

Isaiah 54 4

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Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the Old Testament Scriptures, to the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 54. We may read from verse 15.

Isaiah 54 at verse 15, Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me. Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake.

Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals and the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work. And I have created the waster to destroy.

And especially in the last verse, No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shall condemn.

This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and the righteousness of me, saith the Lord. Now, I would like to draw to a close this evening, an attempt at studying this chapter.

[1 : 29] A chapter which, as we have seen, deals with the blessings of the church for which Jesus died, and the sufferings and the death of Jesus are very clearly brought before us in the preceding chapter.

And as the prophet unfolds, and as the prophet unfolds the blessings that he has purchased for the church, and the glory and the blessedness that will be the churches, so in chapter 55, he extends an invitation to all who would come to receive these blessings, to come and to take them freely from his hand.

As the chapter brings before us the church and the blessings that Jesus purchased for her, so it also unfolds for us the covenant faithfulness of God towards that church.

God's unfailing faithfulness and his loving kindness is manifested time and time again in his dealings with that church.

Just as Paul in Romans chapter 8, and there's a very real connection between much of this chapter and part of Romans chapter 8, just as Paul there stresses that nothing can stop God loving his church.

[3 : 05] So this chapter makes the same emphasize. It also deals with the safety and the security of the church of God in the world.

The church, we are told, is as safe as Noah was in the ark on the waters of the flood. And though there are things in this life which seem to be so immovable, so unchangeable, they seem to be like that.

For example, as he says here, the mountains and the hills, nevertheless, they are capable of moving, and they will be moved one day.

But his covenant with his church will not be moved. And his church is secure within that covenant relationship.

And as we saw last week, he then goes on towards the end of the chapter to speak of the glory that awaits the church when in her ultimate state of glorification before the Lord, she will be removed far away from all that has oppressed and distressed and troubled her, caused her fear and terror in this world.

[4 : 30] So you see, the chapter speaks to us of the wonderful blessings and the security of the church of God in the world, the church for which Jesus died.

But as we saw last week, and continuing the same theme now, that does not make the church exempt from problems and difficulties and trials and stresses and strains in this world.

It is addressed in this chapter as, O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted. And here in the verses before us, you have something similar, a picture of enemies gathering together against the church.

And against the head of the church, they shall surely gather together, but not by me. Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake.

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. And so there is given to us here, first of all, another glimpse, and I'll just deal with this very briefly, another glimpse of the enemies that the church has in the world.

[5 : 49] But there is given to us, particularly in these verses and in the last verse, a picture of the church's security. Security which is guaranteed by the sovereign control that our Lord exercises in the world.

I have created, he says, the smith that bloweth the coals and the fire. I have created the person who makes these weapons. And I have created the person that bringeth forth an instrument for his work, the person who takes possession of them.

And I have created the person who uses them. I have created the wester who wants to destroy with these weapons. So you see, no weapon that is formed against the church shall prosper because on the side of the church is the person who exercises sovereign control over all the affairs in the interests of the church for thy sake.

And then we are given a picture, finally, of the church's, as he puts it here. This is the heritage of the Lord.

That is, I think, a reference to what has been said to the past. Her heritage, part of her inventory, is the wonderful security that she has under the sovereign control of God.

[7 : 20] And she will then see that her righteousness is of the Lord. All she has to protect her and to beautify her and to glorify her, she has from him.

And then, for the fifth time in this short chapter, there is brought before her her warrant for the assurance that she exercises in the world.

Again, thus saith the Lord. Let us then look very briefly at these few thoughts here this evening. First of all, then, her enemies.

Now notice, as it is put here, behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me. Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall. Now, you will notice here the hostile intent of the enemies of the church.

They are gathered together and they are gathered together to destroy her. And one of the interesting aspects of this hostile and malicious intent is that God is not with them.

[8 : 34] God is not in their thinking, neither is he behind them. Their gathering, he said, is not by me. Here's a picture of a people who are bent on the destruction of the church for which Jesus died.

And in many respects, the history of this world, as we have seen in a minute, is just that kind of history. It is a history of the church of God in her contendings for the faith, opposed by and assailed by her many enemies in the world.

Psalms 2, as we sang here tonight, gives a perfect picture of the same thing. Why do the heathen roam? Why do they gather together? Why do they amuse in their heart?

Why is there this convention? Why all this deliberation, all this counsel, all this discussion? And why the conclusion? let us break their bands from us and cast their cords asunder.

That's a picture again of the malice of hell against the church of Jesus Christ. And in many respects, that malice can be manifested in a far more orderly fashion than the church very often can muster.

[9 : 58] There seems to be far more organizational ability, if I may put it like that, on the side of those who are bent on the destruction of the church of Jesus Christ than you seem to think, seem to see, through of the church itself.

Well, that has been the history, as I said, of the world throughout the ages, the history of right through to the present day, when there are many who are bent on the destruction of the Christian church, many who work towards it, many who hope that they will see the day when the church will be no more.

Just in the same way, as you don't need to speak of it corporately, you can speak of it at individual level as well. You bear in mind that there are many people, if you're a member of the church of Jesus Christ tonight, you bear in mind, my friend, that there are many, agencies at work, seeking to destroy you and to destroy your faith, and to move you away from your Christian moorings.

Each one of us is exposed to all these forces, to all the manners. Remember what Jesus said to Peter, against the gate of hell, he said, shall not prevail against you.

And it isn't just that the gates of hell are opened and bursting through these gates are all the machinations of hell, and all that the devil has it is supposed to help him, and he has many helpers, not just against the church corporately, but against every individual believer.

[11 : 46] no one is exempt from the attack and the forces of the darkness of this world. No one is exempt from such forces being at work against him.

But it is against that background that you see highlighted for us here the wonderful security that the church has in the world, stemming particularly from the sovereign control that the Lord exercises on her behalf.

And that's brought before us here when he says, their gathering is not by me, I am not with them. It isn't that the Lord doesn't know what they are doing, but he's not with them and he's not behind them.

Moreover, he says, you remember that no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that rise against you in judgment will be condemned because I have created the smith that bloweth the coals on the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work, and I have created the waste to destroy.

All these instruments and all these agents are under his control. The weapons, the makers, and the users, they are all under his control.

[13 : 09] In the same way as the Lord to this very new hour, controls all contemporary events.

Now, harking back again to Romans chapter 8, you remember that when Paul is asking a question, is it possible for the Lord to stop loving his church?

He draws up for us two lists of things which may suggest in themselves the possibility that God has stopped loving his church?

And he pictures for a situation in which people are tempted to ask the question that the psalmist asked in Psalm 77, and that maybe some of you have asked from time to time, is it true that the Lord has stopped to be gracious?

Has he shut up in his wrath, his tender misery? In other words, has he stopped loving me? Does he care any longer? Is he with me? Has he abandoned me?

Has he broken the relationship? Has he gone off? And as Paul asks that question, and as he looks at the various things in these lists, he comes to this conclusion, I am certain, he says, that there is nothing, no creature shall separate us from the love of God.

[14 : 32] And therein lies the believer's security. that whoever it is who's against him, whatever weapons are employed, whatever machinations are adopted, they are all the creation of the creator.

And on his side is the creator. And that's a point that the Lord is making here through Isaiah to his church. Look at these people, he says, look at the instruments that they use, and look at the tactics they employ, and realize this, that I have control over them all.

And I'm pretty certain that there are times, if you are to be honest with yourself, that there are times when if there is anything at all that a person is prepared to forget, or tempted to forget, it is that very fact that God controls all things.

How many times do you panic? Because everything seems to be so meaningless, there is a sheer haphazard meaninglessness of it all. Is there a plan, is there a purpose to all this?

Why, why, why? Forgetting that behind that plan stands the one who has control over all things.

[16 : 01] So the Lord says to the church here, you remember he says that no one acts independently of me. They may think they do, they gather, they don't think about me, they don't take me into their consideration, as a matter of fact, they're bent on getting rid of me, and getting rid of my church and the world.

Same again as you have in Psalm 2, the Lord looks at them and disdains, he that sits in the heaven shall laugh, he shall look on them, and he shall say to them, too late, I have established my king upon my hill.

My king sits enthroned in the midst of the church, and not even the destructive acts of people can happen apart from God's knowledge and God's control.

God, my friend, doesn't abdicate his control over the affairs of this world, he never has, and he never will. And let's not be afraid of attributing all things to the decrees of God himself.

He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. What a hopeless God we would have in the world tonight if we didn't believe that blessed fact, that there were things happening out with his control.

[17 : 21] That then would be no omnipotent sovereign Lord. No one he says acts independently of me. Man, he says, is responsible for his own evil acts.

But in his providence and in the wonderful outworking of his providence, God governs the efforts and the actions of men and employs them as instruments to fulfill his own purpose in the defense of his own church.

For thy sake. And how many of us are prepared to believe that and to accept it that the whole history of this world is unfolding in the interests of his own church.

Nothing happens by chance. Everything interrelated and all things work together for good to them that love God.

And here you have not only a sovereign control but a sovereign control which is wedded to omnipotent power directing all things.

[18 : 33] And again is this not the history of the world, the Christian church and the history of the world? You go back my friend, way back from your pages, through the pages of the Bible, go way right back and start thinking about for example the history of Israel and Egypt.

Israel and Egypt for 400 years. Another king arose in Egypt who knew not Joseph. And the Egyptians began to treat the people of God.

God had a purpose for these people. What did he tell Abraham? Hundreds of years before that. In 400 years time he says your people are going to be delivered out of Egypt. I'm going to bring them into a foreign land.

In that land they would be treated, tortured and suffer the malice of the enemies of my purpose. The Israelites didn't realise that of course.

They wondered for 400 years, does God care? Of course God cared. Why were they there? But because God had placed them there. And of course a time God heard their cry.

[19 : 40] God heard their cry. And he delivered them out of Egypt. And he used the Israelites as the instruments of his destruction of Egypt.

He brought the Israelites into Canaan. He used the Israelites again as the instruments of his destruction of the Canaanites. And as we're speaking about and I just mentioned this in the passing in the prayer meeting a few weeks ago, there are some people and they read these chapters and they see about the slaughter of the millions of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the slaughter of millions of Canaanites and the promise in Canaan.

And they say, we'll read the history of the rise and fall of the German Reich. And we'll be appalled at the atrocities committed in the name of Nazi Germany.

And they will read through the history. And they will applaud the instrument that God used. When they used the allies to destroy that evil power.

And they will say, well, they got what they deserved. Though in the course of it, many innocent millions, millions of innocent people caught up in the destruction.

[20 : 52] But did they not get what they deserved? But they won't apply the same principle to the history of the Bible. Why were the Egyptians destroyed? because for hundreds of years they defied the God of Israel.

Why were the Canaanites destroyed? Because for hundreds of years they were ripening for judgment. And God was giving them years and years and years of grace to turn in penitence to himself.

But they refused in the course of time. The seed of their own destruction was sown by themselves. Do you see how God works?

In the course of time Israel had to be chastised. So God uses Assyria, uses Babylon. These nations themselves had to be overthrown because of their wickedness. So he employs persecution.

And the course of time that nation is overthrown. And other dynasty arises. In the course of time you have the tremendous power of Rome. And it had to be the power of Rome for Jesus was given the world then to be crucified according to the word of God.

[22 : 02] In the fashion of the Roman crucifixion. You see behind it all God is working. I says I've created all these people and all these instruments I'm using them.

For thy sake no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. Carry on through the history of this world. The fish persecution against the Christian church at the time of the counter of mission.

The tremendous persecution endured by the covenanters in our own beloved country. See how God was protecting them and using all these things in the interests of his own church.

church. Just as the devil when Jesus came into the world trying to destroy Jesus used men evil men to put him to death.

And Peter tells people the day of Pentecost yes he says God sent his son into the world you took him and by the hands of evil men he was put to death. But you were up at accomplishing what God had determined beforehand should be accomplished.

[23 : 19] That doesn't exonerate your action one little bit. Doesn't condone the evil and the sin behind what you did. Behind it all was the sovereign hand of a ruling Lord directing all things to their predetermined end.

This is the church and the acts of the apostles. What is it? The church is planted, the church grows, the church is attacked. People died to destroy it.

And just as Pharaoh was struck with consternation, the more they afflicted the people of Israel, the more they multiplied. And so it is, the more the church suffers, the more she extends her influence through the world.

Evil men determined to destroy the church at the very beginning. What did they achieve? They scattered the church throughout every region and the gospel was preached and the seed was sown and the church mushroomed.

And you hear men on the radio today, men on the television, who express the wish. I was with a man speaking on a program the other night, expressed the belief and the hope that the church would disappear, that the church would sink under the waves.

[24 : 44] People hope that that will happen. And I've no doubt that there are people employed in devil worship who even pray to Satan that that will happen. You heard some years ago a man in this pulpit telling you that in one of the major cities of our country there are people gathering praying to the devil for the destruction of a servant, the servant of Christ and of his church.

No weapon he says that is formed against thee shall prosper. The weapon of physical persecution. And there have been times when they seemed as Pharaoh thought, they thought they would overcome the church. But no, they will not succeed. Psalm 107, they cried unto the Lord, he heard them and he delivered them from all their distresses.

But let us always remember this and try to apply this to ourselves here. You know my friend, you may seem that well, and you've heard it said, the church, if there's one thing that seems to be missing from the church's life today in the world, it is persecution.

It isn't difficult for us to gather here tonight to worship. It isn't difficult for the church in the island of Lewis to exercise its function and to witness, to speak out.

[26 : 18] In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, it's not difficult. Of course, you will get people then who will react, typical reaction to what the church says. You see, they're like people like these animals that come out of their halls when something happens.

And from time to time you get that publicly. when the church speaks, then those are the enemies of the church identify, at least, they will identify themselves under pseudonyms and every kind of titles. Very few will give their true identity. Now that may be true, that we don't know much about persecution. In many respects, we ought to be thankful for that.

Having said that, the church has survived and the church has been at her best in times of real persecution, dependent upon the grace of the Lord, alive to the Lord, a flame, even the flames of persecution, a flame for a Lord and a Redeemer, pointing men to the one whom they love and whom they worship and for whom they have suffered as Hebrews chapter 11 brings before us, that cat look of people who went through such terrible ordeal.

In the name and for the sake of the Lord. Having said that, let us not forget that there may be individuals here tonight for whom it is very difficult to live the Christian life, women, yes, and men, and youngsters, who really feel the pain of following the Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 52] It might not be too difficult for you, and you should thank God if you're receiving all the encouragement that you need from those who love you most and those you love.

Spare a thought for these poor people, perhaps who weren't allowed to come out to this church night because it was Christmas day. People maybe who have to sit in front of a blaring television with their hearts breaking and their spirits crushed.

people. Oh yes, there's plenty of that going on in many at home tonight, perhaps even in the island of Lewis.

But no weapon that is you have armed, no attempt that is made to destroy the faith of the individual Christian will prosper any more than they will prosper as they try to destroy the witness of the church in the world because, and this is perhaps what some of you have discovered, the more people try to put you off, the more determined you are to cling to the rock of your salvation. Now, abuse, physical abuse, cruelty, assault of every kind are extremely difficult to bear, but perhaps there is one which is even more difficult, and this is it, every ton that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn.

[29 : 34] Now, again, I think this reminds us, reminds me anyway, of Romans chapter 8, and Paul puts the same question, who is he that condemns? And he pictures us as a court of law, and there's a poor Christian standing there on trial, and there's someone, and the court officer says, who comes forward to condemn this man?

And you know there are plenty of people who condemn the Christian. Many engage in whispering campaigns against Christians today. Many will stand in the street corners and speak about Christians whispering, oh, they don't want to be heard.

Do you see him? Do you see her? You heard about them. It doesn't matter what they've heard is true or not, that doesn't matter. As long as they're sad, as long as you try to destroy a person's character, that seems to be all that people are intent on nowadays, destroyed by accusation. And the pain that can be caused by that, I believe, can be more intense and more acute and more cruel than any physical violence that people have to contend with, the insult, the slander, the vilification, the innuendo, the unsubstantiated accusations, where a person's character is laid low. Ah, you say, that doesn't go on. You don't know the history of your Bible. You don't know your Bible, you think that doesn't go on. You don't know what happened to Jesus when he was in this world. There was no one who suffered so much as he did at the tongue of the enemy.

[31 : 12] You read Psalm 120 and apply it to Jesus and apply it to the Christian church. That man is a wine barber. That man says that he's equal with God.

That man has spoken against God. That man is here campaigning to destroy the Roman dynasty. They said anything as long as they could lay something to his charge and lay him low. And you know the accusing tongue can be so eloquent, so powerfully persuasive. And you know how the Christian church has suffered at the hands of the tongue of philosophy, the tongue of science, the tongue of the infidel, the tongue of the atheist, and more often than that the tongue of the ignoramus.

faith. Tonight, my friend, in 1994, you look back over the history of this world, and you'll see there many battlefields, many battlefields, in which lie the corpses of the Christian church.

And the church is still with us. And the church always will be. who's going to condemn the church?

[32 : 34] What do you accuse the church of? And as a poor church stands often beleaguered, she appeals as Rome, and Paul tells Romans chapter 8, she appeals to a justifying God.

It is God who justifies. Who will lay anything in charge of God's elect? God justifies. Who will condemn? Christ died, yea, rather it's risen again.

And that's the church's great defense, that God is on her side. She would be in the world if God hadn't given her being. She wouldn't be here unless Christ had died for her sins.

And she looks to him in all her stresses, not to herself, not to her own reputation, but to him. And she claims her defense at his hand.

He is her advocate. He is the one who's going to condemn him, and there standing beside the church, is her great advocate, the one who died for her, and rose again to be with her in the world, the one who's going to help her and strengthen her and encourage her.

[33 : 43] her. That, says the prophet here, that is the church's heritage. The church has many things in her inheritance. Paul, right in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, speaks of that vast inventory, all things are house.

Well, here's one of them, the church's security, the assurance of her continuance and of her ultimate victory. This, he said, is from the Lord.

They gather, but they're not from me. What you have is from me. And in a word, finally, all she has is from God.

Her righteousness is of me, saith the Lord. Now, what does this mean? Well, in a minute or two available to us, it means surely this.

You see, there is a wonderful version in the Old Testament that goes like this. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

[34 : 55] Now, none of us here tonight is perfect. We all have many things wrong with us. Wrong thoughts and wrong actions and wrong conclusions, you name it.

Even the best Christian here tonight isn't perfect. But there is one who is. God is righteous. He is perfect in himself. There is nothing that you can accuse God of. Put to his charge, he is righteous.

And he says, their righteousness is of me. And I think that's the way the Bible speaks of it with right to ourselves. You see, tonight, my friend, you and I make your way to God.

We pray, we call upon the Lord. Remember the picture that Jesus painted of two men went up to the temple to pray, one a public and the other a sinner, one a man of bad reputation, the other a poor, poor sinner.

[35 : 56] And it was a poor sinner who was justified. He went down to us, why? Because when he prayed to God, he knew that he had no claims upon God's mercy and favor, he was just a sinner.

I have nothing and I deserve nothing. And if I'm ever going to receive blessing from you, it will be because you freely give.

so our righteousness is this, Jesus Christ as the ground of our acceptance before God, we stand in the righteousness of Christ.

And Christ's right, and I don't want to go into the fields and the areas that you could go into, but not in this kind of set of speaking about the righteousness that the righteousness of God demanded.

Let us remember this, that the righteous God was satisfied with the finished work of Jesus on the cross, which is the ground of my approach before him on the basis of my acceptance.

[37 : 10] And if God is going to justify me, he's going to justify me on the basis of what Christ has done. That is my righteousness first and foremost. Then, as he deals with us in this world, and as he brings us through this world, facing all these problems and all these distresses, all these attacks and all these accusations, as he brings us through the world, he is working righteousness in us.

He is making us like himself. It was Martin Luther who said, the Christian life is more one of becoming than of being.

You are not perfect tonight, but if you're a Christian, God is making you perfect. And as he makes you perfect, he brings you through circumstances and situations that distress you, overwhelm you, perplex you.

God is not perfect. Oh, my friend, many a bruised, grieving Christian heart tonight in the hand of the God who's molding them.

But this is the thing, no matter how you may read the way that he's leading you, he is leading you in a right way.

[38 : 42] He is righteous, shall not the judge of all the earth do right. Of course you and I ask, Lord, what are you doing? But the Lord will tell us what I do just now, you don't know, but you will know afterwards.

And so it is that there are people tonight who can look back on experiences of great and deep and trying bitterness in their lives. And they will tell you, that's when I tasted that the Lord was good, that the Lord was sweet.

There was a man once who stood at the grave of all his family and he said this, the Lord gave, the Lord took away, blessed, be the name of the Lord.

That man was job. People will come to see that God never does anything wrong.

He never makes a wrong decision, you and I do. He's never too late and he's never too early. He never makes a mistake. That is the righteousness.

[40 : 01] And then, come the end of the journey in this world, they will stand before the Lord perfect in holiness.

The righteousness of their standing in Christ in this world is one thing. Their own perfected righteousness is another. They will be in themselves conformed to their standing.

they will share and bear and radiate the perfectness, the righteousness of Christ. And in glory above tonight, the church looks back over a pilgrimage in the world and she sees now that everything he did was for her good and he never did anything but that which was for her good.

Thus saith the Lord. For the fifth time in this chapter, this is your assurance that the Lord has said it.

And you and I will have no greater assurance in the world than what God says to us. What are you looking for tonight? Are you looking for some experience?

[41 : 27] some feeling in this service or any other service? Are you young folk tempted to hive off to places which offer you sensations and experiences and wonderful feelings?

Well, if that's what you want, you go. Let me tell you this, you will never, ever in this world receive a greater assurance of your salvation and your faith than that God speaks to you in his word.

Thus saith the Lord. Do you believe tonight that you're safe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Do you believe in the midst of all your stresses and trials and strains that you're on your way to eternal glory? Do you believe that the Lord will bring you into the peace and tranquility of the blessed life above?

Do you believe that? Of course you do. Why? Because of something you feel? No, my friend. Better because you have the word of his grace than you stand with Peter.

[42 : 46] Who? Contrasting? I think of these people today who offer you experiences, offer you wonderful feelings. I think of these people, I wonder how they would feel if they stood before Peter tonight and he was recalling for them the way he felt on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And he would tell me, you know, what we saw, you've seen what we saw, you've seen the brightness of his clothing, you've seen the glory in his face. If only you had felt what we felt.

But you see, what did that man say to the people of his day as he spoke of his Christian apostolic experience?

Ah, he says, we have a more sure word of prophecy to which you would do well to give heed as to a light that shines in a dark place.

The word of his grace, thus saith the Lord, and you know as well as I do, that the Lord speaks to you in his word, telling you that Christ died for his church, that the church is safe in the arms of our Lord, and he tells you and pleads with you in his word to come and to participate in the blessings and the security of the church, and as he speaks to you once again through his word, and you go out through these doors, is it the case, my friend, that having spoken, you say to him, I won't hear what you say, and I won't have what you offer.

[44 : 30] Well, you won't hear any more than what the Bible says to you, and you won't receive from him any more than what he offers to you, in the word of his grace.

Let us pray. O Lord, have mercy upon our souls, and bless us with thy presence and with thy peace this night. Give us grace to cast out cares upon thee, and continue with us and forgive us.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.