

The Day of the Lord

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[0 : 00] I'm sure you'll find it helpful if you can turn with me in your Bibles to the second chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. As you do so, let me say what a privilege I count it to be with you here this morning.

Whenever I'm in a congregation and a strange face appears in the pulpit, I'm always inquisitive to know who they are and where they're from. Well, you've gathered, my name is Ian Hamilton, originally from Glasgow.

My wife and I lived for 20 years in New Mills in Ayrshire, where I ministered in the Church of Scotland. The Lord was very kind to us there.

1999, we moved to Cambridge to minister in Cambridge Presbyterian Church. From the Irvine Valley to Cambridge was no small jump, but we had 17 wonderful years in that very renowned historic city.

And the Lord, again, was remarkably kind and generous and gracious to us. We have four children, two girls, two boys. The two girls worship in Inverness and Glasgow, Greyfriars and Downvale.

[1 : 16] The two boys, Jonathan now works at the University in Cambridge. David's just moved to London and they are just the finest of children. We have four granddaughters and a fifth grandchild on the way.

So that's a potted history of Ian Hamilton. I hardly need to tell you that we live in dark days.

The society around us seems by the day to be descending into moral anarchy. Good is called evil and evil is called good.

Christian beliefs are publicly decried and marginalised. And it seems that we are in a vortex of confusion.

We have sown to the wind and as a nation we are reaping the whirlwind. That would be bad enough if it were not also for this fact that the publicly professing church of Jesus Christ seems to have fallen completely into step with the culture of the day.

[2 : 38] The church seems to be embracing by the moment the evil that is called good and the good that is called evil. The church and the society in which we live publicly speaking are in moral and spiritual freefall.

And we need regularly to be asking ourselves, how should I, as a professing Christian believer, how should I respond to this?

And how should we, as a church of Jesus Christ, respond? The danger is we can simply retreat into our spiritual ghetto, bring up the drawbridge, shut out the world.

But that surely isn't an option for faithful Christians. When our Lord Jesus Christ said, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world, go into all the world and make disciples.

Retreating into a spiritual ghetto is never an option for a faithful Christian. There are others who would say, well, the only option we have is simply to fall into step with the way things are.

[4 : 02] To embrace the changes that are happening all around us. But no less is that a possible option for a faithful Christian.

We are called in union with Jesus Christ not to conform to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are called not to conform to the world, but to confront the world with its godlessness, its wickedness, its unbelief and its rebellion.

And no less are we called by God to confront the visible, professing church of Jesus Christ from its errors.

Not sitting quietly by while the church walks that broad road that leads to destruction, but faithfully, courageously, humbly, not arrogantly, but courageously, speaking forth the truth of God into a culture that seems determined to walk open-eyed into hell.

This is the context in which Isaiah found himself ministering in the middle decades of the 8th century before Christ. In chapter 1 he begins his lengthy prophecy with these words, Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken.

[5 : 34] Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. A sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, they have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel.

And yet outwardly, everything continued as it always had been. The people had not abandoned religion. They had not abandoned their confession that the Lord alone is God.

They were monotheists. They believed in the inerrancy of Scripture. They were supernaturalists. They had the law of God, the temple worship of God.

And yet there are people, the Lord said, laden with iniquity. Children who deal corruptly.

[6 : 53] In fact, later on in chapter 1, Isaiah writes these searing words to these outwardly religious, but inwardly corrupt men and women.

The Lord says, when you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

I am weary of you spreading out your hands. I will hide my eyes from you. Later on in chapter 29, the Lord says to this people, and the Lord Jesus Christ picks up these words in Mark chapter 7, this people worships me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

The professing church in our day throughout our land worships God with their lips, but their hearts are far from him.

The church by and large, publicly speaking, visibly speaking, has fallen into line with the culture of the day. The church becomes a religious mirror image of a fallen, God-denying culture.

[8 : 19] Anything goes. Anything goes. And if you were to contradict the anything-goes culture, you're considered at best narrow-minded and bigoted, and at worst, someone who should be removed from the face of the earth.

In chapter 2, which we'll look at together this morning, Isaiah is saying to this church, this church nation, for that's what Israel was.

It was the church of God embedded in a nation. No less the church of God for that. It is called in the New Testament the ecclesia, the church of Jesus Christ.

And Isaiah says to them, you need to waken up to three realities. You need to consider three things. Three ultimate realities.

Because if you fail to consider these ultimate realities, you will continue to walk this broad road that leads to destruction. When I went to minister in Cambridge, for a short time, I thought to myself, I'll need to up my game here.

[9 : 40] I have a congregation full of very bright people. We had more PhDs in our congregation than you could shake a stick at. And very quickly I realised, no, Ian, no, no, no.

These people, with all their ability and brilliance, need to hear the basic truths of the word of God. Not the intricacies of Christian theology, but the basic certainties and absolute truths of the word of God.

And that's what Isaiah is placarding before this people to whom he is ministering so long ago, 2,800 years or so ago. And here are the three things, the three ultimate realities that he wants them to take to heart.

Number one, the ultimate day of history. Look at verse 12 of chapter 2. For the Lord of hosts has a day.

The Lord of hosts has a day. Now the chapter begins with these words, it shall come to pass in the latter days.

[11 : 01] So verse 2 of chapter 2, it shall come to pass in the latter days, plural. Verse 12, the Lord of hosts has a day. Now if we were to look at this passage through the lens of the New Testament, we discover that the latter days actually began with the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

His coming into the world inaugurated the last times. Peter preaches that in Acts chapter 2 when he quotes the book of Joel, a slightly older contemporary of Isaiah.

So the latter days are the span of history between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus Christ. And the latter days have a terminus, have an end point, an ordained, decreed end point.

The day of the Lord. The Lord of hosts has a day. And Isaiah wants this people to whom he is ministering to face up to the coming day of the Lord.

The day when God will at the last step again into history. The day when God will finally wind up history.

[12:37] The day when God will finally and ultimately judge the living and the dead. The day of all days that no one can hide from.

Later on in chapter 2 in verses 20 and 21 words that are quoted in Revelation chapter 6 we might turn to them later. People on that day run to the rocks and say rocks won't you hide me? Won't you cover me and shelter me from the wrath of the Lord and of the Lamb? Because the Lord of hosts has a day.

A day when he will right every wrong. A day when he will lay bare the thoughts and the intents and the secrets of every heart. A day when he will finally and fully and irrevocably judge the world in righteousness as Paul puts it in Acts 17 by the man he has appointed even Jesus Christ.

Do you live your life in the light of the day of the Lord? We don't know when that day will come. In fact the Lord Jesus Christ himself says in Matthew 24 of that day and of that hour even the Son of Man does not know.

[14:05] In his true humanity he did not know. But God has it ringed on his calendar. He has determined it.

He has decreed it. It's unavoidable. You can't escape it. And if that day were to come today how would that day find you?

How would it find me? How would it find me? I don't know about you but I constantly berate myself I think that's the word at the way I fail to live in the light of eternity.

How often I fail to reckon with the approaching day of the Lord and yet it's the most inevitable fact in the whole of history.

God has decreed it. God has determined it. Remember how our Lord Jesus Christ spoke about that in Matthew 24.

[15:10] He was warning his disciples that the coming of the Son of Man will be as in the days of Noah. People were eating and drinking and marrying and all the rest of it giving little thought for eternity and at such a time as you think not said Jesus the Son of Man will come.

We can become so wrapped up in this present world so wrapped up with the trials the struggles the difficulties the joys the hopes that belong to this present world that we do not give the thought that the Bible wants us to give to the day of the Lord of hosts.

And so Isaiah is saying reckon on that ultimate day of history. You can't avoid it and let the light of it shine into how you live now.

But not only does he encourage them and challenge them and press on them to consider the ultimate day of history. Secondly, he wants them to take to heart the ultimate demise of man. Look at verse 17. And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low. He says the same thing in verse 11.

[16:41] The haughty looks of man shall be brought low. The lofty pride of men shall be humbled. world. That's why he writes in the last verse of the chapter, stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath.

For of what account is he? Why are you making much of men? This is what Israel was doing throughout its history. It would look to Egypt. It would then look to Assyria.

Threats would come from all sides and it would say, where can we get help from? Let's ask the king of Assyria. He's powerful. He's mighty. Oh no, he's threatening us.

Let's go down to Egypt. Let's ask Pharaoh if he can supply us with the help that we need. It was one of Israel's besetting sins. It was always looking to mere men for help and hope and comfort.

God through Isaiah is saying, on the day of the Lord of hosts, all that is proud and lofty shall be brought low.

[17:52] The haughtiness of man shall be humbled. The lofty pride of men shall be brought low. Isn't that so true of the church of Jesus Christ throughout its history?

we so easily, we so easily look to man. We forget the words of the psalmist, our help is in the name of the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.

That's where our hope and our confidence must alone lie. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.

Remember the 73rd Psalm, you must know the 73rd Psalm well, where the psalmist, aren't the psalms so wonderful, they expose the searing honesty of the psalmists.

They expose the perplexities, the crushed disappointments, the bewilderments as well as the delights and the hopes of the people of God.

[19:01] And in Psalm 73 the psalmist says, I envied the wicked. Oh, he said, I envied them. Their bodies are sleek. They don't seem to have troubles.

They just sail through life. Life is sweet for them. They accumulate wealth. And here am I, a faithful servant of Yahweh.

And life for me is hard. Oh, he says, I envied the wicked, he said, I envied them. And then he says at the great turning point in the psalm, I went into the temple and I saw their end.

He came to his senses. He realized what utter foolishness it is for me to envy the wicked because God has set them on a slippery slope.

They're not to be envied, not to be admired. They face ultimate and eternal ruin and oblivion. The eternal perspective, if you like, came into the mind and heart of the psalmist.

[20:18] Only too humanly if sinfully he envied the wicked. And then he was shown their end, their demise.

And that's what God through Isaiah is saying to his people. How often you put your trust in mere men. He says, I'm going to bring them all low.

The lofty pride of men, I'm going to bring it low. The haughtiness of man, I'm going to humble it. The wicked who strut about the earth as if they owned it will one day be brought to the dust.

And so the psalmist says, stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? I teach church history and Scottish theology at the seminary in Edinburgh, amongst a few other things.

It never ceases to impress itself on me how throughout our history which in many respects is a blessed and privileged history. How easily at times we have succumbed to this sin regarding man in whose nostrils is breath.

[21:41] death. It's a reference back to Genesis 2 verse 7 isn't it? He's just dust. That's all he is. You're putting your trust in dust.

You who want to go down to Pharaoh Necho in Egypt and get his help. You who want to try Assyria. They're just dust. In the 1930s maybe one or two of you can remember that far back.

Sadly not me but in the 1930s the Christian church was in a bad way in Great Britain. Secular humanism was the order of the day.

Darwinianism had seemed to have conquered the face of the land. And Lord Reith who was the first director general of the BBC walked one day into the boardroom of the BBC.

He was an imposing man. He was a six foot six Scotsman. And all the young executives were animatedly discussing something. And Lord Reith said to them what are you doing?

[22:51] Oh they said we are writing the obituary of the Christian church. And Lord Reith stood up and looked to them and said gentlemen the church of Jesus Christ will stand at the grave of the BBC and it will stand at the grave of every human institution because God will bring every human institution bar his church low to the dust.

Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath for of what account is he? So he reminds them of the ultimate day of history he reminds them of the ultimate demise of man but then thirdly and most significantly he reminds them of the ultimate exaltation of the Lord.

You see it at the end of verse 11 the haughty looks of man shall be brought low the lofty pride of man shall be humbled and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day.

Verse 17 the haughtiness of man shall be humbled the lofty pride of men shall be brought low and the Lord alone notice the word alone the Lord alone will be exalted on that day.

When the day of the Lord comes and come at will the Lord alone will be exalted. And the New Testament fills that out for us doesn't it?

[24:25] Philippians chapter 2 where Paul writes of the Lord Jesus Christ who was obedient unto death therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every other name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

On the day of the Lord the Lord alone will be exalted. God will have no flesh to glory before him.

The apostle Peter wrote about that day didn't he in his second letter the day of the Lord will come he says like a thief in the night. The elements will be dissolved with fervent heat.

God will make a new heavens and a new earth the home of righteousness. Jesus Christ alone will be the omega point of creation.

Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. There will be one Lord in the cosmos. One acknowledged King.

[25 : 47] And then Peter says this therefore what manner of people ought we to be? You see Isaiah's point is not simply to present them with three ultimates.

The ultimate day of history. The ultimate demise of man and the ultimate exaltation of the Lord. He wants them to take those truths and translate them into living.

What manner of people ought we to be? If history is heading for an ordained day of destiny, if on that day man and all his abilities and fineries will be laid bare and brought to the dust before God, and if on that day the Lord Jesus Christ alone will be exalted, how ought I to live today?

How ought I to live today? What manner of people ought we to be? says Peter, we should be living lives of godliness and righteousness.

The Bible has a very interesting way of encouraging and challenging believers to live God pleasing lives. Very rarely, very rarely does it issue mere commands.

[27 : 12] It presents glorious truths that are intended to incite obedience from our hearts. And that's what Isaiah is doing here.

Our fourth child, Sarah, is an artist. She graduated English literature and she's doing various things, but in her spare time she paints.

and she will tell me that in art perspective is everything. That's why I'm absolutely hopeless.

I can't even draw a stick man, my children say. One of my first delights at school was dropping woodwork and technical subjects for Latin. What a delight to go from what I couldn't do to what I enjoy doing.

But in art, perspective is everything. And so it is in the Christian life. And Isaiah is saying here is the perspective of life. There is a coming day.

[28 : 18] You can't avoid it. There is the demise of man. Make sure you're not among that demise. And there is the exaltation of the Lord. You see, to the world looking on this morning, people must pass a place like this and just shake their head.

These poor people in point and knock. What are they doing? On a Sunday morning, what are they doing? Shouldn't they be out enjoying themselves?

What are they doing? We are worshipping the one who alone will be exalted on that day. We are worshipping the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

We are worshipping the Son of God who loved us and who gave himself for us. I said at the beginning that in Revelation chapter 6, John effectively quotes from the closing verses of our chapter, people enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the hills to hide from the terror of the Lord and from the splendour of his majesty.

You see that's the alternative we have. We either hide or try and hide for no one can hide but we try and hide from the terror of the Lord, the righteous judgment of God for he is a just and a holy God.

[29 : 51] Or with open arms and with open hearts we can say come Lord Jesus quickly come. Are you living in the light of the ultimate day of history?

In the light of the ultimate demise of man and in the light of the ultimate exaltation of God? What a day that will be.

What a day that will be when the exalted king will acknowledge as his own all who have placed their hope and trust in him.

Who have not simply honoured him with their lips but who have loved him with their hearts. Who have not simply paid outward allegiance to his kingship but who have brought him to reign with unrivaled rule.

within the dominion of their lives. The day of the Lord is coming. We may live to see it but even if we don't, are you ready and prepared for the day of the Lord of hosts?

[31 : 18] Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.