

# Mended Marriage and Family

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[ 0 : 01 ] Let's turn now to Isaiah chapter 54, and we're going to look at the whole of this chapter this evening. I know what you're thinking, it's a large chunk to take.

When I was coming out I said to Donna, we're going to take a bit of a punt this evening and look at one whole chapter of Isaiah. And she said, do you think that's wise?

Well, of course, the reason for that is when you come to Isaiah, the more you read into the book of Isaiah, the more you realize just how rich the material is.

It is just so rich in all its detail and in all its compass that the more you read it you realize this is just such wonderful stuff. And sometimes it's so useful just to zoom in and focus on one particular detail as you could do in this chapter itself.

And as you zoom in and focus on the detail, then the detail becomes clearer to you. You're able to just dissect parts of that smaller portion and see it in all the rich complexity and fullness of that detail.

[ 1 : 09 ] But it's also useful to sometimes just zoom out. And indeed, if you zoomed out far enough, you could take as a unit chapters 53, 54 and 55 of Isaiah.

Because as we'll see from 54, what you have is the success of the servant's ministry. The servant that's mentioned in terms of his suffering and death in chapter 53.

And of course elsewhere mentioned in other ways in Isaiah as well. And therefore, from the success of it, as we'll see tonight in this chapter that deals with restoration in righteousness, bringing us to be set right with God, you then have another chapter following on that, logically chapter 55, which begins with what you could call the universal call of the gospel.

Come to the water and drink. Come and partake of what the servant has accomplished as it set out for us. It was just the other night on the news that there was some correspondent from the BBC reporting from China with what's there just now in terms of the economy.

And as his report began, the camera was on him. He was sailing down this river, but the camera had zoomed in and was just seeing his face standing at the side of this ship that was sailing down the river.

[ 2 : 34 ] And just as the piece was coming to an end, the camera zoomed out all the way so they could see the compass of the city and this large river down which the ship was sailing and this man on it.

And then as it zoomed out, you couldn't see him at all, but you could see the context in which he was speaking. You could see the wide panorama and the whole compass of that scene.

And of course, that carried its own meaning. You weren't then just seeing this one individual. You were seeing him in the context of the wider picture. And that's how you study the Bible as well, of course.

Not just these verses, but sometimes you come and you deal with the detail and you focus on the detail. You get so much from the detail. But then you have to zoom out and look at where that detail is set.

What's the wider context? What's the bigger picture? And that's really what we're doing in a sense tonight, looking at 54. Well, as we said, this chapter following the 53, the sufferings of the servant, the death of the servant of God, which of course is the Lord Jesus Christ and his accomplishment.

[ 3 : 41 ] Then you come to this no single barren one. And from that you get the rest of the chapter that deals with what you could say are two images. The image of a reconstituted family, which includes a restored marriage and also an emphasis on children.

And the second image is one of a reconstructed city from verses 11 through to the end of the chapter. And as you look at these two images, you realize these are actually images of the

redemption or the salvation that the servant has actually accomplished and that is then offered in the call of the gospel as it's set forth in the likes of chapter 55.

So these are two images we're looking at tonight. Verses 1 to 10, redemption as in the image of a reconstituted family. Now, of course, the thing about doing it in the wider compass is you don't have time to look at the detail as particularly as you would at other times.

So we're not going to be able to go into all the detail of it, but just try and focus on this wider picture and then take that with us and see where it all fits in. And as you see there, the emphasis at the beginning is, Sing, O barren one, break forth into singing, you who have not been in labor, for the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married, says the Lord. Now, it's not obvious at the first sight what that means. Who is he talking about? Who is the barren woman and who is the married woman? And what is he saying about the one having far more children than the other one?

[ 5 : 20 ] Of course, it reminds you of Genesis 11 and 16, where there's an emphasis there on Sarah, the wife of Abraham, to whom all the promises were given at first regarding how the gospel was going to be a blessing to the whole world.

And that would be through his descendants. And Sarah was barren until God actually worked his work of power. And she came in her old age to bear the child of promise, Isaac.

God's power, God's miraculous working, turning what was lifeless into that which is life. turning what was so discouraging and so unlikely into that which is just vibrant and full of promise.

And then begins a line of succession. And that's really something of the background and the thought of this passage, at least, whether it was in Isaiah's mind or not, we can't say for sure.

But the same idea that here is an emphasis on the barren woman that bore no child, and yet she's going to have more children ultimately than the married woman.

[ 6 : 34 ] And what he means by this is that Israel or Judah, and of course you remember that throughout Scripture, and particularly at these times in the prophets, the relationship between the Lord and his people was very often portrayed as a marriage.

So that idolatry is equivalent to spiritual unfaithfulness or adultery or a prostituting of themselves.

And the prophets don't mince their words when they're actually speaking about that, because it's so serious.

And what you find here is that the Lord has actually deserted this woman he's married to in covenant, not because he has been unfaithful, but she has been.

And the desertion is not something that's permanent, it's not something equivalent to a divorce.

When you go back to chapter 50, you can see how the Lord begins his words there to Israel.

Thus says the Lord, Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? In other words, he's saying, I did send her away. I've distanced myself from her.

[ 7 : 43 ] There is such a thing as a separation between myself and these people God is saying, But I haven't divorced her. I haven't given her a certificate of divorce. There is still hope for the future. He's going to reclaim her.

He's going to bring her back. He's going to win her back. But for the moment, as Isaiah is ministering in those days, this message is falling on deaf ears, as the Lord indeed said it would.

And of course, all of this brings you up into the New Testament. Anyway, as we've seen, it's related to chapter 53 and its fulfillment in Christ. And you'll find very similar emphasis, as you know, on the likes of Hosea's prophecy, which is so largely built around his marriage as a representation of the relationship between the Lord and his people.

Where again, Hosea has to portray, Hosea has to portray in his own literal marriage, the way that things have become so broken between the Lord and his people because of the people's unfaithfulness.

And yet, Hosea has commanded after his wife, has deserted him, and gone to live with someone else, go again and love this woman as the Lord's love for Israel.

[ 9 : 01 ] And he had to take her back. And he had to say to her, you will stay with me, and I will be true to you. And that's how the Lord's relation with Israel was portrayed, even though the people weren't ready to listen.

And that's what he's saying here in regard to these children. They could not have been produced earlier because the Lord had separated himself from this woman, if you think of it in spiritual terms.

But now that there's reconstituted family and marriage especially, there's going to be, again, a possibility for children.

And when you bring that into the spiritual realm, what it's saying is, when the Lord restores sinners to himself, when the Lord actually deals with our problem of sin through the work of the servant, well, that brings, spiritually, it brings children into being.

It constitutes a church, a people for himself, a family, that are known as the children of God. And that's why you find at the beginning of the chapter here that it's mentioned the children of the desolate one.

[10:14] That's the separation. That's the time of when things were not right and when they still needed to be put right. And now, the children of the desolate one, now that restoration has taken place, will be more, will be enlarged, will be a great family.

Enlarge the place of your tent. Let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out. Do not hold back. Lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. In other words, the family is not just going to be abundant, but it's also going to be a family of stability.

Where you've got strengthening and where you've got widening out of the number of children that are born to the Lord. In other words, you take from this, of course, the fact that children are born for God not by any natural abilities, not by things which people themselves can have in terms of their gifts or abilities.

It's all brought to a head by the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, isn't it? Except a man be born again, he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God.

And that's essentially what God is saying. There will be a family. There will be children born spiritually. And it will all be a result of this suffering servant and his death and what he's accomplished.

[11:41] And of course, the key to it, as we said, is, as you find in verse 5, for your maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer.

The God of the whole earth he is called. And it's the marriage, especially as it is restored, that leads to the family, to the children, to those who are born for the Lord.

You see, back in chapter 50, and verses 1 to 3, again, you find the Lord again calling there, verses 1 to 3, where the Lord is calling the people back to himself, but they are not actually responding.

For your transgressions, your mother was sent away. Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there no one to answer? There is no response properly to the Lord's call to the people to come back, though Isaiah was sent with this message, seeking that they would repent and turn to the Lord.

But the servant's work, as you take that further into the spiritual realm and into the New Testament age, the servant's work leads to this restoration, the people being brought to know the Lord as a spiritual marriage.

[13:04] And now again, he's actually calling forth. Look at verse 6 there. For the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she's cast off, says you're God.

Now you see, the call is going forth on the basis of restoration. The Lord has dealt with the problem. If you take it again spiritually, and of course you have to, as we say, keep bringing this into the spiritual relation we have with God.

We're not connected to him properly as we're born naturally. We come to be reconnected by being born again. And it's all to do with the work of the servant, what Christ has accomplished.

And as he speaks there about the marriage, he says, in verses 7 to 9, he gives this new wife, if you say, or the wife that's been restored to proper relation to himself.

There's wonderful assurances there. And they follow into your own life as a Christian, as a person who knows a life restored to a proper relationship with God.

[14:10] And the assurances are wonderful. They're beautiful. Because they're, in terms of contrast, in many ways. Look at the word moment, for example. For a brief moment, I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you.

In overflowing anger, for a moment, I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love, I will have compassion on you. Contrast the word moment, or brief moment, as it is, with the word compassion.

Contrast the word anger with the words love and compassion. A moment with everlasting. Anger with, contrast it with love and compassion.

What do you have? You have an overwhelming emphasis on the Lord's preference for mercy, for compassion, for love, for forgiveness, for restoration, than for anger and for desertion and for that side of the issue.

He's saying, yes, there was a separation. Yes, you deserved it, but it was for a brief moment. It's as if the Lord is saying, and indeed he is saying, I'm longing until this desertion is over.

[ 15 : 27 ] I'm longing until this period of estrangement is over. I'm longing until, again, there's this meaningful relationship. I'm longing to see children born as my family.

And of course, that's, as we said, that's what you can bring into your life as well, personally. That's one of the things that really strikes the heart and tugs the emotions and gets to your conscience and gets to your inner self.

When you know that something's come between you and the Lord, when you've begun to relax too much in your Christian life, when you've let things come between you and God, when you know that things are not in our right relationship, then you come to this passage and you realize that what you really need to look at is not so much at yourself, although you look at yourself and what's happened as your fault, but you look at the Lord and you look at his longing and you look at his love and you look at the contrast between what he calls a brief moment and what he calls everlasting and which does he prefer and what does he want you to do from that?

It's to know himself again in a reconstituted relationship and that will be more than once. It will be something that you know of again and again or a number of times at least in your life's experience and that's what it is set out for us in Isaiah here between himself and the people and in verses 9 and 10 and as I said we're covering the ground fairly quickly but trying to take in the whole scene as it were in verses 9 and 10 you've actually got what is equivalent to the marriage contract or the marriage covenant.

Not only is he saying I'm going to restore a proper relationship there's going to be a reconstituted marriage and therefore there's going to be a reconstituted family but I'm going to make sure that the covenant between us is lasting that it will not be broken.

[ 17 : 27 ] You see how he puts it there this is like the days it says there of Noah it's much better to translate that like the old translation the waters of Noah to me as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you for the mountains may depart and the hills be removed but my steadfast love shall not depart from you and my covenant of peace shall not be removed says the Lord who has compassion upon you.

Do you take this woman you might say respectfully the Lord is himself assuring her that he's being asked the question do you take this woman do you promise that you will not break your marriage bond with her and the Lord is saying yes it's everlasting it's firm it's sure it's as the waters of Noah to me why is he saying the waters of Noah and why is that better than the days of Noah well go on to look at what he's saying as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth so I am saying to you what did God say when Noah came out of the ark he said I will never again destroy the earth with a flood why was he able to say that what is that picture really giving us an insight into spiritually it's this the Lord's justice has been satisfied and the bow that he hangs in the clouds the rainbow that you still see of course in the clouds that he mentioned in that specific context context in this arrangement with Noah

I'm setting my bow in the clouds as a reminder of this covenant and as one writer has put it the bows can be taken as the equivalent of a warrior's battle bow the bow the bow that would be used in the old days in battle to fire the arrows and this writer was saying there is the Lord the deluge has happened the earth has been visited in his wrath he's now satisfied he's at rest in his justice and Noah comes out of the ark for a new beginning and a new age and God says I have no more need of the bow my wrath is gone as far as this people is concerned I'm hanging it up and that's how it is with what he's done in Christ with what he's done in regard to his people his covenant people his people who have come to know him the bow is not directed at them as far as they're concerned he's hung it up in the clouds every time you look at the rainbow it's saying to you this is like the waters of Noah to me his relationship with you as a Christian and with God's people all together as a family and that's redemption in terms of a reconstituted family the marriage and the family the children and how that itself gives us a picture of what God has done through Jesus

Christ his son what Christ has achieved how lasting it is how productive it is how it's still ongoing in terms of its success as people are still born again to become children of God that's the first image and we'll move on to the second one in verses 11 to 17 there's redemption in the image of a reconstructed city a reconstructed city of course again in these days the relationship between God and the people was often portrayed in terms of a city as well and what a city is in terms here of its beauty and secondly of its security notice what he's saying oh afflicted one storm tossed and not comforted and that too is important and you could zoom in on that detail so meaningful the people that God is going to speak about as being so beautiful and so secure are the very people that were storm tossed and not comforted and afflicted and while that is true literally of Israel and Judah when God was saying all of this through the prophet to them that he was angry with them that he was going to separate himself from them that there was a captivity coming because of their sin it's true also in our own sense that our life is so very often one of affliction storm tossed lacking in complete comfort not one that we see as full of ultimate beauty these are the very people of God that are being addressed and he's saying behold I will set your stones in antimony and lay your foundations with sapphires

I will make your pinnacles of agate and your gates of carbuncles and all your wall of precious stones and the two things that strike you about that beauty is that it is extensive every single part of that city is mentioned from the walls to the bulwarks and the pinnacles and the gates they are all mentioned as having been made beautiful bejeweled in fact with the most beautiful beautiful precious stones and not only is it extensive but it is stunningly beautiful this is not just a semblance of beauty that's mentioned it's just taking the most exquisite precious stones and using them as an illustration of the beauty that God bestows upon his people as redeemed people that's what Christ has achieved Christ died and you look at the ugliness of Calvary in terms of its suffering and in terms of what Jesus himself suffered on the cross not just of course physically but in the depths of his soul in the separation that was between himself and God the Father why was it so that it would in fact come to bring you and

[ 23 : 58 ] God and I and God back together and out of that ugliest of scenes flows the most wonderfully exquisite and beautiful redemption there's nothing more beautiful than what God makes beautiful in his salvation because it's actually his own beauty that he puts upon us because he makes us like himself he restores the image that was broken and barred in Adam's fall and as he restores it it's restored ultimately as Romans 8 puts it so well into the image of his son that's what our destiny is that's what all of God's redeemed people ultimately will look like they will have the luster the brilliance the splendor the unspeakable beauty the stunning beauty of God's son glorified and now he's saying you afflicted and storm tossed and not comfort not comforted that's what

I've got in store for you that's what's awaiting you that's the beauty with which I'm going to make you beautiful and I'm just going to mention it but you can follow it through for yourself when you've got a moment go to Revelation chapter 21 and especially verse 9 following on through from verse 9 and you'll see remarkably you know that it's got the description of the city but the way the chapter begins you can see three things brought together in the chapter and that is the wife the bride the lamb's wife and then she's described as the new Jerusalem the city and you've got an emphasis also on the way that in that passage in Revelation the security of the city is so complete wife city security exactly the same as you've got in

Isaiah 54 the wife of God the redeemed church of God the people of God now this city that is so beautiful in all its magnificence and also its security because verse 13 there says in all your children shall be taught by the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children in righteousness you will be established you will be far from oppression for you shall not fear and from terror for it shall not come near you of course there you find as well taught by the Lord what is the equivalent of that in the New Testament well it's the word disciple isn't it the Lord's people as they're born again as they're brought to be his own family so they have this privilege that they are taught by the Lord it's the Lord himself who teaches them through his word one of the things that really distinguishes them from all other people is that they have the word of the

Lord and they know the word of the Lord even though they go on learning yet they still in principle know that word of the Lord they're taught of the Lord and of course there's security even in that itself and it goes on to speak about oppression which is really a word for internal disruption and terror it mentions there an attack from outside so you see this city is not just beautiful but it's a perfect security system you don't get any of its riches plundered you don't get like you find in this

world even the most secure strong rooms as was in London so very recently over the trial of these men who broke into these vaults through that gigantically thick wall that's human security at its best but it's not infallible nothing's going to break through this one and it reminds you of the fact that there are forces in the heights in the spiritual realm that are always seeking to get access to the people of

God these forces these principalities and powers that you cannot see with your eye but that are all the time seeking to get access if they could if the Lord would permit them to get to the people of God to disrupt them to spoil their peace and while that may happen in this life as it did with Job and as it does sometimes to a lesser extent with ourselves what God is saying is ultimately this city is perfectly secure it doesn't need an alarm system because nothing can actually penetrate the security it possesses the servant has made sure of that by his work and that's where the great peace of the children really comes from your children shall have great peace in verse 13 great shall be the peace of your children this he says in verse 17 is the heritage of the servants of the Lord the word heritage there really means effectively the actual possession of a heritage something that's come by way of being bequeathed to them through a specific death the death of the servant they've come to have this heritage but what he's now got in mind is they've actually come into the possession of it it's theirs they have a hold of it they're in it and because they are that's where they'll stay and it will remain theirs forevermore indisputably and of course in Peter's epistle you remember that's one of the arguments that he's bringing to bear upon the way in which suffering for the present moment is beneficial and is indeed necessary because you've been called to this inheritance that is kept in heaven for you who are being kept by the power of God through faith until this is finally revealed and all of that both the beauty and the security is tied together by one thing there's one word there that unites together the beauty of the city and the security of the city you can pick it out from verse 14 and then the very end of the chapter in verse 17 the word vindication there is not a very good translation it's the same word as you find in verse 14 the word righteousness and if you've got a margin as there is here in this bible you'll find a reference that it can be translated righteousness which would be much better because what is being emphasized there is that the substance of the spiritual beauty that God gives to his people is righteousness his righteousness [ 31 : 38 ] Christ's righteousness Christ's likeness Christ's own righteous standing and the foundation of its security is the same righteousness righteousness why are you sure that your salvation will never be overthrown why are you sure that your relationship with the Lord will never actually come to be broken finally and irreparably righteousness God's standard that meets with his own exacting standard of righteousness in himself and that standard that righteousness is huge in Christ it really is the substance of your beauty and the foundation of your security and it all goes back to chapter 53 in chapter 53 and verse 11 out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied by his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant make many accounted to be righteous or you could say shall justify them it's the same thing they're accounted righteous they're justified but righteousness is absolutely at the heart of it and foundationally there that's what he's saying the anguish of his soul will lead to this righteous one making many righteous bringing them the status of righteousness which is why again in chapter 54 the very last words of the verse of the chapter say and their righteousness is from me declares the

Lord he's done it he applies it he maintains it he keeps it and it's absolutely secure as your foundation also there are the two images we've skimmed over it very quickly but I hope that's given you and going over it that quickly it will be profitable for me as well as for yourselves just to go over it again and just try and take the points we've mentioned briefly and just then zoom in on some of them more fully and more detail and you can get some more precious teaching from that but the reconstituted family and the reconstructed city are two wonderful images of what God's redemption is about and who is it for and what the benefits of it are and what we owe to him because of it let's pray Lord our gracious

God we come to give thanks again as we have looked at this aspect and teaching of your word to give thanks for the security and for the certainty for the assurance that you bring to us through the things that you emphasize for us in regard to your own redemption we thank you Lord that it is indeed from you that you have created it for us that you apply it that you are the one who emphasizes its perfection we thank you for the means of securing it for us for the way in which we come to possess it and to enjoy its benefits and we pray Lord that that may continue to be our portion and our enjoyment of it day by day hear the prayers of your people here this evening and in

all the gatherings of your people grant oh Lord that we may continue to depend more fully upon  
your power and your sovereignty and your creatorhood for the production of more spiritual children  
to be born into your kingdom and family for  
Jesus sake Amen O' Do you American