

Trust

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[0 : 00] Well, do have your Bibles open or switched on at Isaiah chapter 10. And as you do that, let me pray for God's help. Heavenly Father, I pray that your spirit would give me words to speak and would give us all ears to hear from you through your word this evening.

Amen. What do secondhand car salesmen, journalists and politicians all have in common? I think the answer is probably fairly obvious. We simply don't trust them, do we? In fact, in a recent survey suggested these were the three most or least rather trusted professions in the UK. I'm sorry if you are a second car salesman, journalist or politician, but we just don't trust you. There's no prizes for guessing who topped that list. But trust is important, isn't it? Trust is given and it is given for a reason. Through the prophecy of Isaiah, God is asking the nation of Judah, who are you going to trust?

[1 : 16] Will you trust God? And maybe we can ask that same question of ourselves. Who are we going to trust? Or more specifically, what would God have to be like for us to truly trust him?

That's the question we will be asking this evening. What sort of God would we trust? But where have we got to? Where have we been in the story of Isaiah?

Well, the first five chapters offered a sort of spiritual health check for the southern kingdom of Judah. They acted as a sort of prologue to the book. They introduced, if you like, the themes of God's judgment and hope.

Then in chapter 6, we see Isaiah's vision and his commissioning from the Lord. Then in chapters 7 to 9, Isaiah proclaims God's coming judgment on the southern kingdom.

Judgment is coming to Judah, he says, but God will rescue those who trust him. Then last week, the spotlight sort of shifted.

[2 : 23] Up to this point, Judah has been the main character in the spotlight. But then last week, the focus shifts to Israel in the north. Now, I take it this section that we're in is still a warning to Judah.

That's where Isaiah ministered. But I think it's still a warning to Judah, as if to say, see what's going to happen to them. When you see it, don't expect to escape the same sort of judgment.

And last week, Christian helped us see why God is angry at the northern kingdom of Israel. For turning their back on him, for failing to trust him.

And so in all of this, up to this point, God's really been asking, who are you going to trust? That's where we've been so far in this book.

But this oncoming judgment on Israel, as Judah in the south looks north as they look on, it begs the question, why would they trust this God? It's really what we're going to be thinking about this evening.

[3 : 26] The Assyrian army is coming. God just does not look like he's in control. And the Assyrian isn't being judged for his evil or his pride.

God doesn't look very fair. And God has made all these promises to his people. And it looks as though he's breaking them. God doesn't look very faithful.

Why would they trust this God? Well, today's passage wonderfully answers those questions. And it reassures God's people. It reassures faithful people, both then and now.

Three big reasons that we can trust God. Three F's. God is always in full control. God is always fair. And God is always faithful.

So the first thing to notice in our passage is that God is always in full control. Did you see that in our passage? Have a look at verse 5 with me. How is Assyria described?

[4 : 27] The rod of my anger. The club of my wrath. Assyria is being described as a weapon in God's hand.

Simply as a rod or a club. Certainly effective and powerful. But without the one wielding it. Simply an inanimate object. Or in verse 6.

God says, I send him. I dispatch him. Assyria is simply God's errand boy. A messenger. Something like a royal envoy sent on the king's behalf.

It's God who is in full control here. Verses 15 and 16. We see the same thing again. Have a look at verse 15 with me. Does the axe raise itself above the person who swings it?

Or the saw against the person who uses it? God says, Assyria is just like a simple tool in my hand. And a tool has no control over the one using it.

[5 : 32] That famous saying, a bad workman blames his tools, couldn't be more inappropriate at this stage. God's tool simply carries out his purposes. For God is in full control.

Even when it looks like the opposite is true. So the Assyrian army is coming to conquer Israel. It looks as though this God and his people are totally defeated.

And yet it is God who is in full control. God is saying to Judah, you can trust me in this. I am in full control. I think there's something that we need to be really careful about here this evening.

As we think about this. It's really important, I think, that we don't jump to try and describe all sorts of things today as God's judgment on a sinful world. Have you seen? I don't know if you've seen this. People trying to say that about COVID or about various governments or whatever. And that might be true. We just don't know. But I'm not sure we'd be wise to try and play the role of the prophet in that way.

[6 : 39] What is key for us today is that in all of this, God is in full control. There are lots of things in this world today that we don't have control over, aren't there?

Sometimes even in the small things of our everyday. And that can feel really overwhelming. Often in it all, it's really hard to see God's purposes.

But we can be absolutely certain that he has a purpose in it all. Whatever we're facing. The oncoming Assyrian war machine. He is in control.

God is always in full control. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the person of Jesus. At the cross, the very people that his followers thought Jesus had come to free them from, the oppressive Roman Empire, those very people execute Jesus in a most horrific way.

He just looks totally defeated. God does not look like he is in control in that moment. But of course, that was the moment that God was fully in control.

[7 : 54] That was the moment his plans reached fulfillment at the cross. Where the power and majesty of King Jesus was made so clear in his weakness and his humanity.

When God looked most defeated, he was in full control. And so for us, on this side of Jesus, as we struggle to see God's purposes in the world today.

As we struggle to see his purposes in the hurt and the pain of everyday life. Whatever it is that we're facing. Know this.

When God looked his weakest. When he looked most defeated. When it looked as though the world had won. In that moment, he was in full control.

In that moment, he was making a way for you and for me. Despite our sins and our failures, he was making a way for us to know him. And that is good news, isn't it?

[8 : 59] That is really good news. Would we trust this God? He is in full control. We also see in our verses this evening that he is always fair.

Maybe you remember that feeling. It happened to me all the time. Accused by your teacher or your parents for something that you simply did not do. Just so unfair. Or maybe when your big sister gets a much nicer, bigger, more expensive Christmas present than you.

It's just so unfair, isn't it? And we feel that because we all want justice. We all want to live in a world that is governed fairly. How reassuring then that our God is always fair.

Judah, the southern kingdom, as they look at this unfolding judgment on the north, they've got to be asking, what is God going to do about Assyria?

Isn't he going to judge them too? Assyria is famously evil, famously anti-God. This all just seems so unfair. And their answer comes in verse 12.

[10 : 05] Do you see what God says in verse 12? I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

This is the only bit of our passage that isn't written in Hebrew poetry. I don't know if your translation makes that obvious, but this verse is clearly really important.

Because God is saying he's going to humble prideful Assyria. He's saying here, you can trust me. I am always fair.

Now, at this stage, you might be asking the question, if Assyria is simply a tool in God's hand, how can he blame them? Is God a bad workman for blaming his tools?

Honestly, I don't have a really good answer to that question. I'm not sure the Bible really gives us one explicitly. But the Bible is clear. God has made us human beings with the ability to make decisions.

[11:09] And there are two things that the Bible is really clear on all the way throughout the Bible. God is in full control. He's sovereign over all. And God is also fair throughout the Bible.

He holds humans to account for our decisions. The Bible holds these two things in tension without any difficulty. Maybe we can do that too.

Last week, we saw that God was fair to bring his righteous anger to bear on Israel. And he uses Assyria to do that. He's in full control. But in our verses today, we see that Assyria was not content with God's purposes.

This is the key here. Have a look at verse 7. God is speaking about Assyria. This is not what he intends. This is not what he has in mind. His purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations. Assyria wants more than to exercise judgment under God's restraint. He's maybe a bit like a prefect that's been asked to supervise detention, but can't help but start beating the other pupils.

[12:22] He's been given the job of disciplining by God, but he can't help but take it further, take things into his own hands. And Assyria is such a dominant power on the world stage at this moment in history.

Have a look at verse 8. The Assyrian says, Keep reading with me in verse 9.

Has not Kalno fared like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad and Samaria like Damascus?

These are all places that the Assyrian Empire has already conquered.

He says we have a track record. Our war machine will not be stopped. Assyria is so confident in his own power and majesty.

And then the whole thing, it comes to a head in verses 10 and 11. Read those with me. As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria.

[13:33] Shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols?

Assyria says that he has destroyed all these other kingdoms and their idols, their gods, and he will do the same to Jerusalem.

See, he thinks nothing of this nation or this God. In fact, he thinks himself bigger than this God. Just think about how ridiculous that is.

Bigger than the God of the universe. And as if to underline this pride, in verse 13, have a look at verse 13. This is the king of Assyria speaking.

By the strength of my hand, I have done this. And by my wisdom, because I have understanding, I removed the boundaries of nations. I plundered their treasures like a mighty one.

I subdued their kings. It's just so full of pride. In verse 14, he says it was so easy for him, like stealing eggs from an abandoned nest, like stealing candy from a baby.

[14:39] It's just so arrogant, so prideful. We desperately want people like that to get fair justice, don't we?

And in verses 16 to 19, we get a picture of what God is going to do. The pride and the pomp of the Assyrian empire will be utterly destroyed.

So thoroughly that in verse 19, all that will be left is a few trees. So few that even a child could count them. At the very end of our passage, in verses 33 and 34, come there with me, says this.

See, the Lord, the Lord Almighty will lop off the bows with great power. The lofty trees will be felled. The tall ones will be brought low.

He will cut down the forest thickets with an axe. Lebanon will fall before the mighty one. This is what awaits prideful Assyria.

[15:40] He will be brought low, chopped down like a lumberjack fells a tree. God will raise up a new tool, a new axe, and execute judgment on the Assyrian empire.

And of course, history tells us that the Babylonian empire was used by God for exactly that purpose. This God is always fair.

And it's good news. Because we all want justice, don't we? We want to live in a fair world. If you use that silly example, it's really obvious in children, as they scream how unfair it is that their big sister got a bigger portion of chips than them, or that they're not allowed ice cream for pudding. But in the world more generally, perhaps more seriously, as we read horrible headlines about women being abducted and killed, or closer to home, when we think about the people in our own lives that have wronged us in some way, For some of us, this might be really painful. And we desperately want justice. We desperately want God to be fair. How reassuring, then, that God is always fair. That people will get final justice, if not in this life, the far more lasting, eternal justice.

[17 : 04] Maybe even as we think about where we have wronged others. Maybe sometimes we're a bit like the Assyrian. Perhaps even unknowingly.

And as we think about our own pride, or our arrogance, or even our own misdirected motives, we have to see, don't we, that if God is always fair, then we too deserve to be judged by him.

God is always fair. And again, nowhere is this more apparent than in Jesus. Think at first glance, the cross of Jesus looks to completely deny this.

It just looks totally unfair. All of our sin for all of his goodness. But nowhere is God's justice more apparent than in Jesus, at the cross.

Romans chapter 6, verse 23, Paul tells us that the wages for sin is death. When we say that we deserve to be judged by God, that's what we're saying.

[18 : 10] That is what we're saying. We deserve death. But that verse wonderfully continues. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Because he paid that price. He received the wages for our sin. He died in our place. And so God's justice, his desire to be absolutely fair, was totally satisfied in that moment.

If you're listening in tonight and you're not a Christian, if you're not trusting in Jesus for your right standing before God, this is really, really good news.

You can trust this God. He is absolutely fair. Whatever it is that you have done, he's paid the price. And if we do trust him, his promise is that we will not permanently die, but that we will have eternal life with him.

God is in full control. God is always fair. And finally, God is always faithful. And this was just so important to the people of Judah.

[19 : 20] This is the God who has made great promises to his people. Promises through Abraham that they would be a great nation and that through them other nations would be blessed.

That promise doesn't look like much in light of the oncoming Assyrians, does it? They're about to be completely squashed. Have a look at verse 20 with me.

In that day, the remnant of Israel, the survivors of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down, but will truly rely, truly trust on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

God says that as the Assyrians will be judged, so then on that day, a remnant of Israel will return to trust in him.

Think Israel here is referring to those who trust in him. Faithful Israel, if you like. Despite all of faithful Israel's failings, despite God's judgment on them, despite the might of Assyria, God will restore a faithful remnant to himself.

[20 : 30] And he says to them in verse 24, do not be afraid, because in verse 25, very soon my anger against you will end, and my wrath will be directed to their destruction.

And you know, God is just so well placed to make a promise like that, because he's done it before. He's overcome his enemies for his people before. Do you see that in verse 26?

It's what he's reminding them of. There's a sort of mini retelling of the Exodus story here. A story of God's faithfulness to his people, bringing them out of slavery in Egypt and providing everything they needed on the way.

And I don't know if you noticed, God uses that name for himself throughout this section. Whenever we see the word Lord written in capitals like that, it's the covenant name of God, the name revealed to Israel in the wake of the Exodus story.

God says, I am who I am, or I will be who I will be. It's the name of a God who is who he is, utterly faithful to his promises.

[21 : 39] God says, I've done it before. You can trust me that I'll do it again. I am faithful to my promises. Verses 28 to 32 give us an almost comical picture of what he is promising to do.

The Assyrian is going to march through all these places. Do you see them there? Ayath, Migron, Michmash, and so on. But then in verse 32, when he gets to daughter Zion, the hill of Jerusalem, which I take again just to be a picture of those faithful to God, all Assyria can do is stand there and shake his fist at them in frustration.

God says, you are my people. Do not be afraid. I am faithful to my promises. I have done it before. I will do it again.

Again, it's important to say here that we are not the prophet. We do not know what our future holds. Perhaps we will face trials in this world.

Trials that make our God seem very small and this world seem all-consuming. It's possible with recent legislation that we would be criminalized for sharing the gospel in this country.

[22 : 56] It might not come to that, but even if it doesn't, with our families or at school or university or in our workplace, as we go about our everyday lives, I'm aware that God can feel very small and the world around us can feel very scary or even just like it demands all our attention.

But if we trust in this God, we know that he will be faithful to his people. He says here, do not be afraid. I've done it before and there is coming a day when I will do it all again, finally and once for all who trust me.

What will that day be like? Well, have a look at verse 27. It says, In that day, their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, their yoke from your neck.

Maybe that's familiar imagery for you. Jesus says something similar, doesn't he, in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 11. His yoke is easy. His burden is light.

See, God is always faithful and nowhere is that more apparent than in Jesus. Come to him. No longer be afraid for his yoke is easy.

[24 : 19] And it's at the cross, the place where all the promises of Scripture are fulfilled, where Jesus paid the price to redeem his people, where those great promises were fulfilled.

He did it then. He did it at the cross. And we can trust that he will do it all again. Friends, if God is faithful to his promises, then we can be certain that the final victory is his.

And so as your body aches, as your mind is tired, fed up of lockdown, in your most painful relationships, in your greatest anxieties, frustrated at your own sin, trust in this God.

His promise is that one day we will be with him. No more tears. No more pain. New creation. New body.

No more sin. We can trust this God. He's always faithful. He's done it before. He'll do it again.

Finally, once and for all who trust him.

[25 : 35] We might not trust the politician or the car salesman or the journalist. Certainly, I hope we don't trust them with our eternity. But this God is always in full control.

He is always fair and he is always faithful. And in Jesus, we see these characteristics of God most clearly revealed to us.

At the cross, where he looked most defeated but was in full control. At the cross, where the punishment looked anything but fair and yet satisfied the justice of a perfectly fair God.

At the cross, where all his promises to redeem a people for himself were fulfilled. He did it then. He did it at the cross.

And he will do it all again. We're about to sing a song that speaks of that day. When he returns, when every eye shall see, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[26 : 44] Some will shout with joy. Some will fall in fear. All will bow before the throne. So tonight, who are you going to trust?

He is always in full control, always fair and always faithful. Will you trust this God? Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

Thank you that through it we see that you are in full control, that you are always fair and that you are always faithful to your promises. Lord, help us to be a church and a people who hold tight to those promises.

Help us to be a people who really trust in you for our eternal security. And Lord, help us be a people who are not afraid to share this good news with the world around us.

For it's in your son's precious name that we pray. Amen.