



Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action
in the community of Cornton

Through the Bible

Exodus
Nehemiah
2Chronicles Luke
Acts 2Timothy 2Peter
Zephaniah
Ecclesiastes
1Timothy Joshua
Psalms James
Isaiah
Titus
Daniel
Hebrews
Zechariah
1Samuel 2Corinthians
Malachi
Philemon
Job
1Kings
Ruth
Jonah
Jeremiah
Romans
1Chronicles
2Thessalonians
1Thessalonians
Deuteronomy
Ephesians
Judges
1Corinthians
Leviticus
Numbers
Mark
Ezra
Ezekiel
1Peter
John
2Samuel
Matthew
Habakkuk
Lamentations
SongsofSongs
Haggai
Colossians
Micah
Nahum
Joel
2Kings
Amos
2John
Jude
3John
Hosea
Revelation
Philippians
1John
Proverbs
Esther
Obadiah

December 2012

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. (v.3)

Few things (if anything at all) in this fallen world can be called perfect. But God promises to keep us in ‘perfect peace’ if we keep our minds focused on Him and continue trusting Him (Isaiah 26:3).

So why do we find it so difficult to trust Him? Often, it’s because we’re afraid that things won’t go as we want them to unless we control them ourselves. The less we are in control, the more anxious and worried we become. We like to be in control. It’s hard to hand that control over to someone else, even to Jesus, and trust that he will take care of it.

Isaiah has spoken of difficult times. He has been depressed by the painful realities of the present (Isaiah 24) and then joyful and excited about the glorious prospect for the future (Isaiah 25). Between these extremes lies the settled disposition of patient, trustful waiting to which the people of God must return again and again. It is to be their hallmark as they live out their lives in the world as it is. And that is true for us today as well.

Notice the two aspects needed for perfect peace – having our mind on God and trusting in him. The NIV says keeping our minds steadfast whereas the KJV says keeping our mind stayed on thee. Both carry the idea of being resolute and determined to keep our mind on God. When we look to God and think on him everything comes into focus once more. God is the creator and sustainer of the world. We can trust God because he always wants the best for his children. We can trust God because all of his promises in Scripture have been kept. He is trustworthy.

Next time you feel yourself troubled by what is happening around you ‘turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full in his wonderful face then the things of life will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.’ Keep your mind on God and trust him always.

Pray: thanking God for his perfect peace.

Reflect: do I keep my mind on God?

I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it. (v.3)

This chapter gives two wonderful reminders to us as Christians. The first is that Satan will one day be defeated completely. Leviathan is pictured here as a sea monster and serpent – and the LORD will take care of him. Satan was defeated the moment Jesus laid down his life on the cross as punishment for our sins. We are forgiven and restored in our relationship with God. Satan has been allowed to continue his work but only for a set time. One day soon Jesus is coming back and Satan will be condemned to eternal punishment at that time. We are safe and secure in Christ.

The second reminder builds from the first – God is in control and he watches over us and protects us. He does this day and night. We do not need to worry about the things that come against us – we simply have to hand them over to God. Someone recently sent this as a message from God email:

Good Morning. I am God. Today I will be handling ALL of your problems. Please remember that I do NOT need your help. If the devil happens to deliver a situation to you that you cannot handle, do NOT attempt to resolve it. Kindly put it in the SFJTD (something for Jesus to do) box. It will be addressed in MY TIME, NOT yours. Once the matter is placed in the box, do NOT hold onto it or remove it. Holding on or removal will only delay the resolution of your problem. If it is a situation that you think you are capable of handling, PLEASE consult ME in prayer to be sure that it is the proper resolution. Because I do NOT sleep nor do I slumber, there is no need for you to lose any sleep. Rest my child. If you need to contact ME, I am ONLY a prayer away. HAVE A NICE DAY.

Let's be encouraged that God is in control and he will bring his purposes to bear in his time. Keep trusting him and handing over every anxious thought to him.

Pray: thanking God for watching over us at all time.

Reflect: do I hand everything over to God?

For we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place. (v.15)

A pastor was walking down the street when he came upon a group of about a dozen boys, all of them between 10 and 12 years of age. The group surrounded a dog. Concerned lest the boys were hurting the dog, he went over and asked “What are you doing with that dog?” One of the boys replied, “This dog is just an old neighbourhood stray. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home. So we’ve decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie will get to keep the dog.” Of course, the pastor was taken aback. “You boys shouldn’t be having a contest telling lies!” he exclaimed. He then launched into a ten minute sermon against lying, beginning, “Don’t you boys know it’s a sin to lie,” and ending with, “Why, when I was your age, I never told a lie.” There was dead silence for about a minute. Just as the pastor was beginning to think he’d gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, “All right, give him the dog.”

We have all lied about something. And the danger is we get so got up in them that we hide behind our lies. The leaders of Israel had put their faith in political alliances and not in God. In the days of King Ahaz they made a secret treaty with Assyria; and in the days of Hezekiah they turned to Egypt for help. But these ‘covenants with death and the grave’ were destined to fail because God was not in them. They were living in the hope that they would be saved but failing to trust in God leads to defeat and death. They could hide behind the lies for a time with those around them but ultimately they would be found out.

The same is true for you and I. We can hide behind lies and deceit for a time but as the web of deceit gets bigger and bigger, inevitably it will come crashing down around us and we will be found. God longs for people to be truthful and live well. He longs for us to trust in him and follow his ways always. Judgement is coming is the big theme of chapter 28 – its time now to repent. Are there lies you need to repent of now and stand out from behind them?

Pray: confessing your sins to God.

Reflect: am I hiding behind any lies or falsehood?

These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. (v.13)

Tourists throughout the centuries have visited the famous Acropolis, the ancient hilltop religious citadel in Athens. Thousands of sightseers from all over the world have picked up marble chunks as souvenirs. Why hasn't the supply of pieces been exhausted long ago? The answer is very simple. Every few months a truckload of marble fragments from a quarry miles away is scattered around the whole Acropolis area. So tourists go home happy with what they think are authentic pieces of ancient history.

We can be deceived by other kinds of imitations. Religious language and music, religious objects and services may fool us into imagining that we are experiencing a firsthand relationship with God when in reality we are simply going through empty routines. It is easy to come to church Sunday by Sunday and sing the songs, and say "Amen" at the prayers and listen to the Word and then leave and live life as we always have during the week without God in it. We worship God with our lips and not our hearts in that case.

This is what happened to the Pharisees, in fact Jesus quotes this passage when talking about them (Matthew 15:1-11). The Pharisees were worshipping God by outward expressions. They were more concerned about "the way we've always done it" rather than learning what God's heart was. They did things properly on the outside, but their hearts weren't close to God.

God doesn't want your "religion" He wants a "relationship" with you. "Religion" is when a person does outward, "religious" kinds of things. Let's not settle for false imitations...rather let us worship God with our heart as well as our lips. Let's live in relationship with Him all the time.

Pray: thanking God that he wants a relationship with us.

Reflect: do I worship God with my heart or simply my lips? How can I give him all my heart?

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." (v.21)

Linda Anderson was sitting in her car at some traffic lights in Watford when she distinctly, but quite unexpectedly, heard God say to her "I want you to be a schools' worker." Linda had been praying about what she should do when her youngest daughter started school, but she hadn't even considered the possibility of Christian schools' work. The next day she spoke to her minister. He told her that the previous day he had been at a ministers' fraternal. As it happened they had been discussing the situation in local schools and had decided that they needed to appoint another Christian worker. The meeting had been taking place at the very time Linda was sitting waiting for the lights to change.

How often do we hear God speak and simply ignore him when he does? How often do we long for God to speak but never ask him to? Isaiah is speaking to the people and reminding them that as they cry out to God, he hears and he speaks to them. As he speaks he expects our obedience. There are some qualities of these people who hear the "voice" of their teachers, the voice of the Holy Spirit, that we can learn from:

- 1) They cry to the Lord for help (v.19). Though others want to trust in Egypt, these people cry to the Lord for help. And God answers their cries.
- 2) They've trusted the Lord even through hard times (vs.20). They've eaten the 'bread of adversity', but have still trusted the Lord. They haven't given up on the Lord.
- 3) They have listening ears (v.21). These are people who hear because they listen.
- 4) Obedience (vs.22). These are people who have responded to the Lord by doing away with their idols. They may not have yet had all the answers to all the questions that they were asking, but they took time to do what they knew they ought to be doing.

Do you want God to speak to you? Then cry to Him for help. Keep trusting in Him even when it's tough. Take time to just listen. Be sure to do the things that you already know you ought to be doing.

Pray: asking God to speak to your heart about what he wants you to do.

Reflect: do I take time to listen for and to God?

For in that day every one of you will reject the idols of silver and gold your sinful hands have made. (v.7)

The Titanic was said to be unsinkable and people truly believed it. On 10 April 1912 as the passengers embarked on the liner's maiden voyage, one of the crew said to a lady who expressed her nervousness "Madam, even God himself could not sink this ship." But then the unthinkable happened – 500 miles south of Newfoundland the liner struck a huge iceberg, tearing a hole 300 feet long in her side. As the icy water flooded into her heart and the ship began to list, one passenger was heard to say "Why doesn't the captain press a button and make it all right again?"

It is amazing how people put so much faith in invented things and things around them. Back in Isaiah's time we see them in Isaiah 31 putting their trust in horses, chariots and horsemen rather than in the Lord. They also seem to have been putting trust in idols made of silver and gold for a time. Now they realise that is all useless. The obvious helplessness of their idols to deliver rendered them completely useless. Isaiah called them to reject their idols and turn back to God – for only God could save them.

And yet today we still put our trust in almost anything and everything else other than God. We work hard to get a good and secure job and keep it. But as we see in our world today no job is safe anymore. We work hard to earn lots of money and buy fancy cars and gadgets – but they still break down and fail us. We work hard at living a good life, treating others well and doing no harm to anyone – but death still comes to each one of us.

The only way to be saved in life is to trust God. He will not fail us like our inventions. He will not be rendered helpless like our idols. God has saved us in Jesus. He has promised he is coming back to take us to spend eternity with him. Let's stop trusting in our own efforts and start trusting in God alone.

Pray: asking God to forgive us for trusting in ourselves and our idols rather than in him.

Reflect: what idols are there in my life that I need to get rid of?

But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands. (v.8)

If you go to the Library of Congress in Washington, there is a little blue box that contains one of the Library's rarities. The label on the box reads "Contents of the President's Pockets on the Night of April 14, 1865". That was the fateful night that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. There are five things in the box: a handkerchief, embroidered "A. Lincoln"; a country boy's pen knife; a spectacles case repaired with string; a purse containing a \$5 bill; and some old and worn newspaper clippings.

The clippings were from articles that talked about the great deeds of Abraham Lincoln. One of them actually reports a speech by John Bright which says that Abraham Lincoln is "one of the greatest men of all times." That's not a surprising statement for us, but in Lincoln's day, millions shared a different opinion. The President's critics were fierce and many. His was a lonely agony that reflected the suffering and turmoil of his country ripped to shreds by hatred and cruel, costly war.

We like to think people will think well of us. And they will if we live life well and live life the way God intended. We are told today in Isaiah that a generous man who generously lives life will stand by those generous deeds. God has generously offered us salvation through the death of his son on the cross of Calvary. He pours his outrageous and generous love and grace and mercy on us. And he calls us to live outrageously generous lives in return – to love Him above all else and to love our neighbours as ourselves. The quality of our relationship with God will be evident to all in the way we act and speak in life.

The converse of course as Isaiah reminds us in these verses is that the fool and the scoundrel and the wicked will be found out and will be seen for what they are. May we be seen as men and women of God, living well for him in this world.

Pray: asking God to help you live for him always.

Reflect: do others see Jesus in me as I live life among them?

“Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire?” He who walks righteously. (v.14)

Dr. George Sweeting, a past President of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, tells of the day he noticed an unusual combination of bumper stickers on the car of a man who was visiting the school. The coincidental message conveyed by the two stickers prompted Dr. Sweeting to suggest to the unsuspecting visitor that he might want to remove one of them. One read: JESUS IS COMING! and the other: ESCAPE TO WISCONSIN.

Jesus is coming but Wisconsin is not the place to be escaping to – we ought to be running to Jesus. When tragedy strikes people often sit up and take notice. That was true in Isaiah’s day.

Just before darkness settled, the Israelites who stood on the walls of Jerusalem saw with dismay the mighty Assyrian army surrounding the city. But at dawn the enemy camp was deserted, and thousands of dead soldiers lay scattered on the ground. What awe and gratitude must have filled the hearts of godly Israelites - but the wicked were terrified!

The prophet Isaiah portrays trembling sinners asking how they can live with “the devouring fire” and “everlasting burnings” (Isaiah 33:14). These phrases do not refer to hell, but to our holy God. Those hypocrites were really asking, “Who can live with Him?” Isaiah’s answer was simple: “He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly” (v.15). It wasn’t enough just to participate in religious ritual; Isaiah was reminding them that to live in the presence of the consuming fire they had to obey God.

It is not enough for us simply to come to church Sunday by Sunday – we have to be living for Jesus every day of our lives. We have to be reading his word and obeying his commandments, living life the way he intended. Who can dwell with the consuming fire? Those who live righteous lives before God.

Pray: asking God to help you live righteously.

Reflect: do I walk righteously and speak uprightly?

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! (v.1)

Over the past decade there have been several movies made about the end of the world. Films like ‘Armageddon’, ‘Independence Day’, ‘The Day After Tomorrow’ and ‘2012’ all portray a coming day when disaster will strike the world. This movie is intended to entertain us, but it really doesn’t require us to take any action in light of what we see in the movie. In fact, most of these movies do just the opposite – they leave us with a feeling of futility as we see how helpless that we are to deal with these catastrophic events.

There is a danger that we begin to view the Bible in the same way. It is easy to look at the prophecies and the events that they represent and to view them only as a source of information, or even entertainment, but never be called to action as a result of what we are learning. Isaiah is concerned for the people. As he gives his prophecy here in Isaiah 34 he calls the people to pay attention. He doesn’t want them to miss what he is going to say. Disaster is coming. Judgement is coming. God is angry with his people. They have been disobedient and rebellious. Isaiah is really seeking that they would listen, be convicted of their sin and rebellion, repent and turn back to God. He is calling the people to take action.

And as a reminder of all that he says, he urges them to pick up the scroll of the Lord and read it for ‘*none of these will be missing*’. He reminds them that everything that is written in God’s Word is true. It will come to pass. If we need to know how to change our lives and live God’s way, then we would do well to pick up the Bible, read it and pay attention to what it says. And as we come to put our trust in Jesus, God’s Spirit will come upon us and help us change over time to be the people God has called us to be.

Let’s not simply read God’s Word as if it is a novel. Let’s read it and heed it and live by it. Pay attention!

Pray: thanking God for His Word and asking him to help you read it and apply it to your life.

Reflect: do I learn from God’s Word and apply it to my life?

Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come." (v.4)

During World War II, a military governor met with General George Patton in Sicily. When he praised Patton highly for his courage and bravery, the general replied, "Sir, I am not a brave man - the truth is, I am an utter craven coward. I have never been within the sound of gunshot or in sight of battle in my whole life that I wasn't so scared that I had sweat in the palms of my hands." Years later, when Patton's autobiography was published, it contained this significant statement by the general: "I learned very early in my life never to take counsel of my fears."

Isaiah has spoken in chapter 34 of the sinful world being judged and the people might well be despondent and fear it is all over. He goes on in chapter 35 to speak of the joy of the redeemed as the glorious kingdom is established. He encourages the faithful to be strong and not fearful for their God is with them and will come through for them. What they are experiencing is not the end. The best is yet to be.

The danger of fear is that it stops us doing anything. It paralyses us and we end up living as if life is futile. Isaiah though reminds us to be strong and not to fear. He reminds us that although we might not see God at work in our midst...he is and he will bring his plans and purposes to bear.

There are many examples of fearful people in the Bible who God took and used for his glory. Gideon was hiding away in the winepress and God took him and used him. God told Joshua to be strong and courageous. And God says to us be strong. I am with you. I will never leave nor forsake you.

Let's not become discouraged or despondent as we look at the world around...rather let's take courage and keep serving God and seek to share the gospel with others before its too late.

Pray: asking God for strength to keep trusting him and serving him.

Reflect: do I let fear of the future stop me from serving Jesus?

But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply. (v.21)

Do you remember as kids hearing a story about three industrious little pigs? They built their own houses, and were fine until one hungry old wolf came around looking for a ham dinner! When the big, bad wolf came knocking at the door, he made a lot of threats, and did a lot that scared and intimidated those little pigs. Sometimes we get fearful about things that we shouldn't. What do you think when you walk into work after lunch and someone says, "The boss wants to see you right away"? The first thought is, "Oh, no, what now?" Or how about when the pastor calls up and says, "I'd like to come over and see you this week." We so quickly become fearful. How do we deal with fear? Where is our security? We can learn something from Hezekiah today and tomorrow for here is a man who comes face to face with an enemy who is trying to outwit him and make him afraid.

Notice how the enemy comes – the enemy comes saying that we are on our own and no one will help us. The Assyrian king warns that Egypt will not help them this time. Of course they won't, Isaiah has been warning about this already. We ought not to be putting our trust in other people – our trust should always only ever be in the Lord. The Assyrian king then claims that God is on his side so the victory is his. He is lying of course.

But that is what the devil does. He lies. One of the enemy's greatest attacks against us is to give us the wrong idea of what God is thinking. He tries to get us to believe we are worthless and have sinned too much for God to help us. Don't listen to his lies – be rooted in the Word of God and know what the Lord says. How would the people in Jerusalem know whether the man is telling the truth or not? By listening to what God has ALREADY spoken through Isaiah. God has already promised that the Assyrians wouldn't be winning this one.

And look how the people respond. They are silent. They do not rise to the bait. Hezekiah has already anticipated this attack. Let's be prepared for the devil's attacks by being rooted and grounded in the Bible.

Pray: thanking God for His Word.

Reflect: do I fearfully listen to the devil's lies?

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD. (v.14)

Tom Monaghan in his book “Pizza Tiger” shares an incident that occurred when he was flying his Cessna 172. “I flew over to Pontiac one day that summer to see Eldon Huff. The ceiling was very low when I started back, and once again clouds closed in on me. In trying to ease myself below them, I lost control of the plane. It stalled, and I found myself in a spin. I pulled back on the control yoke with all my might, but I couldn’t budge it. Ploughed fields were whirling up toward me, and I realised there was nothing left to do but pray. I released the controls, closed my eyes, and folded my hands under my chin: ‘Father in Heaven, please help me’ I began, and I felt a miraculous change take place. The spinning stopped and suddenly the plane was flying level again. Great advice when we’re in a tail spin: release the controls, close our eyes, and pray.”

I always find it interesting that we try almost everything before praying to God. It is OK to ask others to pray for us, but we are always well served in praying to God ourselves. Hezekiah has a problem and the first thing he does is lay it before God in prayer. He knows God. He has read His Word. He has obeyed his commands. He has worshipped in the temple. He has prayed before. And so when a crisis comes he does what is natural – he prays.

I heard of a friend who once needed urgent prayer. He called the office of the church he was attending, but nobody was there and he got the answer machine. The message on the machine was, “We’re not here right now, but have you tried taking your problem to the Lord?” The friend felt convicted that he hadn’t been praying himself yet, so he prayed, and God helped him!

Let’s not waste time when trouble comes – let’s go straight to the Lord in prayer.

Pray: thanking God for the privilege of prayer.

Reflect: do I take everything to the Lord in prayer?

In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. (v.17)

Queen Victoria was only eighteen when she succeeded to the throne. Soon afterwards the Lord Chamberlain presented her with several documents that required her signature. Among them was a paper concerning a man who had committed a serious crime. He had been sentenced to death. The Queen's signature was required for his execution to be carried out. But the young Queen was hesitant. 'And must I become party to his death?' she asked. 'I fear it is so, unless Your Majesty desires to exercise her royal prerogative of mercy!' To her delight, Victoria was informed that she had the power to pardon the condemned man. She said, 'As an expression of the spirit in which I desire to rule, I will exercise my royal prerogative!' She wrote the word 'pardoned' on the document and the prisoner was set free.

Hezekiah has been told here in Isaiah 38 to get his affairs in order as he was ill and about to die. He pleaded with God to live for he wanted to continue to serve him and honour him among the people. Hezekiah was also upset because he didn't yet have an heir to his throne. So God would give him his request, and extend his life, also making it possible to have a son. But what a son! Hezekiah's son, Manasseh was evil. Very evil. He was the exact opposite of his dad.

However in being given more years to live, Hezekiah recognised God's hand of pardon on him and we see these wonderful words written down which remind us that God lifted Hezekiah from the pit of destruction and put his sin behind him.

We are grateful to God too for he has lifted us from the pit of destruction and removed our sin from us as far as the East is from the West. Jesus died in our place on the cross of Calvary and we ought to be eternally grateful.

Pray: thanking God for saving us from sin and destruction.

Reflect: do I regularly thank God for my salvation?

Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses. (v.2)

When Satan cannot defeat us as a roaring lion he comes as the deceiving serpent. Back in chapter 37 when the enemy sent a letter, Hezekiah laid it straight before the Lord and prayed for help. Here the Babylonians come as friends with gifts pretending to be happy Hezekiah has overcome his illness and is still alive. But they are deceiving him. He buckles under their kindness and shows them all he has. He is proud of what he has achieved and all that he has gained over the years. What the Assyrians could not do with weapons, the Babylonians did with gifts. God permitted the enemy to test Hezekiah so that the proud king might learn what was really in his heart (2 Chronicles 32:31).

It was a mistake for Hezekiah to show his visitors all his wealth, but pride made him do it. After a time of severe suffering, sometimes it feels so good just to feel good that we let our guard down and fail to watch and pray.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells of having a very close friend while he was imprisoned in the Gulag. They saw eye to eye on everything. They enjoyed the same things; they liked to discuss the same subjects. Solzhenitsyn thought their friendship would last a lifetime. To his astonishment, however, when his friend was offered a privileged position in the prison system he accepted it. That was the first step in a change in his friend that ultimately saw him end up as a torturer who devised horrible and cruel torments against Soviet prisoners. Solzhenitsyn described the fear in his own heart when he realised that simple decisions, made in a moment, in the face of an offer of prosperity, could wreck a life, though attack and personal insult were unable to shake one's faith.

We ought always to be watchful and take everything before the Lord in prayer – including offers of prosperity and blessing.

Pray: asking God to help us watch and pray always.

Reflect: do I lay the everything before the Lord?

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. (v.28)

At the time when most people his age have long ago ridden off into the sunset, Bruce Brown is still in the saddle as a volunteer mounted sheriff's deputy in Oklahoma City. At 85, Mr. Brown is believed to be the oldest mounted sheriff's deputy in the country. He spends many hours on his quarter horse, patrolling public events, helping investigators search for evidence, or visiting with children's groups. People like Bruce Brown are newsworthy because they seem to defy the norm. Our physical limitations usually become more obvious and tend to take over as we get older.

Imperfect, powerless people like us need a God who does not wear out, run down, or give up. There's only one God who qualifies; the "everlasting" God of Israel. Only a God who is eternal is able to stand apart from and above every created thing, untouched by the passing of time and the winding down of His creation.

So while our limitations and weaknesses may frustrate us, our eternal God never suffers any loss at all. Here's another name of God in which we can take real comfort. In fact, comfort is the theme of Isaiah 40: 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God' (Isaiah 40:1). The people of Israel in Isaiah's day needed comfort. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom were under threat from the Assyrian empire, and would be conquered and taken into captivity in 722 B.C.

This was God's judgment for Israel's sin, but those who remained faithful to Him needed to know God had not forgotten them. Even in the middle of judgment, He would give strength to the weary and restore those who had lost their strength. It was obvious where Israel needed to put its trust. God's people had been carrying on an illicit love affair with idols for many years, but these manmade gods could not compare to the eternal God. They would rot, tarnish, and topple over (Isaiah 40:18-20). Israel's trust was misplaced. Where is your trust today?

Pray: thanking God for being the Everlasting God.

Reflect: where is my trust today? Is it in God alone or in my idols?

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (v.10)

Rebekah does not like dogs very much. She has got better over time and particularly with dogs she knows and trusts. It is not uncommon for us to be out walking and enjoying the fresh air blethering away without a care in the world. The next minute Rebekah will come up quickly on one side of me and take my arm. Invariably that means she has spotted a dog up ahead and is unsure of it. She comes close to dad for protection. With me there at her side she is able to walk on past and everything is fine.

What a picture of our pilgrimage through this world! From time to time the fierce-looking obstacles of illness, money problems, or personal conflicts appear before us, striking fear into our hearts. At first we are bewildered and life seems to be at a dead end. But then by faith we make our way to the Saviour, realising we dare not go forward without the assurance of His presence. As we completely trust in Him, He helps us face the future by walking with us each step of the way.

If anxiety and dread are lurking on the threshold of your tomorrow, remember God's wonderful promise in Isaiah 41:10, '*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*' In fact take note of this whole chapter. The Lord says three times '*do not fear*' (v.10, 13, 14). He has promised to help Israel during their times of trouble.

If God is with you, you don't need to be afraid. He will give you strength. Perhaps not always the strength of eagles' wings, but He'll give you at least the strength to walk (Isaiah 40:31).

Pray: thanking God for being our strong tower.

Reflect: do I turn to the Lord for help or suffer alone in my fear and anxiety?

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. (v.1)

The late Vance Havner was one of the most popular Bible teachers and conference speakers in America for a number of decades. Known for his plain-spoken, no-nonsense style of teaching God's Word, Havner was equally as straightforward and unpretentious when it came to the epitaph he wanted on his headstone: "Just a preacher."

One of the greatest portions of the Bible begins in a similarly unpretentious way. Isaiah 42 begins with the phrase, 'Here is my servant' - a simple declaration, but one that carries with it infinite meaning.

Today's passage describes a figure identified as the 'servant' of the Lord. This is a person so amazing, so anointed by God, and so righteous that only the Lord Jesus Christ could fit the description, as Christian interpreters have generally agreed.

At least four times in his prophetic book, Isaiah describes this One called the Lord's Servant. These passages, which include Isaiah 42, 49, 50 and 52 have come to be known as the 'servant songs'. The context surrounding the Servant Songs is Isaiah's message of comfort to Judah's exiles in Babylon (Isaiah 40-66, see Isaiah 40:1). Although Judah's exile and return would take place 150 years in the future, God prophesied the nation's coming judgment and return under a Gentile king (Isaiah 41:25-29).

Ultimately, however, God's Servant is the one who will establish justice on earth. The two comings of Christ paint the picture of an unassuming Servant who brings justice. In His earthly ministry, Jesus was the meek Servant. At His Second Coming, however, He will boldly bring righteousness to the world in His millennial kingdom.

Pray: thanking God for the Servant King.

Reflect: do I think more highly of myself than I ought?

Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you and people in exchange for your life. (v.4)

There was a story of the father and son who worked for months to build a toy sailboat. Every night when he came home from work the man and his boy would disappear into the garage for hours. It was a labour of love - love for each other and for the thing they were creating. The wooden hull was painted bright red and it was trimmed with gleaming white sails. When it was finished, they travelled to a nearby lake for the boat's trial run. Before launching it the father tied a string to its stern to keep it from sailing too far. The boat performed beautifully, but before long a motorboat crossing the lake cut the string, and the sailboat drifted out of sight on the large lake. Attempts to find it were fruitless, and both father and son wept over its loss.

A few weeks later as the boy was walking home from school he passed his favourite toy store and was amazed to see a toy sailboat in the window - his sailboat! He ran inside to claim the boat, telling the proprietor about his experience on the lake. The store owner explained that he had found the boat while on a fishing trip. "You may be its maker," he said, "but as a finder I am its legal owner. You may have it back - for fifty dollars." The boy was stunned at how much it would cost him to regain his boat, but since it was so precious to him he quickly set about earning the money to buy it back. Months later he joyfully walked into the toy store and handed the owner fifty dollars in exchange for his sailboat. It was the happiest day of his life. As he left the store he held the boat up to the sunlight. Its colours gleamed as though newly painted. "I made you, but I lost you," he said. "Now I've bought you back. That makes you twice mine, and twice mine is mine forever."

So precious was Israel to God that he told them not to fear for he would redeem them. So precious are we to God that he sent his own son to the cross to die in our place that we might live.

Pray: thanking God for his amazing grace, mercy and love.

Reflect: do I know how precious I am to God?

Who shapes a god and casts an idol which can profit him nothing? (v.10)

Charlie was a regular visitor at the racetrack. One afternoon he noticed an unusual sight. Right before the first race, a Catholic priest visited one of the horses in the stable area and gave it a blessing. Charlie watched the horse race very carefully, and sure enough the blessed horse came in first! Charlie followed the priest before the next race, and again he went to the stables and performed a similar procedure. Charlie played hunch and put a couple of dollars on the blessed horse. Sure enough the blessed horse came in by two lengths and Charlie won close to fifty bucks! The priest continued the same procedure through the next few races and Charlie won each time. He was now ahead \$1000, so between races Charlie left the track and went to the bank and withdraw his life's savings \$20,000. The biggest race of the day was the last one. Charlie followed the priest and watched carefully which horse he blessed. He then went to the betting window and put his whole \$21,000 bundle of cash on that horse to win. Then Charlie went out to watch the horses race. Down the stretch they came, and as they crossed the finish line, the horse Charlie's fortune was bet on was dead last! Charlie was crushed. He located the priest and told him that he had been watching him bless the horses all day, and they all became winners except the last horse on which he had bet his life savings. Charlie then asked, "What happened to the last horse which you blessed? Why didn't it win like the others?" "That's the trouble with you Protestants," sighed the priest. "You can never tell the difference between a blessing and the Last Rites."

The warning here in Isaiah 44 is that age old warning to the children of Israel – don't put your trust in idols, put your trust in God alone. And yet for some reason the people liked to make idols and worship them even although they cannot do us any good. And we are still at it today. Making idols of money, houses, gadgets, clothes, jobs, lucky charms, etc. Its time to stop being silly, and time to trust in God alone who says '*I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God.*' (v.6)

Pray: asking God to forgive you for worshipping the idols in your life.

Reflect: what am I putting my trust in?

Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God and there is no other. (v.22)

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in the minds of some of us, was the greatest preacher since the apostle Paul. When Spurgeon was 15 years of age, he had not come to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. On a blustery, snowy Sunday morning, he decided to go to church. He couldn't get to his planned destination because the weather was so bad. So he turned into a side street, and went into a Methodist church. The preacher didn't even get there. Only fifteen people had come to the church. A layman decided worship ought to take place, so he got up to preach. He used Isaiah 45:22, '*Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth.*' In ten minutes he had exhausted all that he could think to say.

Then he noticed a boy in the back, under the balcony. He said, "Young man, you look like you're in trouble. Look unto Jesus and be saved." That's exactly what happened that morning. Charles Haddon Spurgeon gave his life to Christ. That troubled young man became the mightiest preacher of the last century. He was led to faith in Christ by a man nobody knows - an obscure layman. All we need to do to be saved is to look to Jesus.

Back in Isaiah's time the people thought they could go it alone or else they took time looking to their idols. God comes to them in Isaiah 45 and reminds them that it is he who made the world and everything in it. He is the potter that takes the clay and makes it into something beautiful. He declares that those who carry about idols of wood are ignorant. He calls on all nations to turn to him and be saved.

And that is the same cry today – turn to Jesus and him alone and he will save you. Jesus died in our place that our sins could be forgiven. The only way to God is through Jesus (John 14:6). Know that yourself and share it with others before it is too late for them.

Pray: thanking God for the gift of salvation.

Reflect: have I turned to Jesus for my salvation?

I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. (v.4)

Henry Moorhouse, the 19th-century English evangelist, was feeling loaded down with the burdens of his ministry. Then the Lord gave him a tender reminder of His care.

When he came home one day, his young daughter, Minnie, whose legs were paralysed, was sitting in her wheelchair. He was going to take a package upstairs to his wife when his daughter asked if she could carry it. Moorhouse said, “Minnie dear, how can you possibly carry the package? You cannot even carry yourself.”

With a smile on her face, Minnie said, “I know, Papa. But if you will give me the package, I will hold it while you carry me.”

Moorhouse saw this as a picture of his relationship to God and the burdens of ministry he was carrying. But praise God, he could proceed with confidence, knowing that the Lord was carrying him.

It is this picture Isaiah shares in chapter 46. God reminds the people of Israel that he has carried them from the womb and he will carry them to the tomb. He watches over them and sustains them. And this despite their sin and rebellion. God loves his children. He cannot stand their sin and ultimately his own son took the punishment for that on his back. God will carry them through it all.

I don't know what you're struggling with just now but be reminded that the God who made you and loves you has promised to carry you through the ups and downs of life. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

Pray: thanking God that he carries us through life.

Reflect: do I try and do it all on my own or do I let the Lord lead and guide?

Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself 'I am and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children. Both of these will overtake you in a moment on a single day. (v.8)

Three guys are out having a relaxing day fishing. Out of the blue, they catch a mermaid who begs to be set free in return for granting each of them a wish. Now one of the guys just doesn't believe it, and says, "Okay, if you can really grant wishes, then double my IQ." The mermaid says, "Done." Suddenly the guy starts reciting Shakespeare flawlessly and analysing it with extreme insight. The second guy is so amazed, he says to the mermaid, "Triple my IQ." The mermaid says, "Done." The guy starts to spout out all the mathematical solutions to problems that have been stumping all the scientists in various fields-physics, chemistry, etc. The last guy is so enthralled with the changes that his friends that he says to the mermaid, "Quintuple my IQ." The mermaid looks at him and says, "You know, I don't usually try to change people's minds when they make a wish, but I really wish that you would reconsider." The guy says, "No, I want you to make my IQ five times higher, and if you don't do it, I won't set you free." "Please," says the mermaid, "You don't understand what you're asking, it will change your entire view on the universe. Won't you ask for something else...a million pounds, anything?" But no matter what the mermaid said, the guy insisted on having his IQ increased by five times its usual power. So the mermaid sighed and said, "Done." And he became a woman.

The point is, things don't always go according to *your* plans. Here in Isaiah 47 we learn that as God warns the Babylonians. The folks in Babylon had never known defeat. They had all their five year and ten year plans written in stone. They had thought that they were in control of their future. But they were wrong. The same happens in our lives when we try and work out our own plans and ignore God. What we think can't possibly happen all of a sudden can. Its time to let go of our own scheming and start following God's leading.

Pray: asking God to help you follow his plan for your life.

Reflect: do I follow my own plans at all costs?

They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock, he split the rock and the water gushed out. (v.21)

An intriguing painting is on display in the Louvre in Paris. It portrays Faust (the legendary German magician who bartered away his soul to the devil) sitting across from Satan at a chessboard. Satan is gloating over what appears to be the checkmate of Faust's king. The magician's expression is that of a beaten man.

According to an often told story, a famous chess master visited the gallery one day and studied the painting with great care. All at once he startled everyone around him by shouting excitedly, "It's a lie! It's a lie! The king and the knight have another move."

Isaiah assured the people of Judah that God always provides a way of escape. Although they would be deported to Babylon because of their sinfulness, Isaiah prophesied that a future day of release would come when they would have to leave hurriedly. But they wouldn't have to worry. Just as God had provided water for the Israelites in the desert, He would also provide for them on their long trek homeward.

I wonder how many 'hopeless' experiences you have faced, situations you thought you would never get through, and you prayed to God and he worked that miracle and opened a way for you to go through? I'm sure we can all think of occasions God has answered our prayers way beyond our wildest dreams and imaginations. Our God is great and mighty. He has promised to give us a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). And he has promised to never leave us nor forsake us.

We can trust God for all things in life. He can never be checkmated.

Pray: thanking God for all he has done in our lives.

Reflect: how did I feel when God brought me through that 'hopeless' situation? Give him thanks once more for that answer to prayer.

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. (v.6)

In Keeping the Spirit of Christmas, Handel H. Brown writes, “There is a beautiful contrast between light and noise. You watch the sun rising in the east, quietly stealing into the sky, dispelling the night, and gently waking all nature to life. It does not shout...it moves silently across the world, transforming it. And so it is with Jesus...He is the Light that enables us to see things more clearly.”

We celebrate Christmas tomorrow, 25 December, just three days after the day with the fewest hours of daylight. It seems appropriate that each year our days grow increasingly dark until just before Christmas - when Jesus was born to bring light into the world.

Before Jesus was born on earth, Isaiah 49 tells us that God chose Him to bring light into a dark world (v.1). The birth of Jesus was an act of love that God had planned from the beginning of time. God was willing to send His only Son to earth for us. He would be ‘*a light for the Gentiles*’ and he would ‘*bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*’ It is great to be able to read Isaiah back in light of the time we live in, knowing all that Jesus accomplished on the cross for us.

This is one of the Servant Songs and it speaks clearly of God sending his own son into the world to save the people and in the future to restore Israel. The heavens, the earth and the mountains are called to sing praise since God is coming to comfort his people.

We too as we look forward to Christmas Day can remember the gift of love that lights up the world. As we light our final candle on the advent candles in church we remember Jesus light of the world.

Pray: thanking God for Jesus, the light of the world.

Reflect: in what ways have I seen Jesus light up my dark world? Give him thanks for revealing the truth to you.

Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. (v.10)

Many of us have heard the chilling German folk story of “The Pied Piper.” In this centuries-old tale, the town of Hamelin hires a mysterious stranger to get rid of the town’s rats. He walks their streets playing a magic flute, and the rats rush to follow him out of town.

Hamelin refuses to pay, however, since the stranger did the job so easily. The “pied piper” warns them that he will get his revenge. One day he appears again, playing his flute. This time it is the children who follow him out of town and through a door that opens magically into a mountain. The door shuts and no one ever sees the children again.

The mysterious stranger was both attractive and deceptive. Those who heard his flute and responded went to their doom. Today, many such “pied pipers” seek to draw people into darkness. Only Jesus Christ shines the light of truth into the hearts of all who come to Him.

In these closing verses of Isaiah’s third Servant Song, the prophet adds a postscript to the Servant’s challenge to His accusers. The Servant had said that anyone who tried to oppose Him would fall apart like a moth-eaten garment. Isaiah, who had seen the Lord in all of His awesome holiness and glory (Isaiah 6:1-4), understood the fear of the Lord. So he offered his testimony to the truth of the Servant’s claims.

If we fear the Lord and have a reverent respect for him then we will obey his words. Obeying his words leads to salvation. When we are in the dark we should look for the light of the Lord rather than trying to light our own fire or follow someone else’s light.

Today we celebrate the birth of the light of the world. Let’s commit afresh to walking in his light.

Pray: thanking God for his indescribable gift to the world.

Reflect: do I walk in the light of the Lord?

Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults...my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations. (v.7-8)

Fear of the disapproval of others can often affect the way we act. Some Native Americans recognised this and used scorn and ridicule to promote social order. For instance, when a child of the Fox tribe was taught the do's and don'ts of his culture, his elders didn't hold over his head an abstract rule of morality. Nor did they threaten him with punishment now or in the hereafter. Instead, they said to him, "The people of the village may say things about you."

In that culture the power of social restraint was used as a motivation for right conduct. But in speaking to the tribes of ancient Israel, the Lord warned His people that the 'reproach of men,' worrying about what people think, could be their downfall (v.7-16). Their concern with what others said about them could cause them to make compromises. Instead, they were called on to trust the Lord and seek only His approval.

In life we worry about what others say about us. We all long to be liked and loved so there is a temptation to give in and run with the crowd. As a child I was like that. I was a nice Christian boy on Sunday but then as the week progressed and the boys were out playing I began to compromise to fit in with their lifestyle. I would use the language they used and treat people they way they did. It wasn't until later I realised I was giving in to the ways of the world and running from living God's way.

Following God's way is important for us...especially as Isaiah reminds us that God's righteousness and salvation last forever. The crowd will pass and their interest in us will wane. But God will remain right and just and true to the very end. Let's not give in to the temptation to compromise and let's not worry what others think of us. Let's only concern ourselves with what God thinks.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for seeking the approval of men over him.

Reflect: do I desire the praise of men or God?

For the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard. (v.12)

On New Year's Eve 1916, a chaplain spoke to a gathering of British Commonwealth soldiers in Cairo, Egypt. Standing before men whose lives had been turned upside down by World War I, Oswald Chambers talked to them about yesterday and tomorrow.

Chambers said, "At the end of the year we turn with eagerness to all that God has for the future, and yet anxiety is apt to arise from remembering the yesterdays. Our present enjoyment of God's grace is apt to be checked by the memory of yesterday's sins and blunders. But God is the God of our yesterdays, and He allows the memory of them in order to turn the past into a ministry of spiritual culture for the future. God reminds us of the past lest we get into a shallow security in the present...Let the past sleep, but let it sleep on the bosom of Christ. Leave the irreparable past in His hands, and step out into the irresistible future with Him" (taken from 'My Utmost For His Highest').

In the first verses of this chapter, we see God's promises to restore His people (v.4-6). Then, in verse 7 Isaiah tells us the good news: peace and salvation are found in God. The people will be comforted and will burst into '*songs of joy*' because the Lord '*has redeemed Jerusalem*' (v.9). God promised Israel, '*The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard*' (v.12). We too can take comfort in knowing that our God will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

In a few days we will see the end of another year – a year in which we have experienced good times and difficult days – and look forward to the start of a New Year filled with its hopes and dreams. Whatever you think of a New Year in front of you, remember that God goes with you – before and behind. Keep looking to him.

Pray: thanking God for the year past and asking him to continue with you for the year ahead.

Reflect: do I know the Lord's presence behind and before?

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. (v.4-5)

A man had the duty to raise a drawbridge to allow the steamers to pass on the river below and to lower it again for trains to cross over on land. One day, this man's son visited him, desiring to watch his father at work. Quite curious, as most boys are, he peeked into a trapdoor that was always left open so his father could keep an eye on the great machinery that raised and lowered the bridge. Suddenly, the boy lost his footing and tumbled into the gears. As the father tried to reach down and pull him out, he heard the whistle of an approaching train. He knew the train would be full of people and that it would be impossible to stop the fast-moving locomotive, therefore, the bridge must be lowered! A terrible dilemma confronted him: if he saved the people, his son would be crushed in the cogs. Frantically, he tried to free the boy, but to no avail. Finally, the father put his hand to the lever that would start the machinery. He paused and then, with tears he pulled it. The giant gears began to work and the bridge clamped down just in time to save the train. The passengers, not knowing what the father had done, were laughing and making merry; yet the bridgekeeper had chosen to save their lives at the cost of his son's.

What an incredible picture of the gospel is presented to us in Isaiah 53. The last of the Servant Songs is the most powerful. Isaiah 53 looks ahead to the death of Christ on the cross for us. We might consider him stricken by God but the truth is Jesus left the glories of heaven knowing he would fulfil God's plan to save and redeem his people. It is only through his sacrifice that our sins are forgiven and that we can be reconciled to a holy God. He took the punishment for our sin upon himself. The perfect Lamb of God gave up his life for us.

Pray: thanking God for accepting Christ's sacrifice on the cross for us.

Reflect: on all that it meant for Jesus to be pierced for your transgressions and crushed for your iniquities.

I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. (v.12)

There was an old Glasgow professor named MacDonald who, along with a Scottish chaplain, had bailed out of an airplane behind German lines. They were put in a prison camp. A high wire fence separated the Americans from the British, and the Germans made it next to impossible for the two sides to communicate. MacDonald was put in the American barracks and the chaplain was housed with the Brits.

Every day the two men would meet at the fence and exchange a greeting. Unknown to the guards, the Americans had a little homemade radio and were able to get news from the outside, something more precious than food in a prison camp. Every day, MacDonald would take a headline or two to the fence and share it with the chaplain in the ancient Gaelic language, indecipherable to the Germans.

One day, news came over the little radio that the German High Command had surrendered and the war was over. MacDonald took the news to his friend, then stood and watched him disappear into the British barracks. A moment later, a roar of celebration came from the barracks.

Life in that camp was transformed. Men walked around singing and shouting, waving at the guards, even laughing at the dogs. When the German guards finally heard the news three nights later, they fled into the dark, leaving the gates unlocked. The next morning, Brits and Americans walked out as free men. Yet they had truly been set free three days earlier by the news that the war was over.

Isaiah was sharing with Israel here in chapter 54 that God was coming to save them and restore them – all they had to do was wait. We too simply have to wait. We're like those men in the prison camp. The war is over. Jesus has won. We need to simply wait out the remaining days until we experience our complete freedom in heaven.

Pray: thanking God that Jesus has won the battle.

Reflect: am I looking forward to heaven?

Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul might live. (v.3)

There is a story about two people who wanted to immigrate to America. They scraped up all their money to buy two tickets on an ocean liner headed for New York. With their last bit of money, they were able to buy enough bread and cheese to live on for the two week journey across the ocean. For the first couple of days, the bread and cheese were okay. But by the tenth day, the bread was getting pretty hard and the cheese was starting to mould.

Every day they would take walks out on the deck and wander by the dining room where they would watch the other passengers lining up and the huge buffet tables filled with all sorts of incredible foods.

Finally, they approached one of the cabin stewards and begged if there was any way they could perhaps work to earn enough to buy maybe one meal up in the dining room. But to their surprise, they found out that all their meals were paid for with the price of their tickets. If they had paid attention when they bought their tickets, they could have spent the entire trip in the dining room feasting on roast beef instead of cheese and crackers.

There are many in this world who do the same with Jesus. They do not listen and so do not hear the good news of the gospel. This past week people have been celebrating Christmas yet many forgot what Christmas is all about – the best gift we could ever receive.

Here in Isaiah 55 the Lord cries out to the people to come to him. Those who are thirsty are invited to come and drink and those who are hungry to come and eat the bread of life. He is conscious that people do not pay attention so he says in verse 3 '*Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul might live.*' Are you listening to the Lord? Are you found in His Word so you might find out more from Him?

Pray: thanking God for his invitation to come and dine with him.

Reflect: do I listen for the Lord speaking to me?

For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. (v.7)

I remember the Sunday morning a rather dirty and smelly young man came into the church in Crieff. He didn't have his Sunday best on like the rest of us – no tie, in fact if truth be told that was the least of the dress problems. His clothes were scruffy, worn and dirty. No one sat next to him in the pew. I watched as people who usually sat in that pew took one look and picked another pew for the week, and as others looked and moved on by without so much as a word to him. After 5 minutes I set the sound levels on the sound desk, took off my jacket and my tie and went and sat next to him. I asked his name and we chatted a bit. At the end of the service he shook my hand and said thank you for welcoming him and sitting with him. A reminder for me that sometimes we expect people to look like us and act like us to be worthy of a place in church and by implication in heaven.

Here in Isaiah 56 we enter the third book of Isaiah, as scholars think it was split into three. We come to a section where God through Isaiah is prophesying that when the Messiah comes all will be welcome in God's family. The kingdom is not just for the Jews. It's not just for the religious elite. Here Isaiah very clearly shares that all who love the Lord and walk in his ways will be welcome. God's house will be called '*a house of prayer for all nations.*'

And that is great news for us. For we are not Jews and so would have been excluded. We are Gentiles and here Isaiah says the foreigner and eunuch will be welcome in. Jesus came to draw all people unto himself – Jew and Gentile. What do we have to do to enter in? John tells us in Mark 1 as he prepares the way that we have to repent of our sins and turn to follow the Saviour. Isaiah prophesied that we should maintain justice and do what is right, keep the Sabbath, and hold fast to the Lord's teaching. Let's rejoice that God welcomes all who will come to him in repentance into his family.

Pray: thanking God for welcoming us into his family and kingdom.

Reflect: do I maintain justice and do what is right?