

God's Grand Vision: God's grand design (Mission Pledge Combined Service)

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[0 : 00] There is something majestic about the book of Isaiah. It asks us to imagine the creation and then the recreation of the entire world.

It evokes the historical periods of the 8th century BC and then into the exile and beyond. It asks us to imagine that the very heavens and earth are taking part in the drama of Israel's history. It begins in chapter 1 verse 2 with heaven and earth called to bear witness. Hear, O heavens, listen, O earth. And it finishes in verse 22 with a new heaven and a new earth.

As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make endure before me, declares the Lord, so will your name and descendants endure. And so Isaiah takes us from the beginning of history to the end of all things, from creation to the recreation of God's universe.

It insists that God is doing something for which even the ends of the earth wait. God has an all-encompassing purpose and it unravels for us page after page in Isaiah.

[1 : 23] Of course, in unraveling God's great plans and purpose for his creation of people for all of history, we naturally get a magnificent vision of God.

God's purposes, his actions reveal God, reveal himself. And you immediately notice in Isaiah just how great and big this God is.

His plan is all-pervasive. His rule is all-encompassing. And if those things don't stagger us, then Isaiah clearly reveals the magnificence of God in passages like chapter 6.

I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings.

With two wings, they covered their faces. With two, they covered their feet. And with two, they were flying. And they were calling to one another, holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.

[2 : 28] The whole earth is filled with his glory. And in the last chapter, we are given another glimpse of the grandeur of this God.

This is what the Lord says. Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. It is the only place in the Bible where the earth is described as God's footstool.

It is almost 6,500 kilometers straight through. It is 40,000 kilometers if you decide to go around. It weighs something like 6,000,000,000,000 tons.

It has a surface area of 510,000,000 square kilometers, a volume of around 10,000,000,000 cubic kilometers. It spins at 1,600 kilometers an hour.

And God calls it his footstool. This is my footstool.

[3 : 51] God sits on his throne in the heavens and he rests his feet on the earth. This is the magnificence of the God that we come to worship this morning.

The God who calls us to tremble at his word. Of course, the doctrine of God is given a few more clues as you move on into the next verse. Verse 2. Everything in this footstool that God calls the earth, that we call the earth, is made by the hand of God.

Everything owes his existence to this God. He is the God who sits on the throne and rests his feet on the earth.

He is the God who brought all things into being. The sun. The moon. The stars. The smallest part. Mount Everest.

The weirdest creature in the depths of the sea. Delicate flowers. Noamble fall. The tallest redwood tree. The Amazon jungle. The Kalahari Desert. The most gorgeous supermodel.

[5 : 07] The soaring eagle. The brightest mind. The best preacher. The successful entrepreneur. The most influential church. They are just a few of the wonders that he has made.

The whole earth is full of the glory of God. The whole earth is full of the glory of God. And yet, as wonderful as all these things are, in this thing that God calls his footstool, there is one thing that draws the gaze of God.

This is the one I esteem. He who is humble and contrite in the spirit and travels at times. Having gaze upon the magnificence of this God.

Having gaze upon the magnificence of this God who sits on his throne with his feet resting on the earth. They do what Isaiah did in chapter 6.

He says, He says, He says, He says, He says, He says, He says, He says, flows out of a broken and a contrite heart, a humble heart.

[7 : 47] And this is the one who draws the gaze of the eternal God, whose feet rest on the earth. The alternative to true worship is put before us there in verse 2.

Again, let me read to you. This is the one I esteem. He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word, but whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, whoever offers a lamb like one who breaks a dog's neck, whoever makes a grain offering like one who presents pig's blood, and whoever burns memorial incense like one who worships an idol.

They have chosen their own ways and their souls delight in their abominations. A humble and contrite heart and a trembling at the word of God has been exchanged for a worship, a false worship, which is equal to religion and rituals and rites.

This is the people of God that is spoken about here in Isaiah 66. Not the pagan nations.

They didn't listen. They didn't tremble at the word of God. They didn't bow in humble submission to God and his purposes. And they went their own way.

[9 : 11] They did evil and they chose what displeases God and it was hidden. Their evil was hidden under the veneer of worship.

Now, of course, Isaiah is not against worship here in these verses. He wasn't against sacrifices. He wasn't against the temple. In fact, the rebuilding of the temple occupied the people of God for the best part of 20 years. And when they slackened off in rebuilding the temple, he sent prophets to tell them, don't slacken off and get going with it.

Yet in these verses, the temple and their rituals and religion are spoken of with extreme reserve.

The temple was a good thing. But Isaiah was painfully aware, painfully aware of the capacity of human beings to misuse it, to focus on the temple and its rituals and its rites and not the God of the temple.

[10 : 26] He was aware of the human tendency to exchange true worship, true, humble, God-honoring worship within pure worship, a worship that is wrapped up in performing rituals and minimum effort and minimal reflection.

Isaiah understood very well that physical restoration of the temple was not enough. Spiritual restoration was what was needed.

Spiritual renewal, unless they had spiritual renewal, the future would just simply rehash the sins of the past.

Isaiah was not against the temple. He was against ecclesiasticism, that ugly distortion of true worship worship of God does not flow out of the heartfelt contrition before God.

For God, no matter what building it's in, no matter what form it takes, what order it takes, no matter how seamless the transitions, how well it is read, no matter how great the singing or accurate the theology or historically sensitive, it becomes no better than pagan superstition.

[12 : 06] And it angers God and it calls forth His righteous judgment. And so there is a warning here in Isaiah 66.

It is so easy to exchange true worship for false worship. On the surface, it may look like the same. The warning here is like Israel, we can hide our evil and our refusal to listen and obey the word of God in beautiful worship.

In beautiful worship. In beautiful worship. Worship. False worship becomes a substitute for listening to God, to faith in God, to obedient, trembling at His word and the pursuit of His purposes.

The warning here is not to box God within the building, not to box God within a few religious activities, potentially good activities, but true worship is all of life at the feet of the one on whose feet He rests on the earth.

The feet of this God in humble, contrite submission. True worship, my friends, is God's grand design for His universe. True worship is what God wants for us.

[13 : 49] God's plan for the world that He's made, the world that He calls His footstool, is that people would see His glory and gather to Him and bow at His feet who sit on the earth.

Throughout all history and eternity to come, God's design for people is worship. The worship of Him in humble submission.

As it says in verse 22, As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make endure before me, so will your name and descendants endure. From one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me at my feet.

in humble submission. In the new heavens and the new earth, the redeemed of the entire human race will offer unending worship at the feet of their Creator.

It's the place we call heaven. Isaiah leaves us in no doubt at all that the key to God's purpose is God's perfect King, the Lord Jesus Christ and how eloquently and simply the Apostle John puts it in John chapter 12, Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke about Him.

[15 : 31] You see, the invincible purpose of God is that the gospel of the glory of Christ spread to all the peoples of the world so that they might come and bow in worship, in humble submission to this God.

It's everywhere in the Bible. It's the promise of Philippians 2 who being in very nature God, speaking about Jesus here, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man.

He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross and therefore God exalted him to the highest place, put him on a throne that is, and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

It was the promise of the Old Testament, Psalm 22, all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord and the families of the nations will bow down before him for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over all the nations.

It was the promise of Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 24 and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and the end will come.

[16 : 57] It was the design of the cross according to Revelation 5 and they sang a new song, you are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seal because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

It was the final command of the risen all authority of Christ according to Matthew 28. Then Jesus came to them and said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you and surely I am with you always to the very ends of the age.

It was the design sorry it was the divine purpose of the sending and filling of the Holy Spirit according to Acts 1 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.

The invincible purpose of God is that the gospel of the glory of Christ spread to the peoples of this world that they might come and they might see the glory of Christ and bow at his feet in humble contrition.

This is God's grand design for his world. It always has been and it always will be and the task is not yet done.

[18 : 43] 2,000 years after Jesus gave his great commission to his disciples 6,645 of the world's 16,350 people groups are either barely reached or not reached at all.

that equates to approximately 40.1% of this world which equates to 2.84 billion people who have either never heard of Jesus or the witness of Christ is even barely there at all.

Why? After 20 centuries is the task not finished? It's not because of the lack of money.

I want to say it's because we've got too much. The comforts of the West have made us soft and cautious and fearful and indulgent and self-protecting instead of tough and risk-taking and bold and self-controlled and self-sacrificing.

You see many of these least reached 6,645 peoples are religiously unsympathetic to Christian missions.

[20 : 23] That means that we need to go to these people with the gospel and it will be dangerous and it will be costly to finish this task some of us and some of our children need to be killed.

but we are so infatuated with our comforts and our securities that we have exchanged true worship and God's agenda for false worship and we hide our sinfulness by a veneer of temple worship. that is what Israel did and they were judged for it. They had their temple and their rituals and they didn't care a rip about the nations.

and so let us not forget the somber word of Jesus in John chapter 12. I tell you the truth unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed but if it dies it produces many seeds the man who loves his life will lose it while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

In other words a fruitful life and an eternal life come from this dying like a grain of wheat and hating your life in this world.

[22 : 03] More and more I am persuaded by the scriptures that God's design for the completion of his global plan and the consummation of his purposes includes the suffering of his people.

To put it more plainly and specifically God's plan is that his purpose triumph through the suffering of his people.

I don't just mean that the suffering is a consequence of being obedient to God's mission. I mean that suffering is one of Christ's strategies for the success of his mission.

Jesus said to his disciples as he sent them out in Matthew 10 I am sending you out like sheep amongst wolves. There is no doubt what happens to sheep in the midst of wolves and Paul confirmed the reality for us in Romans 8 as it is written for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. And Jesus continues in Matthew chapter 10 be on your guard against men they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.

[23 : 24] On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. Did you notice there that the witness before the governors and kings is not merely a result or a consequence it is a design.

you will be brought before governors and kings as a witness to them. Suffering was not just a consequence of our Lord's obedience and his mission it was the central strategy of his mission. Jesus calls us to join him on the Calvary road to take up our cross to hate our lives in this world to fall to the ground like a seed and die that others might live.

We are not above our master. To be sure our suffering does not atone for anyone's sins but it is a deeper way of doing mission than we realize.

And unless we think this way of saying it aligns it, the suffering work of God's people too closely, to the suffering of our Savior, listen to the decisive word on this from Paul, Colossians chapter 1, now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body which is the church.

[24 : 54] In his sufferings, Paul is filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the church. Not that Paul's suffering atones for sin or propitiates wrath, or vindicates divine justice in passing over sins as Jesus' death did, but they show the unreached peoples of the world the sufferings of Christ.

Paul's missionary suffering is God's design to complete the sufferings of Christ by making them more visible and personal and precious to those to whom he died.

God, what I'm saying is this, that when a prosperity preacher flies his private jet into a poverty-stricken country to preach the gospel and promise the poor that if they believe in Jesus, they will be rich.

They are not just getting a few things wrong, they are destroying the very foundations of the gospel. And so I say this very sober word to myself, to you, some of my brothers and sisters, some Pauls, who love their comforts and their securities and are consistently tempted with them, God's plan is that his gospel-spreading purpose triumph through the suffering of his people.

At the heart of true biblical missions, both for those who go and those who stay, is an eagerness to live simply and to give lavishly and to suffer in doing it.

[26 : 51] At the heart of true biblical missions is suffering, not merely as a result of proclamation, but as the means of proclamation. Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed, but if it dies, it produces many seeds.

things. On holidays, recently I read a biography on the life of Adoniram Judson. I'm very pleased to know that Nick and Sam have named little Judson after this man.

When Judson, not this one, Adoniram Judson, entered Burma in July 1813, it was hostile and utterly unreached place.

It probably would have been considered a closed country today. All the previous missionaries had died or had left, but Judson went there with his 23-year-old wife of 17 months.

He was 24 years old and he worked there for 38 years with only one trip home after he'd been there for 33 years. He never saw his parents or his brothers again.

[28 : 13] And the price he paid in that 38 years was immense. His suffering was immense.

He was a grain of wheat that fell to the ground and died and oh how often he died. He died to the prestige of being offered the best pulpit in Boston.

He died to his personal like of cleanliness and hygiene. He died to good food, clean water and a comfortable environment. He died to the prospects of wealth and the trappings of wealth.

He allowed his two wives and his six children to die. He was in prison for nearly two years with his feet hanging in the sky and having rats eat his head at night.

and after 38 years of church planning, of translating the Bible for the Burmese church and writing an English Burmese dictionary for future missions and his many, many deaths day in, day out, at 15 minutes after 4 on Friday afternoon, April 12, 1815, he finally died one last time.

[29 : 32] At sea, away from his family, all alone, on a ship full of godless sailors and away from his Burmese church.

That evening, the ship pulled up, the crew assembled quietly, there were no prayers, no Bible readings, the captain gave the order, the door was opened, his coffin was slid into the sea, latitude 13 degrees north, longitude 90 degrees south, a few hundred miles away from Burma and the ship sailed on.

An end of a life. And I read that and I said, it can't be. But God's purpose was done.

The Bible was translated, the dictionary was done, hundreds of converts were now leading the church in Burma and estimates today are that Myanmar's Baptist Convention to have 4,530 congregations with 1.14 million members and 1.72 million affiliates.

The fruit of one dead seed. What a life. Unless a seed of grain falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

[31 : 09] But if it dies, it produces many seeds. And so, my brothers and sisters, the question is not whether you will die, but whether you will die in a way that bears much fruit.

Life is fleeting. Life is fleeting. And God calls us to give up the comforts of this world. In a very short time, we will all give an account before Jesus Christ to how well we have obeyed the command to make disciples of all nations, amongst other things.

The very last verse of Isaiah is meant to serve as a sober warning to the people of God, in fact. Anyone who wants to reject God and his purposes, and they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me, their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.

And so we sit here in 2011, and many of the peoples of this world are without any indigenous Christian movement.

Christ is not enthroned there. His grace is not known there. And people are perishing with no access to the gospel. people.

[32 : 45] And most of those hopeless people do not want you to come. At least they don't think they do. They are hostile to Christian missions. And the word of our Lord still stands.

I am sending you out like sheep amongst wolves. believers. And so I am asking you today not to love what this world loves and to suffer by either going to those people, and I pray that there will be many of us who will, go, or by suffering in staying and giving up your securities for the sake of God's grand design for his people, that people from every tribe, language and nation come at his feet and bow before this great king.

We've set a mission target of \$125,000 this year. Is it big? Well, it's bigger than last year. And the only reason we won't reach it is not because of lack of money.

It's because our hearts are not aligned with God's heart. That's the only reason we won't reach it. And so I've asked you to be prayerful. You've heard the word of God.

And now I encourage you to tremble before the word of God and to fill out your pledge card. Nick is going to come up and he's going to play some music while we do this.

[34 : 26] If you haven't got a pledge card, wave your hand and the ushers will come and give you a pledge card. So stick your hand up and they'll give you a pledge card. Nick's going to play.

I'm going to ask you to fill out the card. Then the ushers are going to come and collect the cards and then I'm going to pray. Amen. Stop doing more and back into your hearts or go and out close Kansas and hear each other and hear through his and hear the ■ of hope
Thank you.

We declare your name above all names. Oh, the gospel, he became our sin.

Oh, bring worship made acceptable in him.

[36 : 41] The treasures on earth will fall. Put Christ above them all.

We treasure you, Jesus, above all things.

We treasure you, Jesus, above all things.

We do, we do treasure you.

We're daily taking up the cross of Christ.

[37 : 44] We're fully free to live and sacrifice.

Glory, glory to the risen King. Holy, holy earth and heaven will bow to him.

The treasures on earth will fall. Put Christ above them all.

We treasure you, Jesus, above all things.

We treasure you, Jesus, above all things.

[38 : 47] We depend on Jesus for everything.

We treasure you.

We treasure you. Yeah, we do, we do treasure you.

That's it. Thank you. Thank you. Let's bow our heads. I'm going to pray. If you're still filling out your pledge card, you can bring it in after the service.

These boxes will be here. and I'm going to use a prayer of David from 1 Chronicles 29. Let's pray.

Praise be to you, O Lord God of our Father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

[39 : 58] Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor. For everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom.

You are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you. You are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

Now, O Lord, give thanks. We give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. But who am I?

And who are these people that we should be able to give like this?

Father, everything comes from you and we have only given you what comes from your hand. We are aliens and strangers in your sight. Our life is fleeting as we're all of our forefathers.

Our days on earth are like a shadow without hope. O Lord, our God, for all this abundance that we have provided, that your name might go to the ends of the earth.

[41 : 04] It has only come from your hand and it belongs to you. I know, Father, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. And all these things that we have willingly given with honest intent.

And now, Lord, may it be a great joy amongst your people. There might be an ongoing willingness amongst your people to continue to pursue your purpose.

Keep the desire in our hearts, Father, for the unreached peoples of this world, for those who are lost. Help us to continue to have your purpose and that we might be loyal to your purpose consistently.

They might be in front of us all of our days. Give us a wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, your requirements and your decrees and that we would do everything within our power, Father, to finish the Great Commission.

And we ask it for your glory. Amen.