

# CONSECRATED

## Connect Resource

**Dates:** Sunday, 8th September to Sunday, 29th September 2024

**Purpose of this campaign:** To help our church enter into a place of calling and consecration by reflecting on the holiness of God, exploring His justice and mercy, and understanding the need for repentance in the book of Isaiah.

**Key text for this campaign:** The Book of Isaiah

**Week 1:** High and Exalted: The Holiness of Father God

**Week 2:** The Justice of God

**Week 3:** The Gift of Repentance

**Week 4:** The Purpose of Consecration

## Key historical context, commentary or references:

### Background of Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah was written across three major historical settings.<sup>1</sup> Much of the book (the first 39 chapters) is believed to have been written during the ministry of Isaiah son of Amoz, which began in 739BC with the rise of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III a few years earlier.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah's construction was probably in Jerusalem; this was a critical period for the Israelites, with Assyria's rise in power becoming a significant threat.<sup>3</sup>

The second main section of the book (chapters 40-55) is believed to have been written in the mid-6th century BC during the Babylonian exilic period.<sup>4</sup> The latter section, with lots of post-exilic references, is commonly dated from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>5</sup> The broad dating range for this section is largely due to the lack of explicit historical information beyond a referred return from exile.<sup>6</sup>

### Author and Date: Isaiah

The discussion concerning the authorship of Isaiah is extensive. However, it is widely accepted within modern scholarship that Isaiah was written by more than one prophet.<sup>7</sup>

There are notable exceptions to the majority (John Oswalt).<sup>8</sup> He appeals to the unified themes of the book as evidence for 'one human author',<sup>9</sup> although many have suggested this unity comes through other avenues. For example, John Goldingay notes that the shift in tense from future (what God *will do*) in Chapters 1-39 to present active (what God *is doing*) in Chapters 40-55 points to a different writer, one familiar with the writings of first Isaiah and confident in their authority to carry on his message.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Oswalt.

<sup>3</sup> Paul D. Wegner, *Isaiah: An Introduction And Commentary* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2021), 33, <https://www.scribd.com/book/523175769/Isaiah-An-Introduction-And-Commentary>.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Barker, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Isaiah* (Eerdmans, 2019), 1, [https://www.perlego.com/book/2985423/eerdmans-commentary-on-the-bible-isaiah-pdf?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&campaignid=15820430121&adgroupid=131576157306&gclid=Cj0KCCQjw4bipBhCyARIsAFsieCyWOZZiGd9RSuXkFPKQ8FcAjYHkKJMPxZxVWQ-SZnEe1hvYpKAV2UoaAgjeEALw\\_wcB](https://www.perlego.com/book/2985423/eerdmans-commentary-on-the-bible-isaiah-pdf?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&campaignid=15820430121&adgroupid=131576157306&gclid=Cj0KCCQjw4bipBhCyARIsAFsieCyWOZZiGd9RSuXkFPKQ8FcAjYHkKJMPxZxVWQ-SZnEe1hvYpKAV2UoaAgjeEALw_wcB).

<sup>5</sup> Barker, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> Jenni Williams, *The Kingdom of Our God: A Theological Commentary on Isaiah* (London: SCM Press, 2019), 14, <https://www.scribd.com/book/437611201/The-Kingdom-of-our-God-A-Theological-Commentary-on-Isaiah>.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*.

<sup>9</sup> Oswalt.

<sup>10</sup> John Goldingay, ed., *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 12.

Despite the discussion on authorship, we can be confident that the unified message and purpose of Isaiah remain integral and upheld within the Bible as a whole. We see Isaiah held in reverence by New Testament authors, of which it is directly quoted 21 times, and alluded to beyond this.<sup>11</sup>

Webb summarises well:

*“It will be apparent by now that I am convinced that the book of Isaiah is a unity. But there are various kinds of unity, of which unity of authorship is only one.”<sup>12</sup>*

**Purpose:**

Wegner suggests that at its core, Isaiah is primarily concerned with calling the Israelite nation to account for their wickedness and recommissioning them to be “a light to other nations.”<sup>13</sup> It is a book of contrasts. Differences between divine glory and humanity's shortcomings, humility vs pride. According to Oswalt, much of Isaiah's writing is influenced by these contrasts, specifically:

*“the greatness of God and the corruption of humanity. But caught up with this contrast is the amazing paradox that if humanity will lay aside its pretensions to deity, the true God will raise us to fellowship with himself (57:15).”<sup>14</sup>*

Isaiah is thoroughly *kerygmatic* (to proclaim, announce, preach) in its structure.<sup>15</sup> This message, “from opening verse to last...resounds with calls to hear, to attend, to deal with, to take action.”<sup>16</sup>

**One thing to note:** We cannot separate the text from its historical setting. This is not to say that a text cannot speak to new situations, but we must also take it at face value. See comment from Oswalt:

*“As with most of the OT books, a knowledge of the historical background of the book of Isaiah is essential to understand its message. This is so because God's revelation is always incarnational. That is, it is mediated through a specific setting in time and space.”<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Wegner, *Isaiah*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah* (Havertown, UNITED KINGDOM: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2014), 4, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/harvest/detail.action?docID=3328725>.

<sup>16</sup> Oswalt, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 4.

## A note on Apostasy.

We often loosely speak about Israel's disregard for God, which led them towards apostasy and judgment. Oswalt points out that this Apostasy is specifically defined in the books of Hosea (chs.1-3) and Ezekial (chs. 16 and 23) as:

*"Prostitution, the debasing of oneself with unworthy lovers for gain. For the people of God, this meant 'forgetting God'(Deut. 8:11), that is, forsaking their sole allegiance and obedience to him and serving other gods...abuse of those weaker than oneself, because the primary goal has now become satisfying one's own needs through manipulation of the environment. Thus, for the prophets, idolatry, adultery, and oppression are always indissolubly linked."<sup>18</sup>*

## Occasion:

*"The occasion for the book of Isaiah was the Assyrian crisis, which would bring about the destruction of Northern Israel and threaten the existence of Southern Judah. Above everything else, this was a theological crisis, and it was one of the first magnitude."<sup>19</sup>*

Questions that this book raises:

- Is God truly the Sovereign King of history if the godless nations are stronger than God's nation?
- Does might make right?
- What is the role of God's people in the world?
- Does divine judgment mean divine rejection?
- What is the nature of trust?
- What is the future of the Davidic monarchy?
- Are not the idols stronger than God and therefore superior to him?

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<sup>18</sup> Oswalt, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Oswalt, 28.

## Week 1: High and Exalted: The Holiness of God

Date: Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2024

### Key Scriptures:

- Isaiah 1:1-6
- Isaiah 1:12-17
- Isaiah 6:1-13

### Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

Historically, this chapter is at a crucial turning point in the life of the nation of Judah. Under the long reign of Uzziah (c.792/791–739 BC), the nation had prospered, but by the time of Ahaz (c.735–715 BC) the country had become an Assyrian vassal. Morally and politically the nation had experienced a deplorable decline. God sends Isaiah at this difficult time as a prophetic voice to the nation.

Isaiah wasn't alone in seeing the vision of God's throne: The prophet Michaiah saw God's throne ([1 Kings 22:19](#)), Job saw God's throne ([Job 26:9](#)), David saw God's throne ([Psalm 9:4](#) and [9:7](#), [11:4](#)), The Sons of Korah saw God's throne ([Psalm 45:6](#), [47:8](#)), Ethan the Ezrahite saw God's throne ([Psalm 89:14](#)). Jeremiah saw God's throne ([Lamentations 5:19](#)), Ezekiel saw God's throne ([Ezekiel 1:26](#), [10:1](#)), Daniel saw God's throne ([Daniel 7:9](#)), The Apostle John saw God's throne ([Revelation 4:1-11](#)). In fact, the book of Revelation may as well be called "the book of God's throne," because God's throne is specifically mentioned more than 35 times in that book.

In the year King Uzziah died is a time of upheaval and threat, when the king dies there is a period of unrest, sense of loss, uncertainty until another king is in place. This would be the best time for the enemies to attack because the city was without a leader. In this time of uncertainty, God calls Isaiah to be a prophet to His people. Isaiah 6 is the chapter of consecration, commissioning and calling and for Isaiah to the things of God.

### A conclusion:

Oswalt describes Isaiah 6 as offering the solution to the opening Chapters, which paint the people of God as thoroughly disobedient and hard towards God. However, despite their pridefulness and sin, God **will** use them to reveal himself to the world. **How?** By his people undergoing the experience of Isaiah himself a revelation that God is a God of mercy and judgment, holy and able to save.(see [Isaiah 6](#))

“When the nation has seen itself against the backdrop of God’s holiness and glory, when the nation has received God’s gracious provision for sin, then she can speak for God to a hungry world.”<sup>20</sup> From practising *sinfulness* to revealing God as his *servants*.

We can take this message for us today as a church and people, when we see ourselves compared to the revelation of God’s holiness and glory, we understand God’s gracious provision of salvation through Jesus Christ and that enhances our message of God to a hungry world!

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-holiness-of-god/>

#### Further Resources:

- “The Holy One of Israel” See Reading: [Holiness in the Book of Isaiah](#)
- *Theologies in the Book of Isaiah (John Goldingay) Part One “Holiness”*
- Witherington III, Ben. *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.

#### Supporting points to key point:

**Consecration** is the action of making or declaring something sacred, it’s about setting apart a person, object or building for God.

As we journey toward our C3SYD Conference we want to start to prepare our hearts for what God is going to do in us and through us. Our vision for 2024 is to “Prepare the Way for the Lord.” Isaiah 40:3-5

So, in this campaign we are going to go through the revelations of Father God in the book of Isaiah. As we get a fresh revelation of Father God his holiness and power, preparing our hearts in repentance and our lives in consecration... God does great and powerful things.

Time and time in the Bible God fell with power and fire on an altar. It is up to us to lay our lives and hearts down on the altar so that he can send his fire. We do that as we get a fresh heart, fresh revelation of his holiness and justice and fresh consecration in our lives.

It is in the light of God’s holiness that the cross of Christ shines the brightest! To truly understand the grace and power of the cross we need to understand the holiness of God compared to our sin. That is what Isaiah 6 reveals.

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<sup>20</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 175.

## **Isaiah 6:1-8**

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.<sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.<sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

*<sup>4</sup>At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

*<sup>5</sup>“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”*

*<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.<sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*

*<sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”*

### **1. Consecration comes from a fresh revelation of God**

**God is not a better human.** Sometimes we live with the thinking that God is a superhuman; like us but without any of the defects. This is not the case. **God is completely other to us.**

## **Isaiah 6:1-4:**

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.<sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.<sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

*<sup>4</sup>At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”*

## BACKGROUND:

*“The burden of the song of praise is both holiness and glory. The holiness of Yahweh is regularly called to mind in the name “the Holy One of Israel,” frequent in Isaiah (as in 1:4), denoting his radical and unapproachable “otherness.”<sup>21</sup>*

The holiness of God is declared as a character trait, whereas glory is the impression left on “those who encounter him.”<sup>22</sup>

To see the Lord was of incredible significance for the hearer of these words. It brought memories of the Covenant made at Sinai, where the almighty Yahweh said to Moses “No human shall see me and live!” (Exodus 33:20). To gaze upon the Lord directly was seen as fatal for a human. And yet, we see in verse 5, Isaiah is spared for a purpose.

## 2. Consecration comes when we get an Inward awareness and outward praise

We must reflect on the magnitude of the God we serve; the nature of Isaiah’s vision paints a grand picture of God as *the completely sovereign king*. What is the appropriate response to such a vision and revelation of God? It seems two-fold;

- **Inward awareness** (covering, terror at inadequacy-both the “seraphim” and “Isaiah” engage in this)
- **Outward praise** (singing of the glory of God, delighting in Him and offering him what he deserves).

To gaze upon (look at, consume, perceive) his holiness is good. When we peer at the Holiness of God, we are often drawn towards our inadequacy. This can be painful, but we follow a God who is faithful and merciful. He knows *who* we are and does not leave us in our state! Think of the Incarnation of Christ- the ultimate expression of God’s love toward us)

### **Isaiah 6:5-6**

*“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*

For Isaiah, the tragedy of the situation is that he and his people are unclean. They are not following the Holiness of God by keeping in step with him or pursuing his character. They are

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<sup>21</sup> J. G. McConville, *Isaiah*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Prophetic Books (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Witherington III, *Isaiah Old and New*, 97.



not singing the praises of God with their lips like the Seraphim are.<sup>23</sup> How often do we forget about the pursuit of God's holiness?

Yet God in his grace, **offers forgiveness**. Isaiah seems to consider his position hopeless, but God produces a cleansing through a "fiery coal." Isaiah makes no case for his innocence; God just reaches out. Williams points out another significant part of this mercy; namely that Isaiah himself produces *nothing*.<sup>24</sup>

*"God does not reveal himself to destroy us, but rather to redeem us..."*<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Consecration activates us to Go!

#### ***Isaiah 6:8***

*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? "And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

Through cleansing, we are used for his glory. We can be commissioned for service when our revelation of God's character and holiness is clear. God's holiness is not meant to keep us in introspection and despair; the opposite seems to be the case for Isaiah! "Unless that (Spiritual) experience issues in some form of lived-out praise to God, it will turn upon itself and putrefy." In other words, our recognition of the **grace** of God can stir us towards complete service. When we reflect on the unmerited mercy God has shown towards us (focused in the person and work of **Christ**) what other response is there other than **"Here am I. Send me!"**

Being redeemed by God and living in the understanding of his Holiness offers a call towards right living. For Isaiah, this can be summarised in

#### ***Isaiah 58:6***

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?"*

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<sup>23</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 183.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *The Kingdom of Our God*, 46.

<sup>25</sup> Oswalt, 184.

## Week 2: The Justice of God

Date: Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024

### Key Scriptures:

- Isaiah 26-27
- Isaiah 63:7-64:12 (Prayer Two) See comment from Goldingay below.

### Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

Chapters 24-27 seem to “zoom out” from specific nations being addressed (or even the people of God themselves) to the broader understanding that God is not merely king of the nations, but the **sovereign judge and Lord of the whole earth**.<sup>26</sup> A collection of hymns, these songs act somewhat as a finale to 13-23.

These chapters have often been referred to as “The Apocalypse of Isaiah because their focus is upon the worldwide triumph of God.”<sup>27</sup> It holds some similarities to the book of Revelation, in that it provides a picture of the end of history—one where God sits as Judge and ultimate King—yet at the same time, secures his people through utter turmoil.<sup>28</sup>

*“Isaiah introduces God’s universal judgment, the renewal of the earth, the removal of death and the effects of sin, the deliverance of his people, and the victorious and universal rule of God.”<sup>29</sup>*

Scholars have attempted to locate these chapters in history, but no critical consensus seems to be favoured due to the lack of specific events mentioned.<sup>30</sup>

### Justice in the book of Isaiah

God taking humanity’s wayward venture away from his rightful rule seriously, acting within the earth and beyond to bring redemption.

**Note:** We don’t often discuss the judgement of God. For this reason, explaining some of the context will be helpful for people when launching into these chapters. In isolation these verses can seem like God is simply “angry”- why can’t he just forgive? The large picture is that he does forgive our trespasses, but this does not do away with his justice. To stand before God means to acknowledge that **he** is in the right and that **we** have sinned. This is important, but not the final part of the story. **AGAIN**-look to the cross of Christ!

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<sup>26</sup> Oswalt, 440.

<sup>27</sup> Oswalt, 440.

<sup>28</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *Isaiah*, The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2019), 66.

<sup>29</sup> VanGemeren, 66.

<sup>30</sup> For more information, see Oswalt 441-443 and Witherington, 195-202

## Supporting points to Key point

Last week we looked at the holiness of God, this week in understanding consecration and the cross, we need to take a look at the justice of God. No-one likes it when people get away with something, there is something built into us as ones created in the image of God for justice. For right things to be rewarded and for people who do the wrong thing to have to account of their actions. Justice means "what is right or as it should be," it is fairness in the way people are dealt with. The Righteousness of God incorporates his holiness and justice.

God is a God who is just.

### 1. The justice of God *opposes* sin.

#### ***Isaiah 24:1-5***

*See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth  
and devastate it;  
he will ruin its face  
and scatter its inhabitants—*<sup>31</sup>

*<sup>2</sup> it will be the same  
for priest as for people,  
for the master as for his servant,  
for the mistress as for her servant,  
for seller as for buyer,  
for borrower as for lender,  
for debtor as for creditor.*

*<sup>3</sup> The earth will be completely laid waste  
and totally plundered.  
The Lord has spoken this word.*

*<sup>4</sup> The earth dries up and withers,  
the world languishes and withers,  
the heavens languish with the earth.*

*<sup>5</sup> The earth is defiled by its people;  
they have disobeyed the laws,  
violated the statutes  
and broken the everlasting covenant.*

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<sup>31</sup> For more information on this image of devastation, see Oswalt, P.444.

One of the main issues we find within Isaiah is the injustice of **human pride**. “Human pride and God cannot coexist.”<sup>32</sup> We are not designed to elevate ourselves above our maker. We see in verse 2 the equalising of all humanity; no one person due to their position or state will be better off before the judgment seat of God than another.

Verse 5 addresses the breaching of covenantal law- this appears to be referring to the general covenant between God and his creation; namely “the basic standards of right behaviour given to the man and woman at creation...”<sup>33</sup> We see a similar cry in Romans 1-3, as man refuses to pay attention to the natural/spiritual laws instigated by God for his glory and peoples good. No wonder God needs to act!

How relevant is this today? War, famine, and devastation continually impact our world. People don’t behave as they ought. For life to endure as it should, **we require the fruit of the spirit** (Galatians 5:22-23.) Life in the Spirit leads us towards fulfilling the natural and spiritual law God has given to the world.

## 2. The justice of God produces *praise and security*.

### ***Isaiah 25:1, 3-4***

*<sup>1</sup> Lord, you are my God;  
I will exalt you and praise your name,  
for in perfect faithfulness  
you have done wonderful things,  
things planned long ago*

*<sup>3</sup> Therefore strong peoples will honour you;  
cities of ruthless nations will revere you.*

*<sup>4</sup> You have been a refuge for the poor,  
a refuge for the needy in their distress,  
a shelter from the storm  
and a shade from the heat.*

This song sets forth the purpose of God’s **justice** (him taking seriously humanity’s disregard for his good law) in **triumph**. We must grasp that there is always careful purpose within the righteous justice that God enacts; as opposed to the idols “who have no plans.”<sup>34</sup>

The response to such good Kingship and justice (deliverance) is **praise** (verse 1) and **recognition** (verse 3). There is an intensely personal element to this song. It is **essential** to remind ourselves of the closeness of God our Father. He is not distant, and his justice affirms his relationship with us.

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<sup>32</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 444.

<sup>33</sup> Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 106.

<sup>34</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 461.

His justice becomes a stronghold. The result of God being the ultimate King is safety for the oppressed. His good judgements *tear down* human pride, which as a result creates a *refuge* for those who have been mistreated by others.<sup>35</sup>

How much better is life when God is recognised as King *and* Father? As almighty creator, and intimate friend? Holding closely these two realities will help us both fear (with awe, respect and wonder) and rely upon Him.

### 3. The justice of God produces life

#### ***Isaiah 27:2-3,6***

<sup>2</sup> *In that day—*

*“Sing about a fruitful vineyard:*

<sup>3</sup> *I, the Lord, watch over it;  
I water it continually.  
I guard it day and night  
so that no one may harm it.*

<sup>6</sup> *In days to come Jacob will take root,  
Israel will bud and blossom  
and fill all the world with fruit.*

The comparison to the abandoned vineyard of **Isaiah 5:1-7** can be seen, however, the other side of God’s righteous intervention has transformed it.

The vineyard (or, **people of God**) was corrupt, producing nothing of value. Now, we see a productive vineyard, with God (or, **the farmer**) stepping in himself to water, care and protect his people; **as a result they are finally producing wine.**

Verse 6 provides the **key for us today**- as God’s people are transformed by his Justice and grace, more are added and “grafted in.” (Romans 11:11-24). His rulership getting into the hearts of his people allows the expansion of his kingdom to the ends of the earth.

This picture of restoration is eschatological (meaning with the **end** of time in mind). In other words, as believers, we are benefactors of this image and members of the people of God as we look forward to his ultimate redemption. We get to participate in God renewing and recultivating the earth by living according to his just ways!

- The end result of God enacting justice is **his glory.**

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<sup>35</sup> Oswalt, 462.

## Connect Questions

Week 1: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024    The Justice of God

### GATHER:

- Share any times you think that the church has done a good job of displaying God's justice (in redeeming, repairing & restoring) rather than the extremes of "forgive & forget" or cancel culture.
- How should the knowledge that God will judge everyone in the end change the way we engage with the world?

### GROW:

- God's redemption plan through Jesus was for all the earth, all of humanity because we all needed it! What would you write in your own song of praise about what God's grace changed in your life?
- We are redeemed but not yet perfect. Through our intimate relationship with Him, what is God's justice working on in your life? What could be your next step?

### GO:

- How would you respond to someone who said "there's obviously no God because the bad guys on the news get away with everything"? (Note: this is how many of the Psalms begin – God is not afraid of the question)
- Is there a particular region or country suffering in this broken world that speaks to your heart? Pray for the believers there to have opportunities to share the gospel and for the 'earthly enemies of God' to have open hearts to hear it and repent.

## Week 3: The Gift of Repentance

Date: Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024

### Key Scriptures:

- Isaiah 1:16-17
- James 5:6
- Isaiah 30

### Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

Unlike Chapters 24-27 which carry a grander picture of God's sovereignty, the next section of Isaiah pulls the reader back to earth. Historically, **chapters 28-35** deal with whether God's people (in particular, their leaders) will rely upon the false hope of an alliance with Egypt, or choose to trust in God in the face of a growing military threat from Assyria.<sup>36</sup> This is the threat Isaiah predicted in chapter 8; with the invasion of Assyria "about to burst full force against the southern Kingdom (Judah)."<sup>37</sup>

**Chapter 30** specifically deals with the outcome of their decision to trust Egypt for protection. We are met with a people who—despite continual invitation towards relying upon God who is always faithful—carry hard hearts towards his good news of protection.<sup>38</sup> God allows them to be overrun, yet even in their disobedience, he is patient with his grace, ready to pour out his faithful love upon his people who return to him.<sup>39</sup>

*"It seems so strange that it is **only after** we break ourselves on the results of our pride that we can see him where he has been all along, offering his grace to us."*

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<sup>36</sup> Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 116.

<sup>37</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 504.

<sup>38</sup> Oswalt, 550.

<sup>39</sup> Oswalt, 550.

## Supporting points to Key point:

### *Isaiah 30:15-21*

<sup>15</sup> *This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:*

*“In repentance and rest is your salvation,  
in quietness and trust is your strength,  
but you would have none of it.*

<sup>16</sup> *You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’*

*Therefore you will flee!*

*You said, ‘We will ride off on swift horses.’*

*Therefore your pursuers will be swift!*

<sup>17</sup> *A thousand will flee*

*at the threat of one;*

*at the threat of five*

*you will all flee away,*

*till you are left*

*like a flagstaff on a mountaintop,*

*like a banner on a hill.”*

<sup>18</sup> *Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you;*

*therefore he will rise up to show you compassion.*

*For the Lord is a God of justice.*

*Blessed are all who wait for him!*

<sup>19</sup> *People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you.*

<sup>20</sup> *Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them.* <sup>21</sup> *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”*

## 1. God Longs to be Gracious

Verse 18 shows us that God’s heart towards us is full of grace, compassion. He loves justice and his desire is that we will be blessed.

Psalm 103:1 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

But as Paul explains in Romane we are not to take God’s kindness as validation to do what we want, his kindness and grace is supposed to lead us to repentance.



Romans 2:4 <sup>4</sup>Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

## 2. Repentance is necessary

Throughout the Bible, repentance and recognition of sin have been **key** to acknowledging the Lordship of God, and for healing.

See Isaiah 1:16-20, James 5:16

- In this passage, God is yet again inviting Israel into a state of trust and repentance. To turn from their ways and acknowledge his rule.
- In this context, with the impending threat of war on the doorstep of the nation, the temptation to trust in what can be seen (Egypt) is clear.

How often do we forget the faithfulness of God in our own lives, that we seek assurance through the things of this world? (Wealth, people, status). The invitation to repentance is not only continual but necessary.

- Just like Isaiah before the throne of God in chapter 6, having a heart orientated towards repentance is essential to receiving the graciousness of God.
- Verse 15 reveals the extent of God's invitation; we must simply rest in God's plan. We must rid ourselves of the notion that our strength can save us!<sup>40</sup> What does this look like in our own lives?

The pride that enters the human heart is suffocated through repentance.

## 3. Mercy drives us towards repentance

"It is judgement which shatters the false values and makes one attentive. It is grace that motivates the broken to believe and obey. Neither is ultimately effective without the other."<sup>41</sup>- John N. Oswalt (Biblical Scholar)

We see a beautiful picture of God's open arms in **verses 18-21**. God desires to pour out his mercy upon those who recognise him. We must remember the absolute grace of God, and that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." **Romans 5:8**.

Although we receive the full message of Salvation through the knowledge and receiving of Christ, a vein runs deep throughout the entirety of the Bible: humility before God and acknowledgement of sin allows the mercy of God **complete effect** in our worlds.

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<sup>40</sup> Oswalt, 555.

<sup>41</sup> Oswalt, 559.

**Verse 18** is a conclusive statement to the verses prior.<sup>42</sup> This is significant because it seems to suggest that God is waiting for his people to **wait upon him**. In other words, “the Lord must wait to show his grace until they are in a position to receive it. So to the repeated cry of “How long, O Lord?” his answer is, “Whenever you are ready.”<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. Repentance washes, restores and makes a way forward.

##### Isaiah 1:16-17

<sup>16</sup> Wash and make yourselves clean.

Take your evil deeds out of my sight;  
stop doing wrong.

<sup>17</sup> Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed.<sup>[a]</sup>

Take up the cause of the fatherless;  
plead the case of the widow.

- There is nothing like the practice of confession to trigger progress. To allow God to remove the burden our hearts and conscious carry through his **complete forgiveness**.
- There is clear forward momentum in **verse 17**- the washing we experience goes hand-in-hand with action. There is no room for passivity in our confession, but our confession of wrongdoing is radically transformed into good through Godly action!

##### See further James 5:16, Psalm 32

- God is present in our confession. He longs to supply grace to those who “**cry out to him**”.
- Confession is not simply the admission of guilt. When we confess, we are given a new focus-“**Learn to do right, seek justice.**” We have a new aim. We are not just trying to avoid sin, but to crowd it out with righteousness!

**Do you have someone in your life you are being vulnerable with and sharing your sins? It is God who supplies forgiveness, confession brings healing!**

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<sup>42</sup> Oswalt, 557.

<sup>43</sup> Oswalt, 557.

## Week 4: The Purpose of Consecration

Date: Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2024

**Key Outcome:** To explore Israel's original calling to be a 'light to the nations' and reflect on our involvement in that consecration as Christians today.

### Key Scriptures:

- Isaiah 19:24
- Isaiah 48
- Isaiah 49:1-6
- Isaiah 53:1-3,6
- Isaiah 56:1-3
- 1 Peter 1:14-16
- Ephesians 2:10
- Hebrews 12:2

### Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

In broad strokes, Chapters 40-55 of Isaiah are speaking to a people who have been taken into exile by Babylon during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. <sup>44</sup> A significant question that the people of God are asking – “Is God still to be trusted despite our present circumstances? Has our election as his people been abandoned?”

Oswalt argues that the main thrust of Chapters 1-39 centralises on the theme of **servanthood**.<sup>45</sup> Yet it is clear that the people of God fall short (Does this not ring true of Romans 3:23, that we have **all** fallen short?). The message of Isaiah 40-55 thus “addresses the possibility of **restoration**.” Not only does God have the ability to restore and reinstate his people, but he desires to on account of his steadfast love.

These chapters also introduce the character of the suffering Servant. This mysterious figure will bear the **weight** of sin found in God's people; he will restore their ability to reflect him rightly. The initial calling of being consecrated to God **still stands**, the outworking of that calling is found in the grace offered by God's ultimate servant. As Christians reading this portion of Isaiah, we think “inevitably of Jesus Christ: a baby born in the back-stable of a village inn.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Witherington III, *Isaiah Old and New*, 267.

<sup>45</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah / by John N. Oswalt. 2: Chapters 40 - 66*, Nachdr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 6.

<sup>46</sup> Oswalt, 382.

Supporting points to Key point (3-5 points max):

1. Consecration begins with a Saviour.

**Isaiah 53: 3-6**

<sup>3</sup> He was **despised** and **rejected** by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and **familiar with pain**.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

<sup>4</sup> **Surely he took up our pain**  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
**the punishment that brought us peace was on him,**  
and by his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

To be set apart for sacred use (consecration) requires cleansing. It is clear from the book of Isaiah—and more broadly, the world in its entirety!— that we are unable to meet God’s standard. God desires us to glorify and honour him in the world; but how can we do that if we are continually falling short?

**God answers this question with a resounding, confident and planned answer: The Suffering Servant: Jesus Christ**

The picture found within Isaiah 53 is **shocking** for the reader. This is not the grandiose, triumphant image of the deliverer-king expected, but someone “familiar with pain”, “despised” and “stricken.” In the ancient world, sickness and suffering were often equated with sin; **what can this man possibly offer the world?**<sup>47</sup>

It is here where Isaiah switches it back on us: it is not his pain and sickness he carries, **it is our own.**

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<sup>47</sup> Oswalt, 383–84.

Oswalt expands:

“The skill of the poet is shown in his repetition and reversal of sickness and pains from v.3. The weakness and illness that made us think little of the Servant — it is our weakness and illness! **The very things that made us think him of no account are the things for which we ought to honour him because it is for our sake he is enduring them.**” (The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66, John N. Oswalt, p.386)

In other words:

“He suffered, but it was we who sinned.” This Suffering Servant **became** the true people of God who in themselves were helpless before God; he did what they could not do.

The Christian is immediately reminded of the Christ. His life, death and resurrection for the sake of all humanity. This includes us! What good news! Christ took the punishment that was destined for us.

**The beginning of true consecration requires the ultimate act of Salvation that man could never achieve.** We are left wondering—“How could God love us like that?”<sup>48</sup> We are also reminded of the words in Hebrews 12:2; “for the joy set before him, he endured the cross.”

## 2. Consecration is outworked by God’s own strength in us Isaiah 56: 1-3,

This is what the Lord says:

“Maintain justice  
and do what is right,  
for my salvation is close at hand  
and my righteousness will soon be revealed.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the one who does this—  
the person who holds it fast,  
who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it,  
and keeps their hands from doing any evil.”

<sup>3</sup> Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say,  
“The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.”  
And let no eunuch complain,  
“I am only a dry tree.”

<sup>8</sup> **The Sovereign Lord declares—  
he who gathers the exiles of Israel:  
“I will gather still others to them  
besides those already gathered.”**

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<sup>48</sup> Oswalt, 408.

Once people have been cleansed by this Servant, how can one expect to remain holy and continue if the cycle of sin is so apparent? It is evident through the scripture that despite God's mercy, people again miss the mark.

What is different because of this Suffering Servant? How are the people of God meant to be consecrated and fit for service?

“It has been amply demonstrated that God's people cannot live out their God's character...(however) **those who will choose to make the Servant a sin offering may also find in him the power to live the lives of the servants of God.**”

This service to him and for him is built upon a relationship. For us to be consecrated for God, we need to understand the joy of participating in his justice and righteousness! **(Verse 1) See Psalm 1.**

It is clear through Isaiah that the message of Salvation is not one of righteousness preceding the grace of God. It appears that we are **compelled and exhorted** to act out his righteousness as a result of his “gracious work”. “In other words, obedience is to be lived out as a response to Salvation.”<sup>49</sup> If one is tempted to abuse this grace, we are reminded of **Romans 6- shall we go on sinning? By no means! We are those who have died to sin...**”

This righteous living therefore becomes the witness to the nations of the salvation of God— as:” living evidence”.<sup>50</sup> **(See Isaiah 43:10)**

**This is good news!**

### **3. We are called to be Holy as God is Holy**

The ingrained message of Isaiah is the absolute Holiness of God (his distinction, otherness). And yet as we are consecrated and set apart for good works (see Ephesians 2:10) we are **also exhorted today** to be Holy!

#### **1 Peter 1:14-16**

“<sup>14</sup>As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup>but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup>since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.””

We are not called to be Holy based on our own righteousness, ability or white-knuckled strength! The **story** of Isaiah, the Gospel and the Bible is enough evidence against this. We live out His holiness through the power of God.

For us today, this is the **power of the Holy Spirit**. By living according to the Spirit, we are enabled to be witnesses of the grace and goodness of God. (Romans 8)

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<sup>49</sup> Oswalt, 455.

<sup>50</sup> Oswalt, 454.

Coming to the end of this campaign, we are reminded of **Isaiah 6**. Isaiah's vision of the complete removal of guilt, the **absolute holiness of God** and the ultimate consecration of the people of God fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

"Sinful Israel can become **servant Israel** when the experience of Isaiah becomes the experience of the nation."<sup>51</sup> We must continue to hold to this understanding of the magnitude of God, and the lengths he went to to cleanse and restore us as we reflect him in the Earth.

#### 4. How do we respond?

Let's visit again the call of Isaiah 6, Send me!

**Isaiah 6: 8** Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

When we see Father God is his holiness, with all power, authority and justice, and we consecrate our hearts to him afresh he will use us for his glory as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. Paul calls this true worship!

#### **Romans 12:1-2**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Consecration has a reason. Vessels in the Old Testament were consecrated for "sacred use," Paul puts it this way

#### **2 Timothy 2:20-21 NIV**

<sup>20</sup>In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. <sup>21</sup>Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

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<sup>51</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*.

## Connect Questions

29<sup>th</sup> September 2024

The Purpose of Consecration

### GATHER:

- Christians in the past have often seen consecration as a call to withdraw completely from the world. Share any experiences of being called to withdraw from something or being empowered by the Spirit to be a light in a dark place.
- The suffering servant really changes the picture of glorious & triumphant. Share any stories of self-sacrifice that have impacted your view of saviours and heroes growing up.

### GROW:

- How does it help you today to know that Jesus, the suffering servant knows what you're going through?
- Do you feel set apart for God's work? What could be your next step in being a living sacrifice, in reading scripture, your prayer life or serving at church?

### GO:

- Are there any areas of your life where you are the only Christian? Pray for the courage to stand out for God and to share the gospel if given the opportunity.
- Encourage each other in how to overcome the inconvenience of serving others in the moment (because it isn't easy!).