

# God's Grand Vision: Complete Salvation

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] It would be fantastic if you could keep that passage open in front of you. We're going to be looking through that now, and I'm going to pray for us that God will open our minds and our hearts.

So let's pray. Father God, we thank and praise you for the gift of your word. We thank you for the opportunity we have this morning to open it and to hear you speak. Lord, we thank you for today, the chance to remember and honour the mothers amongst us, both physical and spiritual, that you have blessed us with.

And Lord, we thank you that you have brought us together as a family to sit under your word today. Lord, please shape us by your Holy Spirit and equip us to be your people as we await for Jesus' return.

Amen. It has been a significant week in the world. We have had a fairly significant event in these past seven days. I spent last weekend out of mobile reception, so it only gradually leaked through to me the information that Osama bin Laden had been killed.

And I was reflecting on that this week, and I wonder if you remember where you were on September 11, 2001. I remember it for myself quite clearly.

[ 1 : 1 0 ] I remember hearing on the radio I was driving in the car that a plane had crashed into one of the towers. And I kind of, at that stage it was an accident, and so I turned it off and listened to some music or something like that, and woke up the next morning to discover what had actually happened.

And when we have a major event like September 11, or even this week, like the death of Osama bin Laden, the question we ask is, what now? A major event like that changes things, but we need to figure out what's different as a result.

In 2001, a lot was different. It changed the way and the possibility of international travel. It changed the way airline security is done.

It sadly also changed the way that we view Middle Eastern people. A lot changed that day. And significant events in life affect what comes afterwards.

And where we've reached today in our series in Isaiah, in chapter 56, Israel is at one of those significant turning points. I'll just give you a quick recap of where we've been as we've wandered through the book of Isaiah.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] We've begun by looking at God's assessment of his people. In chapter 5, God says this. It says, The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.

And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed, for righteousness, but heard cries of distress. So the reality as God scans his people is that he sees nothing but disobedience and rebellion.

And so for the first 35 chapters of Isaiah, as we've dropped in at different points, what we've seen is judgment, and righteous judgment, and correct judgment, and punishment for what Israel has done. God rescues Israel in the middle there in 36 to 39, but now in the back half, Israel has jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, and is in exile in Babylon, in trouble again.

The first half of Isaiah feels like God's pointing the finger, and he is. He's pointing out where Israel has failed, and the punishment they deserve, but something significant has happened by the time we reach chapter 40.

[ 3 : 1 9 ] That finger pointing gives way to the first words of chapter 40, comfort, comfort my people. There's this uplifting message that begins to come through. In chapter 42, a couple of weeks ago, we looked at the promised servant of God who was going to bring justice.

Even though Israel had failed so significantly, this servant was going to bring the justice that they so desperately desired. So now, in this back 26 chapters of Isaiah, Israel is entering into a new age.

An age that won't be filled with the failure and the punishment and frustration that has gone before, but an age of fulfillment and hope. An age where they get all these things that they've been looking forward to and hoping for, and where the promises of God are fulfilled.

But the question is, what now? As this servant arrives and establishes justice and delivers and changes the world as they know it, what now?

What does it look like for Israel to be the people of God now that this servant has come? What does it look like for us today to live knowing that Jesus has come and established justice on the earth, but that we still await the day when he will come back?

[ 4 : 33 ] The question we should always be asking ourselves is, in light of Jesus, what now? How do we live? And so into that situation, God speaks to his people in Isaiah 56 with these words.

Verse 1. This is what the Lord says. Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand, and my righteousness will soon be revealed.

Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hands from doing any evil. Maintain justice is the command that God gives to his people.

Not try and establish it like you've been failing at, but maintain the justice that my servant has established for you. Live out the salvation that you've got. Live as chosen, forgiven people.

Live with all the benefits that go with being chosen to be part of my family, because, there in verse 1, my salvation is close at hand, and my righteousness is being revealed.

[ 5 : 34 ] God is about to make it really obvious. They've had promises since Abraham. God is going to bless them. God is going to save them. God is going to rescue them. And in Isaiah, we see it coming through.

In 42, the servant is coming. Over Easter, we looked at 52 and 53, how the servant would bear their iniquities. So God is gradually giving them more insight to his plan for salvation.

But now it is about to be revealed fully in Jesus. And this salvation is going to be different to the salvation that Israel's anticipating.

It's going to be different to the salvation that they're expecting. It's going to be more than they're expecting. It's going to be bigger, better. I remember when I was 21, I had the chance to travel through Europe.

And one of the things I really enjoyed about Europe is that everything's old. When you go through Europe and you come back to Sydney, you realise that the oldest building in Sydney is a new building in Europe. We've got a whole 200 years of history.

[ 6 : 32 ] And, you know, they're talking thousands and thousand-year-old ruins and stuff like that. And so I was really excited about visiting the city of Pompeii in southern Italy. I'd read a little bit about it.

And it was in all the books recommended that you could go and see this city that had been buried by a volcano in almost no notice. And that there was just these amazingly well-preserved evidences of life.

And I had built up in my mind this expectation of what this city was going to be like. I thought, city, a long time ago, we're probably talking more like a village. I was expecting sort of mud huts, maybe, you know, 100 yards of sort of a couple of huts and some areas where they'd, I don't know, done stuff, hung out, whatever you did in a city thousands of years ago.

But I had a picture in my mind. I expected it to be amazing. But as I arrived and got off the train in the town that now is next to the ruins of Pompeii, the city wall went as far as I could see in both directions.

And after literally hours of walking past house, not hut, but house after house, after significant amphitheatre, after cobbled roads that went for, like, kilometre after kilometre, I was blown away.

[ 7 : 40 ] I had this expectation, which for me would have been plenty. If there was a couple of huts there, I would have walked away a happy man. But seeing Pompeii for real surpassed any expectation that I had had.

It redefined what it was. And for Israel, salvation has been tied up with returning to Jerusalem. That would be enough for them. If God would just take them out of Babylon and bring them back to Jerusalem, let them be a country again by themselves under their own rule, that's what they're desiring.

But God is redefining salvation for them. He is saying, I have got a bigger, better plan, something that will far surpass anything you have expected. Salvation is not about the country of Israel anymore.

It's not about the city of Jerusalem and getting back there. Salvation is now about justice. It's about God's justice. Not Israel's idea of getting back what was taken, but of God's will and his plan being worked out.

His promises to Abraham being fulfilled. And I want to show you two things in this passage in Isaiah 56 that mark the salvation that God has won. Two things that mark the community of salvation that we are now a part of.

[ 8 : 53 ] Two things that we must seek to be the things that define us as a group of people. First one. A better blessing.

The salvation of God is about a better blessing. When I was growing up, I had this habit of using words that my grandma didn't understand. And probably still doesn't understand.

My grandma's name, or her name is Merle, but we call her Marnie. I'm not sure why. But I remember when I was young, me and a group of friends, when we were about 12, thought that a good way to refer to ourselves would be to call ourselves units.

U-N-I-T. Because, you know, I was letting everyone know how big and impressive we were. And so I would always come home, and when Marnie was babysitting us, and I'd go, Marnie, I'm a unit. And she'd look at me like, what are you talking about?

Like, just this confused look. And she'd kind of shrug her shoulders and let it go. And one day, she just couldn't take it anymore. And I'd said it too many times. And she finally just said, look, why do you want to be a eunuch?

[ 9 : 53 ] And at the time, I had no idea what a eunuch was. So after she explained to me the ins and outs of being a eunuch, I decided that I needed to come up with another word that sounded less like it.

But it was interesting for me, as I was preparing this week, to reflect on both my grammar and my attitude towards a eunuch. For her, she could not comprehend why someone would want that. And for me, hearing what it was, I couldn't either. The idea of being a eunuch seemed like it was some sort of a disability. Now, a eunuch doesn't have to be someone who is physically mutilated or unable to have children.

A eunuch can be as simple as somebody who doesn't have children for choice, by lack of means, whatever it might be. But it's interesting how we look upon that as some sort of a failure.

Even today, in a culture that's all about doing your own thing, and maybe the family unit doesn't have the value that it once did, we look upon it as some sort of a lack of fulfilment in being a woman.

[ 11 : 00 ] And that's certainly the way that Israel viewed it. For Israel, having children was the means by which God had given them to grow his kingdom. God's kingdom was Israel. If they didn't have kids, the kingdom died out in a generation.

And so it was an incredible, prestigious and privileged position to be a mother. And we feel that even today. That's why we here celebrate motherhood and parenthood.

But I'm sure that even today, there are women amongst us for whom today is a sad day. Possibly you're unable to have children. Possibly you have chosen not to.

Possibly you have difficult relationships with your children. And I fear that just like Israel, we look at you as if you're missing out.

We look down on you as if you didn't quite get to the fulfilment of a family. We would never say it like that, but we pretend. We look with pity. Because we feel like maybe you've failed or haven't fulfilled the ultimate design of God for a person.

[ 12 : 08 ] But God has redefined family for Israel. He has something better for them. In fact, he redefines it in the New Testament when in John 3, speaking to Nicodemus, he says if you want to be saved, you must be born again of the Spirit.

The family of God is made up of those who are born again of the Spirit, not of those who are physically born to particular parents or different countries. And that is why, as I prayed this morning, I rejoice that if you are a woman in this room, you are a mother in this family.

You are a sister in this family. See, we have this really small view of salvation where we just narrow it down to the things that affect us right here and right now, like being a parent.

The Bible's clear. Being a parent is a gift from God. It's a blessing. Being a grandparent is a gift from God. It's a blessing. Being a kid is a blessing and probably sometimes a curse on your parents.

But we have this idea that salvation exists in the right here and right now. The job I have. The house I have. The friends I have. The opportunities that I have. But God has a bigger picture of salvation. [13:20] For Israel, salvation was just about getting back to Jerusalem. But God is saying, I've got something better for you than that. We've become like the paralytic in Mark 2 who goes to Jesus just to walk.

That's what he wants. But God says, I have something better for you. Have a look with me in verse 5 at the blessing that God gives that is significantly better.

It says, to them, this is to the eunuch and the foreigner, to the one who is outside of God's family, to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord and to worship him. All who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. God looks to his people and he says, I have something better to offer you than sons and daughters.

[14:35] He looks to the eunuch and the foreigner and he says, I will give you an everlasting name. I will give you something that lasts forever. I will give you joy in God's house.

I will accept your sacrifices. It's an eternal blessing. Children are a blessing. Marriage is a blessing. Family is a blessing. But it is a temporary and a secondary blessing.

I had the privilege of speaking at our spare day, which is I think only a week ago now, but it's a blur. On our spare day we had a bunch of primary school kids sitting together teaching and I had the joy of teaching the year three to six kids.

And as I began speaking about treasures that we have and precious things and valuable things, the joy of kids is that the idea of rhetorical or listening till the end doesn't really happen.

So I'm midway through, in full swing, preaching away, and this arm pops up at the back and it's Brian's eldest, Bethany Tung. And I politely ignore her for a little while and she gets more enthusiastic and starts waving around to make sure I can see.

[15:42] And I thought, well, I kind of need to acknowledge her now. Everyone's looking at her. And so I said, what's up, Bethany? And she goes, we're not supposed to have treasure on earth because of rust and moth. We're supposed to have treasure in heaven.

And I thought, that is so good. I pray that I know it as clearly and as simply and as much conviction as she does for the rest of my life. There are good things that God gives us in this life now.

And children are one of those. But they are secondary and temporary compared to the eternal better blessings that God speaks of in this passage.

Compared to the chance to be with him forever in heaven. Compared to this family. Our physical families are secondary and temporary.

As the Bible paints the picture of heaven in the future, there is no marriage. No giving in marriage. There is every tribe, nation and tongue brought together.

[16:42] The distinction is not lost, but they are more importantly unified in Christ. There is a oneness in heaven that far surpasses who you are blood related to.

God gives us good blessings in our lives now. But the better blessing of the salvation that is won for us in the servant Jesus is that we have an everlasting covenant with God.

A covenant of forgiveness. A covenant of adoption. A covenant of being welcomed into his family. And that is why as a church we value treasuring Christ above all else.

Thanking God for his good gifts. But gladly and willingly forgoing them and being content without them so long as we know Jesus. Anytime you look down on someone because they don't have something that you have in this life.

Be it children or an iPhone. You are saying Jesus is not enough. You are saying I cannot be content.

[17:47] Unless I have Jesus and this other thing. You might be asking the question, can't I just have both? I mean, can't I have Jesus and the gift of children?

And look, I want to say I understand the question. And I understand, well I don't understand, I'm not a mother, but I can comprehend the pain that goes with not being able to have kids. It's one of my deepest desires is to one day be a father.

But can you see that the question is fundamentally wrong? In asking the question you are saying I cannot be content with just Jesus. You're saying I need something else.

Children are not bad. Desiring children is not bad. But the best blessing we have is Jesus. Is forgiveness.

Is eternal. The coming of the servant who would establish justice was supposed to lift Israel's eyes. Beyond their immediate circumstance.

[18:54] Beyond their return to Jerusalem. For them to see that they had an eternal destiny as the people of God. That being the people of God meant forever with Jesus in heaven.

Not just being a military might. Not just being a military might. And God's call to us now is the same. To live in light of the certain hope we have in a risen saviour.

And to eagerly await his return. Looking forward to the fullness of blessing that we will get when Jesus comes back. And to hold on to that blessing now.

Even if it costs us everything else. Paul paints an incredible picture in 1 Corinthians. Where he said it is a great thing for those who can choose to go without family.

For the sake of the gospel and for the sake of the kingdom. That picture of absolute contentment in Christ. That they choose to go without something good that God offers. Paul doesn't prescribe whether we should go one way or the other.

[19:57] But the message is clear. The better blessing is Jesus. Treasure Christ above all else. The first mark of the salvation that God has brought in Jesus is a better blessing.

An eternal covenant. The second one is an open community. For us to comprehend just how offensive it was for God to welcome the eunuch and the foreigner into Israel is kind of difficult. In ancient times a eunuch was looked down on as disabled in Israel. They were unable to grow the kingdom. They were cursed by God to not be able to have children.

There are countless stories in the Old Testament of women who were ostracised for not being able to have children. Who begged God to release them from that curse. And so for God to turn around now and say these people I welcome in with the everlasting covenant.

Would have absolutely messed with their heads. God's law forbid Israel marrying foreigners. Because they would be set apart as God's holy people. To stand out and be different.

[21:02] But what God is saying is the servant I am sending. This has been the drumbeat all the way through Isaiah. Not only removes the guilt of Israel. But removes the guilt and sin of anyone who would come and trust in Jesus.

Isaiah 52 that we looked at at Easter. The substitutionary death of Jesus in our place was for anyone who would seek his forgiveness.

Not just for people who are born of a specific country. Not just for those who happen to be a little bit like us. Not just for those who culturally fit in this group of people.

But anyone. I wonder how we would go at welcoming a known criminal into this room. I wonder how comfortable we would be with that.

If they came here genuinely seeking Jesus. Would we be okay for them to sit here in their singlet and thongs. Smoking a cigarette up the back. Or would we have extra things that we wanted them to do. Before it was okay for them to be part of this family.

[22:09] Would we have extra hoops that we would want them to jump through. Jesus quotes this passage in Isaiah in Mark 12. When he clears the temple. He turns up and in the outer court.

Which is the court for the Gentiles and the foreigners. There's people selling stuff. There's people trading. And he overturns the tables and gets very angry. And he says this is supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations.

Even after this word from God to say there's something better. Israel still puts barriers in the way for other people to come to Jesus. I wonder if there are things that we put in the way.

For those who don't fit with us culturally. Those who have different hobbies to us. Maybe there's preferences that we have.

About how we do church together. About how our relationships work. About how big we get. You might feel I'm pretty happy with this number of people. But God is saying here.

[ 23 : 15 ] His family. The community of saved people. Is not full. Look there in verse 8. The sovereign Lord declares. He who gathers the exiles of Israel.

I will gather still others to them. Besides those already gathered. We are not full as a church. And we need to understand. We need to remove the barriers that we add.

To the gospel. We are not to be defined by the building that we meet in. By the furniture that we have in this building. By the clothes that people wear in this building. We are defined.

By Jesus. By Jesus. And by him alone. He is the covenant and the better blessing. That God has given us. And this community must be defined by Jesus.

And nothing else. My generation is really good at pointing the finger. At an older generation.

[ 24 : 17 ] Of church brothers and sisters. We are really good at letting you know. How you are too precious about your traditions in church. We are really good at telling you.

That you should just stop being so petty. About the clothes that we wear. Or about the seats that we sit on. Or the songs that we sing. Or the volume of the songs that we sing. And all these other things. But the reality is.

As I look at my own heart. And the heart of people my age. My peers. We have the exact same pride and selfishness in our own ways. We want particular songs. We want particular seats. We want particular clothes. I want to say God is saying to all of us. Those are preference issues. We are not defined by those things.

We need to let go of those things. And be defined by Jesus. He is the reason we are here. He is the only thing that unites us together. Not the fact that we sit in this room for an hour on Sunday morning.

[ 25 : 18 ] We need to be willing to let go of tradition and preference. That is not dictated by God and his word. And be defined by Jesus alone. We need to be willing to make sacrifices.

That are uncomfortable for us. That others might hear about Jesus. And join this community. Because God is still gathering people in. We are not full. We are the salvation community of God. And God is continuing to call people to himself. That they might know that better blessing. Finally verse 8. The sovereign Lord declares.

He who gathers the exiles of Israel. I will gather still others to them. Besides those already gathered. It is the sovereign Lord who gathered you into this family.

It does not matter who your parents were. It does not matter what job you do. God chose you. He sent his son to die for you and forgive you.

[ 26 : 22 ] And he gave you the eternal blessing. Of a covenant of forgiveness. Of a certain hope that you would spend forever in heaven with him. And so this morning.

And tomorrow morning. And every day for the rest of your life. Be thankful. You did nothing. But he chose you and he drew you in. And he gave you the best blessing he could give you.

Jesus. Jesus. But also. He is still gathering others. Until Jesus comes back.

This community is open. Until Jesus comes back. There is still spare seats. No matter how full we get. So don't give up. On your brother.

Or sister. Or friend. Or neighbour. No matter how many times. They say no. Until Jesus comes back. This community is still open.

[ 27 : 22 ] Because that is what salvation means for us right now. Between Jesus coming first. And him coming back. Which is where we live. Salvation means we have the best blessing. And that this community is open.

So don't give up hope. Keep praying. Keep talking. Keep persevering. That we as the people of God.

Might treasure Christ. Might be the gospel in the way we relate to one another. Might be open and welcoming. Might willingly sacrifice.

That as many people as possible would be gathered in. And know the blessing of Jesus. Jesus. What a significant impact we would have on this world.

If we are able to genuinely. Treasure Christ above all else. If that was our deepest desire.

[ 28 : 26 ] To know God. To treasure him. And to represent him. I pray that God would use us. No matter what it costs.

Let's pray. Father God. We acknowledge and confess that. We are so often distracted. And obsessed with the things that you have given us.  
Or the things that you have chosen not to give us. And we forget. That you have given us more than enough in Jesus. Lord I pray that. Every day you would overwhelm us.  
With a sense of gratitude. And awe. At your generosity. Lord help us to have that eternal perspective. To see with your eyes. That your kingdom is forever.  
That you have given us a name. That will not be cut off. That you have included us by your will. That even if we have nothing else. We have enough. In you. Father we pray.  
[ 29 : 27 ] That you would strip away anything in us. Any pride. Any preference. That would block the gospel. For other people. Lord may Jesus be the thing.  
That marks us. As a community of your people. Lord may you give us wisdom. To love one another. As we search the waters. Of how we do church.  
And how we gather together. That your gospel. Might be the clearest message. Father I pray. That we would have. A burning desire.  
To see your kingdom grow. Amongst us. That we would desire. That all people. Would be brought into a relationship. With you. Might know the salvation. And blessing of Jesus.  
Lord I pray. That you would make our life difficult. That this church. Would be so full. That we're having trouble. Figuring out. How to handle all the people. That you are gathering in. Lord give us perseverance.  
[ 30 : 22 ] With those who are difficult. Those who oppose us. When we speak your truth. May we remember. That it's you who gathers. And until you return. You are still gathering. Hope is not lost.  
Father we thank you for Jesus. We thank you so much. That we can know you. That we can be part of your family. And that we have everything.  
We could ever hope for. Father may we treasure you. In everything that we do. Amen. Amen.