

Isaiah 12

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to Isaiah, the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 12. Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 12.

On that day you will say, I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away, and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation.

I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. The joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

So on to the end of this chapter. As we hinted this morning, of course, when Isaiah was preaching in the 8th century before Christ, it wasn't such a great time.

It wasn't a time for true religion. It wasn't prospering very well at all. It was a time when actually things were getting worse and worse. Isaiah could look backwards, just like you perhaps, and looking back he could see things in some part of a golden age.

[1 : 16] And now as he looked in his own present day, he was seeing things getting worse and worse and worse. And as he looked forward into the future, had he been left to his own mind, he would have thought things would just continue to get worse and worse.

I mean, after all, what kind of problems do you have in Isaiah's day, but the same as we have in our day? You had nominalism, that kind of religion and name only.

Isaiah talks in chapter 2, in chapter 1, of people coming to worship him. They're coming to his courts. They're offering sacrifices. They're there at the new moon times.

They're there at the feastal times. They're offering all the right sacrifices in the right place. And what does God say? He says, you're just trampling my courts.

He took no delight whatsoever in their religion. Why? Is it that he didn't like sacrifice? Of course he did. He commanded that such be offered.

[2 : 19] But he says, your hands, the hands with which you offer sacrifice, are stained with blood. In your own conduct, you are willing to hurt people.

And having hurt people, denied them social justice, you then think you can just come and worship me as if that was all just fine.

No, says God. That's nominal religion, and that's not proper. It's not true religion. So there's that kind of nominalism.

We have that in our own day and generation. Same kind of thing, where people feel they can conduct themselves one way when they're out there, so long as when they come here at the stated hours of worship and join with the people of the Lord, offering the sacrifice of their lips in worship and so on, so long as they do that worship time in here, they think it doesn't matter what it's like out there.

Listen, the God of Isaiah is still our God. And if the cross tells us anything, it's that true religion does matter.

[3 : 37] Conduct, your own Christian conduct out there matters before you come to confess God's name in here.

We cannot separate the two. God never gives us that liberty. They must always be enmeshed together. In Isaiah's day, people were pulling them apart.

It was also a day in generation in which God's word was mocked. People were actually poking fun at God's word. They were mocking the very idea that God had a purpose, that God had a plan.

Let it come, they were saying, so that we may see it. They were just mocking it. They were rejecting the God of Israel and the word of the God of Israel, despising it, treating it as if it was something of no great value.

So when they saw this great colossus of Assyria, the great army led by this powerful, mighty king, it brought the people into crisis.

[4 : 53] And they thought, how are we going to cope with this crisis? How are we going to survive as a small nation with this great nation of Assyria in the north and coming closer and closer to us in the south?

And they thought, well, the way to cope with it, we don't need to go to God's word. We don't need to go back to God's law. We don't need to go back to what God says.

What they did was, they actually began to think in things in a worldly fashion. They began to say, well, Assyria is powerful. Which powerful nation can we get that will side with us against Syria?

That's what they wanted, you see. They wanted to think in worldly terms how they could deal with this crisis. And really, that kind of worldliness, I suppose, still persists to this day.

When we see things coming into our own lives or our own congregations, what do we do? When we see the encroachment of this huge power of the world, where we see it in some way distracting the Lord's people, we see many churches being shut down, even in where I live just now in Bathgate.

[6 : 09] Huge, big tower of a church there, a church of Scotland, just being closed down the year before last. And it's only this morning I found out that it's being turned into another nightclub.

It reminds me very much of what happened to D Street here in Aberdeen. And when you see that kind of thing happening, you think, well, how do you deal with it? How do you actually cope with that?

How do you reach out to people in the world? And very often, our thinking can become very worldly. We think we've got to become like them so that we can deal with them.

And God says, no. If you want to deal with that enemy out there, you've got to become like me. You've got to respect me in my holiness as you go and deal with these people in their unholiness.

God's holiness was not hugely appreciated in the eighth century before Christ. Nor was God's power. And possibly, that's still the way it is today.

[7 : 19] All I'm doing there in the opening is just showing that Isaiah's world and our world are not that different. But what's brilliant is that Isaiah has been given a message from God.

And this message says, it's not always going to be like that. The world that you're looking out in Isaiah, a world that seems to be getting worse and worse, it will not always be like that.

In fact, he says, wonderful things are going to happen. Why? Because I will intervene. I personally will intervene.

I will come as king and I will change this world. And that's what Jesus did. God personally intervened in the world.

He came in the person of his own son and he came to set things right. What you and I call the kingdom of God. A beautiful theme in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

[8 : 30] Jesus keeps on saying the phrase the kingdom of God. God intervening. God reigning to set things right. And great things have happened.

Well, that's what Isaiah prophesied in chapter 7, 14, in chapter 9, 67, and in chapter 11, almost the whole chapter.

But as a result of that, in chapter 12, Isaiah actually has a confidence to say to the people, he says, you know this, a day is going to come when you will say, I will praise you, O Lord.

Although you are angry with me, your anger has turned away, and you've comforted me. Do you know that that little psalm, what we know as Isaiah 12, you can divide it into at least two parts.

The opening words in that day, you will say in verse 1, the you is singular. In that day, you individually will say, I will praise you, O Lord.

[9 : 44] So you've got this picture of a whole nation made up of individuals, each of whom will praise God. And then in verse 4, the you is in the plural.

In that day, you, plural, will say, give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known among the nations what he has done, proclaim that his name is exalted.

it. There, in that second part of the psalm, you've got a whole nation together who are going to actually long to give thanks to the Lord.

They're going to encourage one another to do so, to confess his name, and then to proclaim his name to all the world around. Now, I doubt if we could have anything higher than we would love to see the people of God do in our generation than to utter these words from their hearts.

Can you think of anyone tonight whom you would love to hear saying these words, I will praise you, O Lord. Although you are angry with me, your anger has turned away, you've comforted me.

[11 : 01] Can you think of people tonight and that's what you would love as they are revived in their own souls, they will say, surely, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid.

Can you think of anyone tonight whom you'd love to see becoming a Christian and they would say, the Lord, the Lord is my strength, my song, he's become my salvation.

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Can you think of anything higher than a whole congregation made up of true worshipping people addressing one another and saying to one another, give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known among the nations what he has done, proclaim that his name is exalted.

Isn't it wonderful? Can you imagine longing to come to church, not just so that you would hear a sermon from God's word, can you imagine longing to come together so that you could address one another, so that we would actually address each other and say, you give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known among the nations what he has done.

And the other one is addressing you and saying, you proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for he has done great things. Imagine if you actually met people on this Lord's day and they said to you, listen my friend, sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things.

[12 : 34] Let it be known to all the world. Imagine if somebody came to you personally and said, shout a loud friend, sing for joy, people of Zion. Do you know why?

Because great is the Holy One of Israel among you. I mean, this is the kind of stuff that I longed to see when I was minister in Dingwall.

I would love to have seen the people individually using the words of the opening three verses as they addressed God for what he had done for them.

And then the congregation as a whole, meeting in fellowship to encourage one another in confession and proclamation. And I'm sure it's the same for yourselves too.

Please don't waste the time when you come to church, as we call it. Don't just think of it as an hour to spend listening to someone.

[13 : 36] See, when you praise God using that book that you're using, use it wisely. Have you noticed how many of these psalms are psalms that you use to address one another in praise of God?

It's not that you're addressing God always, but you are actually so earnestly longing that God would be praised, that you address one another. What good is it if we say these words without meaning them?

How honoring can that ever be to God? He wants everything to honor Him. Let's look at this psalm very briefly tonight.

First of all, this opening part with a singular you is used. In that day you will say, I will praise you, O Lord. You know, praise is good.

And it really is good when you meet with other people who praise. That's partly why Christians love to meet together. Of course it is.

[14 : 43] And it's great, you know, that we have this desire to praise. And Isaiah is saying to these people, you know, at the moment that's not the way it is. but a day is going to come in that day, once God has intervened through His King's Son, once the kingdom of God has come and He has begun to change things, in that day you will say, I will praise you, O Lord.

Praise is good, so long as you know why you're praising God. No point in saying to God, I praise you. And if somebody said to you, why are you praising Him?

Well, I don't know. God wants you to know why you praise Him. He even gives you the words here. I will praise you for what?

Although, and I don't like the word although, because the although is not there in the Hebrew. I will praise you, O Lord. You are angry with me.

Your anger has turned away, and you've comforted me. See, the although brings in something that shouldn't be there. This is not somebody praising God despite the fact that God was angry with him.

[16 : 04] This is somebody saying, I will praise you, O Lord. You were angry with me. And that's the first thing you see. He's praising God because God was angry with him.

Now, when you think of it, why on earth should we actually praise God for being angry with us? What good is God's anger to us?

As I was thinking about this in the afternoon, I did a quick scan looking over the words for wrath and anger in the New Testament, asking myself, is this the kind of theme that belongs only to the Old Testament, so that now that we're in the New Testament, it's all very much to do with the love of God.

And I came to the conclusion the love of God is very much what the New Testament is about. Does that mean that the wrath and the anger of God never occur?

Far from it. Read the book of Revelation. You read the book of the Revelation, and you come back and ask, does the wrath of God have any place now or in the future?

[17 : 13] of course it does. But here's this individual saying, I praise you, O Lord, you were angry with me. Imagine if God never showed his displeasure with our sin.

How terrible would that be? Imagine if us parents, parents who have children, imagine if us parents, we never showed any displeasure when our children were doing things that were improper, inappropriate, plain wrong, or evil.

That would be quite improper. We should be expected to express our displeasure even to the point of anger because it's a way of showing that things are not the way they should be.

And here, this person here, this man or woman, as it were, is praising God and he's saying, you know, Lord, I'm grateful that you were angry with me. And I'm grateful that you brought me to know where I am, that I am not where I should be.

I'm grateful, Lord, for the things that you brought into my life. In Isaiah's day, he could be saying, I'm grateful, you know, that you brought that colossus, that Assyrian empire.

[18 : 38] I'm grateful that you brought that war to my own doorstep, because through it, Lord, you showed me where I was. You showed me how worldly I had become.

You showed me that I'd become a Christian or a believer in name only. I'm grateful for your anger. I'm grateful for your displeasure.

And you know, God can do that still today. You know, the Holy Spirit, do we not say that within every believer, the Holy Spirit takes up residence?

So do the Father, so do the Son, but for the moment, the Holy Spirit takes up residence. Can you ever grieve that Holy Spirit?

Can you ever bring that Holy Spirit to the point where He suffers sorrow, as it were, frequently?

[19 : 44] Very often by our own relationships or poor relationships with one another, we can grieve the Holy Spirit with whom we are sealed for the day of redemption.

You know, when the Holy Spirit makes known to us His displeasure, we should be thankful. When God makes known His displeasure or His anger, the believer has to learn to say, thank you, Lord.

Now, it's not for me to say how God is working in your life, or for you to say how He works in my life. God, I'm not going to have the audacity to say God brought such and such into your life to show you that you were wrong, that you had gone from Him.

Of course not. I wouldn't have the right to do that, nor would you. But you know your own relationship with God. And you know that when God works in your own life, in your own path, in your own experience, He can bring you to that point where you admit things aren't what they should be.

And you become grateful that God has shown you this. I will praise you, Lord. You were angry with me.

[21 : 16] It's that personal. But then notice, I praise you, Lord, you were angry with me. Your anger has turned away.

Or more appropriately translated, you turned your anger away. There's this idea, you see, God was angry and then He Himself did something so that the anger, the displeasure would be removed from us.

And isn't that exactly what Jesus has done for us? If God's anger with us is just and righteous and appropriate for our sins, isn't it wonderful that God, against whom we sinned, sends His own Son into the world to deflect His anger away from us and to direct it all onto Jesus, His own Son?

Son. And when you think of the cross at Calvary, you have to think of it as a place where God's love was demonstrated for sinners.

Of course you must. God's love was God's love demonstrated. It was demonstrated by the way in which He put His own Son, as it were, in the firing line.

[22 : 38] He put His own Son before His own anger. And He took the hell for our sins. He actually stood where we should have stood.

He took all of God's displeasure. He bore all of the weight of God's anger. When the Lord should have crushed us rightly for our sin, He laid it all upon Jesus.

Now you might say, surely God doesn't care about sin that much. My friend, if you don't understand how sinful sin is to God, to a holy God, you can never understand the cross.

But once you understand how sinful sin is to God, and how righteous His anger is against you, and me, then you will be grateful that God finds a way in which He can be propitiated, when His anger can be turned away from us, unto His Son.

That's why Jesus died, of course, as you well know. He's the only human being ever who chose to die. Nobody could make Him die.

[24 : 05] He had no death to die for His own sins, no wages of death to receive, but Jesus chose to die. He chose to take the punishment for our sins upon Him, as the Lamb of God.

And the result, God's anger turned away. God's anger is absolutely and forever turned away.

There is now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus. Absolutely none. If you are a child of God tonight, and you can call God Father, just remember that though you may grieve Him as your Father, you will never make Him angry as a God again.

As your Father, you may grieve Him time and again, to your sorrow and to my sorrow, but as God, you will not make Him angry, because His anger has been turned away onto Jesus.

And this person is saying, I will praise you, Lord. You are angry with me. You made me know my sin, and you turned your anger away, but then God did something else.

[25 : 36] You have comforted me. See, this is the brilliant thing. God doesn't just stop short of showing His anger, or turning His anger away onto Jesus.

He then actually takes all His comfort, and He directs it towards us. God actually comforted me, says the psalmist.

That's beautiful. Do you remember what it was like for you when you first realized that God had taken your sin away, laid it upon Jesus who died for your sin, and in place of the guilt, He then came with His comfort, and He filled your heart with comfort.

When He consoled you, when He came near and encouraged you, when you actually felt encouraged to call Him God and Father, when you actually could say, I love you, I praise you, when your heart felt so full of comfort that you knew that you belonged to Him.

It's a beautiful thing to know the God of all comfort. The God of all comfort. Paul speaks of that God of all comfort.

[26 : 58] A magnificent way to speak of God. He's not somebody who barely, scarcely, merely forgives sin, but comes to comfort.

And remember what we've said. How does He comfort you? Does He comfort you from a distance? Does He wave some kind of wand so that you are somehow feeling the comfort?

No. The beauty of it is He actually comes to live within you. He doesn't keep His distance from you.

He doesn't just come near you. He doesn't just come close to you. He doesn't just hug you. He actually says, I want to live within you forever.

The God of all comfort comes within you so that He can comfort you from the inside out. That's how real it is.

[28 : 04] And God does that. He is the God of all comfort. Oh, yes, these are sweet and nice words. you may say, belongs more to the 19th century than the 21st.

Nonsense. These are the words of Scripture. And they should belong to 21st century Christian vocabulary.

In other words, Christians should meet together and they should be able to talk about God's anger. And they should be able to talk about God and his anger away.

And Christians should be able to talk about God bringing his comfort. Surely we are not breeding a generation of Christians that refuses or is ashamed to speak and use these biblical words comfort.

Of deep religious experience. Comfort. You know, the time that we often speak of comfort as believers is when we're going through suffering.

[29 : 19] Paul can understand that. There was a point in Paul's own life in 2 Corinthians. He tells us that he came to the point where he despaired even of life itself.

Just think of it now. We call him the super apostle. We imagine Paul was always riding high in the clouds. We imagine that Paul was always so sure of everything.

Remember when Paul was in Corinth, his knees shook. He trembled on the inside. He knew what it was to come up in a place like this or to stand before yourselves and just shake.

He also knew what it was to be brought into experiences where he just couldn't seem to see the light of day. He couldn't seem to see how things would work out.

He despaired, he says, even of life itself. That's low. Have you met a Christian this year who despaired even of life itself?

[30 : 25] Well, this is the great apostle Paul, and it was precisely there that he began to speak about the God who comforts us.

God came. It's as though God, I knew, carved a place in his heart for his comfort. And I'm glad that God does that.

Sometimes we just become over-familiar the air with the doctrines of redemption. And what God does is he carves a place. He may bring us to the point where we just despair of things, just so that he can say, now do you remember who really matters, that I can comfort you like no other, the God of all comfort.

Very often as well in times of death, we find that the Lord's people enjoy, rightly so, the talk of comfort.

Psalms 23 is always a favorite with us all. you, your rod and your staff comfort me. But when do God's rod and God's staff comfort us?

[31 : 50] When is God's shepherding protection? When is God's encouragement seemingly at its most high? It is when you're going through the valley of the shadow of death.

I will fear, he says, no evil. See, it's the little words. I will fear no evil.

Explanation for you, rod, and your staff comfort me. I know you're there. I know we're all afraid to die.

But what then? What do you do in that situation? I remember somebody saying to me, you know, when I was hearing of a believer who had died in Stornway, and just shortly before he died, he was so bright, and he died, I said, well, almost with triumph.

And I said to this man, I said, you know, I'm afraid I couldn't do that just now. And he said to me very, very wisely, he says, God doesn't give us grace to be a luxury.

[33 : 07] He won't give you just now what you will need then, so you can have it on your mantelpiece and take it off when you need it. He'll only give you that grace when you need it as you go through the valley of the shadow.

And that's precisely right. That's exactly it. God comforts, not once, not twice, not thrice, but he comforts you as often as you need it.

And at times of his special need, he gives his special comfort. Don't ever be afraid, and I know you're not, don't ever be afraid to ask for special comfort.

God you are angry with me, your anger has been turned away, you've comforted me, and here he is now.

Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength, my song, my salvation. See how personal it all is?

[34 : 24] This is what he means to me. This is the true, proper individualism of Christianity. God is my salvation.

Put it this way, you always stood out from the crowd in God's eyes. If you're a Christian tonight, from all eternity, you mattered to him.

Always you mattered to him. Before you were made, before you were created, before you were a fetus in your mother's womb, before you breathed your first breath in life, you mattered to him.

And you mattered so much that he organized the world's history so that you would become a Christian. And he has organized the whole of the future so that you, along with God's people, will be saved, finally, fully, and forever.

Every one of us who will be in glory, every one of God's people who will be in heaven, every one of us who will be in that new creation that God is creating, every one of us will say, he's my salvation, my strength, my song, my salvation.

[35 : 49] That's it. It will always be personal. God doesn't just save churches. He doesn't just save a bride, he saves individuals whom he makes into a bride, into a church, into a people, into a family.

And it's all so, so special. I will praise you, O Lord. In the second half, which we'll just briefly look at, you, plural, will then say, give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known among the nations what he has done, proclaim that his name is exalted.

In other words, praise him. I want to meet with the Lord's people so that I can encourage them to praise the Lord. That's my burden, that's your burden too, I'm sure.

You want people to thank the Lord, don't you? Well, encourage them to do it. You want people to call on the name of the Lord, you pray to God to make them do it, encourage them yourself to do it.

You want people to go out and be missionaries, don't you? You want them to go out and tell the nations what he has done. Well, maybe you are the one who should actually go and do it yourself or ask others to do it, encourage them to do it, proclaim that his name is exalted.

[37 : 31] We're addressing one another, our concern is for the glory of God. We want others to taste what we've tasted. We want others to experience what we've experienced, because this God is not just for us, he's for the nations out there.

Sing to the Lord, he has done glorious things, let it be known to all the world. Shout loud, sing for joy, people of Zion. Why? Because great is the Holy One of Israel among you.

There's a whole series of sermons, but in that last phrase, shout aloud, sing. Why? Because the Holy One of Israel among you is great.

God in all his holiness dwells among the likes of us. He doesn't dispense with his holiness, but he magnifies his greatness.

He finds a way in which in all his holiness he can dwell among us. Once you've understood that, tasted that, then you really will sound far less hollow when you go out to encourage others to give their lives over to missionary work, to the praise of God's name.

[39 : 09] Great is the Holy One of Israel among you. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us