

The Enduring City

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[0 : 00] Isaiah The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament The New Testament About...

People are very sensitive about drawing and sculpture and so on with regard to creating graven images and Isaiah is very much against that and people... But the thing that you need to recognize about Isaiah it's a very, very visual book and instead of writing down what's in it you could go through it and draw what's in it and you would have a massive volume of drawings which would go on and on I tell you I've got a...

Some of the things that appear in... He does a very... He does the vineyard as you know He does the women of Jerusalem and it's a cartoon He does the peaceable kingdom which you have seen where a little child shall lead them He does the voice in the wilderness and the wilderness...

Do you not like the bell? Do you not like the bell?

Well, I... What's your name? Do you have something you'd like to tell us? I'll ring the bell and you come up and tell us.

[1 : 47] I heard tell recently that God was quite concerned about what was happening here on earth.

He sent an angel down. The angel came back up and said to God, things are really bad, really, really bad. Only about 5% of people on earth are being faithful to you.

The rest is just awful. So the angel goes away and God's quite concerned and sends another angel down. He doesn't quite believe it's really that bad. The second angel comes back and says, Yeah, 5%. 5% at the most.

Well, God has to do something about this and decides to use a new method of communication. He decides to send an email to the faithful, a real good word of encouragement to all those faithful believers.

You didn't get one either. You didn't get one either. That sort of says it like it is.

[3 : 01] Let me pray.

Let me pray. Our God, grant that by the ministry of your Holy Spirit in our midst, that we may be enabled to hear what Isaiah is saying about you and your glory and your purpose.

And that we may be given to understand something of who we are within your purpose.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I'm talking tonight about the enduring city. And in order to talk to you about this, I have a little illustration that I want to give to you, if I can find it.

It's funny how things disappear, isn't it? And it was right here a moment ago. And it's very important that I get it straight, so I go and look over here and see what's happened to it.

[4 : 39] Well, sorry for the suspense. It'll be all right, though. I know where he is.

Very strange. I haven't got it. It's the story about a boy back in Ontario who, in the course of the formalities of his graduation night at his high school, you may have heard this story, all the graduates in solemn procession came up to the front in their best clothes and received the graduation certificate and made their bow to the staff and principal of the school and the distinguished guests of honor that were there for the occasion.

And then they stepped down on the other side of the platform, and this went on and on and on until a boy named Michael came up. And Michael got into the center of the stage and received his certificate.

And then he turned his back to the audience, as they were, dropped his pants, and had the year 2000 stenciled across his bottom.

And he bowed and sort of showed this off. Now, you may think that's a bad thing, but if you look in Isaiah chapter 20, verse 3, you'll think, no, don't bother.

[6 : 35] But it's there. Isaiah spent three years walking naked through the city of Jerusalem as a close relative of the royal family in order to fulfill his prophetic vision.

And the distinguished editors or editorial in the Globe and Mail said, Michael, you have done us a great service. You have shown the artificiality of all our protocol.

You've shown the artificiality of all our ceremonies, and you've done a great service. You have done a prophetic service to us. And the editorial in the Globe said that and said thank you to Michael for having done this.

He said, you may have revealed your backside, but you've revealed a lot of the artificiality about ourselves. And what I want you to be thinking about tonight is the enormous amount of artificial structures which we observe within the city as a matter of decorum and as a matter of respectability and as a matter of our conservative nature and so on.

And we do those things without recognizing that we are maintaining something which we ourselves don't believe in and we recognize the artificiality of it and don't know how to break out of it.

[8 : 06] And that's part of what life in the city is about. And I told you last night that there is this tension in that we live in between the city of man over here and the city of God over here.

And that we're in this tension between the two cities. And if you look at the history of the Old Testament, you will see cities that were very famous for one thing or another.

You perhaps could mention some of them to me. I'll mention these. You know that Sodom and Gomorrah were cities in which sexual immorality dominated the whole culture.

Corinth was another city which had peculiar things that dominated their culture. Rome was the eternal city.

But the first chapter of the book to the Romans talks about the breakdown again of sexual morality. Babylon was another city of the ancient world which called itself, which thought of itself as the queen and the eternal queen of the world.

[9 : 28] That was the concept that you had. So that you have all these cities. And when you think of cities that stand for something in particular, can you think of any in North America?

When we call Detroit the motor city, we call Toronto the good. That's from when I was a boy. The city of brotherly love.

And anybody else give us one? What? Firetown, Akron, Ohio. Good. Well, cities develop a kind of character around them and that character seems to stick to them.

What is characteristic of Vancouver? What? Pleasure. Sorry?

Coffee. Coffee, yeah. Yeah, I saw that some people, some elderly people in Florida have sued the tobacco companies for so many billions of dollars because of that.

[10 : 49] and I'm looking forward to joining the case against Starbucks for the damage they've done to the nerves of the city of Vancouver. Anything else that is...

Yeah? The sea and the sky and the... Do you know what the biggest event in Vancouver is?

The Sun Run. Or at least it boasted itself to be that. And it's sort of full of ethnic subcultures, which we're proud of.

It has a sort of socialism, which some people feel differently about than others. But Vancouver has some of those characteristics.

Well, now, I want you to look at chapter 1 of Isaiah and see what it has to say about the sort of alienated city and how cities develop.

[11 : 57] You'll see that in chapter 1, verse 21, you'll see the faithful city has become a harlot. And that's because...

Remember last night, I hoped I told you that the drift is always in this direction. And this direction takes grace, but this comes naturally to us.

This is gravity and this is grace. And moving in these different directions. So that the city has become a harlot. It's called the Daughter of Zion.

And that's the name that the Lord gives to the city of Jerusalem. The direction the city was moving in, it says in chapter 1, is towards Sodom and Gomorrah.

It's breaking down the structures of the city. It describes the city as like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, suggesting that it is a very transient housing, that it is virtually a shack town, and that it is very susceptible to enemies who surround it and prey on it, either from within it or from

the outside.

[13:23] So that you might be... It's quite helpful, I thought, to think about the city and the people in the city who pray and the people in the city who pray.

And that those two elements in the makeup of the citizens of a city are very important. If you look in verse 11 to 15, you'll see a really amazing thing about this decadent and alienated city.

The amazing thing about it is it was full of flourishing religious activity. And if you read about this religious activity in verses 11 and 15, you'll see that it refers to a lot of dead meat sacrificed to God. It has incense that stinks in the nostrils. It has an abundance of religious convocations which need breaking up.

As Jesus broke up, you see the sort of temple when it became a place of commerce. So religion becomes a commercial activity. And our religious convocations become totally self-serving.

[14:50] There is a multitude of prayer from bloody hands spread out like the who are crying out to God and God has no intention whatever of answering those prayers.

He says about the whole religious scene in the city, I am weary of bearing them. They have become a burden to me.

So if you find church a burden, think of what happens when God finds church a burden. Because of the artificiality of the religious activity which is going on full bore when there is no reality to that faith whatever.

So then in verse 21, you see how the city becomes a harlot. In verse 16, it says the conclusion of all this religious activity, it says in verse 16, you need a bath from the blood you have shed and the evil you have done.

Then it goes on to tell you that religious failure leads to social breakdown. And in 117, you'll see how the breakdown occurs.

[16:17] There is a need to do right. There is a need to seek justice. That this loses its place.

And that's the prophetic function of Isaiah in the city, urging people to do right and to seek justice. Bishop Stephen Neal says, if you want to know what a definition of justice is, it is Jesus. And you look at his ministry and you'll discover what justice is.

Another points to an example of justice as being the two harlots who came to Solomon and both claimed the living baby when one baby had died.

And Solomon laid down the law and said, cut the baby in half and each take half. And of course, justice came out of that pronouncement when the real mother was willing to give the baby to the other woman simply because of her love for it.

[17:26] So you get, justice has to be sought. You have to encourage the oppressed people in the city instead of barricading yourself from them.

You have to defend the cause of the fatherless. You have to plead the case of the widow. And you remember how last night I told you about the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity and the small one down here.

And God's concern is for this person. And our concern has to be for this person. This person who is the oppressed, the fatherless, and the widow.

But slowly the city continues this process of degradation. From the faithful wife to the Lord under a covenant, that's how the city is used, how the picture of the city should be, to what it is, to the promiscuous sexuality of the harlot.

And you find that happening in the city when you see the moral collapse that takes place in the center of the city where under the cover of anonymity people carry on and promote all sorts of forms of human degradation which destroy the character of the city.

[19:02] And the result of this is, look in chapter 1, verse 21. The righteous have been replaced by murderers. Silver has become dross, that is a devaluation in the currency.

Wine has been diluted for profit. Rulers are rebels in the pay of criminals. And that's been one of the problems in Russia, in trying to resurrect Russia, is that so many of the people in positions of political power have been compromised by their connections to the underworld.

And so they are unable to give rule to the city. They are in the pay of criminals. They love bribes, Isaiah says.

That is, money talks, and it's the only thing they listen to. They chase after gifts. The cause of the fatherless is neglected.

Do you know in the Manchester Guardian, it said a couple of weeks ago that by the year 2010, there will be 40 million orphans in Africa without father or mother.

[20 : 21] And that's a major social issue for our time. The widows are reduced to being nobodies from nowhere because of their neglect.

And so you have the Lord intervening in the city. And how does he intervene? By judges who are judges to be restored, by counselors who are faithful to the faithful city.

The city needs to be redeemed with justice. The penitent ones with righteousness. A good connection there, you see, because justice is that which is administered by the judges.

Righteousness is that which comes out of the character of individuals who themselves have found redemption through faith and repentance in God by Jesus Christ.

So righteousness has to be part of the character of the individual and they become part of the citizens of the thing.

[21 : 27] so that rebels and sinners will be broken. Those, you see, that whole process that I talked about last night of resistance and rebellion, that process against God is to be broken.

Those who forsake the Lord will perish. And that's the inevitable result of that.

If you look at chapter 62, verses 1 to 7, you'll see there how the city is meant to be.

And that's in Isaiah 62, verses 1 to 7. For Zion's sake, the Lord will take action. For Jerusalem's sake, I will not remain quiet until her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.

The nations will see your righteousness and all kings your glory. You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

[22 : 39] You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hands, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you deserted or name your land desolate, but you will be called Hephzibah.

And the word Hephzibah refers to one in whom you take delight.

The picture of a bridegroom taking great delight in his new bride. And the city will be called Hephzibah and Beulah.

And Beulah means married. They will have found a husband. The city will have what it needs to have.

And that is a husband with whom it lives under a covenant. So the city is the place where the Lord's people in relationship of faithfulness to the Lord, they live there in the city.

[23 : 50] And you'll find them in the sports domes and in the parks and in the business towers and in the cafes and in the restaurants and in the pubs, in the theater, in the university, in the multifaceted life of the people of God living in a faithful relationship to their God in which art and music and drama motivated by submission and obedience and not by rebellion and resistance.

So that that's, you see, what I think is, they're getting at, and you may be wondering why I'm talking about the city, but this is a theme that goes all the way through Isaiah.

You find all kinds of references to city, to people living in cities. Now the Christian church has, I think, under a sense of persecution over the past generation or so, laid all the emphasis on an individual coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ and that that's at the heart of human righteousness.

But Isaiah has the bigger picture and that he sees God in terms of the whole city and that those who are the righteous, who have got the email from the Lord, they are the ones, they are the ones who are to be the messengers of God within the city and in every part of the city.

And they are to be there and to take part. If you want to look at what an afflicted city is like, you can look at chapter 54, 54 verses 11 to 14 and you can see the afflicted city but there's many cities that are described in Isaiah.

[25 : 52] But it says in verse 11 of chapter 54, O afflicted city, lashed by storms, not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires, I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones, and all your sons will be taught by the Lord.

There's a teaching process involved. And great will be your children's peace. In righteousness you will be established. Tyranny will be far from you and you will have nothing to fear.

Terror will be far removed. It will no longer stalk the streets of the city. It will not come near you. So, you see how the Lord reaches out to the afflicted city.

The city requires a husband to whom it is loyal. And that husband is the Lord. And you read more about that.

If you look at the husband, you can see a sort of picture of a husband's relationship to his wife. If you look in 54, verse 8, where it says, ...

[27 : 12]

I think I'm in trouble. Your maker is your husband.

The Lord Almighty is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He is called the God of all the earth. and he describes there this primary relationship.

And in one verse he says that, Though the mountains be shaken and though the hills be removed, my unfailing love for you will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace removed, that he will be a faithful husband to the city, and the city will be the city of God, which has this relationship.

In the other verse it says, In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but that was a moment, for with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer.

[28 : 44] In chapter 62, verse 5, it talks about, Your land will be merry, and God will rejoice over you like a bridegroom, and you will become the praise of the whole earth.

And so God is concerned to take the city and to use a remnant within the city as the agency through which he pours out his love so that the whole city will come into relationship to him and live in that relationship to him.

Now in order to understand this, you need, I think, to understand it further, you need to go back to the city of Babylon, which is the sort of prototype of all cities, the story of which is told in Genesis chapter 11.

Not Babylon, but the city of Babel. You come, let us build. This is what's told. This is in Genesis chapter 11, very early on in the historical record of the Bible, where it says, Men gathered together and said, Come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

So in order to defend themselves, you have the city, and in the city you have the towers. It sure looks like downtown Vancouver. And these towers are there for the purpose of, it says, so that we may make a name for ourselves, but the Lord came down and saw to see the city and the towers that men were building, and he said, this is what the Lord said to himself, If as one people, speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

[31 : 06] Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.

The city of Babel means the city of confusion, and the Lord stopped them building it. And the reason that he stopped them building it is this, that the ultimate consummation of what it means to be the city of God is not something that men themselves can do.

They need that relationship to God. It's a matter that, you know, that human, I mean, we live very much in a kind of city of Babel Babel, because we have an enormous concentration of human endeavoured and human enterprise, and we are able to create a world the way we want it to be, and we are able to do great things, and we are able to sort of sit back and sort of rest on the enormous accomplishments of our generation even.

accomplishments in every area of science and technology, so that we can say to ourselves, we have in fact built our way into the heavens.

We have taken over. We are in control of our own world. And God at the beginning said, this isn't to happen. This isn't to happen, because the consummation of human life is not to be found apart from man's relationship and fulfillment in that relationship to God.

[33 : 02] So, remember that that's, that's, that's what happened. That if you, if you, if you, if you think about it, you see, it was, God was, God is, God has this, this care for the whole world, for the restless, resistant, and rebellious world.

God seeks to win it, and God seeks to pour his love out upon it, and God seeks to prove his faithfulness to it, to the whole world. And that applies to our whole city.

And God wants to use those who are faithful to him in order to accomplish that. So, let me just conclude by showing you one or two more things that, that you should consider in terms of, the city.

And the foundation of the city is spoken of in hymn number three. And perhaps you could sing, we could sing that, could we?

That's, that's Christ has made this your foundation. Just that one? Yeah. Well, we'll sing the one verse of number two.

Glorious things of the year spoken. And then have the city in your mind as you stand and sing one verse of number two.

And then we'll sing the two verses of number three. Amen. Amen.