

Strengthened Through Remembrance **Isaiah 46:1 – 13**

Our sermon text this morning is Isaiah chapter 46. We're looking at the whole chapter, which is verses 1 to 13. Before we read that portion, we will pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, you have told us in Scripture that your name and your word you have honoured above all things. We pray, Father, that you would indeed honour your word here this morning, that you would bless your word to us, that we would receive from it strength and life and help. Father, we pray that you would help us as we hear. I pray that you would help me as I speak. I pray, Father, that we would be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and willing hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 46, starting at verse 1: ¹Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. ²They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.

³‘Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

⁵‘To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? ⁶Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! ⁷They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.

⁸‘Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,” ¹¹calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

¹²‘Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: ¹³I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.’” Amen.

Just looking at verse 3 of our reading, Isaiah 46 verse 3, “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel.” All the remnant. So Isaiah preaches to a nation. He preaches to the nation of Judah, supposedly God's people, the nation of Judah with its capital city of Jerusalem, with the temple of God in its midst. Isaiah speaks to the house of Jacob, and yet from within the house of Jacob, he narrows the command down to the remnant of the house of Israel.

Now you could possibly understand that as meaning simply that Judah is the remnant of the original kingdom of Israel—Israel, founded by Joshua, Israel the twelve tribes of Israel, Israel originally ruled over by King David and King Solomon, twelve tribes, the whole nation, which

was divided according to the judgment of God in consequence of the sin of idolatry that was carried out by King Solomon.

And if you remember, ten tribes became the Northern Kingdom, two tribes became the Southern Kingdom of Judah. And the Northern Kingdom—well, they're pretty much already finished at about the time that Isaiah is speaking. If they're not already destroyed. They're very close to destruction. They're going to be carried off into captivity by the Assyrians. The Northern Kingdom will never be re-established.

The Assyrians will be overtaken by the Babylonians, the Babylonians will be overtaken by the Persians. Whilst it's the Babylonian Empire, the Babylonians will also carry off the people of Judah. Once it becomes the Persian Empire, there's to be a restoration of Jerusalem. God has already named in the previous chapter His servant, Cyrus—Cyrus the Persian emperor, who would reestablish Jerusalem and would command the rebuilding of God's house in Jerusalem.

So they're the people to whom Isaiah speaks. He speaks to the house of Jacob, then he speaks to the remnant of the house of Israel. I don't think we could say that we can take that word "remnant" apart from the meaning that Isaiah himself has already given to the word previously in his book, in his prophecies. As far as Isaiah's concerned, the remnant is not simply just the people who are the descendants of Abraham; the remnant is the people who are the descendants of Abraham and who share the faith of Abraham. The remnant are those who actually believe the word of God, the ones who believe not only his own preaching, but the other prophets whom God has sent.

We're dealing with a hard-hearted nation, a nation that takes things for granted, a nation that assumes that everything's okay. "We're God's people. God loves us. There's a temple, there's a priest, there's a sacrifice every day. What more could God want? Everything should be just fine." Hypocrisy—outright religious hypocrisy. They're the people to whom Isaiah speaks.

Now if we look back into last week's portion, looking back at Isaiah 45, verse 23, remember God saying, among many things He said from our passage last week, "By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'"

Why is that important? Well, look at where our portion this morning starts: "Bel bows down; Nebo stoops." Who are Bel and Nebo? Bel and Nebo are the gods of the Babylonians. They are the chief gods of the Babylonian pantheon of idolatrous gods. "Bel bows down; Nebo stoops." So what's being said? It's the Babylonians who are going to come and take Judah captive. It's the Babylonians who are going to rule over those who consider themselves to be God's people.

Go back into ancient times, if one nation rules another nation, to the people of the time, it was really fairly obvious exactly what that meant. A nation that ruled another nation had more powerful gods. "My gods are stronger than your gods; therefore, I rule you." Well, God is saying something different. God is saying He rules all the gods. God is saying that if any god—small "g" god, demonic god, idolatrous god, non-god god—but if any idolatrous god seems to have power, it has power because I said, You have some power. If it has authority over any place, it has authority over that place because I said, You have some authority.

Well now God says, “These gods of this mighty nation Babylon, which you fear, they bow down to me. They bow to me. Amongst all of those things, by myself I have sworn that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance. Well understand this, even the gods of Babylon, Bel and Nebo, they’re not reserved from what I’m saying. They serve me. They bend the knee. They bow down before me. If they have power over you at this moment, they have it because I gave it to them.” God is claiming to be God over all things.

Now we know that the idols are basically the representation of demons. We actually read that in Deuteronomy, didn’t we. We should probably look there. Turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 32, which we read earlier. We’ll start reading at verse 16:

“¹⁶They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. ¹⁷They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded.” Now this is Moses preaching his closing messages to the people of Israel, and he’s speaking of the rebellion of the people of Israel, probably referring particularly to the incident with the golden calves. Remember, they made the golden calves on the spot, and suddenly the golden calves became the god who delivered them.

But this is also Moses’s charter to the nation. This is what you read in Deuteronomy chapter 32. It’s the guideline for God’s relationship with that nation of Israel from that time forward. And they’ve always been the same people, and there’s always been the same problem. There were in the nation faithful people who truly believed. Even as there were faithful people who truly believed, there were hard-hearted unbelievers who thought the blessings of God were there before them, though God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, yet they would rather sacrifice to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known.

What’s the attraction to idol worship, to demon worship? Well, the attraction, if you’re a sinner, is really very simple. Demons and idols don’t demand any reform in your life. Demons and idols don’t demand that you turn aside from your sins and your lusts and your desires. If you want to have a religion where you get to satisfy your own personal greed, avarice, lust, and desires, what you need is a demonic and an idolatrous religion.

For example, go back into ancient Greece at New Testament times, and there were temples to goddesses which were basically just large brothels. You went into the temple, you made your offering, and off you went with a priestess to her booth. Many believed there were not only priestesses, there were young priest boys. That’s the kind of thing you get from idolatrous worship. That’s the kind of thing you get when you submit to demons. Lust becomes part of your religion. Evil becomes part of your religion, and evil becomes good in your eyes, because the demons are forever subverting God’s order.

The order that God has placed, they want to subvert. They want to turn things the wrong way around. They want to break God’s image. So God made them male and female—one man, one woman—they were the image-bearers of God. The demons, Satan, the idols, they want to break the order that God put in place. How do you break it? Through sin, through lust, through desire.

People choose to worship demons, and God says His power is over those very demons that they choose to worship. My friends, people construct idols all the time. It was John Calvin who said that the heart of man is an idol-factory. You know, it's like a conveyor belt, just turning out one idol or another idol, one idol or another idol, all different kinds of idols. Many people have idols that masquerade as the Christian religion. But if they do not worship according to the revealed God in Scripture, they're worshipping an idol and they're calling that idol "God."

If we were to turn back into the passage in Exodus where they made the golden calves, understand they called those golden calves Yahweh.—"Yahweh, who delivered you." They said that the calf was God. They were trying to say, "Well you know, we're being faithful here. We're worshipping the God who delivered us." But it was an idol. God has sovereign authority over all these things.

So as we consider that, and we consider the rest of the passage, I'll give it to us in three points. They come from the text. Verses 1 to 7: Contrasting idolatry with faith. Verses 8 to 11: Remember. I've just called it Remember. Remember. Remember the truth. And then the final two verses, verses 12 to 13, Though sinners are far from righteousness, yet salvation draws near. Though people are far from God, God is never far from people. The division is not a division that cannot be bridged through grace.

So let's have a look, then, verses 1 to 7: The contrast of idolatry with faith. I know we've looked at these things before, but if God tells us something more than once, He wants us to hear it more than once. It's as simple as that. Notice something about these idols, looking at verse 1 of chapter 46 of Isaiah. They're on the beasts. They've been carried by livestock. They've been carried by tired beasts. They stoop and they bow down. They cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. They can't work salvation. They cannot save what they're meant to save. They can't do anything. They can't move.

Looking at verses 6 and 7: "6 Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! 7 They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble."

The point that God is making, and He's made it again and again and again in the book of Isaiah, is that an idol is a dead thing. It has no life. It has no life to offer. It can do you no good, no matter how beautiful it is, no matter how carefully you construct this beautiful thing, no matter how much you love it, no matter what you do for it, no matter where you place it, no matter how you move it around—it's dead. It does nothing. It can't carry you to salvation.

Back in 46, verse 2, "They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity." Where are the idols going? Into captivity. Where are the gods going? Going to the same place as the people who serve those gods, those small "g" gods, those would-be-if-they-could-be gods. And that should immediately have us thinking forward into the book of Revelation. Where does the whole kit and caboodle end up—all unbelievers, and all the gods they serve? The lake of fire. The Antichrist gets cast into the lake of fire. The false prophet gets cast into the lake of fire. The Devil that headed them gets cast into the lake of fire.

And then who goes into the lake of fire? Everyone who ever served them. Everyone who followed them. Everyone who bears their mark. All end up where? Same place.

So the idols can't save, and they end up in the same mess that the people that they can't save are in. They're useless. And then set in the center of those verses from 1 to 7, you have the description of God, the contrast. Now usually in Hebrew literature, if you have bookends, and the bookends here are verses 1 and 2, and verses 6 and 7, which concern idolatry and the idols, the *important* part is the center part between the bookends.

So the important part here is that which Isaiah says about God, verses 3, 4, 5—God speaking through Isaiah. “³ ‘Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb.’”

Notice the contrast. The idols are being carried on beasts. They're burdens on the backs of weary old beasts, and the idols themselves, the middle line of verse 2, “they cannot save the burden.” They can't save themselves. They can't save the things that are carrying them. They can't save anything.

Yet what does God say to His people? “Who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb.” Idols can't carry, but God does carry. Idols can't help, but God does help. Idols can't bear a burden or save a burden, but God does save. God does carry His people. “Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.”

Man makes gods, small “g”s. God makes servants. God makes people. It's God who makes and creates His people. It's God who makes those who are His servants. Man can make anything he likes. Verse 5: “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?” To whom do you compare God? No one. Nothing. The heavens do not contain Him. We can barely understand the size of our universe.

I don't even know whether the scientists have got half an idea. You know, they come up with all their ideas and they give us lots of numbers and stuff like that. Do they know what they think they know? I doubt it. But even if they're only 50% right, we still can barely get our head around that. And God fills heaven and earth. He's greater than His own creation. His own creation is nothing compared to the God who created it.

We can't liken God to anyone. You know, that's why I never, ever, ever try to use illustrations if I'm talking about the Holy Trinity. None of them work. They all lead you off into some kind of heresy. So you have to very carefully construct some concepts. You have to very carefully use words to explain concepts, because I can't just give you a picture and say, “Oh, look at this. You'll get some ideal.” All I'll do is I'll lead you astray.

We can't use illustrations when we're trying to actually display to people who God is and what God is like. God is glorious. God is great. God is good. Proclaiming His glory should be our joy and our pleasure. We can't compare God to anyone. God stands alone.

Let's move on. Verses 8 to 11. The command is to Remember, verses 8 to 11. “⁸ ‘Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.””

I quite like the way it's caught in the New King James, where it says, “Remember this.” And what does it say—“Remember this, and show yourselves men, recall it to mind, you transgressors.” Remember this and stand up straight. Remember this and face your enemies. Remember this and don't be afraid. Remember this and take courage. Remember this and stand firm. Remember what? That God is God, and that idols are nothing, and that idols serve God, that Bel and Nebo are nobodies, that the kingdom of Babylon is nothing but a tool in the hand of our God. Remember this. Draw courage from these things.

Our Christian faith is not based on ideas, it's not based on myths, and it's not based on stories that aren't true. The strength of our faith comes from the truth of our Book, and the Book tells us the truth. So the Bible speaks not of imaginary things, but of things that really have happened in our history. God says, Go back. Go back to Calvary. Look at Jesus Christ. Look at what happened there. Look at how one who was innocent suffered, one who did no wrong, one who did not have to die for any earthly reason, one who died according to my will. Look at what happened there. Look at the resurrection. Look at the empty tomb. Look at those apostles, those disciples, those fearful little average kind of folk like you and me. Look at what happened.

When the day of Pentecost came, when the Spirit was poured out upon the church, look at the transformation in their lives, in their very natures. Look at how these men who were fishermen and had nothing to say, and wouldn't even own up to who they were to a servant girl—suddenly they're preachers. They're facing down an audience of thousands. Peter must have been yelling his lungs out that day, to be heard by thousands. He must have been facing them down and giving it to them big time. Suddenly he's a man of courage. Suddenly he's a man of conviction.

And what was his sermon? His sermon was of the things that God had accomplished, the things that God had done. He was remembering. He was remembering what God had done, and that was giving him the courage to stand and to face down the world and to preach the truth with love and great boldness. God was helping Peter, as God helps all of His people who remember the things that God does, who remember who God is. “Recall it to mind, you transgressors,” Isaiah 46, verse 8, “⁹ remember the former things of old.”

So what's he saying? How did your nation get started? How did it all start? Remember, there was a man called Abraham, and he was off, you know, of the Chaldeans, and he was an idolater in an idolatrous nation, and I called him apart. He had a ninety-something-year-old wife and no children, and I gave him a child. Remember. Remember the things I've done. Remember that the people went into Egypt and were in slavery. Remember Joseph, remember Jacob, remember Moses, remember the Exodus. Remember the giving of the law. Remember the crossing of the Red Sea. Remember the manna. Remember, remember, remember. Remember King David and Goliath. Remember, remember, remember.

Remember the things of old that I have done, “for I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.” Remember. As you get carted off to Babylon to serve the Babylonian king, what are you supposed to do? Remember! This has happened before. Something like this has happened before. People ended up in Egypt, under a tyrant. People ended up in Egypt, and God delivered His people, and His faithful people were always His faithful people, and they always eventually inherited the things that God intended for them to inherit. Remember. Remember the things of old, for there is only one God. “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

Everything that God had spoken of in the past had come to pass. Every word of God had proven true. Well, Isaiah’s saying, I now, speaking as a prophet, speak the word of God, and I’m telling you that you’ll be taken off to captivity in Babylon. God’s purposes will come to pass. And a bird of prey from the east will be called. Now he’s already referred to that man—it’s Cyrus. Cyrus. He will be called and he will conquer the Babylonians, and he will set God’s people once again on a path to construction. He’ll send them back to Judah and Jerusalem.

“I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” My friends, build your faith upon facts. Build your faith upon the truth of God’s word. Build your faith upon the testimony of God’s people. Things really happened. Jesus really walked the earth. People really were healed. Lazarus really was called back to life. Jesus really did go to the cross. There really was a governor whose name was Pontius Pilate, who sent Him there. There really were corrupt priests and Pharisees in Jerusalem who rejected their Saviour. All of those things are true. He really did rise from the dead. He really has ascended on high. He really is enthroned on the right hand of the Father. He really does possess the title deeds to all of creation. He really does mediate for His people the will of God. He really does rule over all things, including His church, and nothing is out of His control.

Remember all of these things. Always remember all of these things. God’s purpose will be done. He has purposed, He will do it. Jesus said He would build His church until He’d finished building His church, which would be the end of this present evil age. He’s building His church now, in this earth. He has purposed to do these things; He will do these things.

We’re having a communion meal this morning. What’s one part of communion? Remembrance. “Do these things in remembrance of me.” What are we remembering? What do the elements remind us of? Well, Jesus told us what they remind us of. The broken bread is the broken body. The wine is the spilt blood. Remember these things. Remember the price has been paid. Remember you have the gift of life. Remember you need not imagine that God will ever cast away that which He has purchased at the expense of His own Son.

Remember these things, and they will give you courage. Remember, therefore, that good times are coming. We might not see them in this earthly mortal life, but God has said good times are coming. The restoration of all things is coming. The end of all evil is coming. God’s people will inherit the earth. The new heavens, the new earth—God’s people will come into their inheritance.

Looking at the final two verses. Remember the subtitle: We're far from righteousness, yet salvation is near. Verse 12: "12 'Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: 13 I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.'"

"You who are far from righteousness." Our sins separate us from God. Our sins, in a way, put us far from God. "Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness." Righteousness in the sight of God is not simple, plain morality. It's not simply the ability to do some right things. Righteousness in the sight of God is innocence, according to His own holiness. It's positive goodness, according to His own goodness. It's being like God.

And all—all of humanity, everyone, is born far from righteousness. Abraham was far from righteousness. Moses was far from righteousness. Every single person in Scripture was born far from righteousness. You and I are born far from righteousness. Yet we're not far from God, in a manner of speaking. In a manner of comparing humanity to divinity, comparing human nature to the divine nature, the distance is immense. It's infinite. But God has come near. God has come near: "I bring my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory."

Though the people of Judah had a temple, and the temple was the dwelling place of God, so to speak, yet they were far off from righteousness. They were far off from righteousness. What was the problem? Well, Isaiah puts his finger right on it there, doesn't he. Verse 12: "Stubborn of heart." Stubborn of heart. What's the problem with all of humanity? It's the old problem—everyone's got a heart disease. Worse than that, everyone's just got a dead heart, a heart of death. It's fatal. And it's already inflicted its damage.

Everyone's got a heart problem. It doesn't matter what religion you've got, even if you have Old Covenant revealed religion, with a temple, with the commandments, with a priesthood, with a king, with some prophets. You've got all of those things. You've got the Old Testament. You've got the Hebrew scriptures. You've still got the heart problem—the same old heart problem, the heart problem that's always been there.

Turn to Jeremiah chapter 17, verse 9. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" The heart is deceitful above all things. You hear what's being said there. Think of the most dishonest, deceitful person you've ever seen or heard of, and God's saying, "Now look at your heart." Think of the person that's told you the most lies, or put the knife into your back the deepest, and then God says, "Your heart is more deceitful than that. Your own heart. Your own heart can't be trusted."

Isn't that the exact opposite of what we're told in the world today? "Trust in your heart. Go where your heart guides you. Fulfill your heart's desires. If your heart's in it, it can't be wrong." You know, it's so easy to disagree with that. Those guys who were flying those planes that hit the World Trade Center? Their heart was in it. I'm pretty sure their heart was in it. They were committed. They were pretty serious about that. Their heart was in it. No. Their heart was deceitful above all things. Their heart was telling them lies. Their heart was telling them, Give your life here, and you'll get eternal life and reward. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick.

Jesus said something very similar in the gospels, didn't He. For example, in Mark chapter 7, He speaks of the wickedness that comes forth from the heart—adultery, lying, murders, all forms of corruption. He says, These things don't come into you. He says, You're not like that because you breathe it in from the world around you. You're like that because it comes *out* of you. The problem is what's within you. If the problem is what's within you, well then, the solution must be something that's outside of you. We can't solve this problem ourselves. We can't change our nature just by wanting to. You don't change your nature just by choosing to be good.

You know, even as Christians, even as people who are saved, born again, we've received life from above—what good is it to choose and say, "I will never sin again"? My friends, you know, I'm almost ashamed to say it, but I realize I'm standing amongst fellow sinners. Before I walk out of here this morning, there's certainly going to have been some kind of sinful thought run through my mind. There's certainly going to be some kind of sin committed, whether it's in thought or in deed, sin is sin. And all sin draws down the death penalty.

The problem's not going to be solved by changing your heart, or exercising your will. The problem can only be solved by receiving an infusion, a gift. Where there was death, you need life. Where there was corruption, you need cleanness. Where there was sin, you need righteousness. The heart problem has to be solved.

God brings His righteousness near. "I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory." And, you know, I'm not going to take the time this morning to trace out through the New Testament the concept of coming to Christ as coming to Zion, coming to the heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly city. We've gone that way a few times. Salvation is still in Zion, but we're coming to the eternal Zion. By faith, we're citizens of the heavenly city that's revealed to us later on in the book of Revelation. That's the city we're all looking for. That's the city we all want to walk into.

You know, I often say, I don't care if you're thinking of that literally or not. We're going to the city of Zion. We're going to the city where God's people dwell, where the Lamb dwells in their midst. And the only people who walk into that city are the people whose heart has been changed, whose stubborn heart has been removed, who've been given a living heart, a good heart, that came to them by the power and the work of the Holy Spirit—because Jesus died, because Jesus purchased a people for the glory of God, because Jesus is the Saviour and the Redeemer that we all need.

So those sinners are far from God due to sin. They're close to God through the work of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, who's been sent into the earth to bring the gospel into all the nations. And where once there was darkness, now there is light. Where once there was no hope, now there is hope. Where once death ruled and reigned, now Christ rules and reigns through the power of His gospel.

Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 30. As I said at the start, Isaiah is speaking to the people from the background of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy, Moses basically gave the run-down of the way things should be, and the way things would be. And Isaiah is writing almost as a prosecuting lawyer. He's taking that which was said in the book of Deuteronomy and applying it to the

people of God. He's the one who's taking the law of God and applying it to the situation right now, which is what a prophet does. More than tell the future, more than make predictions, a prophet takes the law of God and applies to the heart of the people, convicting them of their sin; or, hardening their hearts because they refuse to receive His word.

We'll start reading Deuteronomy 30, at verse 11: ¹¹ 'For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.'"

The word is very near you. My friends, the word of salvation comes very near to all people. It comes very near in the preaching of the gospel. The word is very near to you. Hope is very near to you. Christ's righteousness is very near to you. The problem will always be in the end some form of pride. Always in the end, the reason someone doesn't want to bend the knee before Jesus and seek the forgiveness of their sins is some form of pride. It's not easy.

No one really wants to confess that they are unable to save themselves and that they desperately need the help of God, and that they have no righteousness of their own. But, my friends, salvation is very near, and salvation will not delay.

So the call of Scripture, the call of Isaiah, the call of God through His prophets, is to repent and to put your faith in God, seeking forgiveness. Today we seek forgiveness in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, because God has spoken by His Son. Therefore, we must come to God through His Son. No one comes to the Father but through Jesus. He's the revelation of God, and to refuse to receive God revealed in Christ is to return back to idolatry. And so the heart remains unchanged.

In the end, God just keeps trying to separate people from their idols. This is the aim of Scripture, this is the aim of salvation—separate people from their idols. What did Jesus say? "The Father seeks those who worship in spirit and in truth." They worship truly, in truth, with true knowledge of who God is. They worship according to God's revelation. They worship according to God's word. They worship spiritually, in their hearts. They put aside their wickedness. Now we know that no one does this apart from the work of God, and yet we preach the gospel. Why? Because the word is near. The word is near, that people may receive hope and salvation.

And so, my friends, as we close, I simply say to you, Consider the Lord Jesus Christ. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. He is the revelation of God for us, for now and forever. If you know Christ, you know the Father. If you are of Christ, you have been separated from your idols. If you are not of Christ, you are still an idolater, and you have no part of Him, and you have no peace with God. You're still serving the dictates of your stubborn heart, and you're still far from righteousness.

As we come into our communion service, I say to you, Bring Christ to remembrance. Remember who He is. Remember what He has done. Stand firm. Face the world. Face the sins that once

appealed to you and push them away. No. No, I will no longer serve the idols. God rules over all things, God rules over those things, but God through Christ rules in my heart, and I will no longer serve wickedness. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do indeed pray that you would open our eyes to any wickedness and idolatry that dwells yet in our hearts. Help us not to think foolish thoughts. Help us not to be fools in your sight. Help us to love you and to know you and to receive your word. Father in heaven, let us not be proud. Let us not be stubborn. But let us submit to your will. Enlighten our hearts, enlighten our eyes, enlighten our minds, that we may know you truly, through Jesus Christ your Son. And we ask these things in His name. Amen.