

Isaiah 46-47

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[0:00] The sermon text for today is Isaiah 46-47. At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare, this is the word of the Lord, and the church, in joyful response to his revelation given to us, will together respond, thanks be to God.

Bell bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and livestock. These things you carry are born as burdens on weary beasts.

They stoop, they bow down together. They cannot save the burden, but they let themselves go into captivity. Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been born by me from before your birth, carried from the womb.

Even to your old age, I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear, I will carry, and will save. To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me that we may be alike?

Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh out silver in the scales hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god, and they fall down and worship. They lift it to their shoulders.

[1:20] They carry it. They set it in its place, and it stands there. It cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble. Remember this, and stand firm.

Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, things not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.

Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass. I have purposed, and I will do it.

Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness. I bring near my righteousness. It is not far off, and my salvation will not delay.

I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory. Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon. Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no more be called tender and delicate.

[2:31] Take the millstones and grind flour. Put off your veil. Strip off your robe. Uncover your legs. Pass through the rivers. Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen.

I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one. O Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is his name, is the Holy One of Israel. Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.

I was angry with my people. I profaned my heritage. I gave them into your hand. You showed them no mercy. On the age you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.

You said, I shall be mistress forever, so that you did not lay these things to heart, or remember their end. Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, I am, and there is no one besides me.

I shall not sit as a widow, or know the loss of children. These two things shall come to you in a moment. In one day, the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments.

[3:43] You felt secure in your wickedness, and said, No one sees me. Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, I am, and there is no one besides me.

But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away. Disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone. And ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing.

Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your mouth. Perhaps you may be able to succeed. Perhaps you may be able to inspire terror. You are wearied with your many counsels.

Let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you. Behold, they are like stubble, and fire consumes them.

They cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before. Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have done business with you from your youth.

[4:46] They wander about, each in his own direction. There is no one to save you. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Heavenly Father, your foolishness, you say in 1 Corinthians, is wiser than the wisdom of men.

And your weakness, O God, is stronger than the strength of men. God, in this passage today, the world would see this as a foolish word, an outdated, archaic word.

And yet we know that this is the voice of the living God, the Almighty. And you have a word here for us today. You have a word for Shoreline. For all those gathered here under the sound of my voice, would your voice be the one that is heard as you speak to your church.

Breathe life through this word, I pray. In Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen. Well, good morning, church. If you're new here this morning, and I just want to say welcome again.

We're so glad that you've joined us. And I also just want to say that if you're relatively new to Shoreline, I hope it's been clear to you even in gathering, but we're a church that is about God and his word, chiefly.

[6:10] So in all of our gatherings, what we aim for is that the word would be the center of what we do. It's what we say, it's what we sing, it's what we pray, it's what we preach. God's word gives life.

It's God's word that gives life. He speaks and conjures up life and we respond to him in faith and in praise. And so he's speaking to us through this word written in 700 BC.

He's speaking to us today through this word and that's why we're reading a passage like Isaiah 46 and 47. I mean, even as Catherine was reading through, you might have been maybe embarrassed even, confused for sure, maybe embarrassed about the language that's here, but I want to assure you, Christians especially, you don't need to be embarrassed about the word of God.

This is his word. He has something to say to us. Even in a passage like Isaiah 46 and 47. So let's press in and listen to what the Lord would have us learn today.

You know, very often in life, it appears as though the bad guys win, right? The bad guys get what they want, the good guys lose. You know, an example is you might conduct yourself at work with honesty and integrity.

[7:23] You might value and show empathy to those around you and then you get passed over for a promotion because the other guy, you know, the guy that acts deceitfully and bulldozes everybody in his path to achieve success, he's selected instead of you.

Bad guys win, right? Now, if you think the Bible ignores this phenomenon, you would be quite wrong. For it's expressed in lament all throughout the Psalms.

For example, one of my favorite Psalms, Psalm 73, in that Psalm, Asaph, the psalmist, bemoans the apparent prosperity of the wicked. Listen to this. This is his words.

He says, Behold, these are the wicked always at ease. They increase in riches. All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

If you can't beat them, join them, right? If you can't beat them, join them. You know, that's not actually what Asaph concludes in Psalm 73. See, the turning point of Asaph's story, it occurs when he enters into the sanctuary of God and there in God's presence with the truth clearly displayed before him, Asaph's blurry vision, as it were, is corrected.

[8:34] He's made to see that, in fact, the wicked will be destroyed in a moment. Asaph confesses in light of this that there is nothing on earth

that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever. The wicked, in this short life, they can have all the worldly treasures they want, but for me, Asaph concludes, it is good to be near God.

Now, I hope this kind of perspective alignment is something God will grant us today as we work through Isaiah chapters 46 and 47. So if you haven't turned there already in your Bibles, please do so now.

And if you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the back table bookmarked to today's passage. Feel free to take that as our gift to you if you don't own a Bible. Today, we're in the seventh sermon in a 14-week series in Isaiah chapters 40 to 55 entitled From Sighing to Singing.

The title of the sermon today is The God Who Saves and Shatters. The God Who Saves and Shatters. Now, if you remember last week, the passage opened up the aperture on God's promise of salvation and redemption for Israel.

[9:52] This promise, Isaiah prophesied, is both eternal and global in nature. In chapter 45, verse 22, God made this astonishing offering offered to the nations. He said, Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth.

Now, in many ways, chapters 46 and 47 demonstrate why the nations should turn to the Lord and be saved. So I just want to say, if you're here and you have not yet turned to Christ by faith for the salvation of your soul, if you have not done that, I hope and pray that you will be compelled to Him this morning by what He has to say to you through His word.

At the same time, remember, this prophecy of Isaiah, it's directed first and foremost at who? At Israel, right? It's first and foremost directed at the people of God.

Now, what does God want to say to His people, Israel? And the first thing that God wants to say to them in chapter 46 is, I am the God who saves. I am the God who saves.

And the first assertion in verses 1 through 7, we see this assertion that God, not idols, is the Savior of His people. God, not idols, is the Savior of His people.

[11:04] Kev, if we could put that on the screen, it would be awesome. So Isaiah opens this passage by humorously, we've seen this before, humorously comparing the gods of Babylon to the God of Israel.

Verse 1, Bel and Nebo, Isaiah mentions, those were two of Babylon's chief gods. And their prominence in Babylon is seen even in the names of Babylon's kings.

If you remember from the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar, right, you see that prefix, Neb, and then his son or grandson, Belshazzar. So you see the names of their gods even in the king's names.

During an annual New Year's festival in Babylon, images of these gods would be paraded around the streets. Now, the irony is that these gods are utterly powerless to save, right?

Instead of, as Isaiah depicts, instead of lifting the burdens of their people, they're burdening the poor pack animals, right? Now, eventually, these images would be carried off as souvenirs by the Persian army who would come and sweep over Babylon.

[12:08] Now, radically unlike the Babylonian gods stands Israel's god. Did you catch the repetition but the reversal of terms in verses 3 and 4? Look at verses 3 and 4.

Babylon's gods are born and carried on the backs of beasts. That was 1 and 2. But God, verses 3 and 4, has born and carried on his own back his chosen people Israel.

Even to your old age I am he. And to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made and I will bear. I will carry and save.

You know, parents eventually grow old and need their own children to care for them, right? But not so with God the Father.

He is the parent who never becomes old and weak and he is content to care for his children from cradle to grave. Can idols do the same for those who put their trust in them?

[13:07] Of course not. God, not idols, is both the maker and carrier of Israel. God, not idols, is the savior of his people.

So to whom then would we possibly liken God? Verse 5. To whom then would we make God's equal? To whom then would we possibly compare with God?

There is no fitting comparison. In light of that, Isaiah goes on to show how foolish it would be to bow and worship and offer up prayers to anything or anyone else.

This is actually the final little episode that Isaiah shows to Israel about the foolishness of idols. It's like he's making a final appeal to Israel. Are you going to choose the gods or are you going to choose the one and only true God?

And you say, Mike, haven't we been over this though like seven times already in the book of Isaiah? I know what you're going to say next. You're going to talk about how we still worship idols today and how those idols cannot save and how we need to trust God alone.

[14:17] You know, that's how I felt reading this passage. I was like, Lord, really? Like, you want me to preach on this again? And he's like, well, did you stop worshipping idols yet?

Have you stopped bowing Mike to your little idol that you call control? Worshipping him, carrying him around on your back, praying to him, hoping for your control of events and circumstances to deliver you from chaos or from shame or from feelings of inadequacy?

No. How's that working out for you anyway? not great? You know, there's a reason Isaiah keeps coming back to the same themes.

Because we are forgetful and slow to learn and need to be reminded of the same ancient truths time and again. Now, if you're a Christian and you're only here to learn something new today, like, I'm really sorry.

I mean, you might learn a new, cool, historical thing you didn't know before. Like, you might see a connection in the text that you haven't seen before. But I have to admit, you probably won't walk away thinking, wow, I learned this amazing new and profound truth today in church.

[15:39] But Christians, I don't think God wants you to learn something new today. I think he wants you to take to heart what he's already revealed to us time and again. Namely, that all the idols we turn to for meaning and satisfaction and deliverance, the idol of control if you're like me, or of entertainment, or of financial security, or of career success, or of perfectly behaved children in public, or of marriage, or whatever it is.

These idols are powerless to rescue us from the things we actually need rescuing from. They cannot rescue us from the bondage of sin.

They can't do that. They cannot save us from the spiritual attacks of the enemy. They can't do that. They can't rescue us from death.

They can't even rescue us from things like anxiety and fear. I mean, like, maybe they can ward those off for a time, but certainly not in any deep or lasting way.

Now, who is the only one strong enough to rescue? The one who has made us. The one who bears us, who carries us on his own back, who will save us.

[16:59] Even to your old age, I am he. And to gray hairs, I will carry you. He bears our burdens.

That's a God worth trusting in. He bears our burdens. You know, the ultimate burden of sin, he bore upon himself on the cross.

And the burdens that we carry day in and day out, he gladly takes those off our backs and places them on his strong back, if we would but let him. You know, in doing that, Jesus talks about how he turns our labor into rest.

Paul says that our anxiety is replaced by peace that passes understanding. And God, our maker, our carrier, he will joyfully do this until our dying breath, when he welcomes us into our eternal heavenly home, completing the good work that he began in us.

God, not idols, is the savior, the maker and carrier of Israel. Now, what does that look like in the daily life of a believer, though? Helpfully, Isaiah offers three practical points of application in verses 8-13.

[18:16] And the first one is this, therefore, in light of these things, remember, remember. Now, after reminding Israel of the powerlessness of idols and his sole ability and desire to save, God says to them, verse 8, remember this and stand firm.

Recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old. What we need to do first is remember.

We need to read our Bibles and see God's track record of perfect faithfulness over all of human history, culminating in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We need to reflect on our own journey, remember the ways that God has born and carried us, even from the womb. Now, I want to get better at this myself.

I want increasing rhythms in my life of reflection and remembrance. So we ought to be regularly recounting to our spouses and our children and our brothers and sisters in this church what God has done, passing down stories of God's faithfulness from one generation to the next.

[19:31] This Thanksgiving season is the perfect opportunity annually to do that. Do you have rhythms in your home of remembrance of what God has done?

We don't just look at what God has done in the past, but also who He is today. Verses 9 and 10, they remind us that God is the only God, eternal and unchanging in nature and character.

He is the one, He reminds us yet again, who rules over human history, advancing it according to His own sovereign will and for the good of His people. He is the one whose word is powerful and effective, speaking into existence what is to come.

So friends, if the past shouts of God's faithfulness to His people, rest assured, the same is true today. Today. And it will be true tomorrow and forevermore.

So remember, remember God's past faithfulness. Also remember who God is today. In other words, we need to continually remember who God is and what He's done.

[20:41] Who God is and what He's done. Now did you notice though, the less than remarkable names and descriptions God attributes to Israel in this passage?

Verse 8, you transgressors. Verse 12, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness. Now God is reminding Israel that even though He has remained faithful to her, she is entirely undeserving of such faithfulness on God's part.

See, she has been faithless, right? She's been faithless and yet He has remained faithful and this magnifies His grace, does it not? See, like Israel, we often wander away from righteousness.

We often harden our hearts in obstinance against the Lord, not wanting in our flesh to submit to His will and ways. Yet God, in astonishing grace, which we've seen time and again in Isaiah, after having breathed new creation life into our dead hearts, He continues to lovingly and patiently bear us and carry us in spite of our sin.

So in remembering who God is and what He's done, we should not only be thinking about God's faithfulness, but also His grace for anything that we have from the Lord, we do not deserve.

[22:08] Remember, remember. That leads us to a second application that's not explicitly stated in this text, but I think it is strongly implied, and that is repent.

Therefore, remember, repent. See, by reminding Israel of her sin, and also His past, present, and future grace and faithfulness, God is calling Israel to repentance, right?

To turn from her sinful ways, and turn instead to Him. Turn from sin and trust in Him. Repentance and confession must be an ongoing rhythm in the life of a believer.

See, sin causes separation between us and the Lord. If you're in Christ, it's not an ultimate separation, but it is a real separation, right? Our communion with the Lord is affected. You've all experienced that in your own Christian walk.

But in turning away from our sin, confessing it to the Lord, we're met with fresh grace and mercy, and our communion with God is restored.

[23:12] I've walked with some of you who have experienced that in profound ways in this church. Do you feel right now, though, like your relationship with God is dry or stale? See, perhaps there is an unconfessed sin in your life that you need to deal with before the Lord.

Perhaps there is an idol within your heart that God is calling you today to abandon, that you might trust in Him alone. In Psalm 32, King David describes his state while remaining in unconfessed sin. He describes it as his bones wasting away, right? God's hand being heavy upon him. But once he confessed his sin, he was met with forgiveness, right, with grace, with a restored relationship with

God.

And at the end of the Psalm, we see the joy and gladness that accompanies fellowship with God. Maybe God's calling some of you this morning to repentance. There's one more implied application in this text as well that follows these first two.

So God's calling His people to remember, to repent, and third, to rely. See, when we have remembered the truth about who God is and what He's done, when we've turned from our sin in repentance and received His grace and mercy afresh, the way forward is then active reliance upon Him, trust, faith.

[24:40] See, Israel is having a hard time here absorbing this news that her promised redemption is going to come by the hand of Cyrus, right? This pagan king, this bird of prey, as Isaiah calls him here in verse 11.

He's going to come as this cold conqueror from the east and from the north. And I think the Jewish exiles are growing a little cynical in their minds and hearts. Cynical.

Cynicism is a critical, mistrusting, suspicious spirit. That's what cynicism is. It's the spirit in the garden at that first sin that asks, did God really say?

Did He really say? Does He really mean? See, Satan loves it when God's people, when Christians grow cynical. And you know, we're really good at growing cynical, aren't we? We're really good at listening to all sorts of other voices other than the Lord's voice.

And those voices cause us to doubt His grace and His faithfulness. And this is why we need to listen to Him. Twice in this passage, God says, listen to me. Listen to me, O house of Israel.

[25:49] If we would but stop listening to other voices and choose to listen to God's, He would drive out our doubts, our cynicism. He would increase trust in Him alone.

And hence, remembrance and repentance, both of which turn our minds and hearts on the Lord, they lead to reliance on Him, to active trust in Him. And don't we this morning, church, don't we have a far greater reason than exiled Israel to rely on the Lord?

For we have seen the fulfillment of verse 13. Right? Isaiah, God through Isaiah says, I bring near my righteousness. It is not far off and my salvation will not delay. I will put salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.

For now, in Christ Jesus, Paul says in Ephesians 2, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. God, by His own sovereign grace, poured out on undeserving sinners like us, who were far from Him.

He has brought His righteousness, His salvation near. So near, in fact, He's placed it in our very hearts and souls. This is the God who saves His people.

[27:02] He's calling us to remember, to repent, and more deeply to rely on Him this morning. You know, yet even though we have this hope as an anchor for our souls, it's still so easy for us to look around at life, the waves and the storms of life, and to lose trust in God.

Right? I mean, consider, again, consider Israel here. God is promising Israel salvation. But what is their present reality?

It's exile. Right? God is asserting His prevailing power over the Babylonian gods, but at present, they're slaves to Babylon. And so Isaiah, he advances the prophecy.

In chapter 46, God was saying to Israel, I am the God who saves. And now in chapter 47, God is saying, I am the God who shatters. I am the God who shatters.

In the first seven verses, God is declaring a message of vengeance and victory. He says, Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon.

[28:14] Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans. See, God is shifting from addressing Israel to addressing her captor, Babylon.

Once the beauty and envy of the world, right, untouchable in her fame and power, Babylon will be humiliated, becoming as a beggar, a slave, and a fugitive.

These are the images we see in these first seven verses. Now, it's almost embarrassing, like I mentioned, to read these verses out loud, but I think that's the point. Like, Babylon is about to be utterly disgraced.

Her might and riches replaced with shame as God sweeps over her in vengeance. But why? What kind of a God acts like that?

What kind of a God talks like that? How angry and vindictive is this God? Angry, yes. Vindictive, no. [29:15] Look at verse 6 in chapter 47. God says, I was angry with my people.

I profaned my heritage. I gave them into your hand. Talking to Babylon. You showed them no mercy. On the aged, you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.

This verse gives us insight into the providence and the character of Almighty God. See, God was angry with Israel and therefore gave Israel into Babylon's hand.

Israel's exile to Babylon was God's punishment for Israel's persistent rebellion against him. Now, we didn't cover chapters 1-39 in Isaiah. We jumped into chapter 40.

But 1-39 is largely about this. Israel refusing to turn from her ways. Ending in this ominous warning at the end of chapter 39 that Babylon is going to come and conquer her and carry her off to exile.

[30:19] But look at what verse 6 is saying here. Though God gave Israel into Babylon's hand, Babylon is entirely responsible for her sin against Israel.

Babylon has treated the people of Israel, even the elderly, with cruelty and without mercy. Babylon's cast off any moral restraint. So yes, God is angry with Babylon.

Can you imagine if your child was being molested or hurt and you were not angry at what was going on? Like, this is a righteous anger. Injustice is happening.

God is angry. This is a good thing that our God is angry. See, God is righteously angry because of the evil of Babylon's ways. That describes God's anger.

Perfectly righteous, never capricious, never uncontrolled, only and ever directed at pure evil. God is angry. But no, God is not vindictive.

[31:20] See, God is perfectly and infinitely just. God measures out exactly the punishment that Babylon deserves for her cruel and unjust mistreatment of his people.

Now, this is a terrifying word for Babylon, right? A terrifying word for the enemy of God's people. But what kind of a word is it for the Jewish exiles? The ones who are subject to Babylon's oppression. We can get an idea from verse 4. Look at verse 4. Isaiah interjects. He says, Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, is his name, is the Holy One of Israel.

God's vengeance on Babylon means victory for Israel. Does it not? The word of judgment and wrath against the enemy as at the same time a word of comfort and hope for God's people.

See, God is the ravager of Babylon, but the Redeemer of Israel. The one who takes upon himself all the needs of his next of kin. God is able to ravage and redeem, to shatter and to save, because unlike the astral deities of Babylon, he is the Lord of hosts.

[32:40] Not them. He is the one who brings out the starry host by number and calls them each by name. That was 4026. He alone rules over creation and to him alone belong all power and might.

And God's decision to act, to shatter the enemy and save his people, it emanates from within the perfection of his divine character and nature. That's why he says he's the Holy One of Israel.

Because of his holy love, he will not stand aloof as his people suffer injustice. His anger towards the enemy is righteously aroused.

God will ensure that justice is executed. His compassion for his people, it springs forth, does it not? He will ensure that his people are rescued from oppression.

Now what great hope is this for Christians all over the world today who are persecuted for their faith? If you look at the prayer guide from the International Missions Board that we sent out a link to for the persecuted church, it talks about two missionaries to the northern Maluku Islands in Indonesia.

[33:48] These missionaries are seeking to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to a predominantly Muslim people and one of them was poisoned in an attempt to take her life. But you know what those missionaries are doing?

They're praying for the salvation of the one who poisoned her. Are those missionaries, they know, they know that God loves them, they know that he sees them in their affliction, they know that in the

end justice will be meted out, righteousness will prevail, they know that in the end the riches and joys of heaven will be theirs and this frees them to love even those who hate them.

This is the great hope that we have as Christians and we'll talk a little bit more about that later. The word of judgment against Babylon though, it advances forward from a word of vengeance against her to Babylon's diagnosis and downfall.

This is verses 8 through 11. Diagnosis and downfall. We see here that verses 10 and 11 run parallel to 8 and 9 and both stanzas diagnose the deeper problem behind Babylon's wickedness and declaring as a result her sure downfall.

Now perhaps you notice the repeated claim of Babylon in these stanzas. I am and there is no one besides me.

[35:12] She says that in verse 8 and verse 10. Now where have we heard that line before? Who has said that line before? Anybody? God.

Over and over again in Isaiah. Six times alone in last week's passage, right? And then in verse 9 of chapter 46 today, for I am God and there is no other.

But Babylon is said to be asserting I am and there is no one besides me. Babylon in her pomp and pride was claiming God-like status.

Here I am in all my beauty and splendor, right? All other nations bow to me. No other power could usurp or overthrow me. I am untouchable. Babylon is saying nobody's going to call me to account. This is the audacity of human pride. Right here. And do you know what? All human pride, all human pride, it bears the same shape and direction of Babylon's pride here, even if in miniature form.

[36:19] All human pride, given enough time and access, will fester and grow into what we see here. I am and there is no one besides me. You know, Babylon here isn't just a nation 2,700 years ago.

Babylon here represents all of sinful humanity. We see that in Revelation 18 when it picks up on this name, Babylon.

Babylon represents all of those who reject God's rule and seek to assert their own. all of those who in pride believe themselves to be at the center of world history, right, the earth going round and round for their own happiness.

All of those who reject any talk about an objective standard of right and wrong, reject any talk about a judgment to come, reject any talk about a heaven or a hell.

And what do we see here is the outcome for these enemies of God and his people. it's the outcome that the Apostle John foresaw in that vision of the end times in Revelation.

[37:30] Now, barring language from earlier in Isaiah, an angel declares in Revelation 18 to fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. Proverbs say that pride goes before destruction, right, and utter destruction as Babylon's sure end due to this unrestrained pride.

Verse 9 of chapter 47, this downfall is described as the loss of children and widowhood. This represents the complete loss of future security or hope.

It's taken away. The complete removal of protection or status. In verse 11, it's described as evil, disaster, ruin, that her gods and sorcerers will be powerless to resist.

Having diagnosed Babylon's condition and declared her downfall, the Lord then takes up a taunt against her. Verses 12 through 15, we see this taunt and tragedy.

Verses 13, God is challenging Babylon. Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries with which you have labored from your youth. Perhaps you may be able to succeed perhaps you may inspire terror.

[38:50] Now this is what Babylon has tragically given herself to. The zealous pursuit of a false power that cannot save. One commentator writes, commitment, discipline, and effort are a true part of religion.

Right? Isn't that all religion? Whether secularism, which is its own religion, or the other religions of this world, commitment, discipline, effort, but when allied to the worthless, they are only a weariness.

This reminds me of the contest on the top of Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Do you remember this? Elijah, the sole prophet of Yahweh, challenges the prophets of Baal to reach to prepare an offering, remember?

And then to call upon their God and whichever God sets that offering ablaze is the one true God. So the prophets of Baal, they get to go first, right? And what happens? They limp around the altar, they cut themselves, they cry out to their God from morning until noon, and Elijah mocks them.

He says, cry aloud, for he is a God. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened. But there was no voice.

[40:09] No one answered. No one paid attention. You know, such is the result here of all that fervent religious activity of Babylon's magicians and sorcerers.

Who will win the contest between the Holy One of Israel and the gods of Babylon? Isaiah makes the answer abundantly clear in verses 13 and 14. The consuming fire of God's judgment will overtake Babylon.

Babylon. This is no backyard bonfire for warmth and comfort and time with friends. Like, this is a fire of devastation. And all those Babylon turn to for help, her magicians and her sorcerers, they're going to flee in terror as they find their gods powerless to resist Yahweh's flame.

Now, in the end, Isaiah concludes, there is no one to save you. such is the tragic ending for the enemies of God and his people.

An urgent warning here that downfall and destruction is their sure doom. And you know, the Bible makes abundantly clear that there are only two sides.

[41:24] There's two sides. There is, on the one side, the humble and repentant, the ones who turn from their sin and trust in God as their and the only Lord and Savior. And on the other side, the proud and the arrogant, the ones who persist in sin, who reject God's gracious offer of salvation.

And there's no third category. There's no middle ground. You might be sitting in these seats and not feel like an enemy of God. You might actually be an upstanding American citizen, one that generally does good to other people, who gives to charities.

But if you have not believed in Jesus and received life in his name, then in fact, you remain an enemy of God. And therefore, under his just condemnation and wrath, he is storing up for the day of judgment.

But guess what? The good news is that right now, he restrains it. He's holding it back. He's waiting for more sinners to turn to him. That's why he said, turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.

God has drawn near. God doesn't just shout this offer from afar. He has drawn near. God has brought that salvation, that righteousness close to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[42:46] See, Jesus, the Son of God, came down from heaven, taking on our form, taking on the form of a human, and then he willingly laid down his life on the cross for our sake, that he might accomplish the greater redemption that we all needed.

Forgiveness of sins, right? Not redemption from Babylon, redemption from sin and the power of Satan and death. And God has made that possible in Christ.

Forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God. This gift of grace is available to all who would receive it through repentance and faith in Jesus' name.

So the believers in this room, like exiled Israel, we ought to see in this word of vengeance against God's enemies a hopeful and comforting word of victory for the saints.

The enemies of God and of the church will be vanquished in the end. That's the promise here.

Babylon will fall. All the ideologies of this world, the pagan and wicked cultures of this world, all of them will come crashing down.

[44:04] All the idols and gods that this world relies on, even though they don't realize that they're idols and gods, they will fail in the end. Satan and death itself will be cast into the lake of fire.

The new heavens will come down like a bride adorned for her husband. The curse will be fully and finally undone. justice and righteousness will be the pure air that we breathe.

And the dwelling place of God will be with men. It might feel, church, like the enemy is winning. You know, secularism in our post-Christian nation, especially in this region, it might be taking a deeper hold of our culture.

You know, technology with all its allurements might be leading to more harm than good. Worldly ideologies and philosophies that run counter to the morality of God and His Word, they might be advancing.

Hostility and opposition to Christ might be increasing. But Jesus says to us, in the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

[45:15] And again, Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Saints, it might feel like the enemy is winning, but God is emphatically declaring to us today that the enemy has already lost.

He's already lost. The church is storming the gates of hell. We're celebrating the triumph of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and we're urging all those who would come to abandon Babylon, right? to join themselves to the winning team, the church of Jesus Christ. This is the direction that all of history is going because the only God has declared it to be so.

My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose. All my purpose. To invest yourself in the church.

Invest yourself in the church of God. That's where his power is on display. That's the only game in town, as think Jordan said recently in the equipping class. The church of Christ, which will be victorious in the end.

[46:32] And you know, this informs our evangelism quite a bit, doesn't it? People need to know the bad news, Babylon's downfall, right? The condemnation and wrath that is due for the enemies of God, so that the good news can wash over them in the power of the Spirit.

And we don't have to be embarrassed about that, right? This is the word of God. We don't have to be embarrassed about that, but can herald the good news of Christ. Bring salvation to all men. But you know, some of you are feeling hopeless and helpless this morning. Maybe not on the level of the church and where history is going, but maybe just in a battle against personal sin.

Maybe in a marriage that's harder than you thought it would be. Maybe in witnessing to loved ones that seem to be bearing no fruit after years.

Maybe in mocking or ridicule that you're enduring for believing in Jesus. And I just want to return to the application that we saw in chapter 46. Remember these things.

[47:40] The sure promises that belong to us in Christ Jesus. How God shatters the enemy and saves his people by his sovereign grace. Remember these things.

And if you need to, repent of your sin. Abandon all forms of self-reliance. Turn from all false sources of purpose and satisfaction and deliverance.

And then rely on the one and only Redeemer. The Lord of hosts. The Holy One of Israel. Your maker. Your carrier. He will carry you through these struggles.

And all the way until that day when he brings you and all the church into glory. Even to your old age, I am he. And to gray hairs, I will carry you.

I have made and I will bear. I will carry and will save.