

The Valley of Vision Isaiah 22:1-25

Our text this morning is Isaiah chapter 22, the whole chapter. Before I read that chapter, we will pray and ask God's blessing. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, I do indeed pray that you would make your word a living word to us this morning, and that not only would your word be a living word to us, but that we would be a people who live in your word and live on your word. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 22, starting at verse 1: “¹The oracle concerning the valley of vision. What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops, ²you who are full of shoutings, tumultuous city, exultant town? Your slain are not slain with the sword or dead in battle. ³All your leaders have fled together; without the bow they were captured. All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away. ⁴Therefore I said: ‘Look away from me; let me weep bitter tears; do not labor to comfort me concerning the destruction of the daughter of my people.’

“⁵For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and a shouting to the mountains. ⁶And Elam bore the quiver with chariots and horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield. ⁷Your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen took their stand at the gates. ⁸He has taken away the covering of Judah.

“In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, ⁹and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many. You collected the waters of the lower pool, ¹⁰and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. ¹¹You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or see him who planned it long ago.

“¹²In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth; ¹³and behold, joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ ¹⁴The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: ‘Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you until you die,’ says the Lord GOD of hosts.

“¹⁵Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, ‘Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him: ¹⁶What have you to do here, and whom have you here, that you have cut out here a tomb for yourself, you who cut out a tomb on the height and carve a dwelling for yourself in the rock? ¹⁷Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you strong man. He will seize firm hold on you ¹⁸and whirl you around and around, and throw you like a ball into a wide land. There you shall die, and there shall be your glorious chariots, you shame of your master's house. ¹⁹I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your station. ²⁰In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, ²¹and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²²And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall

shut, and none shall open. ²³ And I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house. ²⁴ And they will hang on him the whole honor of his father's house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons. ²⁵ In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way, and it will be cut down and fall, and the load that was on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken.”

Stern words from the prophet Isaiah. Many of you are probably already aware that the Banner of Truth have published a little book called *The Valley of Vision*. The *Valley of Vision* is a book of prayers prayed by various Puritan ministers in days gone by, and those prayers are prayers based largely around the idea of repentance—heart-broken, heart-felt repentance. And this is where they got the title the “Valley of Vision.”

What's happening here? What's God wanting from His people? Repentance. He's wanting broken-hearted, mournful, repentance. He's wanting His people to humble themselves before Him. What's the problem? What are they doing? They're partying. They've gone up on the roofs of the houses to party. Are they relying on the strength of the Lord their God, or are they relying on their own abilities? They're relying on their own abilities, aren't they.

Look at verse 5 of our reading. “For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and a shouting to the mountains.” The Lord has tumult and trampling and confusing and a battering down of walls. What's Isaiah saying? He's saying the Lord is planning the destruction of your city. He's planning the destruction of Jerusalem.

And yet, what are the people doing? Look down at verse 8, starting at the second part 8: “In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest.” Now the House of the Forest, if you don't know, was a building originally built by Solomon in the city of Jerusalem. It was a storehouse for the army. ⁹ And you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many. You collected the waters of the lower pool, ¹⁰ and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. ¹¹ You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or see him who planned it long ago.”

And so the message from the prophet is, “Repent or you will be destroyed. The Lord has destruction coming. These walls are coming down.” And the response of the people is, “Well, let's make the walls stronger. Let's do all that we can to strengthen the city.” It's not really a question of strength, is it? How do you stop the Lord God from coming in in judgment? How do you stop the judgment of God? Do you stop it with great walls? Do you stop it with a great army? Do you stop it with weapons? Of course not.

I hope we all understand, there's only way to turn aside the judgment of God. What is it? Well, it's symbolized in Scripture by the phrase, verse 12, “In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth.” “Repentance, humility. Abase yourselves before the Lord of Hosts,” is Isaiah's message. “Abase yourselves before the sovereign God, who can do as He pleases.”

But, no. No. The people say, “Well, if you think the walls are going to fall, we’ll make the walls stronger. We’ll do all that we can, by human power, to make certain that the disaster that you’re speaking of will not fall upon us.” Useless, wasted, foolish effort. I’m reminded of Psalm 127. We really only need to hear the first line—I’m sure it’s familiar: “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain who build it at all.” Unless the Lord is building the house, we labour in vain to build. Unless the Lord is building the house—in this case, we’re speaking of the house of Jerusalem—they labour in vain. The Lord is not building it. Therefore, it doesn’t matter how big the walls are, how thick the walls are, how many soldiers you have. It’s coming down.

It’s a hard message. It’s a message that comes in two distinct sections in chapter 22. The two distinct sections are the general situation, verses 1 to 14. First, there’s a general accusation, or a general prosecution against the whole population of Jerusalem. And then section two is a particular demonstration of the general problem.

You wonder, Why does it suddenly change from this great onslaught against the people of Jerusalem to speaking particularly of two people, Shebna and Eliakim? Well the answer is, Shebna is a little example of what the problem is in Jerusalem. Shebna is exactly the kind of public servant that, whenever you come across one, you very quickly learn to dislike—important in his own eyes, feathering his own nest. He’s not really a servant. He sees himself as a ruler.

Shebna, we find in other parts of Scripture, was the secretary over the King’s household. He was filled with his own importance. You couldn’t get to the King without going through Shebna. He was such an important man in his own eyes. Look at the things that he’s doing. He’s cutting a tomb in the heights. He’s not going to be buried down with the common folk. He’s not going to be buried down with the rabble—oh, no—he’s high on a mountainside. Apparently he has chariots. If we look down at verse 18, where it says that God will throw him like a ball, it says “There you shall die, and there shall be your glorious chariots.”

So let’s put it in modern terms. He’s the public servant that drives a Rolls Royce, or a Ferrari. He’s the public servant that has set himself up like the king. And God says to this man—and what a fearful thing—“I’m going to roll you up like a ball and throw you far away.” What a fearful thing to be told by the living God, these fools that build themselves up and think they can resist the will of God.

So Shebna is a particular or specific example of the general problem with Jerusalem. People are not listening to the word of God. They’re not hearing the warnings of the prophets. Isaiah was not the only prophet that warned the people of God that disaster was coming, that their disobedience was drawing down the judgment of God. Shebna would not hear it. He was a successful man, he was an able man. “I’ll be just fine,” he says. “I’ll be just fine, and I will make sure that my memory is set in stone so that no one can forget me”—Shebna, the great man.

And then we’re given a contrast to Sheba, a faithful man. His name is Eliakim—Eliakim, one whom the Lord has chosen to be a servant; one whom the Lord has promised to use and to build up. Things are said about Eliakim that actually make him sound like a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the coming Saviour. Not only kings could be types.

First of all, let's look at verse 23. Eliakim will be fastened "like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house." But then look at verse 25: "In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way, and it will be cut down and fall, and the load that was on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken." You see, what Isaiah is saying is that judgment is certain, that no one now can turn this around. Remember that it said, reading verse 14, "The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: 'Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you until you die,' says the Lord GOD of hosts."

And so what's the message? Isaiah is saying that even though some will come along who will, in a way, be saviours of the people, and who will do what is right and will be faithful servants, they can't turn aside this judgment. It will not be turned aside.

We read earlier from Second Kings chapter 22 about the last of the great kings, or the last of the good kings—that son of David, Josiah. We've done a series on Josiah, and most of us have heard it. And how good a king was Josiah? He was great. No one ever repented like King Josiah repented. No one ever reformed like King Josiah reformed. No one ever pursued evil the way King Josiah pursued and destroyed the wicked and the evil. And yet, what was the word of God? "It won't happen in your lifetime, but I will gather you to your fathers, and then my judgment will fall." And so Josiah, like Eliakim, was a peg fastened in a secure place.

But according to the will of God, that peg must be taken from its secure place. Why? Ultimately, why? Why does God do things this way? Why is God doing it this way? Because ultimately, God's people must put their trust and their faith in God alone. And who is that person, and how is it that God's people can put their trust and their faith in God alone?

Well, who's the Saviour? Ultimately, who's the Saviour? Who's the King? Who's the Redeemer? Who's the one that's actually going to turn aside the judgments of God? Who is the one who's actually going to make propitiation? He's a son of David. He's truly a man. But He's also the Son of the living God, the eternally begotten Son of God. He's God Himself. The only one to whom true Israel can look, the only one to whom the true people of God can look, is who? God Himself, in and through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

So God does these things, slowly but surely, revealing His plan of salvation to His people throughout redemptive history. To what purpose? To turn all eyes to Jesus, to turn all eyes to the coming Saviour, that He and He alone will get the glory as the Saviour of God's people. What does God say in Isaiah chapters 42 and 45? He says He will not share His glory with another. So why was it that David could not be the Saviour of God's people? He's not God. Why was it that Hezekiah could not be the Saviour of God's people? He's not God. Why was it that Eliakim, in our passage today, could not be the Saviour of God's people? He's not God. Why was it that Josiah could not be the Saviour of God's people? He's not God.

Why is it that Jesus *can* be the Saviour of God's people? He is God. He can receive the glory that is due to God, because when we glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, we're glorifying the living God, He being God the eternally begotten Son of God. He's the only Saviour that can turn aside this judgment. And so it's a stern and a heavy message from Isaiah.

Let's try and set it a little bit in time. Looking at chapter 22, verses 1 and 2: ¹“The oracle concerning the valley of vision. What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops, ²you who are full of shoutings, tumultuous city, exultant town? Your slain are not slain with the sword or dead in battle.” Okay, let's try and make a little sense of this, in terms of what we have in the biblical revelation.

The first question we've got to ask is, Why has Isaiah called Jerusalem “the valley of vision”? If any of us know any of our biblical geography, we know that Jerusalem is actually in a mountain range, set on a plateau in the midst of a mountain range. It's not really a valley, it's a high place, although surrounding Jerusalem are a number of mountains, one of which is quite important in biblical history, the Mountain of Olives. And my reading tells me that if you were to stand upon the Mountain of Olives, you would actually be above Jerusalem, and it would look as though Jerusalem were a valley.

So I think the point here that Isaiah is trying to make us understand is that as God looks on from above, to Him, this city called Jerusalem, which would want to be called Mount Zion, that great place of salvation—God is seeing a valley. He's seeing a low place, not a high place. Jerusalem is to be humbled.

¹“What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops, ²you who are full of shoutings, tumultuous city, exultant town?” What's all that about? Okay, turn to Second Kings chapter 19. What I think that Isaiah has done is that he has taken a number of events from Israel's history, both past and future to him when he was writing. Remember he is a prophet, and he stitched together a picture that gives us some idea of what the problems with Israel are.

The situation here in Second Kings chapter 19 is that Jerusalem has had the army of Assyria come as far as the gates of Jerusalem, and there a proud officer, called the Rabshakeh, has basically challenged the living God and said, “No other god could ever rescue any other city out of my hands. What makes you think that your God can rescue you out of my hands?” That was his challenge to Jerusalem. At this time, I should tell us that Hezekiah was the King and that Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. He turned to the Lord, as a son of David should.

Moving down then to verses 33 to 36. ³³“By the way that he came,” this is the Lord speaking, “by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. ³⁴For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.’ ³⁵And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. ³⁶Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.”

And so what we may reason is happening here is that the people of Jerusalem have seen a victory. Now they didn't do a thing to get this victory. This victory came only by the hand of God, and God killed 185,000 men of that massive army that was set up to attack their city. And they're rejoicing—“Hurray, hurray! God has saved us! Hurray, hurray! Let's party! Let's celebrate!” But Isaiah's problem is that they're missing the facts. They're ignoring the truths.

Keep reading. Isaiah 22, verse 2”: “Your slain are not slain with the sword or dead in battle.
³ All your leaders have fled together; without the bow they were captured. All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away.” Now what’s that mean? What’s that about? Well imagine—if an army which had hundreds of thousands of men comes through your country and gets to the gates of your capital city, what’s happened to all the towns round about? What’s happened to all the soldiers round about? What’s happened to all the civic leaders round about? Where are they? What did they do?

Isaiah tends to be saying that they didn’t even put up a fight. They didn’t even try to protect God’s holy city. They didn’t even try to protect their capital city. “Your slain are not slain with the sword or dead in battle.” They wouldn’t stand and fight. “Your leaders fled together, and without the bow they were captured. All of you who were captured, though they had fled far away.” The armies of Judah did not even put up a fight, nor even attempt to slow down, it appears, the approach of this oncoming invading army. So they were lost. They became prisoners. They surrendered. They traded their life for their country—they chose not to fight. They chose, rather, to become prisoners.

And so Isaiah says, “There’s big problems here. The people who were supposed to fight for us surrendered. And the ones that didn’t surrender, ran away. And even though they ran far, they still got captured. We lost all that territory, we lost all those cities, we lost all our crops, without even a fight! It’s not a time for partying, friends. It’s not a time for rejoicing. Yes, Amen, Alleluia, God saved the city. But do you really think that’s a good thing, that an army could come to our front gates without anyone so much as shaking sword at them?”

He goes on. “⁴ Therefore I said: ‘Look away from me; let me weep bitter tears; do not labor to comfort me concerning the destruction of the daughter of my people.’” You see, the people are celebrating as though they can’t be touched. They’re celebrating as though Jerusalem cannot be invaded, as though Jerusalem cannot be taken. And Isaiah’s saying, “Can’t you see? Can’t you see, if we can’t defend the territory around about us, we can’t defend the city? Don’t you see, eventually this city must fall.” And he’s weeping over the loss of his people.

“⁵ For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and a shouting to the mountains.” And then he goes on to speak of the armies that are coming up against them. And then down in verse 8, speaking of the Lord, “⁸ He has taken away the covering of Judah.” He’s taken away our safety. He’s taken away our protection. The only reason that Jerusalem was safe was that the Lord was fighting for Jerusalem. But it is obvious when you look at what has actually happened, the Lord has ceased to fight for Jerusalem.

“We are actually under the discipline of God, and you should not be up on your housetops partying! You should not be rejoicing, you should be mourning. And you should not be building things up and trying to make the city stronger, apart from repentance.” The picture here is of a light-hearted people; a people who refuse to take things seriously; a people who refuse to mourn when they ought to mourn; a people who refuse to respond as they ought to respond.

And now I just step into our present day, and I look at our churches in this nation. How many of them have given their worship over to sugar and spice and all things nice? How many of them have given their worship services over to celebration. “Rejoice! Party!”

You see some of the videos that are going around. They’ve taken away the rows of pews or seats, and they’ve made a mosh pit. You’ve got a six, seven, eight-piece band, with three good looking girls singing. You’ve got people bouncing those dirty great balls, whatever they’re called, around over their head, jumping up and down, yelling, “Wohoo, wohoo, wohoo, wohoo!” The message they get is ten minutes long, and it’s about “how you can live the victorious life,” “how your faith will get you what you want, and you’ve got nothing to worry about.”

What’s happening in our nation, my friends? What’s happening in our country? What’s happening in the politics of our nation? What’s the big debate at this very moment? Are we going to have laws that call evil good, and good evil—homosexual-pretend marriage? And understand and know this: those laws will be protected by other laws, and those protecting laws will be directed against people like us—that the things that we are saying are hate speech, that the things that we are saying are hurtful and harmful. And we’ll be outlawed in our own country.

And don’t worry, I am sure that’s going to happen unless the Lord God grants repentance to this nation on an enormous scale. And if the laws first come in without that great raft of protecting laws, so that for a little while we’ve still got the legal freedom to speak and to preach as we will—don’t worry, sooner or later, those will come to power who want us silenced.

Understand—these laws are vehicle for those who hate the things of God. They hate the Word of God, they hate the law of God, they hate the ordained creation order of God, they hate all of the things that are of God. They hate them, and they hate the people of God, and they hate hearing people speak the truth for God.

What should every gospel-preaching church be like at this moment in Australia? Some serious faces ought to be seen, shouldn’t they. Not a lot of partying going on. Not a lot of rejoicing going on. What should we be doing? Repenting. Repenting before the face of the Lord our God, and repenting not only for our sins, but for the sins of our nation.

My friends, we don’t live in a time of rejoicing and partying. And as I’ve said, these churches that want to sugarcoat the whole story, and want to rejoice and party—you know what they’re going to do when the laws are changed, don’t you. They’re going to make sure that they don’t say anything that will interfere with their rejoicing and their partying. There’ll be certain sections of the Scripture that won’t preach from. They’ll sort of gloss over them. You know, “Whoa, there’s a difficult passage there in Romans chapter 1; well, you don’t have to preach from the book of Romans. There’s sixty-five other books in the Bible.” The difficult passage in First Corinthians chapter 6? “Well, we don’t have to preach from First Corinthians. There’s sixty-four other books of the Bible.” There’s some difficult passages there in Leviticus chapter 18. “Well, we don’t have to preach from Leviticus. There’s sixty-three other books in the Bible.” And so it goes. Genesis has got some difficult passages—Sodom and Gomorrah. Why were they destroyed? “We better cut Genesis.” “Let’s have a party. Let’s have a dance. Let’s get a rock band. Let’s get three, four, five good looking girls up the front. Make sure the people are happy and they walk out of the door with a smile on their face.”

“¹³ ... joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine.” Now the drinking of wine is not the problem, all right? Scripture does not blanket forbid the consumption of alcohol. The problem is that they’re rejoicing when they should have been mourning. The problem is that their response to both the word of God and the providence of God is completely inappropriate, completely unworthy of anyone who wants to call themselves a servant of the living God. What should be the situation in gospel-preaching churches in Australia today? A lot of serious Christians, praying repentantly before the Lord our God, because we’ve got a part to play in the blame of what’s happening to our nation, haven’t we—we, the church, even the faithful churches, even the churches where the gospel is preached.

If we wanted to bring out a list of sins, it wouldn’t fit within this room, it wouldn’t fit within this building. If you wanted to bring out a list of errors, we’re a remnant—we’re a remnant in this nation, and we’re not an innocent remnant. Scripture tells us that judgment begins in the house of God. And so it really only makes sense that if we want to see our nation become repentant, if we want to see our nation become sensible and reasonable in the sight of God, where’s it got to start? It’s got to start in the churches. It’s got to start with us.

And we’ve got to preach good, solid, strong doctrine. They say, “Doctrine divides; therefore, don’t preach doctrine.” I’ll tell you what doctrine divides: It divides sheep from goats. It divides wheat from tares. Doctrine unites Christians. Solid, strong Christian doctrine unites solid, strong Christian believers. And we can be united with people with whom, on a number of things, we’re in disagreement. But true Christian people cling to true Christian doctrine, and are united by true Christian doctrine.

So what’s the message of the church got to be? I’m afraid it’s not the happy, clappy, victorious message that the world wants to hear. “God is very happy with you. God loves you just the way you are. Whatever you are, God has made you that thing, and you should just be that thing and rejoice in it, for that is what God has made you.” That’s the message the world wants to hear. That’s the message that so many churches preach.

But from our passage today in Isaiah, what’s the message? “Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you until you die.” God is calling for weeping, for mourning, for boldness, and the wearing of sackcloth. God’s message to the world is, “Your sins are taking you to hell. Not only are your sins taking you to hell in the future, your sins are bringing hell to earth in the present. Your sins are turning this earth into a living hell. Your sins are destroying your nations.”

Look at the news. Look at the things that are happening. We’ve suddenly descended into a society where you can’t even actually have a rational disagreement with somebody. The moment you say you don’t approve of everything they do, they scream, “You hate me! And I’m offended that you hate me! I want equality!” And we’ve got an idiot politician giving his great speech: “The one thing that we will deliver is equality for all people!” What does a politician mean that you’re going to get “equality for all people”? What does a politician mean?

There’s a legend in Greece. You had these little sort of city-states, each of which had their own form of leadership or government, often a king. And a young prince ascended to the throne, and

he went and asked his father's ally, his father's best friend, another king in another small nation, "What's the secret of governing effectively?" And it's said that that king took him out into a cornfield with a sword in his hand, and they walked along a row of cornstalks. And every cornstalk that was higher than the others, he cut the high ones down so that every cornstalk in the row was the same level. And he said, "That's the secret of effective government."

That's equality! Destroy things. You see, if everybody has nothing, they're equal in their nothingness. And so why do the politicians rally behind the slogan, "Marriage Equality"? What do they want to do to marriage? Divorce it of all of its meaning. For what purpose? To destroy it. And then everybody will have the equality of nothingness. Formalize any kind of relationship, pretend any kind of relationship is marriage, so that no relationship is really marriage. It just becomes a stupid government-stamped piece of paper that means nothing. Absolutely nothing.

And the churches of Australia? "Rejoice! Let's have a rock band. Let's have a mosh pit. Let's dance and party. Let's bounce the big bouncy balls around over our head. Because God wants us to be happy and have whatever we want." It's just plain evil. It's sugarcoating the pathway to hell. Someone recently tried to tell me that a particular woman in a particular church was a good pastor. She loved her people. Really? The denomination is apostate. They ordain lesbians and homosexuals. The denomination is campaigning for homosexual pretend-marriage. The woman could not be a minister in that denomination if she herself were not apostate. I don't care how nice she acts, I don't care how much love she talks about. You know, the prophets who say "Peace and well being" as the people slip over the edge into hell? They're the ones God particularly hates.

Honestly, the most evil of all evils as far as I'm concerned, is the sugarcoated evil. Satan is never more dangerous than when he's appearing as an angel of light. And our society is sliding so quickly into the moral abyss that he actually doesn't even need to go to the trouble anymore of dressing up as an angel of light. He'll appear to people as an angel of darkness and sin, and they'll go running after him. "Wohoo! Party! Do whatever I please whenever I want. That's real freedom." And all they are is enslaved in their sins, slaves of their wickedness. All they are is fools. And we, the church, should be serious.

Now for us, it's not to be shaving our heads bald and to be wearing sackcloth in this day and age. For us, it's to be a repentant and a humble people before the Lord our God. For us, it's to be a brokenhearted people. For us, it's to be a people who are seeking to be obedient in the eyes of God. Because the answer is not in politics, and the answer is not in the schemes of men. In the end, the answer comes from God. If God is gracious, He will grant revival. If it is the will of God to draw us back from the brink, the only thing that can draw us back from the brink is revival. Politicians can't do it.

You know, even when you get a decent one in government—and a few years ago, we had a fairly decent government. I'm not saying they were perfect, but we had a Prime Minister, his name was John Howard—remember? And he had around him in his cabinet a number of people whom I believe were actually Christians. And you remember, things seemed to be going pretty well for fourteen years or so there.

Then, everybody—for what reason, I don't understand, but the press, the people—turned on him, and they tipped him and his government out. And what did we get then? A group that were in favor of different ideas that called themselves “Progressives.” And how long did it take for that which was good to be destroyed? How long did it take for wickedness to start expressing itself in our laws and in our nation? Not long.

And where are we now? Our government is weak, both morally and politically weak. The future? I'll be honest, it looks bleak. I don't see much promise in the future of Australia, I really don't, unless the Lord grants revival; unless the Lord turns things around. Because unless the people are changed, the governing will not change. If you want the wicked ones voted out, you have to have enough people who will vote on the basis of righteousness—true righteousness. It has happened in times gone past.

These things are not beyond the power of the Lord our God. He can do these things. My friends, don't fret. And if He does not do these things, don't imagine that He's not in control. He has His purposes. Isaiah understood this. God had set down in stone, so to speak, by His word, the destruction of Jerusalem. Isaiah saw it coming. Isaiah warned the people. Remember, Isaiah was preaching to a faithful remnant. Though their city was burned, though they may have been taken into captivity, though they may have lost all that they had ever worked for—the faithful remnant were preserved through their faith.

I'm not a prophet. Will Australia be dragged back from the brink? I don't know. Will God continue to pour out His judgment upon us? I don't know. Whatever He does is right. What did we sing? “Whatever my God ordains is right.” Whatever He does is right. But I'm praying that He will be merciful, and I'm praying that He will drag His churches back to biblical repentance.

This is not a time for rejoicing, my friends. This is not a time for partying. This is not a time for Christians who should know better to be lighthearted fools. We can rejoice in the Lord our God, and we should. We should worship Him with gladness in our hearts. On Christ, the solid rock, we stand. But God never put the church in the world for the purpose of the church circling the wagons and sitting safely within that circle and saying, “Well, they're going to hell in a handbasket, aren't they.” That was never His plan. When Jesus founded the church, what did He do? What did He say? “Go out. Go out into all the nations. And in that going out, I will be with you. Go out!” So here we are. The challenge is before us. The weight of God's word lands upon us. We're God's people. Do we take this seriously? Do we receive this as God's word? I'm not trying to preach you into a state of depression. I'm trying to preach you into a state of humble repentance, on behalf of ourselves and our sins, and on behalf of our nation.

Remember, all of the intercessors in Scripture always identified themselves with the people for whom they were praying. What sins are recorded in Scripture against Daniel? Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying Daniel was sinless, but what sins are recorded against him in Scripture? None. But when he started to pray, what did he say? “We and our fathers have sinned.” He identified with the very people for whom he was praying, though by grace he was living a life of justified righteousness. “We and our fathers have sinned. Be gracious to us, our God. Be gracious.”

When Moses interceded for the people after the incident with the golden calves, what did he say? Not that his offer was accepted, but what was the spirit, or what was it that he said? “Father,” or God, Lord, Yahweh, “do not blot their name out of your book, but blot my name out of your book.” He identified himself with the people who were the sinners, and he said to the Lord God, “I would rather die than see you destroy this nation.” God said, “I’ll judge whom I will judge.” He didn’t actually accept that intercession, on the surface of it. Why? Because Moses was not the Saviour. Moses was not God. In the end, there’s only one who can really, honestly, truly make that kind of intercession. Who’s that person? The Lord Jesus Christ.

But we, His church, have been called to live in Him, and to live as He lived, and to love as He loved. So we, His people, have been called to be a repentant and humble people, identifying ourselves with the sins of our nation, praying down the mercy of God. You see, I said earlier that the sins of those who wish to establish and confirm wickedness in our land will not only take them to hell, but are drawing hell onto this earth.

You’ve got to understand, that also works in the other way. The righteousness and the faithfulness of God’s people not only guarantee us heaven in the future, but they draw heaven down to this earth. They draw the blessings of God down to this earth. When God’s people pray, the Lord hears them. When God’s people obey, the Lord strengthens them. When God’s people love, the Lord upholds them.

This is actually a world-changing faith. It’s a world and society-changing message. And perhaps one of the things that we as a church have to repent of is the fact that we seem to have forgotten that, and we seem ready to actually circle the wagons and give up. “Let’s forget it. It’s not worth fighting for.” I understand what you mean when you say that. I understand God is God and God will do what God does. But that’s not for us to decide. He didn’t put His church in the world to make that decision. That judgment is not ours, it’s His to make. He put us in the world to be a people of the gospel, to be a gospel-preaching, gospel-living, gospel-loving people—a people calling the nations to repentance, person by person. And He can still do great things. He still is the sovereign God.

You know, you get told things like, “People don’t have the attention span they used to have anymore. They watch TV. They can only think for fourteen minutes at a time.” No. God is the sovereign God. God the Holy Spirit is the sovereign God. When God wants their attention, He’ll get it and He will hold it, because He is God.

“People can’t think anymore. They just want the sound bite.” In a worldly sense, yes, I know it’s true. But God is God. God is God! The gospel has been preached to savages and heathen before, and great revivals have occurred. And they surely hadn’t been instructed in thought and logic, and they surely hadn’t been taught to read, and they surely couldn’t sit and read for hours on end either. Yet God, by the power of His Holy Spirit, broke into the darkness and drew His people out from behind the gates of hell, setting them upon the Rock that is Christ.

Maybe one of the things that the church needs to repent of is the fact we’ve forgotten this, that we don’t seem to really believe this could happen. What are you praying for, if you don’t

believe this could happen? What are you calling upon God for, if you don't believe He's the Sovereign who can answer your prayers? Do you think there was something different about you to all the world around you? Was there something different about me? Or was I just another sinner, hardened in his sin, lost in darkness, until the Lord God, by His sovereign power, granted life? I know what I was. I was just another sinner, lost in darkness, hardened in heart, until the Lord God granted life, until the Lord God put light where once there was darkness. If He can do it for one, He can do it for thousands, He can do it for a hundred thousand, He can do it for a million. Numbers to Him are nothing. He's not limited by anything.

So my friends, where do we fit in this great scheme of things? Are we God's hearing, listening, praying, believing remnant, trusting in God, hoping desperately that our nation will be called to repentance? Or have we surrendered the ground? Are we building up the walls around our wagons? Are we kissing the world goodbye—"Off you go to hell in a handbasket"?

I understand the temptation, honestly I do. But it's not for us to make that judgment. That's the judgment of God, and only God. And when He makes that judgment, He is right in doing it. When we make that judgment, we become nothing but hypocrite Pharisees. I don't want to be a hypocrite Pharisee. I want to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to be a servant of the living God. What is it that you want to be? Do you hear the calling of God now? "Pray, humble yourselves before me." Oh, I pray that the Lord would grant life to the churches of Australia. We'll close in prayer.

Father in heaven, indeed we are sinful people, and we dwell in the midst of a sinful nation. And we have sinned against you, the one, true, living God. And your judgments are righteous and good. And you are doing no wrong in all that you do to this nation. Father, I pray that you would grant life to your church. I pray that you would grant revival to your church. I pray that your people would be convicted, that we would indeed be called to prayer and to intercession, that we would indeed preach the good news of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ to the world around us.

Father, forgive us, for we are sinners. We have no righteousness of our own, and we acknowledge before you that the only thing that sets us apart from the world is your grace. Help us to be like Christ. Help us to speak like Christ. Help us to love like Christ. Use us, we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.