

**Preachers' Gathering 2016**

# **Preaching Isaiah**

**Unleashing Isaiah for  
Twenty-first Century Hearers**

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This booklet contains materials designed to give preachers a ‘leg-up’ in preparing to preach the main themes in Isaiah. They were first issued as four papers at a ‘Preachers’ Gathering’ held in Macdonald’s Hotel, Polmont on 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016, and edited into in this booklet in July 2018

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## Isaiah – an Introduction

Study or preach through Isaiah and you end up overwhelmed, thrilled by the scope and stature of his vision. It is often difficult literature but more than repays hard work.

Isaiah is a key book in scripture. The NT is saturated with Isaiah's insights and his prophetic understanding of both the facts about and the significance of Jesus Christ, and the plans God has for the world. It quotes Isaiah (according to the UBS Greek NT) 418 times. Chapter 53 alone is quoted 41 times. No wonder it is called the 5<sup>th</sup> Gospel.

It was also written at a key time in salvation history. During Isaiah's ministry, as he warned, Israel the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria and most of its inhabitants were deported. Isaiah likewise foretold both the rise of Babylon which took place about 60 years after he died, and its fall to Cyrus of Persia – whom he names – 90 years after that. He predicted the Babylonian exile and the people's return when Babylon fell: watersheds in the life of Israel and in their preparation by God for the birth of Jesus.

But Isaiah's stature rests on far more than knowing things in advance, miraculous as that was (and irresistible evidence for the existence of God who inspired it). His grasp of how God runs the world, and to what plan and climax, is breath-taking. Isaiah is the Romans of the Old Testament. More than that, it is expressed in magnificent poetry. Even in translation you can feel its power.

“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

“I will sing for my Beloved a song about his vineyard.”

“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.”

“How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star.”

“And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.”

“All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

I don't suppose there is a page without a memorable and momentous verse.

It is fascinating that just as the Bible has sixty-six books – 39 in the old Testament, 27 in the new – Isaiah has sixty-six chapters normally classified into the first 39 and the remaining 27. And those twenty-seven tell a similar story to that of the new Testament. Both start with the voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord.” Both have Christ’s cross at their heart. And both end with a startling combination of invitation and warning, glory and solemnity:

Isaiah 66.22-24 = Revelation 22.17-21, **thus:**

- Isaiah: As the new heavens and earth will endure before me, so will your name . . . but the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me will be loathsome to all mankind.
- Revelation: The Spirit and the bride say ‘come, take the free gift of the water of life . . . but anyone who takes words away from this book, God will take away his share in the tree of life.

**Who was Isaiah?** It becomes repeatedly clear that he was well-connected. According to the mediaeval Jewish commentator Kimchi, his father Amoz was brother to Amaziah, King Uzziah’s father. If so, he was minor royalty and cousin to the king. He was a Jerusalem man, married with at least two children.

### **The historical situation.**

Isaiah preached from 740 BC to about 695 or a little longer (Sennacherib was assassinated, ch.37 v.38, in 681). Assyria was the dominant empire from 800 to 625 when it fell to Babylon, then Babylon until 538 when Cyrus of Persia conquered it (Dan. 5:30f). Both of these events were predicted by Isaiah. See the timeline in the ‘Hearing the Word’ booklets p.5, and the map there on p.4 and in colour as a separate file.

Assyria conquered the northern kingdom Israel, taking its capital Samaria in 724 and exiling most of the population, during Isaiah’s lifetime, just as he warned. Later Babylon steadily conquered the southern kingdom Judah, deporting the people in groups from about 605BC (Daniel and friends) with the final fall of Jerusalem and exile of most of the population in 587. Then when Cyrus took Babylon in 538 he arranged the return of the people to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple (Ezra ch. 1) – exactly as Isaiah had prophesied 190 years earlier (44.24 – 45.13). What God says, He does.

And what *does* God say?

## **Isaiah in four paragraphs:**

### **Ch. 1 – 12: The State of the Nation and the Plans of God**

‘Judah, God hates the cruel way you are living. His plan is for the nations to live at peace under his reign. You will bring on the Assyrian invasion for ditching him and for your terrible behaviour; but God will send **Someone** to bring about his reign and a better world.

### **Ch. 13 – 35: God’s dealings with nations and the day of Judgement.**

‘The same cruelty, and worse, is going on in many places. It is partly because of such behaviour that God brings about the rise and fall of nations. So for security don’t turn to them, turn to him. He will indeed send that promised **Someone**, and people’s response to him will decide their destiny.

### **Ch. 36 – 39: Three events to prove the point** (historical and in prose; the rest is prophetic poetry).

‘Here are three dramatic examples of this activity by God in history. Unlike earlier kings, Hezekiah trusted God and the Assyrian army was destroyed. Hezekiah was healed but brought on the Babylonian invasion. God can be trusted. What he says, happens.

### **Ch. 40 – 66: Be comforted. God will return you, redeem you and finally resurrect you.**

‘You will be exiles in Babylon after I’ve died. But be comforted: God will bring you home, using a person called Cyrus. There’s no-one like God! Later the **Someone** of ch. 7-12 will be His servant to bring about the better world. That will involve his redeeming death and resurrection (i.e. they do a rescue job), with huge benefits available. All who choose him will be part of the new heavens and earth that God will finally make. But He will respect the choice of the impenitent.’

### ***Additional note: The unity of Isaiah.***

*A number of factors have led some people to believe that the book must have more than one author. Although predicted in chapter 39, in chapter 40 we find ourselves in a different world from that of Hezekiah. There are now some language differences and it becomes clear that the people being primarily addressed at first are the Babylonian captives: between 586 and 536 BC. Could Isaiah, it is asked, have written for their comfort 175 years or so earlier? And many find incredible Isaiah naming Cyrus of Persia (and giving a good feel for his foreign policy) about 190 years before his accession. The number of alleged authors has varied since the 1890s from two to over a hundred.*

*Those theories and that unbelief are unnecessary and being increasingly discredited. Considerations include:*

- *On the possibility of foretelling, God knows what the future holds. That is the main thrust of ch. 40-48 and his challenge to other gods to emulate him. He is well able to pass that information on to his servants. Passages like 41.26-29 are a fraud if they were written after the event. 1 Kings 13.1-3 and Acts 11.28 are other examples of foretelling that demonstrably came true.*
- *The 'different language' statistics are mostly discredited and contradicted by the great unity of:*
  - a. *Language. e.g. 'The Holy One of Israel' occurs 13 times in 1-39, 16 times in 40-66 and only 7 times elsewhere in the Bible.*
  - b. *Theme. One coherent whole binds Isaiah: the nature and destiny of the people of God, the developing picture of the coming Son-Shoot-Servant, God as lord of history, his superiority to idols (24.21 cp ch. 40-48), the teaching about a remnant of believing people, God's plans for peace and justice between the nations, judgement at the end of history succeeded by new heavens and earth, the journey from sinful Jerusalem in ch. 1 to the new Jerusalem in ch.66 – it is all one exquisitely designed story, distributed and developed all through the book.*
- *Even when addressing those who will be exiles after he is gone, Isaiah writes from the standpoint of 8<sup>th</sup> century Palestine. The trees, the climate are those of Palestine not Babylon.*
- *'Exile' and 'Redemption from Exile' are addressed all the way from 5.13 to the closing chapters.*

- *Early Judaism accepted Isaiah's authorship. Ecclesiasticus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC refers to Isaiah 61.3 as being by Isaiah.*
- *There is no text of Isaiah that divides Isaiah as these critics do. The Qumran text, dating from 100-200BC and earlier by more than 1,000 years than any previously known, has the whole of Isaiah – astonishingly accurate, showing the care with which it was copied – including ch. 40 starting without a space from the end of ch. 39 a couple of lines from the foot of a column of text.*
- *The NT treats different parts of Isaiah as the work of Isaiah himself. This includes the words of Jesus and the way St Paul quotes chapters 53 and 65: 'Isaiah boldly says ... concerning Israel he says...' (Rom. ch. 10)*
- *Ch. 1 v.1 presents itself as the general heading to the book and there is no such equivalent at the beginning of e.g. ch. 40 or ch. 56, the places especially favoured for proposing separate authors. Ch. 1.1 covers the whole book.*
- *There is no evidence for the existence of authors other than Isaiah. If (which we deny) someone else wrote ch. 40ff, we are asked to assume that his name has been completely forgotten or deliberately suppressed – this for work of staggering stature, majestic poetry and fulfilled foretelling (see ch. 53 and its fulfilment in Christ, for example) that perfectly follows on from and dovetails in with Isaiah 1-39.*

*It is not impossible there was some minor tidying. The historical note in ch. 37 verses 37 & 38 recording the death of Sennacherib must have been written after 681 when it took place. By that time Isaiah, if still alive, cannot have been less than 75 years old, more likely 85. (Mind you, I'm writing this in my 70s). We can imagine an editor writing 1.1. But as to Isaiah as a whole we conclude without embarrassment: the book of Isaiah has one author, Isaiah the son of Amoz, exactly as its opening words say.*

# Isaiah – a Summary

It is helpful to see the developing themes in a book: hence the divisions listed below. On the other hand, every commentator divides Isaiah differently. That can encourage us to sit light to any one person's divisions. 'To insist on one structure may be to apply Western literary categories where they may not be appropriate' (G.W.Grogan). I have tried simply to summarise what each chapter says, and the order in which Isaiah presents his material, rather than give theological analysis to his structure.

Amidst his vision of God's message for his people and rule over the nations, a picture is built up of a coming **special person**. The chief places where this picture surfaces are put in **bold**: Immanuel, child, shoot, key person, cornerstone, righteous King, Servant of the Lord, Redeemer.

## PART 1: Warning and Promise. Chapters 1 – 39

**Ch. 1-35: Prophetic, written in poetry. Warning and promise to his contemporaries. Dominant political background = Assyria, 740-700 B.C.**

**Ch. 1 – 6** *Introduction. The state of the nation; God's plans for a better world; Isaiah's call.*

- 1 Historical setting and state of the nation. Your sins are deafening Me to your worship.
- 2-4 God's plan for humankind. Despite our failures, he will get us there.
- 5 Israel is God's 'vineyard,' but producing bad fruit.
- 6 The call of Isaiah. But the people were not going to listen.

**Ch. 7 – 12** *The Assyrian threat and the future Rescuer.*

- 7 Jerusalem is besieged. God promises a **child to be called Immanuel**: God with us.
- 8.1 - 9.7 Isaiah warns that Assyria will invade, but promises a new dawn when a **special child** is born
- 9.8 - 10.4 God's 'No' to Israel's sin
- 10.5-12.6 God will punish Assyria and bring peace through a **descendant ('shoot') of Jesse**. The joy of experiencing God's salvation.

**Ch. 13-23** *Warnings to the nations. The God to whom we must give account.*

*Ch. 13 - 23 warn the nations, including Israel and Judah, that God will bring punishment to them for their evil ways. That will bring some to repentance.*

- 13.1-14.23 Babylon and the pride of the devil.
- 14.24-27 Assyria
- 14.28-32 Philistia

- 15.1-16.14 Moab
- 17 Syria and Israel
- 18 Cush (north Sudan)
- 19 & 20 Egypt and Cush
- 21.1-10 Babylon (the 'desert by the sea')
- 21.1-12 Dumah (= Edom)
- 21.13-17 Arabia
- 22 Jerusalem herself, ironically called 'the valley of vision'.
- 23 Tyre

***Ch. 24 – 35. History and destiny. Humankind's King and his reign.***

*Ch. 24-27 bring that message to its climax, speaking of the final judgement when God winds up history.*

- 24 The final ruin of the earth. God's people will praise him.
- 25 Praise to God that he will bring low the cities that are against God's people. A day of feasting when God will wipe away his people's tears.
- 26 They will be strong thanks to their 'wall', salvation. God's enemies will die; but his people will rise bodily.
- 27 Summary. God will punish 'Leviathan' (the powers of evil) but protect his own 'vineyard' (his people). They will be forgiven and will thrive.

*Ch. 28 - 35 warn Israel and Judah about their sins and the consequences, and promise them spiritual restoration and God's favour in the longer term. They end by assuring God's people of the final joy that will be theirs.*

- 28 'Woe to Israel: soon, an army will conquer you. But God will lay in Zion a **cornerstone** – a key person - and those who trust him will not be let down.
- 29 'Woe also to Judah soon, who for turning from God will be besieged. But they will become teachable and learn to respect him.
- 30, 31 "Stop turning to do-nothing Egypt and objecting to us prophets. Repentance, and relying on God are your true safety - return to him!
- 32 'I predict a **righteous King**. By the Holy Spirit the women who are now smug will become ashamed and find peace in God.
- 33 'Traitors and oppressors among God's people will be ashamed and will be no more; but the upright will see the coming **King** in his beauty, and find everlasting peace and safety.'

34 God accuses the nations, especially Edom, warning that a day of God's vengeance is coming.

35 True members of Zion will have an everlasting future of joy and health

**Ch. 36-39: Historical section, written in prose. Two remarkable deliverances and an act of serious folly.**

*Explains the political transition from Assyria to Babylon.*

*Reinforces the previous teaching, God can be trusted - and should be!*

36, 37 The Assyrian invasion and Judah's last minute escape.

38 King Hezekiah's earlier illness and God's healing him.

39 Ambassadors from Babylon and Hezekiah's momentous stupidity

## **PART 2. Comfort and salvation. Chapters 40 – 66**

**Ch. 40-66: Prophetic, written in poetry. Comfort and expectancy,** mostly for those who will be in exile in Babylon about 150 years after his death. Dominant political background = Babylon, 586-538 B.C.

*God will come and take them home, and beyond that will send a special **Servant of God**, his rescuing death followed by prolonged life, and create new heavens and earth for his people.*

*The 27 chapters are in three groups of nine. Each group has its special focus. Isaiah gives the marker "there is no peace for the wicked" to show where each group ends.*

### **Ch. 40 - 48 The Return under Cyrus**

40 Isaiah brings God's comfort for those who will be in exile after he dies

41 God tells them in advance that he, not idols, will rescue them from captivity in Babylon

42. 1-17A special **servant of God** will quietly bring justice and enlightenment worldwide

42.18-43.13 God assures his people of his love and hold on them even through the discipline of exile

43.14-44.23 God will cause Babylon's downfall, bring Israel home and pour his Spirit on them. How different from idols.

44.24-45.25 A certain Cyrus will shepherd the Jews home. What a God; tell the world

46 & 47 Isaiah foretells Babylon's doom. (It came to pass)

48 God – not idols – foretold their captivity, and runs history. They are to leave Babylon

## ***Ch. 49 - 57 The Rescue by God's Servant***

- 49      **The servant** is called before birth to bring Jew and Gentile to God
- 50      **The Servant** will suffer, but be vindicated; and his enemies discomfited.
- 51.1-52.12    God will comfort exiled Israel and spread his salvation worldwide. Zion, stand tall: the Lord will preserve you.
- 52.13-53.12    **God's Servant** will experience suffering and death in atoning for our sins.
- 54      Let God's people (his Bride and City) work to become more numerous and influential. He is their husband and will protect them.
- 55.1-56.8    All who thirst for fullness of life, come to God in repentance. Yes, all.
- 56.9-57.21    God warns the nation's leaders and all the impenitent that he will judge them. He will heal the contrite; but there is no peace for the wicked.

## ***Ch. 58 - 66 The Resurrection; and the journey there***

- 58      Israel mixes exploitation, violence and fasting. Isaiah is to call them to true fasting, the only road to joy
- 59      'It is your sins that hold back God's rescue.' Isaiah confesses them in the name of the people and is assured, 'I will save you: I'll send the **Redeemer** and my Spirit.'
- 60      'God's people, stand tall. His glory will come on you and attract many to him.'
- 61      God's mission statement: he will send **his Servant** to liberate the afflicted and needy
- 62      Isaiah says 'I will not rest, and don't you rest, until all Zion – all God's people – are one with him for ever.'
- 63.1-6    **The Servant** to come will execute God's judgement on the nations
- 63.7-64.12    Isaiah's prayer: model spirituality especially for when we are defeated, ashamed or desperate. 'Your grace; our rebellion; yet You led; Come down, relent, save us!'
- 65      'I'm available, but many turn their backs on me. Yet plenty don't. Each choice has eternal consequences; here's the wonderful future for my people.'
- 66      Conclusion: God's immensity, human destinies, the missionary task

# Sermon Material and Notes

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The previous pages have provided an overview of Isaiah in 4 paragraphs, then in 4 pages, and essential background.

We recognise both the value of discerning structure, and the danger that ‘insisting on one structure may be to apply Western literary categories where they may not be appropriate’ (G.W.Grogan)

We have seen there are challenges to the Unity of Isaiah and arguments that outweigh them.

Further help is available, e.g.

Commentaries by: Webb (brief), Oswalt (thorough), Grogan (wise), Harman (if you can only afford one).

‘Hearing the Word’ booklets, giving two series each with seven passages, by C Peter White and Nigel Barge. Distributed by Torrance Parish Church, 1 School Road, Torrance, Glasgow, G64 4BZ 01360 620970

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## **PART 1: WARNING and PROMISE. Chapters 1 – 39**

### **Sermon 1      Isaiah introduces his book      Isaiah 1**

‘Here’s what I’ve preached: your sins are deafening God.’

Reason for inclusion: Isaiah is setting out his stall. ‘Here are the themes I’ve been preaching’

Just look at the word pictures!

v. 1 is Isaiah’s title to his book.

Structure of chapter

Lessons here

The People’s sin, 2-9

Sin weakens us

    God’s rejection, 10-15

Sin deafens God

    God’s offer, 16-20

Mercy is ever offered

The People’s choices, 21-31

The choice we all face

Objective for hearers’ lives: evangelical self-examination.

## Sermon 2 God's (truly) amazing plan Isaiah 2:1-5

Reason for inclusion: this is where God is taking history, the DNA code he is working to.

Genes in this DNA:

*The exaltation of God's house, 2.* The Church gathering will be the most eminent of all the world's prestigious places. God has kept this promise. It's happening!

*The ministry of God's word, 3,* is how He is doing it.

*The coming of God's reign, 4.* As v. 3 happens, God's values do and will increasingly inform international values and personal behaviour, leading to the beating of swords into ploughshares: statue by Vuchetich in UN's HQ. But that statue fails to point out what is needed: v. 3.

*The response of God's people, 5.* Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord

### Objectives for hearers' lives

- Confidence that God will achieve this. (ch.2 ->3->4)
- Commitment to live this way, v. 5.

## Sermon 3 Isaiah's call

## Isaiah 6

Reasons for inclusion The immensity of God. The glory of Christ. What makes a prophet. Steps towards spiritual service. Window into Isaiah's *miraculous* transparency to God's plans.

### Structure of chapter

*The meeting, 1-4.* (It was Jesus' glory that Isaiah was seeing: John 12.41)

*The calling, 5-9.*

*The warning, 9-13*

So if we would be of service to God, let us have:

*A sense of his terrible greatness.* Dan.8.17; Lk.2.9; Heb.10.31; Rev.1.17.

"*Woe*": a burden about our sins and their danger

"*Lo*": a receiving of, a relief at, his pardon

*Here am I* → "*Go*" Does your heart ache for your community?

"*Make their ears dull*": an obedient spirit whatever the cost

Objectives for hearers' lives: reverence; gratitude; willingness; realism.

## Sermon 4 The Sign of a pregnant virgin      Isaiah 7

Reasons for choosing: Ahaz's archetypical 'I won't seek God in a crisis', (unlike Hezekiah, ch. 36,37). God's archetypical sign not just for Ahaz but for all people: the pregnant virgin.

The chapter: military threat ... 'Trust God, ask Him for a sign!' ... "Shan't" ... 'I'll give y o u (plural) one anyway. A virgin will conceive: Immanuel. And because you want Assyria not Me, Assyria you'll get, and a close shave from them.'

Issues here: our fears. Fear of being disliked, of flying, running out of money, illness, deadlines, opposition, dying, playground bully, my job is too much for me, ... 'Do not be afraid' is the commonest command in Scripture: clearly in this world Christians will always be tempted to be. Alas for the Christian who has not learned to reckon with this fact!

Structure of chapter: threat, invitation, sign, sentence

Life Lessons: *The crises which belief faces.* cp Acts 14.22

*The sign for all people*

*The costs which unbelief incurs.*

Or perhaps

- The crises God allows
- The sign God announced
- The warning God utters

Opportunity to spell out the certainty and the significance of the virgin conception.

Objective for hearers: to make Ahaz their anti-example. When fearful or threatened, to run to *Jesus*.

## Sermon 5 The coming Prince of Peace Is 9 v. 1-7

Reason for including: Explore the person of Christ.

Context: the people have rejected God and Assyria is about to invade (8.7) Dark days (8.19 & 22).

Content: God promises light (9.2), joy (3), inhibitions melting away (4), the spread of peace (5) via a special Son of David's line, destined to reign, 6 & 7. Western Christianity may be struggling and Eastern Christianity suffering, yet this son's rule is still the only hope for the world.

What makes him so tremendous? His being:

- *Wonderful Counsellor.* 'Wonderful' = divine, totally amazing counsel. How to find it.
- *Mighty God.* Heb.1.8. Our place is beside Thomas, John 20.28. Nothing is impossible to our Jesus. Just ask the Who question and all the great issues of comparative religion are resolved.
- *Everlasting Father.* Happy oxymoron. The son is father, begetting eternal life in us.
- *Prince of Peace.* Where he reigns, come reintegration, reconciliation, harmony, the making of peace.

Objective for hearers: A fresh estimation and admiration of Jesus in his manifold fullness.

## Sermon 6 Oracle against Babylon Isaiah 14 v.1-23

Reason for including: ch. 13-23 are a message of God's sovereignty in respect of the nations, Israel and Judah included. 'Hang on in there.

Babylon and every Babylon will be judged.'

'Christ executes the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.' (Shorter Catechism 26)

Commentators vary as to which Babylon (ch.13&14, and ch.21) is the archetype and which the then empire. Making that decision is less important than getting the message.

Lessons and teaching in ch. 14 include:

- *The justice of God.* He will punish Babylon for her cruelty and her enmity to him (3, 6, 12, 17). God will right all wrongs.
- *The foreknowledge and power of God.* Isaiah is preaching the downfall of Babylon around 750-730: more than a century before she came to power, and 200 years before the Medes conquered her (13.17).
- *The wages of sin.*
  - their downfall (4)
  - the liberation of their captives (7)
  - being taunted in Sheol (9-11)
  - expulsion from God's Presence (12-20)
  - final oblivion (20-23). What a contrast with the Christian hope
- *The pride and doom of Satan.* v. 12 *cp* Ezek.28.12-17
- *Humility.* *cf* Ozymandias

Objective for hearers. To come to terms with the ways Providence assaults us.

## Sermon 7 A thrilling rescue – hey, God *can* be trusted! 36 & 37

Reasons for including. Only 36-39 are history in prose. The chapters underline what is almost the key theme throughout: God IS trustworthy. Will Judah (will *we*) find her safety in God, or in the world? Will we retain, or betray, our servant-hood? Contrast Hezekiah with Ahaz (ch. 7).

### The story

36 *Assyria threatens Jerusalem*

- first her envoys, 1-10
- then her people, 11-22

37 *God delivers Jerusalem*

Prayer, 1-4

God's assurance, 5-7

Enemy withdraws, 8-13

Prayer, 14-20

God's assurance, 21-35

Enemy dies, 36-38

### Spiritual lessons include:

1. *Understanding spiritual assault.* Cp 2 Cor.2.11. You can smell the burning sulphur (i.e. the devil working behind the scenes) in the tactics here: fear (6), lies (7 & 10), insult (9), threat (12), temptation (16f), casting doubt on God (18-20), sickness of heart (22).
2. *Factors in spiritual victory.* N.B. the first prayer did not produce the desired result. cf 1 Kings 18.42-46 and Mark 8.22-26. Yet what prayer:
  - explanation* (16f),
  - recollection* (16),
  - plain request* (17 & 20 cf Matt.20.32),
  - vision* (20).

→ Double victory in 36-38. God **can** be trusted

Objective in our hearers' lives: 1 Chronicles. 16.11. Who wouldn't be a Christian!

## **PART 2. COMFORT and SALVATION. Chapters 40 – 66**

### **Sermon 8 Comfort for the future Jews in exile Is 40**

Outline of chapter: Speak tenderly to my people. Forgiveness is coming and Jerusalem has a future after the exile. And *what* a God is coming.

Relevance. We have baggage too: guilt, memories, fear of disqualification  
...

Shape of chapter:

1. God so comforting, 1-11
  - Your captivity will soon be over, 1f.
  - The preparation for my coming, 3-5
  - The reliability of my word, 6-8
  - The shepherding of my people, 9-11
2. God incomparable, 12 – 26
  - The God of creation, 12-21
  - The Lord of history, 22-26
3. God who supports, 26-31

Lessons for us include:

- God's tenderness
- God's immensity:
  - God of Creation
  - Lord of Providence
- God's support.

Objective for our hearers' lives: Come to terms with *their* baggage, believing & leaning on God.

# Sermon 9 The first servant song Isaiah 42.1-9

Reasons for inclusion: The cruciality of the Servant passages; Jesus' agenda; God's delight in Him.

Outline of passage: (God speaking). "Let me tell you about my coming servant. He will be full of the Holy Spirit. He will steadily bring justice to the nations. Not harshly, yet he will do it with unquenchable certainty, and I will be with him until people are free.

## Key features

*Jesus' resource for ministry:* the Holy Spirit (v. 1)

*Jesus' mission:* justice (3 x in 4 verses)

*Jesus' style:* gentle (v. 2,3)

*Jesus' spirit:* unquenchable determination (v. 4)

*Jesus' inspiration:* God's call (v. 5,6)

*Jesus' goal in ministry:* our unshackling to become all that God intended (v. 7-9)

## Objectives for our hearers' lives:

- To share God's pride in Jesus
- Inner freedom and vision to play the part for which God made them.

# Sermon 10 ‘Who is like our God?’ Isaiah 44

Reason for inclusion: A repeated theme in 40-48, ‘Wha’s like Me?’ cf. 40.18,25; 41.26-29; 42.24; 43.10-12; 44.6f; 45.5f,14,18,21f; 48.4f, 11!

Outline I nearly had to destroy you (43.27f) but you are still my chosen people. I will pour out my Spirit and blessing on you. Who is like me? I established this people; I tell the future. The alternatives to me are human constructs, brainless, powerless. Whereas I have redeemed you and will show my glory by getting one Cyrus to return you home.

Structure: amidst your exile and all its shame (43.27f, Ps.137.1-4),

- Don’t be afraid, 1-6
- I’m unlike all other gods, 7-26
- Through a certain Cyrus I’m going to get you home, 26-28

Lessons include: our God is a God who

- *counters our fears*, 1-6
- *is absolutely unrivalled, incomparable*. Pastorally cp John 6.68
- *deserves our trust*, 21-23
- *plans our future*, 26-28 (+ Jer.29.11-13)

Objectives for our hearers’ lives: that they will *tell* God when they are afraid, *regard* him as incomparable and trustworthy, have a confident readiness to *cross-examine* alternative world views, be *assured* of his will for their lives and *believe* in their perseverance.

## Sermon 11 Our Saviour, and how he saves us 52.13 - 53.12

Reasons to include: best chapter in Bible. Heart of Isaiah and of our salvation. ‘Come and see the King of love → we worship at your feet.’

Outline: My servant will be great, but via suffering. An extraordinary story: not good-looking, bearing our sorrows. Punishment laid on him brings us the whole of Shalom. He didn’t plead not guilty → assigned a grave with the wicked, ended up in a rich man’s tomb. Make him *your* guilt-offering and he’ll see his child → resurrection, the furthering of God’s purposes, and exaltation.

Core Issue: how a righteous God puts guilty sinners in the right, justly.

Structure. See Kidner’s 1st two paragraphs *ad loc*. Concentric poem of five stanzas each of 3 verses:

Exaltation via suffering 10-12

Humility and rejection 1-3

The divinely appointed substitute 4-6

Humility and execution 7-9

Exaltation (and satisfaction!) via suffering 10-12

Objective for our hearers’ lives: ‘my faith has found a resting place, first verse and chorus

A few special points:

Most quoted OT chapter in the NT: every verse except v.10.

v.7 Why didn’t he open his mouth? Rev. 20 great white throne explains: accepted our guilt pre-Fall.

v.10 Guilt offering see Lev. 5.14 – 6.7. Covers both penalty and restitution for so much.

v.10 Read it as the Hebrew says it. If **you** make his life a guilt offering

v.11 We have to ask, was it worth it? Am I worth it? Answer: He will be satisfied. (C. Morgan)

Reason to include: God offers, free, to *all* who thirst, the atonement of ch. 53 and the benefits described in ch. 54. What a revelation of God's heart.

Outline: Whoever is thirsty, come and take the free gift of the water of life. The alternatives do not satisfy. Like David's son you are to be a witness (3-5 cp Acts 13.34). Take it now, realising it does involve a change of heart and behaviour. This message has power to save, with joy in you and nature; and God's reputation will be enhanced.

Structure:

- 1-3 Hey there! Come and receive God's free gift (we must gain attention)
- 4&5 And let the nations know.
- 6-9 Mind you, it will change your life!
- 10,11 Trust me, this message has power
- 12,13 It will both liberate you and honour God.

Notice:

- *The aptness of God's offer.* We're thirsty, poor and guilty (1&7) and the alternatives don't satisfy (2)
- *The people to whom it is made:* Absolutely all who wish. Twelve imploring words in first 7 verses, and includes those previously outcasts, the eunuch and the alien (ch. 56). The only people excluded: the non-thirsty.
- *The benefits:* Waters, wine, milk, rich fare, covenant with God, an attractive splendour (5), mercy, pardon, joy, peace, blessing the creation and honouring God.
- *The way to receive them:* so simple (cp. Rom.10.6-9), just 'come to Me.'
- *The new values faith brings.* To listen to God, invite others, abnegate sin, honour God.
- *Three things about the gospel:* its simplicity, its sufficiency, its solemnity.

Objective for our hearers' lives: to receive Christ (afresh), freely offered in the Gospel.

## Sermon 13 The next life. New heavens, new earth 65.17-25

Reason for including: Spells out the climax of Isaiah's vision, so repeatedly alluded to (ch. 11.1-9; 25; 26; 35; 51.6-11; 53.11f). Tells of the next life, the eternal dimension of salvation.

Recommended reading: Randy Alcorn, 'Heaven,' Tyndale House 2004. 1 Cor.15, Living Bible.

Outline: (God speaking) I am going to create new heavens and a new earth – a delight – no more weeping, no shortened lives. But not as spirits playing harps on a cloud; (new)bodily life with houses and vineyards. Walking in the will of God (24). Satan overthrown ('dust will be the serpent's food' 25 cp Gen.3.14). Harmony in creation: 'they will neither harm or destroy on all my holy mountain.'

Features of the next life: forgetting the past (17), fullness of life (18-20), freedom from misfortune (21-23a), fulfilling work (22), fellowship with God (23b, 24); the expulsion of Satan (25); and harmony in the redeemed creation (25, cp Rom.8.19ff and Isa.11.6-9).

No strong structure to passage:

**Possibly:**

- the redeemed creation, 17 & 25
- the redeemed Jerusalem, 18
- the redeemed life, 19-24:
  - joyful for man and God
  - physical
  - walking with God

or do it **thematically.**

**Our new life will be:**

- embodied
- social
- responsible
- joyful

Objective for our hearers' lives: To long for heaven and live towards it.

## Sermon 14 Humankind's two destinies      Isaiah 66

Reason for including: Does anyone believe this now? What a surprising, solemn ending for the evangelical prophet, the fifth Gospel. All the more telling that it comes from him. How great the need for it to be on the agenda and done well.

Outline: (God speaking, taking up the theme of right and wrong worship from ch. 65). To summarise: I esteem the humble - but will give my enemies what they deserve. Be glad: I will do it suddenly, bringing God's people a river of peace and the wealth of the nations. Your name, and fullness of worship, will endure for ever; but the lot of impenitent rebels will be awful.

The teaching here: God seeks humble friends, his people or 'city,' and sends us worldwide to invite all people everywhere in. How they respond makes an eternal difference to their destinies.

Flow of thought:

1-6 God wants heart-worship, not formal religion; and will reward each.

7-13. He will create a new Zion, all in a day (*cp.* 1 Cor.15.51ff)

14-18 But he will bring his anger to bear on his enemies

19-21 So before then he will send ambassadors worldwide

22-24 Resulting in a great divide across the human race.

Objective for our hearers' lives: their wholehearted 'yes' to the teaching here.

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