

## **The Day of Judgment Isaiah 24:1-23**

Our sermon text this morning is Isaiah chapter 24. We're taking the whole chapter, verses 1 to 23. Before we read that text, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we do ask that you would speak to us from your word. I ask, Father, that you would help me speak. I ask, Father, that you would help us all as we listen. We pray that you would break down that which ought not to be. We pray that you would build up that which you desire. We pray that you would do these things by your word, and through the work and the power of your Holy Spirit. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Isaiah 24, starting at verse 1: "Behold, the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. <sup>2</sup> And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. <sup>3</sup> The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the LORD has spoken this word.

<sup>4</sup> The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. <sup>5</sup> The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. <sup>6</sup> Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left. <sup>7</sup> The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh. <sup>8</sup> The mirth of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. <sup>9</sup> No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. <sup>10</sup> The wasted city is broken down; every house is shut up so that none can enter. <sup>11</sup> There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has grown dark; the gladness of the earth is banished.

<sup>12</sup> Desolation is left in the city; the gates are battered into ruins. <sup>13</sup> For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done.

<sup>14</sup> They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty of the LORD they shout from the west. <sup>15</sup> Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; in the coastlands of the sea, give glory to the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>16</sup> From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, 'I waste away, I waste away. Woe is me! For the traitors have betrayed, with betrayal the traitors have betrayed.'

<sup>17</sup> Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth! <sup>18</sup> He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. <sup>19</sup> The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken. <sup>20</sup> The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again.

“<sup>21</sup> On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. <sup>22</sup> They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. <sup>23</sup> Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.” Amen.

So let’s very quickly try to recap where we are in the book of Isaiah. If you remember, starting back at chapter 1, Isaiah spoke forth concerning God’s judgment upon His unfaithful nation—upon the nation of Judah, upon the nation of Israel. Promises were made. There was going to be a faithful remnant. God was going to rule over the earth from Mount Zion. The remnant would be called into Mount Zion, and it would appear that also peoples from all over the world would be called into Mount Zion.

A Saviour was promised, a Son of David. A Son was given, a child to be born. “Behold,” in Isaiah chapter 7, “the virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a child and His name shall be called Immanuel”—God with us. Isaiah chapter 11: the Saviour will be clothed in the Holy Spirit. He will be clothed in righteousness. He will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He will be wise. He will be mighty. He will work a great work of salvation, which will be similar in many ways to the work of salvation that God showed us earlier in Scripture in the book of Exodus, when He sent Moses into Egypt to call His people out of slavery in Egypt.

Isaiah then started to turn his attention, if you’ll remember—basically, if you imagined Jerusalem at the center of the compass—he looked south, and then he looked east, and then he looked north, and then he looked west—and then he came back to Jerusalem and looked at God’s people and their inappropriate responses to God’s word and to God’s providence.

And now we come to Isaiah chapter 24. It would seem that here and now, Isaiah speaks generally of God’s judgments over all the earth, all the kingdoms of the world. There is, in some respects, a way we could read this chapter as judgments on God’s people, particularly God’s people in Jerusalem. I’m not going to trace all those thoughts out for us today, but there is definitely a reason to believe that much of what Isaiah is saying, we could understand as being said simply and only to God’s people in Jerusalem. But then in verses 4, 5, 6, the prophecy stretches out. It speaks of the whole world. It speaks of this judgment reaching to all the earth.

If you then move forward to verse 18 of Isaiah 24, it says there: “He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble.” Well if you’ve got a fairly good memory and you remember the story of the flood as recorded for us in the book of Genesis, what happened when God judged the world through the flood? It says in Genesis chapter 7, verse 11, “The windows of heaven were opened.” So there’s plenty of reason to also believe that Isaiah is speaking of all the world.

So if you asked me, “Scott, is Isaiah speaking of Jerusalem or the world?” I would say, “Yes, and both.” He’s speaking of a general judgment of all people, including those who were God’s people at that time—the nation of Judah. What’s the basis of this judgment? Why is God’s

judgment coming forth? Well let's look at verse 5. "5 The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant."

Now what's that about? Well, this is one of those parts of this passage which you could apply particularly and specifically to God's people. They had a covenant relationship with God. The Jews were under the Old Covenant. They had the law, remember, written out for them on tablets of stone. They had a covenant with God that was inaugurated through Moses. They had a covenant that they must keep. But this seems to be a covenant that has impact on all the world, on all the nations of the earth. And what we would have to conclude, I think, is that the covenant spoken of here is one of the more general covenants that God made with all of humanity, through representatives.

For example, God made a covenant with Noah when Noah came out of the ark. Now, who was left in the world when Noah came out of the ark? No one but Noah's family. So that covenant made with Noah as the covenant representative, was a covenant made with everybody. Noah stood at the head of that covenant. What was the sign of that covenant? The rainbow. It would appear something had changed about the world's weather systems. I mean, it would be a meaningless sign if Noah had seen rainbows all of his life. But God actually points Noah to a rainbow, and says, "You see that rainbow—that bow in the sky? That's the sign of my covenant with you. I will never again destroy the earth with flooding. This is my covenant with you, and all the generations that come after you."

But God also made a covenant with Adam. Now when I say God made a covenant with Adam, I'm probably stepping into a little bit of a controversial area. It wasn't spelt out. Nowhere do you hear in the book of Genesis God say to Adam, "This is my covenant with you." But when you start to look in Scripture at what a covenant is, and how a covenant works, and how God imposes a covenant, you have blessings. Now what's the blessing that Adam was promised? Life. You had cursings for disobedience. What was the cursing that Adam was promised? "Eat of the fruit, and on the day that you eat of it, you will surely die."

A covenant has representatives, and the man who is the representative of a covenant draws down consequences on all of his offspring. What do we know from the New Testament, particularly from the book of Romans, for example? Adam sinned, and therefore, all of humanity fell. And so although the word "covenant" is not spelled out for us in the book of Genesis, it would seem reasonable to conclude that what God and Adam had was a covenant relationship. And those theologians who would call that a covenant relationship usually call that the covenant of works.

Adam had a covenant of works in the Garden. He was placed in the Garden righteous, and innocent, and holy, and able to obey. He was able to keep the covenant that God gave him, and he broke that covenant. And the thing is, Adam had created within him, written as it were on the tablet of his heart, the law of God. Adam didn't need to tablets of stone with "You shall not murder" written upon them. He didn't need a tablet of stone with "You shall not commit adultery" written upon it. Why? Because he was created upright. We're told in the book of Ecclesiastes that man was made upright, but he has thought of many schemes.

Adam was upright, and it's reasonable to expect that Adam knew those things which have always been upright and holy in the eyes of God, that Adam had God's law, that Adam understood that he was in a covenant relationship with the living God, and that if he broke that covenant, there would be, indeed, consequences.

So my suggestion to you would be that Isaiah chapter 24 is telling us that ultimately, the consequences of Adam's sin, which flowed to all of humanity, the consequences of that disobedience, will be judgment upon all the earth, judgment of all the wicked. There is coming, there is certainly coming, a final day—a day when grace finishes in this age. There is coming a day of judgment. We are in this moment in the age of grace. God sends forth His call, "Repent! Believe! And you will be saved! You will be forgiven. Seek forgiveness and reconciliation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

But Scripture tells us in the book of Romans that there's a definite number—there's not one more, there's not one less, there's a definite number. God has a definite people marked out to be called into His kingdom, and when that number is completed, when that number is fulfilled, the age of grace closes out, and this age finishes in judgment.

I'm not saying that God doesn't judge even now. He does. God is working in all things, through all things, through all of providence. God is always judging, even as we speak—saving and hardening hearts, converting and rejecting humanity. God judges. He judges through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the points of that vision we get in the book of Revelation of the Lamb receiving the scroll and opening the scroll, breaking those seals is that every time he breaks a seal, what does it then describe? A judgment. Jesus has been enthroned. Jesus is mediating the will of God throughout the earth. All things are being done according to the will of God.

We so desperately want to live in a world where you don't have to fear God. The human race in general so desperately wants a fluffy Santa Claus for God. So desperately do people want to be told that it doesn't really matter. It's okay. Do as you please. Don't worry. God's nice. God accepts you just the way you are. Whatever you are is what God wants you to be, therefore you've got nothing to worry about. No need to repent, no need to be convicted of your sins. Cast off guilt. Guilt is just an old-fashioned, hell-fire and brimstone concept that's held by those traditional stick-in-the-mud idiot Christians—you know, the "Fundamentalists." Cast that off. Don't worry about the commandments of God, don't worry about the law of God, don't worry about righteousness. Forget about those things. God will not judge.

That's what the world wants to hear. They won't hear it from Isaiah. They wouldn't hear it from Jesus. When we read earlier from Matthew chapter 24, could you hear some of the similarities in what Jesus says in the Olivet Discourse to what Isaiah is saying here today to us in Isaiah chapter 24? And we've gone through the Olivet Discourse before when we did the gospel of Mark. I think that the Olivet Discourse had a specific and a particular application. It was the judgment of God upon Jerusalem in 70 A.D. But even then I said to you, *But*, this is a sign. This is a pointer. This is God's plan for all the earth. Jesus will return in judgment. He will judge His enemies. He will strike down the wicked.

Let's get down and into our text and look at some major points that rise from it. Basically my summary statement for the first section that I've got for us, verses 1 to 13, would be:

***The world is cursed to destruction as a result of the breaking of God's everlasting covenant.***

*No one escapes*

One of the features of this cursing to destruction, verses 1 to 3 tell us, is no one escapes. This is universal. This covers them all. Notice how much stress was laid on the idea that there's no escape from this.

Looking at verse 2: "As with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. <sup>3</sup> The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the LORD has spoken this word."

None escape. There's no exceptions there: not the wealthy, not the poor; not the powerful, not the weak; not the religious, not the non-religious—and I'm using "religion" there in a negative sense. It doesn't matter what religion people practice, it's not going to make any difference on that final day.

Let's have a look at another feature of this judgment. Looking at verse 1, it speaks of *earthquakes*. "The LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants." Look also very quickly over to verse 19, where some of the judgment is recapped: "<sup>19</sup> The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken." That's one of the similarities with the things that Jesus said in the Olivet Discourse.

Turn to the gospel of Mark chapter 13. This is after He's been asked, "When will these things be, and what will be the sign?" Jesus has just told them that the temple will be destroyed. We'll start reading at verse 5: "And Jesus began to say to them, 'See that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup> And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>8</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.'" These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

Now for those of you who are here and remember as we went through Mark chapter 13, I taught that the major fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse was the destruction of Jerusalem. But look at what it says there—the last thing we read. "These are but the beginning of the birth pains." And even though this message of judgment from Jesus was fulfilled in 70 A.D. in Jerusalem, that was but the beginning of the birth pains. The whole world would like us to say that earthquakes have nothing to do with the providence of God. Scripture doesn't tell us that. Scripture doesn't give us that liberty, that freedom.

Turn now to the book of Revelation chapter 6, as Jesus is now opening the scrolls. Remember I've already spoken of it. Having received the scrolls, He opens them. Chapter 6, verse 12:

“<sup>12</sup> When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, <sup>13</sup> and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.” Earthquakes. Why? Because God has ordained that there will be earthquakes.

Stay in the book of Revelation, and move on to Revelation chapter 16, looking at verses 17 to 21. This time, we’re looking at a different cycle of seven—the bowls, or the censurers of God’s judgment. Revelation chapter 16, starting to read at verse 17: “<sup>17</sup> The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ <sup>18</sup> And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. <sup>19</sup> The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.”

Stay in the book of Revelation and move back to Revelation chapter 11. I’m sort of bouncing you around a bit, but there’s something I want you to see. Revelation chapter 11 is a kind of little break between the running of the seven scrolls, or the breaking of the scrolls, and then you’ve got the seventh trumpet.

Now you’ve got this vision where you have two prophets, two prophetic preachers, preaching in Jerusalem, and they have the power to doom anybody who would harm them, and fire falls from their mouth and consumes their foes. I don’t want to argue about it—past, present, future—that’s not the point; who it is, that’s not the point. Is it literal? That’s not my point here. That’s not what I want you to see. What I want you to see is, when they stop preaching the gospel, something happens. We’ll start reading about these two preachers at verse 7:

“<sup>7</sup> And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, <sup>8</sup> and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup> For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, <sup>10</sup> and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. <sup>12</sup> Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here!’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. <sup>13</sup> And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.”

When the gospel preaching was finished, what happened? A great earthquake. The earth was split asunder. A tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake. We’re told that earthquakes are the judgment of God. We’re told that earthquakes come according to the providence of God.

I’m not a prophet. I personally am no prophet. I cannot look at a certain earthquake and say, “That city was destroyed because that government enacted that law. That city was destroyed

because that king was utterly corrupt. That city was destroyed,” etc., etc. I don’t have prophetic insight or prophetic vision into that kind of interpreting the signs of the times. But I can tell you this—Scripture tells me that earthquakes are a promise of coming and future judgment, and that earthquakes are a sampling, or a foretaste of that future judgment, and they are a guarantee that the end is coming.

Is the end coming this year? I don’t know. As I said, I’m not a prophet. One year, ten years, a hundred years, a thousand years—no idea. That’s not for us to know. But God tells us, when we see these things, to pay attention. Pay attention. Understand, He does these things according to His will. Earthquakes.

Let’s have another look back in Isaiah chapter 24. We’ve already mentioned this somewhat, but we’ll go into a little bit more detail. Verses 4 to 6 speak of the reason for this happening, and it tells us it’s because the earth has been defiled by the breaking of the covenant, in verse 5 in particular. We’ll read verses 4 and 5:

“<sup>4</sup>The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. <sup>5</sup>The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.”

Once again, I’m suggesting to you that this is the covenant of works that God required of Adam from the very beginning of humanity. That simple covenant which was, “Obey, and you will receive life. Disobey, and you will receive death.” And I believe that Adam clearly understood that those were the terms of his relationship with God, and I believe that Adam clearly understood that everything he did had an impact on all of his posterity.

Let’s have a look at a few ideas. Isaiah tells us “the earth mourns and withers.” We’re told a similar thing in the New Testament. Turn to the book of Romans chapter 8. We just want to look at verses 19 to 23. Romans chapter 8, starting at verse 19:

“<sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup>And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

What’s that talking about—creation groaning, creation groaning eagerly in the pains of childbirth? Not only the creation, but we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groaning inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Paul’s personifying the earth. He’s saying the earth suffers because of the sinfulness of humanity. He’s saying that all of creation is waiting for the end of sin, just as we are awaiting our new body in the new heavens and the new earth, and that this is like birth pains. This is like labour, this suffering. It’s as though all of creation is labouring to give birth to the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwells, where sin is not to be found.

And sin is causing this pain and this suffering. Remember in the curses that God laid on humanity, He laid on Eve the curse that she would suffer greatly in childbearing. It would appear that before sin entered the world, if they had never sinned, giving birth to a child would not have been an intensely painful process. And yet, part of the price of sin was that that which once apparently would have been pleasurable—I'm not saying it would not have been work, but it would have been in some way pleasurable, in some way enjoyable—became a painful process. It's painful to give birth. And that apparently has affected the whole earth. This giving birth is a painful process, and the earth groans under the weight of sin.

Turn back to Genesis chapter 3. We'll start reading at verse 16. God is speaking forth His judgments as the result of sin. Genesis chapter 3, starting at verse 16: <sup>16</sup>“To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.’

<sup>17</sup>“And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup>thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’”

What did God say to Adam? “Cursed is the ground because of you. Cursed is the earth because of you.” The earth no longer freely gives up food, as it was in the Garden of Eden where the fruit trees each were bearing their fruit. Adam and Eve basically lived upon the bountiful supply of God. Not anymore. The ground's cursed. “You're going to labour, you're going to sweat to bring forth food. And even as you labour and sweat to bring forth food, the ground is going to bring forth thistles. The earth is cursed because of your sins.”

I just want to trace out this idea of this defiled earth because of man's broken covenant with God. Let's get it really clear in our minds. Move now to the book of Romans chapter 1. We're all over the Scripture today—all over the Bible. It's a good place to be. Romans chapter 1, start reading at verse 18: <sup>18</sup>“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

This is the result of sin, and Paul is not speaking here of just some people, he's speaking of all people, all the people in the world—all the peoples, all the nations, all the races. What's he saying? Everybody should know better. Everybody should know better. God's invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.” *Clearly* perceived—it's not hidden, it's not secret.



Why can't they see, then? They suppress the truth. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Verse 18: "Who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." They don't want to see, they don't want to know, they don't want to hear. They'd rather be blind. They'd rather worship evil. They'd rather be enemies of God, and fool themselves and say, "You see, I'm doing what I want. I'm happy. It's fun. I'm enjoying it. Life is great when you don't have any laws to obey."

They are corrupters of the earth. Where did this corruption come from? Let's just get it straight from Scripture. Stay in the book of Romans, and move on to Romans chapter 5. Start reading at verse 12: "<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—<sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come."

Now what's he saying? Well, he's saying pretty much what I've been saying to us already. All the world is filled with people who die. All the world is filled with mortals, all of humanity. I'm telling you, it's pretty much a one-for-one thing. If you're born, you're going to die. Very few escape. Scripture only records two, Enoch and Elijah. Apart from that, if you're born, you're going to die.

Why? Well, it's clear there, isn't it? "Death through sin." Death spread to all men because all sin, and sin came into the world through one man. Paul there speaks as though someone wanted to argue with him. Reading at verse 13: "For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law." What does that mean? The law—in the context of what Paul is writing that's the Ten Commandments, the Old Covenant law—Paul's saying that if there were no law written on the hearts of men, if they weren't aware of God before God revealed Himself to and through Moses, why is it that they were dying?

Paul's saying they might not have had the law on stone, and they might not have had the law by covenant, but they had the law. They might not have had an Old Testament covenant relationship with God, but they still had the covenant relationship with God that had been standing from the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden—God's righteous requirement of obedience on the promise of life, which was broken.

And so they died. No one has an excuse. No one can hide from God, and no one can hide from their responsibility for breaking the law of God. So the world languishes and withers, the world is defiled, because the everlasting covenant has been broken.

Back in Isaiah chapter 24, verse 6: "Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left." Its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. Let's just think about that. Its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. The world is filled with people suffering for their guilt, and they don't want to acknowledge that they're guilty. The world is filled with people suffering for their guilt, and they don't want to actually confront the fact that they are guilty in the sight of God for the things that they do.

How does the world solve that problem? If you're suffering from some kind of guilt problem, if you're feeling really bad and down on yourself, you know that you do wrong, and you do it again and again and again, and you don't seem to have any true control over yourself. You don't seem to be able to restrain yourself from evil. Go to some kind of worldly counselor and ask them, "What's wrong with me? Why do I always feel so guilty?" And what are they going to tell you? Well, they'll come to you with the wisdom of man.

"You feel guilty because you're allowing old-fashioned rules and regulations to mess with your way of thinking. You're allowing old-fashioned religious righteousness to suppress you and to oppress you. You think you're doing wrong because you've heard those evil old laws that those nasty Christians want the world to hear and want the world to obey.

"You feel guilty because they're telling you that the law says, 'You shall not commit adultery,' and they're telling you that that commandment, 'You shall not commit adultery,' covers all kinds of sexual unrighteousness, and the only true sexual cleanness can be found in a marriage relationship—one man marries one woman in the sight of God, forming a life-time covenant which sanctifies their whole life together, brings God into the relationship, puts God at the center of the relationship, and thereby blesses the sexual union, forming a one-flesh union.

"You hear these things, and they're making you feel guilty with their nasty rules and regulations; whereas we are so wise, and we are so deeply educated now, we understand what you actually are. You're not a special creation. You're not an image-bearer of God. What you actually are is a smart animal. That's all you are—an ongoing, smart, chemical reaction. And you have sexual desires because all animals have sexual desires, and all you have to do is happily and joyfully satisfy your sexual desires, happily and joyfully cast off all idea of right and wrong. With regards to sexuality, do as you please, anytime you please, anywhere you please.

"Don't worry about anyone else. Fulfill all your desires, and you won't feel guilty, because all those rules that God ordained—they don't actually exist. They're just an invention of man. What you are is a smart animal. So, just go for it."

And that's how they try to deal with guilt. Pretend that there's nothing to be guilty about. But here's the thing: Everybody feels guilty. I tried to live according to that philosophy myself. If you had have met me at twenty, I would have told you I was an atheist. I would have told you I believed nothing. I tried to live that way myself. The funny thing is, when I read the Scripture, when I started to read the Bible, I very quickly realized that I was guilty. It didn't take much, it didn't take long, it wasn't hard. I read the Old Testament, I read the law of God, I read of God's righteous hatred of sin, and I knew I was guilty before God.

The world hates the idea of guilt, and the world rejects the idea of right and wrong, in an attempt to escape from guilt. And here's the thing about those people who are saying, "Oh, I'm free. I do as I please. I'm happy, happy, happy." In their heart of hearts, what are they doing? They're suppressing the truth. In their heart of hearts, what are they feeling? Guilt. They're guilty, and they know it. They know what's right. They know what's wrong.

Every time someone gets on the soapbox—and there are very few things in this society that someone, in the worldly sense, is willing to get on the soapbox about—but the moment they get on the soapbox about something, what they're actually acknowledging is that there is a transcendent morality. So the next time a murdering pedophile gets caught and goes through the justice system and gets sentenced to jail, you'll see people all over the country, get on the soapbox, get on Face Book, get on the Internet: "There ought to be the death penalty for that! I hope he never comes out. I hope he dies in jail. Evil, rotten, stinking mongrel!"

If we're just animals, if we're just advanced animals, what makes him an evil, rotten, stinking mongrel? Think about it. If we're just animals, what makes it wrong? How can it be wrong if you're nothing but an ongoing chemical reaction? There has to be something special about a child to make pedophilia wrong. What's special about it?

Well, the child, you say, is innocent. Okay, what does "innocent" mean? The moment you try to tell me that the child is innocent, you're saying that there is right and wrong. You're saying that the child is himself or herself guilty of no transgression. Let's not argue about theological innocence; no one's innocent in the sight of God. Even a child is born a sinner. But in terms of human experience, a child is innocent. In terms of human experience, a three or a four-year-old has done nothing to make them deserving of such an evil punishment. As soon as you say that child is innocent, you're saying there's right and wrong.

You know, every other day of the week, there are philandering, plundering, pornography-consuming, women-chasing, man-chasing, whatever-chasing sexual deviants. But then someone gets on the soapbox and says, "Pedophilia is evil." They know there's right and wrong. And if they know there's right and wrong, well here's the thing—In their heart of hearts, whether they want to know it or not, in their heart of hearts, they know they are guilty of their sin. They know that they are guilty before God, and all the philosophy and the cleverness of the world cannot cleanse them of that guilt. What can wash away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. And so they're guilty, and their conscience is stained. And the earth, the whole earth, is under this burden of guilt. And the day of judgment is coming.

Let's move forward. There's a glimmer of hope. We'll start at Isaiah 24, verse 12:  
"12 Desolation is left in the city; the gates are battered into ruins. 13 For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done." What's Isaiah speaking of here? Well, he's using remnant language. What's left after God has cleansed the city? What's left after God has sent Judah off into captivity? What will be left? Remember? A faithful remnant.

Let's just turn quickly to Isaiah chapter 6. Now Isaiah's just been given his commission, and he's been told to preach to a people—a people with blind eyes, deafened ears, and hardened or fattened hearts. And Isaiah says in verse 11, "How long?" The Lord says, "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, 12 and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. 13 And though a tent remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.' The holy seed is its stump." A burning, and then a burning again—a removal, and then a burning. The holy seed is its stump. How long will this go on, asks Isaiah,

and God said, “It goes on until there’s nothing left but a remnant. There’s nothing left but those whom I am saving.”

Stay in the book of Isaiah, and move forward to Isaiah chapter 10. We’ll look at verses 17 to 20. “<sup>17</sup> The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame, and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day. <sup>18</sup> The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away. <sup>19</sup> The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down. <sup>20</sup> In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. <sup>21</sup> A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.”

***The new creation sings praise while the prophet mourns.***

Now go back to Isaiah chapter 24, verse 13. Isaiah says, after the olive tree is beaten, after the grape harvest is done, then there’ll be a remnant. Now looking at verses 14 to 16, we get something here. I’ve sort of subtitled that section *The new creation sings praise while the prophet mourns.*

What happens with this remnant? I’ll assume that those singing—the “they” that starts verse 14, “They lift up their voices, they sing for joy”—those who are singing are God’s faithful remnant, the ones He’s saving. “<sup>14</sup> They lift up their voices, they sing for joy; over the majesty of the LORD they shout from the west. <sup>15</sup> Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; in the coastlands of the sea, give glory to the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>16</sup> From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, ‘I waste away, I waste away. Woe is me! For the traitors have betrayed, with betrayal the traitors have betrayed.’”

So what’s going on? The remnant prays. Where are the remnant from? All over the world. Verse 16: “From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One.” Now what’s the significance of that phrase, “the ends of the earth”? Well, let’s go to a few places for it. Go to Psalm 2—a psalm of the righteous Messiah, the King whom God is going to set upon Zion. Starting at verse 7, God speaking to His Son:

“<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’” Where does Isaiah hear this praise coming from? The ends of the earth—those who are the possession of God’s holy one are praising. Why are they praising? For the judgment has come, for evil has been put down. The wickedness has been brought to an end. And God’s remnant praise Him.

Stay in the book of Psalms and move to Psalm 67. Now Psalm 67 is often called the “Missionary Psalm” because it talks about how God is sending a message out to all the earth. “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!” is the refrain of this psalm. Look at how it finishes. Psalm 67, verse 7: “God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!” Let all the ends of the earth fear Him. The peoples praising God; all the ends of the earth, called in to praise God.

Move now to the book of Isaiah chapter 62. Once again, one of these great prophecies that Isaiah gives us concerning the people whom the Lord saves. We'll start at verse 10. Isaiah 62:10:

“<sup>10</sup> Go through, go through the gates; prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway; clear it of stones; lift up a signal over the peoples. <sup>11</sup> Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.’ <sup>12</sup> And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.” The ends of the earth—the Lord is proclaiming His gospel of salvation to all the ends of the earth.

Move now to the New Testament, Acts, chapter 1. We'll start reading at verse 6. Now this is the ascension of our Lord, and He's asked a question by the apostles. Acts chapter 1, verse 6:

“<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ <sup>7</sup> He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and’—where?—‘and to the end of the earth.’” To the end of the earth.

So why is this praise Isaiah speaks of coming in from the ends of the earth? Why are people singing, “Glory to the Righteous One”? Because the Saviour has come. Because the gospel has gone out. Because God is calling a people into His kingdom, and all the ends of the earth are calling to God and glorifying Him and glorifying the Righteous One. Even as Isaiah speaks of judgment, he speaks of salvation, and he speaks of the Saviour, who is calling people into God's kingdom.

And let's look at the end of Isaiah 24, verse 16: “But I say, ‘I waste away, I waste away. Woe is me! For the traitors have betrayed, with betrayal the traitors have betrayed.’” Why is Isaiah not rejoicing? Why is *Isaiah* not rejoicing? Why is Isaiah mourning? Why is Isaiah feeling grieved? Why? Because he sees that God's judgment is falling, even upon Judea, even upon His own people, even upon Jerusalem. It's a great and glorious work, this work of salvation—God calling peoples in from all over the earth into His kingdom. And yet Isaiah sees that that means the glory days of Judah are finished. The glory days of this earthly Jerusalem are over. They're finished. It's done for.

Do you know the feeling? Do you know the feeling? I long, I long to see the return of the Lord in glory. I long to see the end of all evil. I long to see God vindicating Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ declaring Himself. I long to be there on the day when every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And I look at my nation, and I mourn. Often it makes me cry, because we are sinful people. We are a Godless nation of covenant-breakers. We are a nation filled with people who hate the living God. We're a nation filled with sinners who will not heed the warnings. They will not heed God's gracious warnings. They've set their hearts on sin. They've turned their backs on the grace of God. And unless God Himself does

some incredible and mighty work, all they're doing is ripening like fruit to fall from the tree for judgment. They're like animals being fattened for the Christmas feast.

It breaks my heart. It breaks my heart. I want to see churches filled with people glorifying God. I don't like seeing people in the misery of their sins. It's no great joy to me to see broken families. It's no great joy to me to see drunks falling over in the street. It's no great joy to me to have people coming here to our church and asking, "Can you pray for my family? So-and-so is suicidal. So-and-so is addicted to ice. So-and-so is an alcoholic. This other one just was drunk driving and had a car crash and he's dead."

Isaiah says, "I waste away. Woe is me. For the traitors have betrayed, with betrayal the traitors have betrayed." The traitors have betrayed. What does he mean there? Who are the treacherous ones? Well we're obviously not getting through the whole chapter today. We're going to come back to chapter 24 next week, the Lord willing. Let's finish off at Psalm 73. Turn to Psalm 73, and start reading at verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. <sup>2</sup> But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. <sup>3</sup> For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

<sup>4</sup> For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. <sup>5</sup> They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. <sup>6</sup> Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. <sup>7</sup> Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. <sup>8</sup> They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. <sup>9</sup> They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. <sup>10</sup> Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. <sup>11</sup> And they say, 'How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?' <sup>12</sup> Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. <sup>13</sup> All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. <sup>14</sup> For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. <sup>15</sup> If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' I would have betrayed the generation of your children. <sup>16</sup> But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, <sup>17</sup> until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end."

What is the Scripture saying to us here, and what do I want us to see? The Psalmist here speaks of how it seems that everything goes right for the world. They've got the money, they've got the real estate, they've got the possessions, they've got children. It seems that all is going well for them. And the Psalmist complains, starting at verse 13, "I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence," but it was vain. "I have been stricken and rebuked every morning."

He's saying, "It seems to me that there's no point in righteousness. It seems to me that there's no reason to pursue holiness in the sight of God. It seems to me that this whole life is just one great pointless joke, because it appears to me that the wicked get everything they want, and it always goes right for them, and nothing ever goes right for me."

Verse 15: "If I had said, 'I will speak thus'"—so stop and think now. What's he saying? He's saying that he never said that. He said, "I thought those things. This ran through my mind. I

couldn't understand why things were like this. I couldn't understand why the world looked the way it looked. If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' if I had taught people to think this way, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. If I had taught this, I would have been a betrayer of the children. I would have been a treacherous one, one who betrays. I would have been a traitor." And, verse 16, "when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,<sup>17</sup> until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end."

Do you hear what he's saying? He looks at the world and he sees the evil and the wicked. And you know how they say, "Evil never prospers," and "Good men have only to fight and evil can never win"? That sort of proverbial wisdom doesn't seem to really work in the end, does it? He's saying, "I look at the world, and I see that everything seems to be going right for the wicked—everything. And I look at myself, and I live in this constant struggle for holiness and righteousness, and the Lord rebukes me every morning for my sin. Every morning, I'm stricken and rebuked for my sins! I feel guilt before God who is in heaven! And if I had taught people that life was pointless, and if I had taught people that that's the way things are, I would have been treacherous. I would have been a betrayer."

But then, verse 17, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end"—then I saw how it finishes. When I came into the presence of God, I realized something. I understood something: The wicked may well indeed appear to be on top of the world. The wicked may well indeed appear to get their unrighteous laws passed. They may well indeed appear to be the victorious ones. What do they say? "We're on the right side of history!" We're on the right side of history. The day is coming. The day is coming. When we enter into the presence of our God, we discern their end. The "right side of history" will not be shown forth until that day. But on that day, that day of coming judgment, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will declare what the right side of history is, and it's *His* side. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you perish in the way." The right side of history is God's side.

It appears the church is without power in the world. It appears we're weak and feeble, and we're nobody, and no one listens, and no one cares, and our life is a complete waste of time. It appears all the happiness and joy is to be found in sin. My friends, come into the presence of God. There you will discern their end. There you will see the way that it really is. They are being fattened for the slaughter. They are being prepared for destruction. And we, God's people, through this burden which in New Testament terms is the carrying of the cross, through this burden of Christ-likeness, through this burden of being hated in the world because the world first hated our Saviour, through this burden of losing battles, we win the war.

The church may lose many, many battles. Evil laws may well be passed. It will be a miraculous grace of God if they are not. Yet we win the war. We are actually on the right side of history. Betrayers betray. They compromise with the world. They say, "Let's get with the strength. Let's get with the right side of history. Let's do what the people want. Let's water down the message. Let's make it nice and agreeable. Let's tell them that sin is not sin. Let's tell them that God doesn't care about sin. Let's tell them that if you want the blessings, you've got to get hold of them and seek them for yourself. Let's tell them what they want to hear."

And they are betrayers, and they betray. Speaking thus, they are fools, and the final day will show that they are on the wrong side of history. They are the ones who will suffer the judgment of God. We'll leave it there. As I said, we'll have to come back to Isaiah chapter 24 next week. Let's close in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you that you, through Jesus Christ, have brought us into your kingdom, and that you have put us in your hand. We are held in your hand, and there we are safe. No matter what the world does, no matter which way things go, you indeed are our fortress, our rock, and our deliverance.

Father in heaven, I pray that you would uphold us in faith. I pray, Father, that you would use us greatly and mightily to preach your truth to the world, that people would be called to repentance, and give glory to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and that they would join in the chorus, and sing glory to the Righteous One. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.