

# Isaiah 52:1-53:12

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Isaiah 51, 1 through into chapter 52, all the way to verse 12. 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.

Chapter 51, Isaiah. Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you. For he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. For the Lord comforts Zion.

He comforts all her waste places, and makes her wilderness like Eden. Her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her.

Thanksgiving and the voice of song. Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation. For a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples. The coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath. For the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner.

But my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed. Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law.

Fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings, for the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool.

But my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to all generations. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.

[ 2 : 1 7 ] Awake as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces? Who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep?

Who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. I, I am he who comforts you.

Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies? Of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the Lord your maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.

And you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor, when he sets himself to destroy? And where is the wrath of the oppressor? He who is bowed down shall speedily be released.

[ 3 : 2 5 ] He shall not die and go down to the pit. Neither shall his bread be lacking. I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar.

The Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in your mouth and covered you in the shadow of my hand, establishing the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, You are my people.

Wake yourself. Wake yourself. Stand up, O Jerusalem. You who have drunk from the land of the Lord, the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs, the bowl, the cup of staggering.

There is none to guide her among all the sons she has borne. There is none to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up. These two things have happened to you.

Who will console you? Devastation and destruction, famine and sword, who will comfort you? Your sons have fainted.

[ 4 : 28 ] They lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net. They are full of the wrath of the Lord, the rebuke of your God. Therefore, hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk but not with wine.

Thus says your Lord, the Lord, your God, who pleads the cause of his people. Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more.

And I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, Bow down, that we may pass over. And you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to pass over. Chapter 52, the Lord's Coming Salvation. Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion, put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city, for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Shake yourself from the dust and arise. Be seated, O Jerusalem, loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus says the Lord, you were sold for nothing and you shall be redeemed without money.

[ 5 : 40 ] For thus says the Lord God, my people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. Now therefore, what I hear, declares the Lord, seeing that my people are taken away for nothing, their rulers wail, declares the Lord, and continually all the day my name is despised.

Therefore, my people shall know my name. Therefore, in that day, they shall know that it is I who speak. Here I am. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns.

The voice of your watchmen, they lift up their voice, together they sing for joy. For eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people.

He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

depart, depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing, go out from the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord.

[ 7 : 14 ] For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning. My name's Andrew. I'm one of the elders here at Shoreline, and I have the privilege of preaching from this incredibly beautiful, hopeful text, and I just hope that it will be at least as much of an encouragement to you as it has been to me.

So this is a passage that's full of hope at an incredibly dark time in the history of God's people. It holds out to the faithful remnant some beautiful promises.

Promises that are so beautiful that they're hard to believe. Maybe hard for us to believe to today, but I think especially hard for God's people to believe at the time that they were spoken to them.

At the time, God's people were probably at maybe their lowest point. They had utterly failed, so they'd been removed from the promised land as a result, and everything was heading in the wrong direction.

[ 8 : 35 ] Well, we today are not the believing remnant of Judah, but there are promises here that are for all of God's people, past, present, and future.

And so I think there's really a word of encouragement here in this text for us today, especially anyone here today that might be facing discouragement. We have a lot of verses to cover, and so I thought it might be helpful to give you guys my outline up front.

The first chunk of text conveys A beautiful promise. And then in the next chunk, we have a confused response from Judah.

Then the Lord responds to Judah with some compassionate, comfort, and correction. And then finally, we have a word of astonishing hope.

And our main point this morning, you are more sinful than you know, but also more loved than you could imagine. And so the future is more glorious than you could possibly dream.

[ 9 : 46 ] These words I'm roughly borrowing here, paraphrasing from Tim Keller. This is a formulation of the gospel that he uses that I think is just so encouraging and really fits our text this morning.

I think this is the message in this text to the faithful remnant, the believing remnant. And I think it's a message that transfers pretty directly to God's people in any context.

And so I think it transfers to us today. So would you pray with me? Father in heaven, Lord, would you give us eyes of faith to see and to understand and to receive your truth this morning?

The gospel can only be understood and received by faith, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it's the power of God.

So would you work in power this morning through your word? Amen. A beautiful promise. So I've used, I wanted to say up front, I've used the phrase, the believing remnant or the faithful remnant a few times.

[10:56] So remnant is a word that Isaiah uses elsewhere and also many of the prophets use and it has some different flavors in different contexts, but really it refers to those who are preserved by God and who truly seek the Lord.

And in this context, the remnant is a subset of Judah who as a nation have largely been unfaithful and so they've been taken off into exile in Babylon.

And in our text this morning, we know that God is speaking here specifically to the believing remnant because he calls them those who pursue righteousness and those who seek the Lord.

And then later on in verse 7, you who know righteousness and the people in whose heart is my law. And maybe the first thing that sticks out as you read or as you hear this text are the repeated commands to Judah to give God their attention.

Listen. Look. Look. Give attention. Lift your eyes. Look. Listen. God has a message for Judah and he's really concerned that they receive it.

[12:04] And if we take a minute and try and envision the state of God's people in exile, I think that helps us understand why God is working so hard here to grab their attention.

In chapter 49, Isaiah describes the headspace of God's people. He says, But Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me. My Lord has forgotten me.

There's a total lack of hope in these words. So picture for me, picture with me for a minute, a parent with a child. So maybe a situation where the child has disobeyed.

And so they've been disciplined. And so the child's been humbled. Maybe their spirit has been bruised a little bit. And so now the parent wants to speak a word of comforting truth to their child.

Well, with the child in the state that they're in, it can be difficult for them to receive that word of comfort. Perhaps they've been devastated by the discipline that they've experienced, a little bit humiliated, maybe feeling miserable, maybe a little confused even.

[13:15] And so the parent moves towards them in tenderness. And the first thing that he does is he gets their attention. Because the word of comfort that he has to speak won't land if the parent, if the child's heart and mind is in a different place.

And so God starts here by getting their attention. And once he has their attention, he lifts their eyes off of their current circumstances and he focuses them on his past faithfulness.

This is in verses 1 and 2. He has an incredible promise that he wants to remind them of. This is not a new promise, but before he can give that promise to them, he first reminds them of his past faithfulness.

And so he gives them an image of a stone that becomes a beautiful structure, a temple, or some other kind of structure. But it starts out first as raw material in a quarry.

And what do you do with stone? Well, you build something impressive out of it. But there's a lot that happens to that chunk of stone before it becomes that impressive structure, right? And so God's reminding his people, you didn't become this temple in your own strength.

[14:28] You didn't become my people in your own strength. I am the one who formed you as a people. And then he paints a parallel picture from their history.

He points them to Abraham and Sarah who were past childbearing years. They were barren, so they couldn't have children. And this is like the least likely couple that you would ever choose as the parents of a nation.

But this is the couple that God chose to be the parents of his nation to bless and to work through.

And so whenever the Israelites thought of Abraham and Sarah, they would think of this promise.

Now the Lord said to Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you. I will curse and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. This was the Israelites origin story, right?

[ 15 : 30 ] It was deeply woven into their psyche. And so when the Israelites heard this text, they would nod their heads and they would say, that's right. You did take Abraham and turn him, make him into a great nation.

You blessed him just as you said you would. We're here today because you were faithful to that promise. We don't have time to dig into this promise. Maybe you have been in preparation for Christmas, but two quick things to note.

First, it's a really hard to believe promise, right? How could God possibly bring this to pass? But he did, right? And then second, it's an unconditional promise. He says, I will.

I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will bless those who bless you. And so it's unconditional. God is the one who brings this about. And so meditating on God's past faithfulness to his promises sows some seeds of faith that prepares Judah to receive a similarly audacious promise.

And before we get on to that promise, I think there is a word for us here. What do we do when the promises of God clash with our present reality? What do we focus on? I know I'm prone to focus solely on the crisis of the moment.

[ 16 : 46 ] You know, maybe it's a crisis at work. Maybe it's a crisis in our family, a health crisis. That's what fills my frame. But we see in Scripture that God regularly urges his people to dwell actually on his past faithfulness and then his promises of future blessing.

And this isn't escapism to do this. Meditating on these truths gives us the gift of a truer understanding of reality.

God's view of reality is actually the only true view of reality. And so meditating on his truth, it actually opens our aperture so that we can take in more of reality because we've sort of focused down on this one little thing, but there's so much more to reality.

And so we want to meditate on God's past faithfulness and his promises of future blessing. And this is a habit we have to develop. Probably I think none of us are good at this, you know, but this is something that we have to, it's something that we have to practice.

And if you're a parent, this is something that you want to be training your children in. And you want to be not just sort of teaching them how to do it, but modeling this. Because we all need this, and so we want to be doing this as a community.

[ 18 : 06 ] This is one reason why we share testimonies of thanksgiving. And we want to be doing this as families, and we want to be doing this as individuals. Okay, so God has lifted the gaze of his people from their present hopeless circumstances to his past faithfulness.

And now that he has their attention, he's going to lay out this beautiful promise, a future blessing. For the Lord comforts Zion. He comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord.

Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving in the voice of song. So first from a rock to a temple, then from a barren couple to a nation, and now a promise that a barren desert is going to become a luscious garden.

This is an unconditional promise. God is saying this will happen. I will bring it about. Where there's currently barrenness, there will be blessing. And I think it's important that we understand the magnitude of what God is promising here.

This is a promise of the Garden of Eden restored. The Garden of Eden was the original state of God's people. And in one sense, the whole history of the world as described in the Bible is the story of a people created by God to be in perfect fellowship with him in paradise.

[ 19 : 35 ] But then we sinned, breaking fellowship with God, and we were cast out of paradise. And ever since then, the goal has been to return to that state.

So this is Genesis 2. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

Now I know we have some gardeners here in the room. Gardening can be hard work, right? Maybe you tend a garden that someone else planted, or maybe you've even started a garden where there

wasn't one.

You tilled up the soil, you planted the right crops, and you built a fence around the garden to protect it from wild animals. How many of you have planted a garden in the desert?

[ 20 : 36 ] Nobody, right? Nobody plants a garden in the desert. There are some soil types and weather patterns and growing conditions that are conducive to gardening, and then there's a desert. Nothing grows in a desert other than like maybe a cactus and a couple scrubby plants, right?

But not gardens. For a garden, you need consistent water. You need good soil. You need the sun to not be too hot. Nobody grows a garden in the desert. But God is saying that is what I am going to do.

You, my people, are a desert. You were supposed to be a holy people. You were supposed to be a light to the nations, and you failed.

And now you're few in number, and you're scattered. You're far from home. But I am moving towards you to comfort you, and not just to comfort you. I'm going to restore you, but not just as the kingdom of Judah.

I'm not just going to restore you to your national borders. I'm going to restore you far beyond that. I'm going to restore you all the way back to the Garden of Eden, where you walked with me in close communion.

[ 21 : 44 ] And what will that produce? That will produce joy and singing. I'm going to do this work of restoration, and your response will be to marvel at it in joyful song, which is the only fitting response of God's people to the things that he's done.

Singing has always been the natural response to God's works. We're made, actually, to respond that way. And maybe you might say, you know, not me.

You know, that's just not something that I do. You know, and I'm right there with you. I have no musical gift. I'm thankful for the people the Lord has blessed our church with who have a musical gift. That's not me.

But that's not what this idea is all about. It's not about giftedness. Whether or not you know it, you are actually wired to sing. That's the way God has created you.

I heard someone named Shai Lin, who's both a rapper and a pastor, which is a great combination. He used this example recently that I thought was so awesome, just talking about how this response of singing, it's something that we even see in the secular world.

[ 22 : 56 ] And so he's talking about, he's a Philadelphia Phillies fan, and he was talking about, this was a couple years ago, and he was watching this game. I guess this was, they had just won a playoff game, and it was kind of a big deal.

And then there was this video that went viral of all the players in the locker room just bursting into song, and they were singing along with some pop song just at the top of their lungs.

Just pure joy. And that actually became like a viral thing, and that song became like an anthem for all Philadelphia Phillies fans. You can watch after games, you know, when they've won, you can see like the whole stadium is singing this song.

And it's just an incredible thing. And that's just joy. That's joy that's in our hearts, and we're wired for that to come out. This concept actually was picked up by one of the political parties in the last election.

They noticed that our country right now is in a time of deep sighing, and they recognize that a message of joy and singing might really resonate with people.

[ 24 : 02 ] And maybe it didn't, you know, for other reasons, but that was a really astute observation. They understood how people are wired. We're wired to sing, and so if you can provide a pathway to people doing that, an outlet for that, there's something innate in us that just wants to respond to that.

And that's really powerful. One pastor says, The fact that Christianity is a singing religion bears witness, not only to the way that we're wired as human beings, but to the kind of God we have, namely a God who one day, according to Zephaniah 317, is going to sing over us.

He is going to lead a choir and celebrate the fact that we are his. And we're going to join in singing that he is ours, because God is so valuable and so beautiful and so multifaceted in his perfections that to leave out the emotional component and not let it spill out in poetry and song would be to leave out a key element in worship.

We humans have explosive souls, and the reason we do is because God is explosively beautiful and great and glorious. He is going to call out from us song and music of every kind, and we might as well just let it out and try to bring it into deep, powerful significance with truth.

So our sermon series in Isaiah is titled From Sighing to Singing, where there's currently sighing, where there are waste places, where there's desert. There will be singing.

[ 25 : 41 ] That's an unconditional promise. So bringing us back to our main point, you're more sinful than you know, but also more loved than you can imagine. And so the future is far more glorious than you could possibly dream.

Judah knew that God was powerful. They'd seen him work in power on their behalf in the past, but perhaps this was just a little bit too much to believe.

In one sense, this promise is easier for us to believe today. We know that God sent his son Jesus, right, to rescue his people, but from Judah's vantage point, they didn't know that.

But even though we're on the other side of the cross, I think we can still find ourselves in a similar place as Judah, feeling the Lord has forsaken me. My God has forgotten me.

On this side of the cross, we rejoice, but we still rejoice in the midst of sorrow and suffering and sometimes deep discouragement. Maybe you would say, I believe the gospel with my whole heart.

[ 26 : 48 ] I know that God has redeemed me. I've seen him work in power in my life in the past, but right now, my life is a mess. Yes, I know who God is.

I know what he's done, but can he really bring about my flourishing? There's just too much desert in my life for that. Maybe you're at a loss with parenting your children.

Maybe you feel as though a spirit of division rules in your home instead of a spirit of peace. For the youth in the room, you know, maybe you're always at war with your siblings and you desire to be at peace, but it just doesn't seem like that's possible.

It doesn't seem like that's something God can do. Maybe your marriage is on the rocks. Perhaps you and your spouse are enemies instead of lovers. Maybe financially, you're in a hole that just doesn't seem possible to climb out of.

Maybe your health is falling apart. Maybe you're struggling with a secret sin that just has you securely in its grasp. If any of these are your struggles, or if you're struggling with something else entirely, I want you to know that your situation is well within God's power to redeem.

[ 28 : 08 ] And whether or not he does, in the way that you hope and in the way that you pray for, he will work through that situation for your good and his glory. And the suffering that you may be experiencing from that situation will eventually pass away.

The desert will become a garden. And here's how John describes what this is going to look like.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, neither crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

And he who is seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Eden restored. So this is the beautiful promise.

[ 29 : 20 ] After giving this promise, God again commands the people's attention. He says, Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation.

He's just given them this really hard-to-believe promise. And you might think, Well, now he's going to stop, and he's going to slow down, and he's going to explain how this could logically be.

Maybe he'll repeat the promise, address any skepticism they might be feeling. But instead, he stretches the promise even further. He starts talking about the peoples. This is other nations.

The law, which reveals his truth and his character, it's going to go out to the peoples. It's going to go out to the coastlands, which represents faraway nations. When he talks here about his arm judging the peoples, this is actually a picture of extending his rule to the peoples.

It's not a picture of God's wrath poured out and punitive judgment on the peoples. And you can just tell this by the immediate context. This judgment of the peoples comes in the context of their salvation.

[ 30 : 25 ] So the peoples are being brought into the kingdom under God's rule and blessing. And we've already seen this in Isaiah, right? So this is from Isaiah 49.6.

It's too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel. I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

And we don't just see this in Isaiah. This echoes the Genesis 12 promise to Abraham, and you, all the families of the earth, shall be blessed.

This has been God's plan from the very beginning, to gather a people to himself from every tribe, nation, and tongue. This is a message of incredible hope.

God's going to accomplish salvation, not just for Israel, but for the whole world. So God expands the promise. And he then contrasts the permanence of the salvation that he offers with the impermanence of the earth itself and with those who oppose his people.

[ 31 : 39 ] He says, look up, look down. Everything that you see, it's going to vanish. Have you ever seen something burn up and go from a solid mass into smoke that's visible for an instant and then just disappears forever?

That's what's going to happen to the earth and those who are reviling you. Don't be afraid of them. My salvation, on the other hand, that's going to last forever.

Now to the Israelites, at this point, this would have been even harder to believe. They'd been carried off into captivity by one of the greatest empires the world had ever seen.

The temple of their God had just been burnt to the ground. Their cities had been destroyed. If anything was permanent, it was the kingdom of their powerful oppressors, not the kingdom of their God.

How could their God save them, let alone expand his kingdom to the nations? And I want you to notice how God says he's going to do this.

[ 32 : 43 ] He doesn't tell them exactly how, except to say that it's going to be accomplished by his arm, which is a picture of his strength accomplishing his purposes. And this is actually a theme, the arm of the Lord, that's pretty common in the Old Testament.

But the thing is, every time God's arm is referred to in the Old Testament, it describes God's power working to save Israel and to punitively judge the nations.

So here's one example from Exodus. Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from slavery to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

And there's similar language all throughout Deuteronomy and several places in the historical books, as well as in the Psalms. But here, it's the distant coastlands, the faraway nations who are hoping in God and are eagerly waiting on his arm to work in power on their behalf.

And so at this point, the people are roused to respond and they respond with a prayer that has tones, I think, of indignation. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.

[ 33 : 58 ] So the people address their prayer directly to the arm of the Lord, which he's just told them will accomplish the salvation of the nations. But how can the arm of the Lord accomplish this incredible promise of extending his rule to the nations if it wasn't even able to prevent his people from domination by another more powerful nation?

Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?

So Judah now boldly seeks to direct the gaze of God back to his past faithfulness and his mighty acts. His mighty arm rescued them from Egypt, pictured here as a dragon, and dried up the sea so that they could pass over.

These are the types of things that they're used to God's arm doing. But now it's as if he's fallen asleep. His mighty arm could not prevent them from being carried off into exile by a more powerful nation, or so it seemed.

When I first read these verses, it reminded me of Elijah actually taunting the prophets of Baal and asking whether Baal was perhaps asleep and needed to be wakened.

[ 35 : 20 ] This is kind of a bold thing to say to God, right? And the Israelites would have known Psalm 121, Behold, he who keeps Israel were neither slumber nor sleep.

So they knew that their God didn't sleep, yet they felt like he in fact was asleep, and so they urged him to wake up. And I just wanted to say, you can talk to God this way.

That's okay. The Psalms are filled with the prayers of people who are in the depths of despair. And so they speak to the Lord all of their emotions, everything that's in their heart.

That's what they say to the Lord. And so we don't need to hide our emotions from God. He invites us to share those with him. In fact, these words might actually be borrowed from Psalm 44.

Awake, why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself. Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

[ 36 : 23 ] So you can pray this way. That's how Judah felt, and so that's how they prayed. Let's see what God has to say in response.

First, he restates the promise. Repetition is always important in Scripture. This promise is guaranteed. And so he repeats it, and he points them to their future return.

The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing. And it will be a time of joy and free from sorrow and sighing. So he's refocusing their gaze again.

These are words of reassurance. The weight that you feel, the sighing that's in your heart, it's going to be transformed into joy and singing.

So back to our main point, the future is far more glorious than you could possibly dream. But God doesn't just respond with a restatement of the promise.

[ 37 : 22 ] There's also the need for compassionate and clarifying correction. The remnant was wrong in their prayer. The Babylonian captivity was not a result of inaction on God's part.

It's not that his arm was too short to save. It's not that he fell asleep. But God doesn't respond to their misguided prayer with condemnation or with judgment.

This is the believing remnant. Instead, he moves towards them with both gentle compassion and with clarifying truth. He says, I, I am he who comforts you.

And this short phrase is both a statement of who God is, Yahweh, the self-existent one, the I am, and a reminder of God's tender, personal love and care for his people.

He doesn't command them, be comforted. He doesn't say, comfort one another. He says, I comfort you. There's echoes here of Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd.

[ 38 : 28 ] I shall not want. It's the Lord himself. Or Psalm 121. The Lord is your keeper. It's the Lord himself. He doesn't, he himself comforts you, shepherds you, keeps you.

And then he reminds them further of who he is. Rather than being a limited regional deity who's fallen asleep, he says, I'm the one who created the universe.

I've already told you that I'll be there when the universe vanishes like smoke. I'm now reminding you I was there at the beginning too. I stretched out the heavens.

I laid the foundations of the earth. And you've forgotten this. The universe, which feels so permanent, had a beginning. I created it. So if the universe, which feels permanent, had a beginning that was shaped by my hands, don't you think that those humans who are oppressing you and are far less permanent than the universe are nothing to fear?

Measure them against my mighty acts. They're going to wither like grass, but my salvation will be forever. This is truth that clarifies your fear is misplaced.

[ 39 : 43 ] You have nothing to fear from man. And if you're sitting here as a believer today, this is a universal truth. It transcends all context. We have nothing to fear from man.

God then gives them assurance that their bondage will end. That's verse 14. And he again reminds them of who he is in 15 and 16. And we need so many reminders of truth, don't we?

Just like Israel, our eyes so quickly shift to the things that we fear and we begin to doubt. And we lose hope. But God is sovereign over the very sea, which represents chaos.

If he's sovereign over the chaos in your lives, then we, his people, we have nothing to fear. All of this sovereign power is at work on behalf of God's people.

He's not asleep. He's actually currently sheltering his people from what they truly deserve. He says, you are in the shadow of my hand. My hand that you have concluded is at rest is actually actively protecting you.

[ 40 : 56 ] So notice how God takes his people back to the very basic truth in the midst of their fear. I am your God. You are my people. I created the universe.

I created you. I am sovereign. You have nothing to fear. This is where we need to go when we're afraid. This is something that we've been talking about a lot in our home.

And I know like reading through the Old Testament, I used to think like all of these things are just repeated, you know, again and again and again and again and just to think, you know, can't we move on to something new?

You know, how many times do we need to hear God created the universe? But the older I get, the more I realize we need these on repeat. You know, these are given in the Old Testament to God's people because they needed to keep hearing.

I am your God. You are my people. I created the universe. I created you. I am sovereign. There's nothing for you to fear and we just need that. We need it every day.

[ 41 : 56 ] You know, we're getting this today, but tomorrow you'll probably be in a place where you need to hear it again and again and again. So again, just we need that practice of just repeating this truth to ourselves and to one another, right?

We do this in community. So it's really gracious for God to comfort his people by reminding them of who he is and who they are.

But these aren't the only truths that the believing remnant needed to hear. They also needed to know that their suffering is actually discipline. Wake yourself.

Wake yourself. Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord, the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs, the bowl, the cup of staggering.

You need to know that what you're going through is not a result of failure on my behalf. It's not that I fell asleep. This suffering, it's actually from my hand. The hand that's actually covering you right now and protecting you from what you actually deserve, which is my unlimited wrath, is simultaneously disciplining you by giving you a cup of wrath to drink.

[ 43 : 15 ] So wake up, Jerusalem. Wake up to reality. It's actually you, not me, that's missing the big picture. You're not suffering at the hands of a powerful enemy nation.

You're being disciplined by the hand of a holy God, by the very hand that you're reaching out to for salvation. Isaiah paints an image here and we see the same image elsewhere in the prophets and then in Revelation.

Israel's like a man who's completely drunk. He's so drunk that he's lost all physical control. Mentally, he's clouded by the fog of drunkenness.

He's helpless and confused and God's telling him to stand up so apparently he lost his footing and he's fallen over and he's so drunk with the wrath of the Lord.

The Lord's saying this cup that you're drinking it came from my hand. We see this metaphor of God's wrath, the cup of God's wrath throughout the prophets. Here, we read it in Jeremiah.

[ 44 : 18 ] Thus the Lord, the God of Israel said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.

Then you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Drink, be drunk, vomit, fall and rise no more because of the sword that I am sending among you.

And those pierced by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented or gathered or buried. They shall be dung on the surface of the ground.

That's a heavy word. God's wrath is overpowering and the end of his wrath is severe. So back to our main point.

Judah, you really are far more sinful than you know. And Judah, you need to know this. It's essential that you not misinterpret what has happened to you.

[ 45 : 19 ] But there is so much grace here which we'll get to in a minute because God's response to the remnant, as severe as it is, it's discipline.

It's not punitive judgment. This is clarifying truth. Then God says, Don't look to your sons to get you out of this. They're a vain hope.

A hero is not going to arise from among them. So don't look there. So this truth is clarifying but it's also incredibly compassionate. The Lord moves towards Israel and their drunken stupor.

He gets down on their level and he shakes them and he says, Wake up. Stand up. And then he speaks a word of entirely unexpected hope and comfort when they're at their lowest point.

Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk but not with wine. Thus says the Lord, your Lord, your God, who pleads the cause of his people.

[ 46 : 23 ] Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering, the bowl of my wrath. You shall drink no more and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors.

This terrible bowl that has made you stagger, I'm taking it from you. The discipline is at an end and those you're afraid of who seem so powerful, they're going to be judged for their cruelty. This is mysterious mercy. And there's an important question here. How can this be? Judah's sin was against an infinitely holy God and therefore it demands infinite punishment. Scripture is very clear on this point. So how could God just remove the cup from Judah? Elsewhere it's clear in Scripture that there are those who will drink this cup to its bitter end. That's what we just read in Jeremiah. Why does the believing remnant escape this just punishment? This is mysterious mercy for which there's actually no clear answer in this text. [ 47 : 27 ] So we'll come back to this. So God awakens Judah to their utter culpability. They're in captivity because of their sin, not because of a failure on God's part, but now he awakens them to something else.

He promises them a future of holiness. Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion. Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city. For there shall no more come into you, the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Somehow, in the future, this drunk who's cowering in the gutter will be clothed in beautiful garments, will be dwelling in a holy city, will be free from all captivity. And the beautiful garments mentioned here probably symbolize the garments of a priest which set them apart for service to the Lord. So the drunk who's in bondage to sin becomes a holy priest who's entirely free.

This is surprising holiness. Your future is far more glorious than you could possibly dream. It's not at all what your sins deserve.

[ 48 : 42 ] And then in verses three through six, God provides more words of reassurance. He recounts some history here. No one else has a claim on you. I didn't sell you into captivity.

I gave you up willingly into captivity, so I can take you right back. Nobody else has the right to stop my hand from redeeming my people.

Today, he says, you and the other nations, you might doubt my word, even despise my name, but the day is coming when my name will be vindicated. So the believing remnant is promised mysterious mercy, surprising holiness, while they're in the depths of despair.

And now the scene shifts to an eruption of God's people into joyful song. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, your God reigns.

So Isaiah gives us a picture here of an advanced messenger after a battle running to Jerusalem with the news of victory in battle. And the watchmen are straining their eyes, and as soon as they see him with the good news, they shout that good news, and they immediately erupt into song, and the whole city picks up the song.

[ 50 : 03 ] The news bursts forth that the Lord has won the victory. Your God reigns, shouts the messenger. Joy and flourishing will abound, break forth into singing.

You waste places of Jerusalem. And that joy spreads then to the whole earth, verse 10 says. This is an astonishing hope.

But what exactly is it that brings about this joy? We're still left with a bit of a mystery. Returning again to the mystery of God's wrath removed.

This text doesn't tell us how God's people could go from sinful, in exile, under his wrath, full of sorrow, and sighing, to holy wrath removed in God's kingdom, and singing.

It's certainly connected to the return of the Lord to Zion in verse 8. But how can the Lord return and dwell with his sinful people? How is it that they're clothed with beautiful garments of holiness?

[ 51 : 10 ] And how will God's arm accomplish this astonishing salvation? Mike's going to be addressing this question in much more detail next week as he preaches on Isaiah 53.

But in case you're sitting here this morning and you don't know, I did want to make it explicit. The only way is Christ. God sent his son, Jesus, to drink the cup of wrath so that we wouldn't have to. Christ died on the cross, was buried, rose again, so that we can now enjoy new life in him. And this is totally undeserved. Each one of us here is more sinful than we know.

but we're also more loved than we could possibly imagine. And so for those who are in Christ, the future is far more glorious than you could possibly dream.

And so I want to invite you, if you haven't trusted in Christ for salvation, he freely offers that salvation to everyone. The Bible says that all are sinners and the wages of sin is death.

[ 52 : 14 ] That's the bad news. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. That gift of eternal life is one that the Lord continually offers to all.

It doesn't matter what's in your past. Just like Judah who failed as bad as you could possibly fail, there's comfort, hope, and an incredible future to look forward to if you turn from your sin and to Christ for salvation.

If you have trusted in Christ, but there are waste places in your life, if you've come to the conclusion that maybe those waste places just can't change, I want you to hear this promise.

The Lord will make your desert like the garden of the Lord. That's an unconditional promise. The God who created the universe, the God who formed a people from an old barren couple, the God who sent his son Jesus to die for you.

His arm is at work on your behalf. He is the one who draws near to you to comfort you. He deeply desires your flourishing and he will bring it about.

[ 53 : 29 ] It may not look the way you want it to look. It might not happen tomorrow, but this is an unconditional promise and all the promises of God find their yes and amen in Christ.

That gives us reason to sing. Would you pray with me?