

Reversing The Curse

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would, let's open up our Bibles once more to Isaiah chapter 55. And this is our last week, believe it or not, here in this chapter.

For six weeks, six weeks we've been in this chapter, Isaiah chapter 55, sitting under these words. And I hope that you have been as encouraged as I have from these words here in Isaiah.

And so this morning we're going to be in verses 12 and 13 this morning. Isaiah 55 verses 12 and 13. And would you please just follow along with me as I read.

For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing.

And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle. And it shall make a name for the Lord.

[1 : 07] An everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Amen. Let's pray together once more. Lord, we thank you for your unfailing word.

This promise of hope that you've given us. And we pray now as we unpack it. As we bring this chapter of Isaiah to a close. Lord, that you would bring your word down from heaven to earth. Into fertile soil in our hearts this morning. We pray. In Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Well, have you ever noticed that some of the most religious people in the world are sports fans?

They may or may not believe in God. But when it comes to their favorite team, the way that they talk, the way that they act, the way that they believe, the way that they celebrate can only be described as religious.

And, of course, the sports world is filled with language of blessing and cursing. Religious rituals and superstition. Especially this language of cursing.

[2 : 15] Sports fans in the room, you may be familiar with the curse of the Bambino. Have you heard of this? Babe Ruth, he played for the Red Sox but was sold away to the New York Yankees.

Where, of course, he made himself a baseball legend. And the Red Sox then went 86 years before the curse was finally broken and they finally won the World Series.

That's the curse of the Bambino. A little bit deeper in the archives is the Billy Goat Curse. I wonder if anybody's familiar with that one. The Billy Goat Curse was allegedly placed on the Chicago Cubs by a man named William Sianis, who owned the Billy Goat Tavern in downtown Chicago.

And I guess as a way to advertise the Billy Goat Tavern, he would bring his goat, Murphy, to the baseball games. Well, in game four of the 1945 World Series, apparently Murphy the goat was disturbing some of the fans.

And so Murphy and William both were asked to leave. And as the story goes, on his way out, William Sianis shouted out for all to hear these hateful words, Them Cubs ain't gonna win no more.

[3 : 29] A curse had been pronounced. Those who heard those dreadful words interpreted it to mean that as long as William Sianis lived, the Chicago Cubs would never again win another National League pennant.

As, again, sports historians would know, the Cubs lost the series that year, and they would not return to the World Series until 2016, when they finally defeated the Los Angeles Dodgers and finally won the National League pennant.

Get this, on the 46th anniversary of William Sianis' death. After 71 years, the curse was finally broken, and the Chicago Cubs went on to win their first World Series in 108 years of losing.

Now, I'm a Braves fan myself, so I don't know what it's like to lose for that long, that consistently, to go that long without winning, but you can put yourself in their shoes and imagine the joy and the relief and the triumph of every individual player for the Chicago Cubs, but not just every individual player of that entire city of Chicago as the curse was finally broken, their hope has finally been

manifested, everything they've waited for is finally here, the curse was gone, now they finally get to rest and rejoice.

Why in the world am I talking about this this morning? It's because, as we bring our time to a close in Isaiah chapter 55 this morning, what we see in these two verses at the end of chapter 55 is our future hope.

[5 : 23] What we see in these two verses is the triumphant reversal of a curse, but this is no superstition. This is the certain, sure promise of the unfailing Word of God for any who come to Him.

Church, I would just remind you this morning that our certain hope, what we live in light of every day is that one day Christ will come. One day Christ will return.

And all that was broken, all that was lost, everything that's been twisted and marred and ruined by the curse of sin will one day be undone.

And all who know the Lord will rejoice and rest and know peace. That's the certain hope of the gospel.

And as Christians, again, we ought to live every day in light of that coming day. That's our hope.

And so this morning, in our conclusion to this chapter of Isaiah, I want to remind us of three parts of our hope this morning.

[6 : 33] Three parts of our hope, and this will be our outline this morning, three parts of our hope that we see here in Isaiah 55, verses 12 and 13.

Rescue from exile, redemption of creation, and the reversal of the curse. Three R's, three parts of our hope.

Rescue from exile, redemption of creation, and reversal of the curse of sin. First, we are trusting the promise of God that one day we will be rescued from exile.

Let's remember again the context of our passage here in Isaiah. The Israelites are in exile. After everything that they've been through, the Lord redeeming them out of slavery in Egypt, carrying them through the wilderness, giving them his law, providing for them food and water, bread from heaven, providing for them every step of the way, conquering their enemies, paving the way, bringing them into the promised land.

How did they respond to the Lord? They sinned against him. They continued to pursue and chase after idols. They did not listen.

[7 : 52] They did not incline their ear to the word of God. And so the Lord brought judgment upon them. He brought the Babylonians down, sent them to bring the Israelites away from their land and into exile in Babylon.

You can imagine how they must have felt after all of this, being brought away from the promised land, back into captivity. Psalm 137.

Psalm 137 gives us a look into how they felt. It says this, By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there, we hung up our lyres, for there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth.

[8 : 57] If I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. See, their joy had been taken away.

Their joy was the presence of God and that place where they could dwell with Him and be with Him and worship Him. And they traded it all away for chains.

And their peace had been taken away. What peace could they have when they dwelled among their enemies and served their enemies? What peace could they have when they were experiencing the heavy hand of God's wrath against their sin?

What hope could they possibly have in the midst of this terrible exile? And in the middle of all of this anguish, here comes a prophet. Here comes Isaiah.

And he brings a word from God, like rain coming down from heaven to give life to all who would listen. And he says this. Listen, verse 12.

[9 : 58] He says, You will not always be here in exile. Verse 12. He says, You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

What a promise. What a promise for those who are in exile. Imagine what it would be like if you were in exile and you heard these words. If you knew that you did not belong in this land of sin and darkness, in this land of false gods surrounded by your enemies, longing to be in your place with your God.

And God sends this word here in verse 12. You shall not belong here. You shall go up from here. You shall not always be here in exile. This judgment is not forever.

There's future hope ahead for you. And my unfailing word, which always accomplishes my purposes, it will succeed in bringing you out from here in unspeakable joy, in unimaginable peace. Could you imagine? Well, you know, of course, for us who are in Christ this morning, we don't have to imagine if we were in exile, do we?

[11 : 12] Because as we know, if you are a Christian church, the Bible tells us that we are in exile right now. You and I are strangers, aliens, exiles here in this world.

Just like Israel, we have been displaced. We are displaced from our home. And just like Israel, we dwell in a foreign land. We dwell in a foreign kingdom.

Just like Israel, we live amongst foreign gods. And just like Israel, our only hope is God's promise, His word, that one day He will bring us home.

But unless we understand that we're exiles here, this promise of deliverance won't sound like good news to us. And so I remind you, Christian, that this place, this land, this country is not our home. America, as great as it is, as many blessings as we enjoy here, is not our home. We are in enemy territory. And this place, it does not even have the slightest fraction fraction of the joy and the peace and the freedom that lies ahead that we will enjoy when we finally reach our final home.

[12 : 40] So I remind you that our hope is not in politicians. Our hope is not in political policy, political gain, is not in American revival, though we may care deeply for these things.

Our hope, church, is rescue from a strange and foreign land where we do not belong, where we will never belong. We have to remember, Christian, that we are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God.

And the church is an embassy of that kingdom. And we are individually ambassadors of that king. So when we come here, when we gather here, we don't gather primarily as Americans. This is not an American gathering. This is a gathering of the kingdom of heaven.

We're gathering as citizens of another kingdom. And our hope, according to the promise of God, is that one day Christ will return and reign as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

[13 : 49] Not just for one people, not just for one place, but for every tribe, tongue, and nation. Church, our hope is that we will be ransomed from here.

Ransomed from our exile here in this place. But we're not there yet. So what do we do? The book of 1 Peter, he addresses that very question.

He addresses this book to those who are elect exiles. The book of 1 Peter, that is the church, that is us, those who have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

And he says this starting in 1 Peter 1, verse 13. He says, Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So look there. Orient your lives there. Don't place your hope here or in anything in this place. Look there. He says in verse 14, As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

[15 : 10] Since it is written, You shall be holy for I am holy. And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Again, in chapter 2, he says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners in exiles, that's us, church, to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

So what's the call? Live as those who don't belong here. Set your hope on the coming kingdom of God.

Place your identity in that kingdom, not in this kingdom. Live as citizens of the kingdom to come. Don't look backwards. Don't conform to the ways of this present age.

[16:29] Don't regress. Don't define yourself primarily by earthly kingdoms. Don't fix your identity on anything. Here is quickly passing away. Identify and claim that eternal kingdom.

Live in light of that coming kingdom. Live as citizens of the kingdom to come. Live as those who have been washed clean by the precious blood of Christ.

So that when others see the way that you live here as strangers and say, that's weird, they would glorify God on the day of the return of Christ.

Our hope is as the hymn says that Emmanuel, God with us would return and we would be rescued. O come, O come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appears.

Rejoice. Rejoice. Emmanuel shall come to thee, church. shall come to thee, O Israel.

[17:45] So the first part of our hope here in these verses is that we would be rescued from our exile here. We don't belong here, but there's more. We're not just rescued from our exile, we are also brought into something glorious.

So second, the second part of our hope here in these verses is the redemption of creation. redemption. The redemption of all creation.

You might ask, well, where are we being brought into? Do we just disappear and poof, we're in the clouds? Well, no. The hope that lies ahead of all who know the Lord is a totally redeemed creation. Look there again to verse 12, chapter 55, verse 12. And notice what happens when the people of God are brought up out of their exile. It says this, it says, the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees shall clap their hands.

Now, if you are not used to this type of language in scripture, this admittedly has to sound completely weird, right?

[19:00] This is strange, but this is normal biblical language for the creation. Creation in the Bible is often talked about with almost human language.

It is personified, so the creation rejoices, and it exalts, and it sings, and it claps. And this language with the creation rejoicing is often connected with the coming of the Lord to the earth.

And so we see in places like 1 Chronicles chapter 16. It says, Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice. Let them say among the nation, the Lord reigns.

Let the sea roar and all that fills it. Let the field exult and everything in it. And then the trees of the forest shall sing for joy before the Lord, for He comes to judge the earth.

Now, here in Isaiah, this promise of being rescued from exile, being led out of exile into the promised land is connected again with creation, rejoicing, and mountains and hills breaking out into song, trees clapping their hands.

[20:14] Now, obviously, this language is poetic. Trees don't have hands, right? Right? Okay. But this is describing something very real that we need to understand.

It's important for us to understand here, and it's this. Creation shares a trajectory with the children of God. We are bound up together.

God created all things. He created the world that we live in, and He created us, and all was good.

And then Adam and Eve sinned. They rebelled against the Lord.

And not only were we messed up, people messed up individually, not only were we messed up, so was the creation. The creation is also impacted and affected by the curse of sin.

It's not just us. This whole world is not as it should be. It's marred and broken. and twisted and cursed by the presence of sin.

[21:25] And I know that I'm new to all and all. How else do you explain mosquitoes the size of helicopters, anthills about five feet tall?

The creation is cursed. It bears on it the marks and the curse of sin. Romans 8 tells us that the creation itself groans under the curse of sin.

Romans 8 verse 19 says, For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Why? What does creation have to look forward to? Verse 20, For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. This is what Isaiah has told us as well.

[22 : 39] Earlier in the book of Isaiah chapter 24, he says, The earth mourns and withers. The world languishes and withers. The highest people of the earth languish. The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

In other words, the earth languishes because people have sinned. Therefore, a curse devours the earth and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are scorched and few men are left.

The creation bears the marks of the curse of sin. Again, our personal sin is not just personal. It doesn't just have personal effects.

Our personal sin has cosmic ramifications for all of creation. The creation itself has been cursed. When Adam and Eve sinned against the Lord in the Garden of Eden, Adam was told, what? Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

[23 : 49] Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field. We live in a land of thorns and thistles.

But our hope, what we have to look forward to, is not only that we will be redeemed out of this world, but that the world itself will be set free from the curse of sin and remade into the most glorious home imaginable.

no sin, no death, no suffering, no howling winds, no crushing waves, no bites, no stings, no burns, no fumes, no death at all.

It's just beauty and joy and peace and comfort and delight in the presence of God. I can't even imagine what that will be like.

Some of you may remember the 2009 film Avatar. Have you all seen that one? If not, it's a three hour long movie about a bunch of blue aliens that live on another planet that somehow became the number one highest grossing film of all time.

[25 : 10] Did you know that? So if you haven't seen it, you're in the minority. The highest grossing film of all time. And the planet that these blue people lived on, stick with me, I promise we'll have a point, the planet that they lived on was beautiful.

Okay? And what happened for so many people was that after they saw the movie, they went into a state of depression. And some of them even became suicidal.

You can look it up. They call it the Avatar Blues. Look it up. And this wasn't just one or two people. This was widespread. It was a phenomenon, the Avatar Blues.

but here's why they were all depressed. This is what they said. They said that they longed to experience the joy and the beauty of this imaginary planet, but they knew in their heart of hearts that they never could.

And it crushed them. Sent them spiraling to imagine something so profoundly spectacular, just to get a glimpse of something so beautiful, and then to know that it wasn't real, that you could never actually experience them.

[26 : 21] It led them into an increasing state of despair. What a terrible way to live. And to have a glimpse of something so beautiful, and to know that it's all just make believe.

You can never go. But church, our experience ought to be the exact opposite, shouldn't it? We have in these verses a glimpse, just a glimpse, of what lies ahead of us, a totally redeemed creation.

It's free from the curse of sin, free from the pains of suffering and death, no more thorns, no more thistles, just peace and joy and beauty, the whole world, a garden to walk with our God for all of eternity.

To know that this is not imagined, that this is real. Church, that ought to lead us into an increasing state of ecstasy, to long for that place, to long for that day when Christ will return and make all things right.

It ought to lead us to wish for it, to long for it, to pray for it. When can I go and be in that promised land? Do you long for the Lord like that? See, the promised land is not just a patch of dirt on the earth somewhere, okay?

[27 : 49] The promised land is all of creation, totally restored, totally remade, totally fit for the presence of God with his people forever.

That's our hope. Our hope, church, is not this place, not this country, it's not even ultimately heaven. Our ultimate hope is the new heavens and new earth, a redeemed creation in the eternity that we have to look forward to with God.

But to get there, something must first be done. God cannot just bring sinners into this perfect creation.

The word says nothing accursed shall ever be in it. So something must be done about this curse of sin that we deal with here, here in ourselves, here in our creation, here in our lives, something must be done with this curse, which is why third, the third part of our hope here in these verses is the reversal of the curse.

Our hope is that the curse of sin would be reversed. Look with me to verse 13. Look with me to verse 13.

[29 : 13] Isaiah says, Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle. And it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Now, here in this one verse, we have the story of the entire Bible. And so with the time that we have left, we're going to cover the whole thing.

All right? And we're going to summarize the entire thing here. This big picture, so stick with me because it's all here. This is the climax of this chapter.

It's the crescendo that Isaiah has been building up to, giving hope for sinners like us. If you've been tracking with us for the past six weeks, this is it. This is what Isaiah has been building to give us this hope.

The hope for any sinner in the world is that God would take it upon himself to fix what we have broken by our sin. Our hope is that he would reverse the curse of sin and bring us home with him.

[30 : 27] So here we go. Here in this verse, we see the problem, the plan, and the point of the whole Bible. The problem, the plan, and the point of the whole Bible.

Do you see it? What's the problem? Thorns and thistles. Thorns and thistles. The problem is the curse of sin in the world. Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you.

All of our lives are marked and cut and scraped and made difficult by thorns and thistles. Our relationships are made difficult by thorns and thistles.

Our work is filled with difficulty. We get sick. We get tired. We get weary. Eventually our bodies will fail us and we will die. That's all a part of the curse of sin in the world.

And the worst part of it is that we are separated from God in our sin. There's this infinite gap between us and God that we cannot possibly bridge by our own doing.

[31 : 27] That's a problem for sinners. So what's the plan? God is going to reverse the curse.

Verse 13 Instead of the thorns there will be a big healthy flourishing cypress tree.

Instead of briars there's a big healthy myrtle. And I don't know much about plants but Google has told me that these are evergreen trees which means that they bear fruit year round.

Is that right? God is going to reverse this curse and here in the pages of the Old Testament as an Israelite hearing this prophecy you're stuck wondering how?

Are you trust that he's going to do it but how will this happen? How will this ruined world be redeemed and this curse finally be broken? And you have some of the pieces of the puzzle but the answer isn't quite completely clear yet but what is clear is the point of it all.

What is it? It's the glory of God. This reversal it says shall make a name for the Lord forever.

[32 : 37] An everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. That's the point. So the point of this entire incredible act of redemption is that God would be glorified and his holy name prays forever.

That his glorious name would be magnified throughout the world. That the new heavens and the new earth would be united in this universal chorus of worship as it should be.

The point of your redemption Christian is the glory of God. The point of all of this this out working of God's unspeakable unimaginable thoughts and ways in human history.

The point of it all is that his name would be magnified and exalted in and worshipped for the rest of eternity that the glory of God would be magnified but how will it be done?

Of course on this side of the cross we know the answer don't we? is in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[33 : 55] The wonderful plan of God from before the ages began was to send his son into a broken world to redeem it.

This was the plan of God that Jesus Christ would enter into the brokenness of this world and live in the place of sinners and die in the place of sinners and rise on behalf of sinners to secure a glorious hope of eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth the eternal kingdom of God for any sinner who would come to him in faith to the praise of his glorious grace for the rest of eternity so you can think of the story of the Bible as a story of three trees three trees the Bible starts with a tree in the garden of Eden the Lord God commanded the man saying you may surely eat of every tree in the garden but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die and in the worst decision in the history of the world that each of us would have made if we were there

Adam and Eve ate rebelled and brought upon themselves and all of their children and all of creation this curse of sin but you know the Bible also ends with a tree the very last chapter of the Bible in Revelation chapter 22 it gives this vision of our future hope where we are headed John says then the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb and through the middle of the street of the city also on either side of the river the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations and listen to this no longer will there be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads and night will be no more they will need no lamp of sun or light for the

Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever that that that is but right in the middle of it all is a third tree that makes all of our hope certain you know what it is it's the cross first Peter 2 24 says he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls the plan of God that accomplishes the redemption of sinners that rescues his people from exile that brings us into the promised land the new heavens and the new earth is the death of his son on the cross in their place and what was on his head but a crown of thorns and thistles the problem we are under the curse of sin the plan Jesus Christ became a curse for us the point the glory of the name of the Lord sung forth in a chorus that cannot be stopped as every heavenly being every redeemed sinner every hill every tree every mountain every beast of the field sings out glory to God in the highest glory to God for the gospel of Jesus Christ so church as we bring this chapter to a close this morning I want to remind you one more time of this message if you do not know the Lord if you have not personally repented of your sin and trusted personally in the Lord Jesus Christ listen to this invitation come all who are weary come all who are thirsty come all who are hungry listen to the promise of God and receive this promise of hope that he offers all who come to his son in faith turn to the Lord that he might have compassion on you and for those who do know the Lord let your heart be filled with hope as we remember these promises this Christmas let your heart be filled with the hope of the eternity that lies ahead of us that we will be rescued from this place and brought home to be with the

[39 : 24] Lord that the curse of sin will not last forever and it will finally be brought to an end and God will be praised I know I've shared this with you before but it's worth repeating joy to the world is not a Christmas hymn at least not originally Isaac Watts when he wrote the hymn he did not write it about the first coming of Christ at all the baby born in a manger was not on his mind when he wrote joy to the world he wrote it about the second coming of Christ and so once again I move that we sing this song year round not only at Christmas time but but here we go I want to remind you of these words joy to the world the Lord has come let earth receive her king let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing joy joy to the earth the savior reigns let men their songs employ while fields and floods rocks hills and plains repeat the sounding joy no more let sins and sorrows grow nor thorns infest the ground he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found he rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love wonders of his love and wonders wonders of his love would you pray with me

Lord what a hope you've given us father we in each of our own individual ways are burdened by the curse of sin and father we want to be reminded of the promise that you've made to us that if we know you by faith if we've come to you by faith if we've received the gift of new life in Christ Lord we have so much to look forward to in eternity with you Lord you are our joy you are our peace you are our hope and we pray God that our hearts and our minds would be fixed on you this morning and as

we go from this place if there's any that don't know you Lord we pray that you would call them to yourself we pray all of this in Jesus name amen