



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,

20 Oct 2024

“God’s Grand Plan”

Readings: Isaiah 2:5 to 4:6

Introduction:

Today’s passage from Isaiah (2:5-4:6) happened 2,700 years ago and yet, I don’t think much has changed for us. What was said then to the Israelite people is a message to us today.

Isaiah (2:5- 22) encourages God’s people to prepare for the Day of the Lord.

Isaiah (4:2-6) offers each one of us the possibility to take hold of the Branch of the Lord forever!

God humbles the proud and exalts the redeemed.

In-between these two readings from Isaiah is judgement (Isaiah 3:1-4:1).

The LORD will take away both supply and support from Jerusalem and Judah, to undermine their pride. God will judge by taking away the things that have distracted them, (and us,) from Him.

God will exalt His people by redeeming and purifying them through the refining fires of judgement. God will create a holy people by cleansing them.

Take to heart this encouragement from Isaiah (2:5), “Come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.” He will keep His promises.

May we trust and hope in Him, for the LORD is our light and salvation.

Preparing for the Day of the Lord:

“Come O House/descendants of Jacob, *all people always*, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”
Isaiah (2:5)

At our recent Remembrance Service, I was struck by the various reactions and impacts of gathering to share memories of those we have loved, both in letting go and holding on. Whether it is the grief of loss of life, or the various forms of suffering, trial, and difficulty we experience, life is complex. If you are experiencing this now, I’m sorry. It hurts significantly. I am here if you need someone to talk to.

We are, together, a people of God, and we genuinely care as we seek to love and serve in community. Suffering, hardship, heartache, and pain are never the end, or culmination of what God desires for His people.

To be sure: suffering, hardship, heartache, and pain are experienced by God’s people, as we know, but to quote Patel in ‘The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel’; “Everything will be all right in the end, if it is not all right, it is not yet the end!”

The Branch of the Lord:

In the coming “*Branch of the Lord*,” (Isaiah 4:2) a Saviour and Deliverer would come who would bring hope and salvation for not only the immediate recipients of the prophecy but for all people, for all time, who put their trust in Him.

The promised “*Branch of the Lord*” we know, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah (4:2-6) conveys this truth majestically: this passage occurs on the heels of an extended and detailed declaration of judgment against Israel and Judah in Chapters 2 & 3.

After describing the judgment that would befall His people because of their steadfast rebellion, God reminds His people through the prophet Isaiah that their coming judgment would NOT be the end of their story.

Living each day of the Lord:

In the preceding two chapters, Isaiah had pronounced judgment upon Judah in part for their arrogant flaunting of their wayward lifestyles. No ages, stages, or gender were missed. All failing to be transformed, being connected to one another as God had and still now has intended.

Isaiah condemned the egotistical men of the nation, telling them that God would take away...

"the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, the captain of fifty and the man of rank," among others, from among the people of Jerusalem and Judea (Isaiah 3:2-3).

In contrast to their conceited trust in their own wisdom and abilities, a competent, capable leader would not be able to be found among them in the days of judgment ahead. Likewise, Isaiah condemned the equally haughty hearts of Judah's women, warning them that their flaunted beauty would be replaced with ugliness:

*"Instead of fragrance there will be a stench;
instead of a sash, a rope;
instead of well-dressed hair, baldness;
instead of fine clothing, sackcloth
instead of beauty, branding."* Isaiah (3:24).

Most people recognise that life as we know it can change in an instant.

And, yet, how easy it is for human beings to secure themselves in their own ways of life, knowledge, possessions, practices, and beauty – even to the point of perceived control closing our heart for connecting, not living as those transformed. This is pride and it is not just Judah's problem. It is a universal disease.

Pride, as we heard last week, is ugliest of all when it is dressed up in religious clothing.

Such pride can eventually only have one outcome: a confrontation with God.

The expression Isaiah uses for this confrontation is **'that day': the Day of the Lord.**

Many of Isaiah's contemporaries understood the Day of the Lord as the day God would come and wipe out Israel's enemies. Isaiah believed that this confident expectation was based in arrogance rather than faith. Israel and Judah had taken on the ways of the surrounding nations.

To quote Michelle Obama, they were going low!

In God's eyes, going low is unsustainable. It might be a quick fix or an easy fix, but it is not a long-term fix.

Obama said, "When they go low, you go high". Isn't this what Isaiah is pleading?

Going high is finding purpose, it is having a plan, fulfilling God's desires, for the day of the Lord. Explicitly it is living with God's purpose and God's plan. It is having an active faith that strives to live as God's people, not a passive faith that is unmoved by the words of God.

So, we, who live in the Day of the Lord; are we active in our faith, going high for God regardless of the decisions of others? Or are we passive, caught napping, going low, unmoved by the Branch of the Lord, our Saviour?

On the Day of the Lord, proud people will be humbled, and Chapter 2 also makes it clear that the Lord alone will be exalted (Verses 11, 17) and seen in all His splendour (Verse 21).

This is the final triumph of God and His purposes.

The Branch of the Lord has come upon us:

Beginning in Isaiah (4:2), note that God begins a new prophecy: He did not leave His people on this note of terrible judgment.

Their judgment was not the end of the story. The prophet's attention has moved to the very end of history, the goal to which everything is moving under God.

The vision of Zion's **glorious** future, beyond judgment, is the climax of Isaiah (2:5-4:6).

God's ultimate purpose for His people is not destruction but salvation.

This is affirmed in the New Testament:

"Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter (1:5)

Also from Paul in 1 Thessalonians (5:9):

"For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This salvation will be fully realised when Christ returns. The phrase, "*the branch of the Lord*," is a metaphor, as I have said, for the Messiah. It is used in parallel with the phrase, "*the fruit of the land*" Isaiah (4:2). The phrase is loaded with symbolic meaning, as God is contrasting the humility of the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus, with the arrogant and absurd magnificence of Jerusalem's rebellious leading men and adorned women.

The Messiah is described as a "*branch*" – that is, a sprout or twig growing out of the Davidic line. Elsewhere, Isaiah would describe the humility of the coming Messiah to an even greater degree. In Isaiah (53:2), the prophet would write,

*"He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."*

In worldly terms, Jesus would not have been recognised for His physical beauty or appearance. No one would have picked Him to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords based on His worldly appearance. To echo (1 Samuel 8), He is not a king like all the other nations have.

However, like King David before Him, Jesus is rightfully the Lord of all the earth by the selection and hand of the Father and not by that of human decision.

"The branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious." Isaiah (4:2)

*"The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.*

*You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil." (Isaiah (9:2-3)*

Though judgment was coming to bring repentance and refine God's people; the Messiah was coming in humility, to bring peace.

And when the Branch of the Lord arrived, He would do three magnificent things as He had promised.

Three fruits of the branch of the Lord:

First, He would provide a fruitful earth.

"The fruit of the land" reminds us of the Messiah's role in providing for His people. *"Land"* was also a gift from God, provided in the days of Joshua in fulfilment of God's promise. This meant the land had religious significance. In Isaiah's day, the land was desolate and ravaged by Israel's enemies. Isaiah was confident that a remnant of Israel would survive and enjoy in full measure what had been promised to their Fathers long ago.

Second, the Branch of the Lord would make His people holy Isaiah (4:3). The holy city, Jerusalem, will be purged of its moral corruption by divine judgment. The holy city represents perfect community.

The Lord Jesus would perfect the holiness of all believers, purifying them by His power and making them acceptable before God so that they would be able to live and reign with Him eternally.

In contrast to the self-righteous, pre-judgment hearts of those in Judah, and the self-righteous, rebellious hearts of so many today, God's people know and understand that human beings cannot make themselves holy.

While we strive for holiness in seeking to be Christ-like, we recognise that we can never achieve holiness in and of ourselves. We only achieve holiness in and through Christ. The Branch of the Lord would make His people truly holy.

Third, this image is of journey's end, of the pilgrim people of God, at last secure in His presence forever *"and a refuge"* Isaiah (4:6) that is eternal/ forevermore!

The language used depicts the time of the exodus; when the Israelites were guided through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud through the day and a pillar of fire by night. This showed the presence of the Lord.

The Israelites were promised a land and in Isaiah's time, this promise seemed more removed than ever! Isaiah is reminding the Israelites that their final encampment would be in the new Zion.

There at last their journey would end.

In this final encampment, the glory of the Lord's presence fills the whole camp and the protecting cloud, like a vast canopy, covers the entire site and all who are assembled there.

Mercy

This is the glorious climax of God's story! All captured in the intensity of these verses of Isaiah (2:5-4:6) 'God's grand plan'.

'God's grand plan' in His mercy in each of our lives for Him.

As 2 Peter (3:9) declares; *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

For those who trust in Christ, God has prepared a truly wondrous and magnificent conclusion to our earthly stories: salvation, grace, forgiveness, and an eternity filled with unimaginable joy in the presence of and in service to our Saviour, the promised Branch of the Lord.

As John sets out before us the new Heaven and the new Earth in (Revelation 21), God's very revelation of Himself to all humanity ends not on a note of judgement but on a note of mercy. Today, let's hold God's vision of mercy afresh!

Let's be inspired to hold God high as we live as pilgrims on the journey to *pray continually, continually pray*...being transformed! Does that inspire you to connect with another?

Amen!