

A HUMILIATED NATION

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

The Lord seeks to show mercy and compassion even to His disobedient people.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Isaiah 13–31

+ SETTING:

God's people always had a tough time obeying. Faithfulness should have marked their lives, but often rebellion was the major key. How did God respond? Did He throw them out and bind Himself to another group of people? By no means! God remains faithful though His people are faithless. God remains true though His people stray. God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love and truth, staying true to a thousand generations of sinful men and women who love Him (Ex. 34:6-7). God is just and true, and He is loving and merciful, but He does correct and judge—all to bring us to repentance.

DAY 1

READ:

Isaiah 22:8-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 22:11

NOTES

We give a lot of thought to preparing for the battles of life. Like Judah, we fortify our walls and build up our defenses. We plan and work hard to prevent destruction. But there is one simple point God wants to show us through a passage like Isaiah 22:8-14. We spend so much time and effort on our work that we never stop to consider the One who controls everything in this world.

Here's a great diagnostic question. Do you factor God into everything in your life? Do you consider Him? How real is He to you, really? Maybe you consciously ignore God. You sense He's there and He cares and He could do something about your situation, but you turn the other way, trying to make it on your own. That's the picture of Judah. The people rebelled and sinned, putting their trust in themselves. Maybe you think God couldn't possibly care about your life, and you've thought that for so long that you can't seem to get out of that rut. But the gospel tells us that God does care. He is involved. He stepped into this world to show how much He cares. He got His hands dirty.

Wherever you are on that spectrum, we all fall into the sin of disbelief. We all find ourselves at one time or another failing to factor God into our lives. God is saying to us today that it doesn't have to be that way. We aren't alone. To some that is very good news, like a balm to your soul. To others, that is bad news because you know you've run from Him on purpose. But to all, it is ultimate reality: God is there, and He's not going anywhere.

Wherever you are right now, God is calling you to Himself. He has all you need. You're working yourself to death, and He's offering His peace and His easy yoke and the kind of rest only God can offer (Matt. 11:28). You can go to Him right now and unburden yourself. Why not trust Him?

What difference would it make for you today to stop and factor God into your life right now?

DAY 2

READ:

Isaiah 25:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 25:1

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"The love of Christ, being the love of God, is *effectual and fruitful* in producing all the good things which he willeth unto his beloved. He loves life, grace, and holiness into us; he loves us also into covenant, loves us into heaven. Love in him is properly to will good to any one: whatever good Christ by his love wills to any, that willing is *operative* of that good."²

-John Owen (c. 1616-1683)

The prophet Isaiah had a big vision of God—a really big vision of who God is. The opening verses of Isaiah 25 are just one sample of that bigness as he exalted God, praising His name and His accomplishments of wonder, realizing it's all part of His plan.

Isaiah knew God is not only the God of the present but the God of the past and the future too. He is over and above all of time and history. God accomplished wonders, and those wonders were planned long ago. He wasn't caught by surprise and then improvised, coming up with a spectacular last-minute shot to put Him in the win column once again. No, everything that happens in this world is by the sovereign plan of God, who knew beforehand what would come to pass. He is perfectly faithful.

Commentator Alec Motyer notes Isaiah's understanding of God's faithfulness is so expansive that it refers to "every imaginable faithfulness or perfect or quintessential faithfulness."¹ Whatever we imagine faithfulness to be, God is that, perfectly, fully, and completely. He is the very definition of faithful. Therefore, He is faithful in bringing about His planned wonders. Everything that happens in this world is in the strong, perfect hand of God. That's hard for us to believe, but it's true.

That means your life is also in His hands. He is proving His perfect faithfulness to you every day. Because God is over all that was, is, and ever will be, we can trust His divine plan will work out for our good and His glory. The Bible promises us that, and if God is perfectly faithful, He can't fail His own words in the Scriptures.

How should the perfect faithfulness of God impact how you face your circumstances today?

DAY 3

READ:

Isaiah 25:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 25:3-5

NOTES

There are two groups of people highlighted in the opening verses of Isaiah 25. There are the strong people (v. 3) and there are the poor people (v. 4). The strong live in well-fortified cities. They instill fear in others around them. They themselves seem to fear nothing. The poor, on the other hand, are weak and needy. They have no stronghold of their own to claim. There is no city wall protecting them, and there is no fortress for their home. The storms hit them hard, and they have no shade from the heat.

But in the logic of the gospel, the strong are actually weak and the poor are actually rich. In the confusion of this world, the oppressor doesn't see his need while the oppressed do. When God speaks, it is hard for the oppressor to hear because he has no evident need, but the oppressed only have need. This, of course, sounds like we're talking about material strength and poverty—those well fed and well secured from the outside world and the natural elements have a disadvantage when it comes to hearing God's voice. That isn't what we're saying. Rather, it's all about the posture of the heart. Spiritually speaking, are you strong and "without need" or are you poor and needy?

Isaiah makes it clear whose side God is on. He is for the poor and against the strong, not because of their status in life but because of their posture of heart. It is the needy to whom God comes. It is the strong and proud against whom God sends judgment. The difference comes down to this very simple but profound question: Do we need God in our lives or do we believe we are doing just fine on our own?

The truth is we sometimes feel like the strong and sometimes we feel like the poor. The key is recognizing that strength comes when we humble ourselves to the poverty of spirit that finds its dependence on God. The reassurance, though, is that the sins of the strong, proud spirit can still be forgiven by God as well.

How would you describe your heart posture before God today?

DAY 4

READ:

Isaiah 30:18-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 30:18

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #17: GOD IS JUST

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

Consider the patience of God. What has He endured from you? Have you always loved Him? Always obeyed Him? Always followed Him? Always sought Him first in every decision? Have you not run from Him, hidden from Him, and questioned Him when things didn't go your way? And yet, He loves and cares for you still. He has not revoked the offer—no, the promise—of salvation for all who believe.

God is far more patient than all of us combined. His patience is eternal, if He so desires. He never wavers. He doesn't tap His toes in anxiousness. He doesn't huff and puff in frustration. Through our wandering lives, He waits to show mercy and is rising up to show compassion (Isa. 30:18).

Praise the Lord that He is so! If God were not patient, would anyone be saved? We do not come out of the womb and begin an upward progression of faithfulness and godliness. We are sinful from the beginning, and as we grow, we add sin to sin. The Lord is patient through it all, and sometimes we even look at this wonderful patience and grow impatient. We wonder what's taking Him so long to do something, to answer a prayer, to intervene in the exact way we want. But Peter says in his second letter that the Lord doesn't delay His promise; He's not slow at it—He's fulfilling it in His timing that all may come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lord's patience is your salvation.

Isn't it wonderful how patient the Lord is with us? Even when we come to faith, we still falter and fall. We still disobey. We still run from Him. But what does He do in return? He waits for us, working out everything in our lives to bring us safely home.

How has the patience of God worked wonderfully in your life?

DAY 5

READ:

Isaiah 30:18-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 30:20-22

NOTES

John Calvin once said, paraphrasing, our hearts are like idol factories.³ We constantly find new things to love, and instead of treating them as the good things they are, we place them on the throne of our hearts and bow down in worship to them. Now maybe we don't physically bow down, and there probably isn't a real throne room in our house with some idol sitting on it. The reality is it may all be internal but still very real.

Humanity has been in the idol business since the fall in the garden of Eden. When we read the Old Testament, we see time and time again the way God's people establish new religions and new gods and new laws and new traditions. It's almost as if the Lord God who created and sustains it all weren't even there.

We also see in the Bible how difficult it is for God's people to get rid of their idols. Just go read through the history of Israel's kings. One sets up an idol, another takes the idol down, then another puts it back up. It's an endless circle of idol worship like a dog returning to its vomit (Prov. 26:11). We are like that too, though it may not be as obvious. When we take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing, when we replace God with something else as the great love of our hearts, we have fashioned an idol.

So how is this cycle broken? Isaiah 30:20-22 helps us see how the presence of the Lord overturns the idols of our hearts. When God breaks in by His wondrous grace, He starts rearranging our internal loves and desires. He clears out the cobwebs so we can see. He instructs us by His Word and shows us the right path. When God lovingly takes over our lives, we gladly throw out the old idols. What was once so precious to us now looks like filth after all.

What idols of your heart need to be dethroned today by God's wonderful grace? Pray to the Lord accordingly.

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind."⁴

-C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

POINT 1: The Lord will be vindicated in judging iniquity (Isa. 22:8-14).

The people of Judah trusted in themselves and their fortifications rather than the Creator. God does not remain silent in the face of our disobedience. He intervenes to _____ us, _____ us, and _____ us.



Why might we find it so hard to abandon our self-reliance and trust God alone?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #17: GOD IS JUST

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POINT 2: The Lord will be praised for judging iniquity (Isa. 25:1-5).

Isaiah praised the Lord because of his _____ knowledge of God, which informed his understanding of God's _____ and _____ against the nations.



Why should the promise and fulfillment of God's judgment cause people to worship the Lord?

God's justice is _____ the oppressor, but it is also _____ the poor and oppressed. People who come to the Lord in faith seeking refuge and salvation will find it, just as the Lord has _____ and promised.

POINT 3: The Lord will be merciful after judging iniquity (Isa. 30:18-22).

Sin deserves eternal punishment, but our just God waits to show _____ ! The Lord is not eager to _____ but patient to _____ .



What does it mean to wait for the Lord?

God's mercy is also experienced in the immediacy of God's _____ and His _____ , which _____ the way we live and see the world.



How has God's mercy changed the way you live and see the world?

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has provided the means of our forgiveness and righteousness, we live in full reliance on Him as we seek to declare God's plan of salvation to the nations.

- **HEAD:** How will the justice and mercy of God change the way you see yourself and others?
- **HEART:** What sins are prohibiting your grateful worship of God? How will you heed God's call to repent?
- **HANDS:** How will you reflect God's mercy today?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"He has seen us sinning and has borne with it. He who forbade us to sin before we did it does not stop waiting to pardon us even after we have sinned. The one we have rejected is calling us. We have turned away from him, but he has not turned away . . . We turn our backs on his face, so to speak, when we reject his words, when we trample his commandments under foot; but he who sees that we reject him still calls out to us by his commandments and waits for us by his patience, stands behind us, and calls us back when we have turned away."⁵

-Gregory the Great
(c. 540-604)