.
There's also plenty in Isaiah about the nature of true faith. What does it look like for us to live as people of faith? Well, Isaiah has a lot to teach us there. And there is that wonderful thread I

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:52:12

mentioned a few moments ago that runs throughout the book that points us to our eternal hope and what God's eternal kingdom will be like.
So in one sense then, Isaiah is like the Bible in whole, just condensed down into one book. And whilst it was obviously written first to God's Old Testament people Israel, there is so much for us to learn.
Because although we're now under the new covenant that the Lord Jesus sealed with his blood, God has not changed and we have not changed. Sin is still serious, but redemption and forgiveness are still available.
[9:28] True faith should lead us to a changed life. And our ultimate hope is in God's eternal kingdom. But we're in a place of real advantage, aren't we? Because as I was writing before Jesus came, we know now how God brought this salvation about.

So as we read Isaiah's word through New Testament ears, those hints of Jesus will stand out for us and we'll understand how God outpoured his grace in ways that Isaiah pointed us to.
Sometimes Isaiah gets called the fifth gospel because there is so much in there about Jesus. And I hope we'll see that. So what about the author and his times? Well, we don't know much about Isaiah actually.
We know he was the son of Amos. It's clear he was well connected both to the ruling royal family and the priestly families as well. He's obviously well informed about what's going on.
As we read particularly the chapters 46 to 49, as the narrative is unfolded there, we'll find that he is very much involved with what's going on.
[10:40] He's not a prophet standing on the sidelines, just kind of shouting from a distance. Isaiah is very involved with what's going on. If you want to read more about his story, you can pick up his story in Two Kings.

There's a lot about him there. He gets mentioned by name three times in Two Chronicles as well. As for his end, well, we're not told in the scriptures, but tradition claims that he was martyred under Manasseh, whose early part of his rule was marked by extreme wickedness.
As for the timing of the book, well, the opening line of his book states that Isaiah received these visions from God during the reigns of four different kings, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. That dates Isaiah's public ministry from around 740 to about 686 BC, all of which means he lived through some tumultuous times.
By this point in Israel's history, the country had been separated into two different nations for a long time. Israel in the north, Judah in the south. The glory days of David and Solomon were a distant memory.
[11:48] Judah was frequently at war with Israel and with its near neighbours and was increasingly worried about the new superpower, Assyria, rising up. And all of this uncertainty wasn't helped by the death of the king, King Uzziah, whose death is mentioned in Isaiah chapter 6.

He'd reigned for 52 years. He'd been a really good king. His son was okay, but he didn't quite have the same gravitas. So militarily, the nation was weak.
And although temple worship was still continuing, all the sacrifices were being made, actually the spiritual state of the nation was at a very low ebb. And it's this situation into which Isaiah was commissioned to bring a message of hope along with a message of judgment, to bring a message of salvation through a coming suffering servant who would have the ultimate victory.
So it's a bit of background for you before we turn to our reading today. Lynn's going to bring that out to us. Isaiah chapter 1, 1 to 20. Do you want to use that?
The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
[13:19] Hear me, you heavens. Listen, earth. For the Lord has spoken. I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption.
They have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel, and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion?
Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness, only wounds and bruises and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:52:12

or soothed with oil.
Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire. Your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.
[14:28] Daughter Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city under siege. Unless the Lord Almighty has left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have become like Gomorrah.

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah. The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me? Says the Lord.
I have more than enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals. I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?
Stop bringing meaningless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, sabbaths and convocations, I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.
Your new moon feasts and your appointed festivals, I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you.
[15:39] Even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood. Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight.

Stop doing wrong. Learn to do right. Seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widow.
Come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.
If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land. But if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
Thanks, Lynne. I don't have a huge experience with the legal system.
[16:37] My only appearance in a magistrate's court was when I was head teacher of a school in mid-Devon. And in those days, you had to appear in court if it was the first time you applied for a temporary bar licence, which we wanted for one of our social events.

But there are different levels of courts, aren't there, for different situations. There are local courts for small misdemeanours, county courts for serious crimes, all the way up to the highest courts of the land that talk about constitutional questions.
The case being presented in these verses in chapter one, because that's how the chapter feels, really, isn't it? It feels like a court scene going on. It's at the very highest level.
Unlike other parts of Isaiah, we really have no idea specifically what situation Isaiah is referring to. It could be, as I said earlier on, that these first few chapters act as a bit of a summary for the whole book.
But what is certain is that the situation is very serious. For the Lord calls heaven and earth to listen to him as he presents his case. Today, if the high court was doing something very important, maybe they would say, OK, we're going to get the TV cameras in to publicise this judgement so everyone can see where here the Lord calls heaven and earth, all of creation, to bear witness to the surroundings, to the proceedings.
[18:01] So what's the crime? What has gone on? Well, it's the Lord's own children that have rebelled against him. So in one sense, this is a family court, isn't it?

Except that the offended party is God himself, the king and ruler of the nations, the Lord of all the earth, the Lord of hosts. So this isn't just about a petulant child upsetting their dad.
This is high treason that's going on. No wonder that the consequences have already shown themselves to be serious. But although it comes across as a court case, I wonder if you notice that the verses are also couched in quite relational language.
There's lots here about them being my children. The Lord as father. The Lord's heart is broken here because those who rebelled against him are his own children.
They're the ones he drew to himself. They're the ones he brought up, who he protected, who he fed, who he watered and taught. The very ones he loved and saved, the ones precious to him, these are the ones that have now rebelled.
[19:08] It's a shock and a scandal. The Hebrew here is almost saying, they of all people. How could they of all people do it? That's what's going on here. The shock is illustrated in verse 3.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:52:12

Even donkeys and oxen know their lords and masters. They know the place where they're going to be fed and looked after, but God's people do not know their God. They've turned away.
The extent to which the children have rebelled gets highlighted again in verse 4. Their guilt is so great that look at what the Lord calls them. They're a brood of evildoers.
Children given to corruption. It's devastating language. How has this come about? Well, because they have forsaken the Lord.
End of verse 4. They have spurred the Holy One of Israel. They have turned their backs on him.
The New Testament equivalent. Maybe think about the prodigal son. There's a great father who provides everything for them.
[20:09] And what does he do? He says, well, I want your stuff. I don't want you. And he heads away. They have become strangers to their own father. I hope you can sense God's pain and anguish in these verses over all that his people has done.

God is grieved by it. And like any good father, his grief is made worse as he sees the mess that they've got themselves into. Verses 5 to 8, Isaiah gives three separate pictures as he describes the consequences of the people's sin.
There's a broken body, a desolate and overrun nation, and a tumble-down shack. So imagine a long-time heroin user who has been living on the streets for months, their body destroyed by the poison they've been putting in, and battered and bruised by the violent attacks they've received. That's that first picture. Or imagine those parts of Ukraine overrun and destroyed by Russian troops who have looted everything, leaving the country desolate, the remaining residents scavenging around for food.
Or imagine a rich family who once lived in plenty, a great comfortable house, lots of peace, everything they needed. Only now, their only shelter is a battered and long-abandoned shed on an allotment.
[21:27] Barely keeps the wind out, let alone the rain. That's what the people have become. That's what they are enduring now. This is the result of their obedience, and it breaks God's heart to see them choosing to endure such things because it is their choice.

It is their choice. They have wandered off of their own free will. See, from the early chapters of Genesis, right through the Exodus, the Judges, and to the Kings, God has been clear to his people that obedience to him brought blessing and that disobedience would bring disaster.
It was true with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Don't eat that or disaster will come. That's what happened. It was true with Abraham and the patriarchs. Moses gave that message to the people time and time again.
Obey God and you choose life. You'll receive his blessing and protection. Reject God and you choose hardship and fear and want and death as God's protection is removed from you.
Actually, that is largely how the world works. When we ignore God's word and reject God's rule, we reap the consequences. In struggles, in broken lives, in a lack of peace.
[22:43] That's true for individuals, for churches, for nations. Now, of course, there are exceptions to that rule where we don't see that working out. But if we look deep enough in those situations, we will always see God's hand at work.

Either working through those times of hardship to teach his people, to discipline them, or to bring them back to himself, or to be pouring out his mercy and grace when it is undeserved.
But all is not lost. Verse 9 gives us our first taste of hope. The people's rebellion has been so great that it deserved the Sodom and Gomorrah treatment, being wiped off the face of the earth.
But that's not what happened, is it? The Lord has protected her remnants. He has preserved his battered, bruised, broken people that some of them might come home to him. This isn't just Old Testament theology, is it?
This is New Testament theology. And actually, it's something that happens all the way through the Bible. Read the Old Testament, you'll see that God has shown divine patience time and time and time again.
[23:53] His gentle heart of a parent who longs for his children to come back is there, right across the pages. And I know that from personal experience.

Maybe you do as well. Just like God's Old Testament people, there have been many times in my life, I became a Christian when I was 6 or 7, something like that. It's so long ago now, I can't quite remember how old I was.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:52:12

But there have been many times since then when I've wandered away. When I have deliberately turned my back on God, turned my back on his commands and wandered off in my own direction. And those are times which, when I reflect on them, God had become a stranger to me. And it was in those times that I found the biggest difficulties, the deepest messes, and certainly suffered the greatest lack of peace.
As I turn my back on the one who is the source of all love and peace. And yet God was there in the midst of it. Even as I faced the consequences of my rebellion, God was there calling me back, being patient and kind, offering me a way back to him.
[25:05] I didn't deserve it. But of course that's the nature of mercy and grace, isn't it? Not getting what we do deserve and instead receiving what we definitely don't.

Maybe you know that in your own life as well. And rather like God's people here, most of my times of wandering away from him have taken place whilst to the casual observer and sometimes when my parents were looking on.
I still looked as if I was living a Christian life. Still turning up in church Sunday by Sunday. But sometimes church going can hold a, hide a very hard heart and a deeply sinful life.
On the surface it looks as if everything is fine. Oh no, well they were in church, they must be okay. It's a cloak that sits there. And God says the same thing through Isaiah to his people in verses 10 to 15.
You see, to the casual observer, God's whole people looked like they were being faithful to him. The sacrifices in the temple were expensive. A fatted lamb or a fatted calf was kind of like the peak.
[26:14] The most expensive thing that you could bring. And there were many of those. In terms of fulfilling the various commands God gave through Moses for proper liturgical worship.

Well God's people were getting 10 out of 10. They were putting on a great show Sabbath by Sabbath. All the proper prayers were said. All the costly sacrifices were made.
But look down what God says in verses 11 to 13. He says that all these sacrifices mean nothing to him. They add nothing to him. And they do nothing for him.
They weren't just a waste of space. God says here they are detestable to him. They're a burden for him. And he won't accept them. Just as he won't listen to any of the people's prayers.
So is God here rejecting the sacrificial system that he himself set up? No, he's not. It was necessary. It was there for a reason. The main reason, of course, so that when Jesus made the one sacrifice that God did find ultimately perfectly acceptable.
[27:21] A sacrifice he could delight in. His death on the cross in our place. That sacrifice would fulfil all of the Old Testament laws. But at this point in salvation history, what God wanted, in fact, what he wants from all people who follow him at all times, is true love and true devotion.

True sacrifice that comes out of the lives of holy, humble worshippers. With clean hands and true hearts. He's not interested in worship from those who play part of a religious service with a sense of pretense.
Who were doing it for show. Even if they wear all the right clothes and have all the right words. So think of Jesus overthrowing the tables in the temple.
Although many times he rebukes the Pharisees, calling them whitewashed hoops. They look great on the outside. Well, this is Isaiah doing the same here. But that's why there is also this call in verses 16 and 17 for the people to come and be washed clean.
To put their sins away and to do what is right. They might have to learn what God wants from them or relearn it because we do forget, don't we? But true worship of our holy God starts with that moment of repentance.
[28:44] And then leads to a changed life. Hands that have been full of evil must become hands full of grace. True repentance will therefore change how we worship.

Not just on Sundays but for the rest of the week. It will change how we speak. How we live. Oppressors will be challenged and put right. So that the fatherless and the widow, the oppressed and the needy are treated with justice and mercy.
God's recipe here isn't just to change individual lives but to change families and to transform societies. And what are the sins of the past?
Well, God's offer here in verses 18 and 19 is that they can be washed away and made as white as snow. And of course God had already provided the means for that forgiveness.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:52:12

The sacrifices God had ordained that would take place in the temple may not have been the ultimate solution for sin. But when they were offered in repentance and faith, they drew their effectiveness from the sacrifice to which they all pointed.
[29:48] The giving of the Lord Jesus. I guess the people who've become rather blasé about their sin. I pray that that would never be the case for us.

That we'd never grow blasé about God's grace and mercy. Never overlook our faults and think that we don't need to keep coming to him. And asking him for his forgiveness and for help to change. Because just like Peter and the disciples who screwed up so badly on that first Good Friday. Just like Christians from across the ages.
We battle in this in-between state, don't we? We are simultaneously sinners and saints. Saints in God's eyes. Fully justified through faith in Christ.
But we still struggle. We are frail and fickle in our love and our holiness. Yet wonderfully, every time we confess those faults, God is faithful and just and promises, as he does here, to forgive us our sins and to wash us perfectly clean as white as snow.
[30:56] And so in this opening passage, God's case has been presented to the court. And yet, it's not a case just for condemnation and judgment. An offer is made to the defendant. Choose life, my child, he says.

Recognise how stupid you've been. Recognise your folly. Turn from it. Recognise your true father and come home. Take the mercy and grace being offered and start to live again.
That's the offer here. That's the opportunity to God's wayward people. It's the same offer he makes to us as well. In our sin and our rebellion, he invites us to admit our faults, confess our sins, to trust in Jesus and to walk with him as Lord and Saviour, obeying his commands.
And so enjoying, therefore, all the benefits of his passion. All the benefits that come from being a child of God. I wonder if you've done that. Or I wonder if the moment, if actually you've wandered off.
There is the pretense of a faith, but it's not quite real. Your heart is hard and cold. Maybe it feels as if you're just going through the motions right now.
[32:14] Well, if so, can you hear the heart of God to you this morning coming through this passage? The call to accept his verdict on you and to come home.

To come home to the God, the Father who loves you, who will wash you clean and pour out his blessings upon your heads. No one is forced to come.
But, of course, there are consequences if we don't. There were for God's people. Verse 20 stresses that there will be for us too. Both in this life and the next. But the heart of this passage and the heart of the whole of the book of Isaiah, really, is a father's plea for his children to come back home.
To receive the salvation God has worked through Jesus and to walk in his ways of life and peace and joy. It is a beautiful offer. Made by a gracious God to a wayward people.
But it comes from the heart of a father who loves us more than we can ever truly know. Isaiah was told that the people wouldn't respond.
[33:25] We'll come to that in chapter 6 in a few weeks' time. But how are we going to respond to that? To that glorious invitation? To have our sins washed white as snow.

And to know the good things that God has prepared for those who love him. May we take that offer with both hands. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-15 02:52:12