

Glimpses of Glory God's King

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Date: 30 April 2023

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. We need to cut the Bible reading short because I needed some more time to preach this morning. I've been away.

This time, in fact, this time last week I was in Dubai. It's a remarkable city if you've ever been there. 30 years ago, Dubai was a desert. I mean, it still is, but it's now this city built on a desert. And as you come into land, it's like sand, sand, sand, sand, sand, and then this city. It's an amazing place. It is a picture of success.

Three and a half million people live there now. It has 13 billionaires, 202 centimillionaires, and 68,000 millionaires. In the space of four minutes, I saw four Lamborghinis drive past me. 90% of the population are expats from all over the world seeking their fortune. If you lose your job in Dubai and you're an expat, you've got 28 days to depart the country.

[1 : 08] That's it. They don't have any hangers on there at all. So how would you do it? That's how Dubai did it. How would you do it? Well, what I mean by that is how would you plan your success?

Imagine you gather some experts into the room, a bunch of friends, and with the goal to put together a strategic plan for a successful life for you.

That you would leave the world a better place. How would you, what would your strategic plan include? There you go. I'm going to give you one minute. Turn to the people around you and come up with a list.

Thank you.

All right.

[2 : 36] That'll do. The strategic plan is amongst us. Struggle to do that without a whiteboard and some sticky notes. But the rest of us, hopefully you come up with something.

If you've just joined us, you've just tuned in, we are working our way through the Old Testament book of Isaiah. It's about 800 years before Jesus. So we're winding history back a fair bit. Isaiah begins with God bringing a message of judgment to his fruitless and faithless people because of their rebellion against him and because of the way that they have been treating one another. They have existed in a life of comfort and ease and wealth and they have drifted for God and his priorities in life. And this judgment can only be averted if they repent of their sin.

And we see that in Isaiah 6 when Isaiah himself is confronted with the holiness and the glory of God. Amid the judgment on a faithless people, there is a promise of mercy.

As we see here, God raises up a new king who will lead with wisdom and bring justice and hope. But there are some surprises with God's king.

[3 : 57] He's an unexpected king. And that theme runs throughout Isaiah, but we see glimpses of it here. So if you've got the St. Paul's app in front of you, you'll notice there's four points today.

Justice of the king, wisdom of the king, identity of the king, and follow the king. So if you've got the app, that'll be a way to keep track of where we're up to. So first of all, the justice of the king. Look at verse 4 in Isaiah 11 that was just read out to us. It says, When it says in verse 4, He will judge the needy, it doesn't mean there that he will condemn the needy.

It literally means he will make things just for the needy and for the poor. The poor in verse 4 means not just economically poor, but the downtrodden, the oppressed of the world, people who are powerless.

When it says he will give decisions for the poor of the earth, it means that he will use his power to stand in for the poor and the oppressed and make decisions on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, the downtrodden.

[5 : 20] He will use his power and authority for the sake, if you like, of the underlings, the minority, the oppressed, the poor. Now we could be tempted to view here, just on a surface reading of this

verse, to think that this king of God, God's king, is little more than a great civil servant crusading for social justice.

What overturns that view is verses 6 to 8. What those verses are saying is that the promised king is going to do a whole lot more than just make the world a better place for some.

He's not just about social justice. This king is going to rid the world of death, disease, violence, suffering, fear.

He's going to make everything right. He's going to bring ultimate reconciliation, renewal and rest to the whole created order. Now if these verses at all seem familiar to you, he's like, hang on a minute, I've read this somewhere before.

It's probably because Isaiah 11 is read throughout the world every year at Christmas time. The Christmas story is the God's king of Isaiah 11, who will identify with the poor and make everything right, is in fact Jesus of Nazareth.

[7 : 25] The Christmas story reveals the extent to which God's king would in fact identify with the poor and the oppressed. Christmas declares that God the son, the Messiah, the Christ, God's king here in Isaiah 11, was born into a poor family.

He did not enter the world as a philosopher or as a general leading a great army, but as the son of a carpenter.

And he worked as a carpenter himself. His mother was a peasant girl from a poor village, an obscure village. His ministry was mostly directed towards the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized of society, as he preached the gospel, raised the dead and healed the sick and lifted the downtrodden.

At the very least, to follow Jesus means that his priorities become our priorities. However, we do not only need to be concerned about the poor and the oppressed in our world right now, as those who have allegiance to Jesus, but we need to do it up close.

Jesus didn't commute in to help the poor and the oppressed. In a non-patronizing way, the church, but I would argue more specifically individual Christians, need to figure out how to come alongside and walk close with the poor and the oppressed of our world.

[9 : 13] At the very least, the life and the ministry of Jesus points us in that direction. The second thing we see here about God's king is his wisdom.

Have a look at verse 2. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord, and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

The word counsel there is the same idea as wisdom. That is, this king, we are told, has wisdom and might. That simply means that he not only has the power to do what needs to be done, but he knows exactly what needs to be done and the best way to achieve what needs to be done.

And then in verse 3, it describes his wisdom in a surprising way. It says, he will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decides by what he hears with his ears.

His justice and his wisdom come together in a very surprising way. That is, he doesn't act. He doesn't decide the way we act and we decide.

[10 : 47] That is, by mere outward appearance. He doesn't look at the surface of things. He sees things the way they actually are.

Another way of saying that is that the wisdom of God's king here turns the wisdom of the world on its head. The wisdom of God's king is a violation of worldly wisdom.

God's king is going to bring justice and reconciliation, renewal and rest for all of God's people in an orderly, remade world, but not as we would expect him to.

I asked you a couple of minutes ago, what was your strategy to become successful to make an impact in this world for generations to come?

What was in your list? I wonder, did it include being born in a backwater town in a feed trough?

[11 : 58] Did it include staying away from major cultural and commercial centres and spending your time in little villages? Did it include staying out of every network of political, social and academic power?

In fact, did it include making sure that you knew no one in any of those networks? Did it include getting executed in disgrace at a young age, just as you started to become known?

Was any of that in your strategic plan to change the world? He turns the wisdom of this world on its head. This is the wisdom of God.

2,000 years since that plan was put into effect, Jesus is still the most influential person who has ever lived. A person of impeccable character that today you still can't pull him apart. One quarter of this world centre their entire lives on him. His teaching is seen as the single most influential body of thought in the history of humanity.

[13:20] Even a few major civilisations have their existence based solely on his person and his teaching. That is way more successful than Cristiano Ronaldo, who is the world's biggest social media influencer with 573 million followers on Instagram.

Within 100 years, he'll be forgotten, except by a few soccer tragics. That's nothing. The wisdom of God makes the wisdom of this world look foolish.

And in the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of God looks foolish. Now, there's another way here that the wisdom of God's king turns our wisdom on its head.

It has to do with his miraculous work in the world. There is a miracle in these verses, and I want to pick it up a little bit later.

But let me just say, miracles cut into another paradigm of the wisdom of our world. It makes our society think that Christianity and anything religious and supernatural or spiritual just makes it look stupid.

[14:43] That's the wisdom of our world. One of the paradigms of our society is that everything has to have a scientific explanation, which means ultimately the miracles can't happen.

The supernatural doesn't exist. Many parts of the Christian church in the Western world have responded to our world and the wisdom of our world in an attempt to align itself and to win over the world by, in fact, downplaying the supernatural in the Bible and in life.

And the Western church has done this a bit over 100 years now that has been roaring in the Western church. Instead, what the Western church has wanted to do is highlight the ethical principles of the Bible and the Christian faith, emphasizing love and social justice over the supernatural work of God.

What's interesting is that the churches that have embraced the wisdom of this world and rejected the supernatural of God, His work in this world, are in steep decline.

Steep decline. But supernatural Christianity is exploding in the world. The Christian faith has grown from 5% Christian to 50% Christian in 100 years in Africa.

[16:19] South Korea went from 0% to 40% Christian in less than 100 years. The same trajectory is happening in China right now. God's wisdom and work is exploding in the supernatural world.

Let me tell you one story from my time in Africa recently. Pastor from Northern Sudan. If you want to be a Christian, being a Christian in Northern Sudan is very hard.

So this is a pastor in Northern Sudan who told of growing up with two things that deeply shaped his entire existence. The Quran in one hand Christian and a deep hatred from anyone from Southern Sudan and especially Christians from Southern Sudan.

A deep, deep, deep hatred. He was a radicalised Muslim. One day a new student joined his school. He was a Christian from Southern Sudan. And so with his friends they abducted him. They beat him. They stabbed him.

[17:30] They stole a car. They ran over him. They killed him and dumped his body in a remote area in the bush. Such was the depth of his hatred even as a school kid.

Later in life as still as a Muslim a relative of his was near death in hospital. Like this relative had been dying for some time and they were it was the end the family were told to gather.

Your relative is dying. They're there. They're unconscious in the hospital bed. The family has gathered around. There's nothing more they can do. And they said in the midst of that scene two Christian missionaries walked in.

Before they knew it they laid hands on our relative and prayed. and as soon as they said amen our relative sat up in bed and said what's going on?

Pulled all the tubes out and walked out of hospital. He said that profoundly impacted my life but not immediately.

[18:43] Ended up at university became a Christian at university went home told his parents that he's now a Christian and they disowned him.

They disowned him. And when they disowned you as a Muslim in northern Sudan they hold a funeral for you. Dug a hole out in the cemetery.

They have a coffin that they parade through the streets. There's wailing and mourning and they bury you. He said he found himself going to his family and saying trying to convince them that Christ is the way and they said you're dead to us you don't exist.

And then he found himself early one evening by standing in the cemetery looking at his grave. tombstone there date of birth date of death he's there looking at it and as he's standing there looking at it he felt a hand on his shoulder he looks around and no one's there and he heard a voice audibly say to him my tomb is empty and so is yours.

Preach the gospel. He said for that moment that's what I did I preached the gospel became a pastor church planter evangelist he's still doing that daily now right now in Sudan a great fear of his life well he doesn't fear his life but a great danger to his existence right now.

[20 : 26] He said he was preaching at this event calling people to respond to Christ and as he did he came down the front asked people to come and he's praying for them they would receive Christ he says a man there came to him he said well just remember it so vividly this person this man walks up to him who clearly broke it in life and clearly they needed prayer for healing arms was twisted they were distorted they could hardly walk he said dear brother how can I pray for you he said oh you've got it wrong I've been praying for you you don't remember me do you I'm your school friend who you left in the bush from that very night you thought I was dead and I was dead but Christ raised me that very night I've been praying for your soul and tonight I see God's answer that are you praying for your friends and your family your neighbours your work colleagues are you expecting a supernatural work of God in their life supernatural Christianity is changing the face of human history

Christianity that has no supernatural element to it is nothing more than a self-improvement religion nothing more than that it seems right it seems appealing it seems wise but it only works for people in prosperous countries it's an elitist religion that has no power at all have you bought into it I said that there are miracles in these these verses so let me pull that together as we look at the identity of God's king in chapter 11 verse 1 we read a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse from its roots a branch will bear fruit what is behind those verses is the description of the judgment of God in chapters 9 and 10 and the picture is of total devastation of God's people because of their faithlessness but the promise of a remnant it's an image of deforestation a thriving forest being cut down piled up and burnt because of faithfulness faithlessness of God's people then in verse 1 the green shoot sprouting out of a stump it's a metaphor of descending from someone a green shoot is descending from someone coming out of life coming out of someone else it is saying that God's king will come out of Jesse who is the father of Israel's king David out of the destruction of Israel's God's king will be raised up from David's family line and yet if you go down to verse 10 you'll notice something interesting in that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the nations a banner for the peoples the nations will rally to him and his resting place will be glorious this is again referring to the same king but it doesn't say he descends from David's family line it says he is the source of David's family line God's king is growing out of Jesse but Jesse grew out of God's king how can someone be both the shoot and the root of David and Jesse and the answer is as crazy as it seems to our non-supernatural society that the creator God who is the source of us all was born into the world as a human being a descendant of King David from Israel the message of Christmas is that the creator God has broken into his world Jesus Christ is not just simply a man concerned for the poor or just simply a wise teacher he's not just left us with a great example of how to live life and some wise sayings that we can twitter this is what Matthew 1 says as the angel speaks to Mary that she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins and all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet then he quotes from Isaiah 7 the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel which means God with us God's king in verse 11 is the son of the virgin in Isaiah 7 that's the miracle here in Isaiah 11

God with us Christmas the Christian faith is category breaking for our world because our world understands two kinds of religion and frankly many Christians are bought into this two kinds of religion idea the religion of wrath is where there are rules and laws that must be obeyed if you do if you obey them God will bless you if you don't God gets super cranky with you it's a very black and white simple religion there are the good people there are the bad people the other kind of religion our world understands is the religion of acceptance God is viewed as a spirit of love in the world and in this religion you must determine your own way and you must accept other people's ways everything is accepted everyone is loved everything is tolerated the miracle of

[27 : 05] Christmas the miracle of the Christian faith is that neither of these work Christianity is neither of those things because both of those religions are religions of the self Christianity is infinitely richer because the one born in a major is not just a human being and he's not just divine he is the God man God's king is not just one more religious founder not one more prophet or sage coming to tell you how to find God the shoot of Jesse the of Jesse God's king Jesus Christ is God come to find you God at Easter as Easter tells us he is the God come to die to rescue people from slavery to sin you see the imagery of verses 15 and 16 of

Isaiah 11 is of a new exodus led by God's king as he rescued his people from slavery in Egypt so he will lead them from slavery to sin and that's why Christianity is so transforming it's not just a religion of wrath it's not just a religion of acceptance it's a religion of grace and grace is costly love yes there is justice on sin we see that in Isaiah 9 and 10 like Israel before us we are not living as we should live there is lots of evil and injustice in our world and frankly there's lots of selfishness and pride in our hearts every single one of us has done things and doing things that we deserve to be condemned for yes there is deserving wrath on our sin on the other hand

God miraculously comes into the world goes to the cross and takes the punishment that every single one of us deserve even right now still deserve God satisfies his own justice by pouring out his wrath upon himself that is costly love not just wrath not just acceptance but God's love satisfying his own wrath life that is the wisdom of God that is the justice of God and to our secular world it is nonsense have you bought into that 1 Corinthians 1 18 says the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to those of us who are being saved it is the power of God and down into verse 25 it says for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of

God is stronger than human strength the cross of Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God the justice of God the power of God to bring regeneration renewal and rest for your souls as 2 Corinthians 5 tells us if anyone is in Christ the new creation has come the wolf now lies down with the lamb in Jesus the old has gone the new is here all this is from God who reconciled himself to us through Christ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting people's sins against them you see the image of renewal of all things in Isaiah 11 begins with the cross where Jesus became poor and oppressed was violently killed so that we can be rich and free and live in peace with him and this renewal of all things will finally come to completion at the end of all time when God's king judges the world and ushers his children into his perfect world forever where there is no tears no more mourning no more crying no more death no more destruction that scope of things is the kind of love this

Christian faith this Christian gospel the kind of love that melts your heart it's the kind that draws you to him it's the kind of love that sets you free it's the kind of costly love that turns you from a slave to the religions of this world and the false hopes and philosophy of this world into a child of God it's a kind of love that turns duty into delight duty into delightful choice and that's where I want to turn as we finish up with following the king let me go back to verse 10 again verse 11 verse 11 goes on from there and lists nations in every direction of the compass in other words it's saying that [32 : 49] Jesus is the banner of all nations he's the one that all nations are to look to he's the rallying point of all peoples what it's saying here is God's king is a king he expects to be followed he expects to be followed and those who come to him will find their resting place in him not their burial plot but their home and their place of rest from all sin and evil the restless wandering of life will be over as chapter 12 tells us in Jesus we move from sin to singing his praise we move from death to life from slavery to joy so let me just close off by first turning to those who are here tuning online who are not yet

Christians these verses are calling you to rally to the king to rally to Jesus and find your freedom your home your forgiveness and rest for your souls Jesus is the rally point of your life he is the gathering point of all people to come to him and find salvation and rest for your souls the very first words of Jesus ministry was a call to repent and believe the good news that's a step that I personally took 30 years ago today to repent and believe the good news some of you have sat here and listened to my preaching for 14 years and your consistent call to treasure Jesus with all of your life and you've refused to take that step

I'm calling you to take it today rally to the king today secondly if you identify as a Christian Jesus is the banner to the nations and all are to rally to him God a king expects to be followed his call on your life is exactly what it was for me 30 years ago to repent and believe the same call in my life

today 30 years later is to repent and believe the good news so hear me as your pastor 14 years leading this church God I fear that far too many of us in a modern church like this in the west do simply half of that we just believe as

J.I. Packer has written God's purpose in our creation as in our new creation is that we should be holy growth in holiness cannot continue where repenting from the heart has stopped in the New Testament repentance is change of mind metanoia change of mind John Stott argues that real repentance requires an admission of failure and a rejection of sin it's not just saying sorry it's an intentional turning away from sin towards Christ to be conformed to his pattern his character his life his priorities that's what repentance is and too many of us I think have stopped a life following King Jesus is a repentant life where we embrace his character his priorities and we turn away from all other alternative it's a life long journey Packer also wrote that the highest priority for Christians in the Western Church as disciples in Christ's school of holiness must be to purge complacency and comfort from our souls three weeks in and I'm wondering yet have we heeded the warning of Isaiah the people in Isaiah's day had a great life they were comfortable they were wealthy they believed but they weren't repentant and we need to be I talk to pastors from all over the place right now and one of the consistent messages

[38 : 09] I hear in fact I haven't spoken to a single pastor who has not affirmed this that ever since the COVID pandemic people have gotten used to living and watching church from their screens and if they're not watching church from their screens they're operating as if they are operating church from their screens most churches have got the majority of their people back from COVID but every single pastor I've spoken to has said trying to get people engaged in mission and ministry is almost impossible nowadays why is it that right now in kids church we have only two adults leading all of our kids one's a volunteer and does it every week the rest of the people leading kids church are kids themselves who may either not yet know what the Christian faith is or are still trying to discover it for themselves

Ash can't get volunteers in kids church why is that so let's repent let's heed the warning of God's people in the early chapters of Isaiah what I want you to do now is close your eyes you may want to turn your hands out in your lap it's a posture of receiving and I'm just going to ask you a bunch of questions you personally ask you a bunch of questions and then I'm going to pray let's do that first of all Lord give us the gift of repentance so let me ask you are you willing to seek God with all of your heart are you willing to take rebukes and instruction from others especially your brothers and sisters in

Christ are you resolving to forsake your idols and inordinate loves do you have spiritual assurance of your standing in Jesus how clear and vivid is it are you conscious of a growing spiritual light within revealing more of the purity and the goodness of God and his word the holiness of God the evil of sin and the preciousness of the gospel of Jesus Christ is your love for God's people growing do you find that you are less judgmental towards others are you cold to anyone right now is your conscious becoming more tender to convict you in the very first thoughts of sin in the mind sins such as resentment worry pride jealousy an over desire for power comfort approval security reputation are you becoming more aware of and convicted about sins of the tongue such as cutting remarks deception lying gossip slander inappropriate humor or thoughtless statements do you see signs in growth in the fruit of the spirit can you give example of responding in new ways with love joy patience honesty humility and self control are you able to discern false and idolatrous motives for some of the good things you do are you able to see that some of your service of others is in fact self glorifying are you seeing new ways to be a better steward of the talents the gifts the relationships the wealth and other assets that

God has given you Lord Jesus by your grace give us the gift of repentance to follow your king the king with wisdom the king with power and might the king with infinite love who draws us to himself too often we have listened to the whispers of the enemy instead of your words in scripture too often we have enjoyed your good gifts more than you many of us have a vision for our lives that only has you as a support person and not the king many of us once walked with you with hearts tender to your love and your leading and yet little by little we exchange your truths for temptations and deceit that led us away from you many of us allowed other things to become more important than loving and honoring you many of us have sought satisfaction in other things than you and you are the one who provides all of our needs forgive us

Lord because repentance has not been in our vocabulary and today we confess our desperate need for you you have promised that if we confess our sin you'll forgive us and make us clean again as Jess has already prayed we ask that you might do in us Lord your remarkable work of transformation and change we truly need your forgiveness forgiveness and so Lord we ask from this moment that repentance of life may be in our hearts it might be on our lips and it might be evident in our priorities Amen