

Depending on God

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- [0 : 0 0] Thanks so much, Rachel. That's a serious reading, good effort. My name's Archie. For those of you that don't know me, I'm the pastor in training here. If you don't have your Bibles open, Isaiah 22, now's a really good time to do that.
- And as you do, let me pray. Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit, through the written word and the spoken word, may we know your living word. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Isn't it wonderful to have been blessed with so many babies here at Brunsfield recently? And yet babies are, well, they're sort of ridiculous, aren't they? I mean, they're actually, I think they're kind of pathetic, aren't they?
- I became an uncle for the first time a couple of years ago, and my sister, desperate for a well-earned rest, left me with her son. Terrifying. Absolutely terrifying.
- And inevitably, as soon as my sister left the room, he started to cry. In fact, to call it crying doesn't really do it justice. This child literally started screaming.
- [1 : 1 1] Quite quickly, my sister popped her head through the door, gave me that look, you might know the look as sort of dismissive, you'll be fine, look, and left. I tried everything. Honestly, I tried everything.
- I thought he might be hungry. I gave him a bottle. It was hurled across the room. Maybe he was bored. I gave him a rattle. It followed the bottle across the room. Five minutes later, my sister came back with that same smirk on her face.
- She picked up her son, held him upside down, gave him a firm pat on the back, and he let out the cutest little fart you have ever heard and immediately stopped crying. Babies are ridiculous, aren't they?
- I mean, they can't even fart on their own. And here's the thing. We all come into the world just like that. Totally dependent on our parents.
- Unable to feed ourselves. Unable to clothe ourselves. Unable even to fart on our own. We wouldn't last a day without our parents, would we?
- [2 : 1 3] Totally dependent. Unable to be independent. And then as we grow up through life, it seems to be this constant struggle towards ever-increasing independence. Of course, we seek to become independent from our parents.
- We want to be able to cook for ourselves. We want to be able to clothe ourselves, to be financially independent. And that's no bad thing. But I do wonder if in our pursuit of independence as sort of the ultimate virtue in life, I wonder if we've forgotten as a society, as a world, what it means to depend on our God.
- What it means to depend on Jesus. Is it possible that in our pursuit for independence, that it's become something more than just a desire to unburden others, but that it's become a desire to take control, to take the reins, maybe even over our own eternity?
- We begin life utterly and ridiculously dependent, don't we? And through life, we increasingly pursue independence. But in our passage today, God says through Isaiah, depend on me.

Key verse in this book comes in chapter 7 in verse 9. It's very worth memorizing, I think. Chapter 7 verse 9 says this, If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.

[3 : 42] If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all. I think that sort of sums up the whole message of this book. It's worth memorizing and it's the thrust of our passage this evening.

God says, depend on me. Have faith in me or else you will not stand at all. Last week, as we returned to this series in Isaiah, Graham helped us see that our God is the God of all the nations.

Although the nations may look powerful, it is God that will have the last laugh. And that message is a message that's designed to be a comfort to the people of Jerusalem so that they might depend on him.

But then there's a potentially surprising twist in this section of Isaiah. Because from speaking to the nations in chapter 22, Isaiah speaks directly to Judah and Jerusalem.

He warns them that they have been standing on works dependence, relying on their own abilities and their own ingenuity for deliverance.

[4 : 44] He warns them too that they've been standing on man dependence, relying on their leaders for deliverance. And then in chapter 23, Isaiah, you may have noticed, returns to addressing the nations, the great trade empire of Tyre.

It's not as though Isaiah is on a preaching tour here, though. He's not preaching to the nations. This book, the whole book is addressed to God's people. And so in his judgment on the wealthy trading empire of Tyre, Isaiah is saying to Judah, you have been standing on wealth dependence, relying on your connections with this trade empire to bring you deliverance.

Three aspects then this evening of independence from God that come out in these verses. Works dependence, man dependence, and wealth dependence.

Dependence. So let's begin by looking at works dependence in verses 1 to 14 of chapter 22. The section begins, have a look at verse 1 of chapter 22. A prophecy against the valley of vision.

Quite a strange phrase that, isn't it? It's clear from the rest of the chapter that Isaiah is talking to or about Judah, the southern kingdom, specifically to the city of Jerusalem, which is sort of just symbolic of God's people.

[6 : 03] But it's described here as the valley of vision. I think that's probably just to establish the tone of this chapter. The valley, like the valley of the shadow of death.

It's poetically speaking, illustrating the depth of darkness that Isaiah feels at what it is that he sees. And what does he see? Well, in verse 1, in the beginning of verse 2, the people seem to be celebrating, actually, don't they?

Do you see that? They're on the roofs. There's much tumult and revelry. That phrase translated in verse 1 in the NIV, what troubles you, I think it's probably closer to what business do you have doing this?

I think Isaiah is saying, why are you dancing on the roof? Why does he ask that? Well, because he sees another scene. It's set in the future perfect tense.

It's so certain that it's as though it has already happened. What does he see? It's the downfall of Judah. It's the defeat of Jerusalem.

[7 : 05] It's the oncoming Assyrian war machine that we've been talking about throughout this series in Isaiah, if you remember from before the summer. But this isn't some crushing siege that Isaiah sees.

But people slain without a sword. Do you see? Leaders fleeing without a fight. Failing to depend on God. They're giving up. They're walking away.

And in verse 4, see how God responds? Look at verse 4 with me. Turn away from me. Let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people.

God is distraught and full of compassion over this judgment on his people. And then verses 5 to 7 describe exactly how that judgment will come.

Do you see at the beginning of verse 5? The Lord, the Lord Almighty has a day. This judgment, the judgment for which this God weeps, it's his judgment.

[8 : 13] He's the one that's going to bring it. But do you see how it comes? It comes through foreign powers. You see them in verse 6. Elam and Kir. These are God's instruments, these foreign powers.

And there will be no escape. Because in verse 7, have a look at verse 7. Your choicest valleys are full of chariots and horsemen are posted at the city gates.

There's nowhere for God's people to turn. There's nowhere for them to run. Because the enemy have them surrounded. Why?

Because as the first half of verse 8 puts it, the Lord has stripped away the defenses of Judah. So this is what is coming. What's Judah's response going to be?

Well, it's utter works dependence. See, in the rest of verse 8, what do they look to? The weapons in the palace of the forest.

[9 : 11] They'll be fine, they think. They have halls. That's the palace of the forest. Great big wooden halls full of weapons. This is the armory of Judah. And in verses 9 and 10, they're going to tear down their own houses to rebuild the city walls.

And then they're going to reroute the water so that the invaders can't cut off their water supply. Actually, King Hezekiah did exactly that in Jerusalem. You might have heard of it. You can read about it in 2 Kings chapter 20.

In fact, if you go to Jerusalem today, you can see Hezekiah's tunnel. And these things are actually really quite impressive feats, right? I mean, Jerusalem really did have an incredible armory.

And actually, isn't it incredibly selfless to vacate your home in order to rebuild the city's defences? And it is, I think, both very wise and ingenious to ensure that the enemy can't cut off your water supply in a siege.

The problem here isn't with what Jerusalem are doing. It's not with their actions, but with their heart attitude. Have a look at the second half of verse 11.

[10 : 21] Here's the problem. What does it say? You did not look to the one who made it or have regard for the one who planned it long ago. This is the problem.

They have no recognition of God. The people of Jerusalem, they're just totally dependent on those works. Doing it all under their own steam. And then in verse 12, using repentance language, really, God calls them to tear out their hair and put on sackcloth.

To repent, to turn around, to recognize and depend on God. To stand in faith. Instead, in verse 13, they have this fatalistic attitude.

We've done what we can. We have built our defences. And so today we're just going to party. For tomorrow we die. People without faith.

The way that Paul applies this verse in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is to say that they're people that God, that do not believe that God will raise them from the dead. They're not depending on God for their own resurrection.

[11 : 30] And so they squeeze as much as they can out of life today. For tomorrow they die. They're just totally works dependent. And we can be like that too, can't we?

I mean, individually, that is certainly true. I think naturally we're all bent that way. Believing that one way or another we're going to be able to save ourselves.

You'll know what this is like if you're a Christian here this evening. Right? You'll know that because you feel better, don't you, about your prospects of a relationship with God when you've ticked all your Christian boxes for the day.

We all know what that feels like. You've read your Bible. Tick. You've said your prayers. Tick. Maybe you've even dared to have a conversation with a colleague about Jesus. And again, note that none of those things are bad, are they?

But just like the people of Jerusalem, building the defenses and ignoring the defender, we reveal our works dependence. For if you do not stand firm in faith, you will not stand at all.

[12 : 39] But actually, I think the real application of this is not individual but collective. This is written to God's people as a whole. And so collectively as a church, there is a danger, isn't there, that we become works dependent.

What is it that will see God's kingdom grow through the church here in Bruntsfield? To see our church grow and thrive. Would it be the addition of some new members of staff?

Replacing the pews? Even solid biblical teaching and engaging worship music? None of these things are bad, are they? But do we pursue these sorts of gifts and blessings and ignore the giver?

Building defenses and ignoring the defender. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all. So first, Isaiah is warning Judah that they have been standing on works dependence.

And next, he warns them that they've been standing on man dependence. We come across two leaders in these verses, don't we? One, very bad. The other, pretty good. The first, in verse 15, is Shebna, the steward, a palace administrator.

[13 : 50] He's obviously a pretty big wig. Certainly, he thinks that he's a big wig. I mean, have a look at verse 16. What's he doing? He's cutting out a grave for himself. A grave, as verse 16 has it.

A grave on the heights, which is the spot reserved for royalty. But do you see what God is going to do with this prideful man? Have a look at verse 17.

He's going to take a firm hold of him and hurl him away. Sort of Garden of Eden and fall language, isn't it? You see in verse 18, it's as though he's rolled him up into a ball.

Kind of have a picture of a tennis ball at the bottom of a sock. And he just whirls it round and round and launches him out. Out of God's promised land to die. And we get a hint of why in the second half of verse 18.

Shebna was behind Jerusalem's works dependence. It was his chariots that he was so proud of. Defenses without the defender. And the people seem to be relying on this bad leader for their deliverance.

[14 : 56] Man dependence. There's also a better leader that God is raising up. Do you see that in verse 20? Eliakim. Given the clothing and authority of Shebna before him.

But more than that, look at verse 22. He's given the key to the house of David. Which means he's given royal authority. And not just any royal authority, but the authority of David's line.

Which is, if you know your Bible, the line of the promised coming future king of deliverance. And in verse 23, it just looks so promising. He's going to be like a peg driven into the wall.

A peg for all of Jerusalem to hang on. A man to depend on. Maybe a bit like a brand new set of coat hooks. Freshly installed by the newlywed husband.

Ready to take the ever increasing growing collection of coats and jackets. But then see what happens in verse 23. A little like the newly installed coat hooks.

[15 : 56] Inevitably unable to take the weight. This peg is going to give way. You see, that's the inevitable end of man dependence. No matter how good the man.

You see, I don't know who first said this. You may have heard it before. It's been said by many. But the best of men are men at best. I think of some of the leaders in my Christian life.

Men and women that I have looked up to and learned from and depended on. Often only to get a little closer and see what they're really like.

Because the best of men and women are men and women at best. And of course there have been some very high profile cases. Horrific cases really recently of fallen Christian leaders.

And so we know that if your Christian life has been the result of the ministry of a man or a woman. And if your Christian life is dependent then on your human being. Man dependent.

[16 : 57] Then you're surely going to be disappointed. For the best of men are men at best. And again for us as a church this really addressed to God's people collectively.

It's worth asking what do we expect from our leaders? What are we dependent on them for? Because at its heart their role is really quite simple.

To help us become increasingly dependent on Christ in faith. Less dependent on them and more dependent on him. For if you do not stand firm in your faith.

You will not stand at all. So in chapter 22 then we've seen how Judah and Jerusalem have been standing on works dependence and man dependence.

And then in chapter 23 Isaiah says you've also been standing on wealth dependence. Reliant on your connections with the trade empire of Tyre to bring you deliverance.

[17 : 56] Verses 1 to 14 contain a picture of Tyre destroyed. And then in verse 15 we get a surprising twist. Notice first in verse 1 and again in verse 14 the repeated refrain.

Wail you ships of Tarshish. Wail you ships of Tarshish. Tarshish is really just symbolic of some city far across the sea. And Isaiah says wail.

Why? Well still in verse 1 Tyre's empire is destroyed. This prophecy spells their end and it's a stark warning. But remember Isaiah isn't embarking on a preaching tour here.

He's not going around Tyre's expansive empire. This warning isn't to them, to the nations. No he's preaching in and to Jerusalem. And so really he's preaching a warning that says you Judah have become wealth dependent.

Dependent on trade with Tyre. An empire of pride that has been judged and will be destroyed. So what was this empire? What was the empire of Tyre?

[19 : 01] Well you'll notice in the following verses some of the places named Cyprus, Sidon, Shihor, Egypt, Phoenicia. This was the trade network of Tyre.

A string of city-states that spanned across the entire Mediterranean. Connected by sea and by trade. And places that through Tyre, just like Judah and Jerusalem, had become wealthy.

But places that in verse 2, like Sidon, are to be silenced. No longer bustling with trade. Places that in verse 3 had been enriched by the harvest of the Nile, thanks to the trade of Tyre.

But no longer. Places that like Judah via the trade empire of Tyre had become rich, but that in verse 4, are to be ashamed. And then the sea itself speaks.

I have neither been in labor nor given birth. I have neither reared sons nor brought up daughters. The sea here is lamenting the loss of her sons and her daughters.

[20 : 04] The merchant sailors that, because of the destruction of this empire, are no longer at sea. In verses 6 and 7, the merchant sailors who have now become refugees.

Read from verse 6 with me. Cross over to Tarshish. Wail, you people of the island. Is this your city of revelry, the old, old city whose feet have taken her to settle in far-off lands?

These sailors, having previously traveled to and from Tarshish, that port city at the end of the world, they now return there with their tail between their legs.

And so their revelry when they get there, just like the revelry of Jerusalem in chapter 22, is silenced. The wealth of Tyre, Isaiah warns Jerusalem, the wealth that you relied on in your wealth dependence is only temporary and it is being destroyed.

Verse 8 then asks, I think, a really important question. Who is behind this? And I guess by implication, why is this happening? And in verse 9 comes the inevitable and familiar answer.

[21 : 13] The Lord Almighty planned it. It is Yahweh, the God of Israel, Judah and Jerusalem, who is snatching away the wealth of empires, removing that on which his people have become dependent.

In her pride, the Lord will humble her. With the simple gesture of an outstretched hand in verse 11, the Lord will bring this empire to an end. They will lose their harbor in verse 10, their fortress in verse 11 and their rest in verse 12.

And it will be utterly destroyed. Because you see, the wealth of men and of nations and of empires is always temporary. It's all too easy, I think, when you are standing like this on wealth dependence.

It's all too easy for us to start running our lives independent of our God. Or to think that somehow God's mission in the world is reliant on our wealth and our giving.

You know, in many ways, I really do not envy the very wealthy in this world. Especially Christians. I think it must be incredibly hard to be a wealthy Christian.

[22 : 24] Easy to think if I somehow, if I write a check or fund something that the church is doing, I can somehow bypass my need for faith and repentance. We are, aren't we, incredibly blessed here at Brunsfield.

I know that many of you here this evening give generously. And I know that many of you steward your money faithfully, not in dependence on it, but in faith. But we need to know that human wealth is insecure.

That it only takes one bad investment or a credit crunch or a recession or a global pandemic to reveal that folly of wealth dependence. Whether we're relying on our own wealth or on the wealth of those around us.

We would do well, wouldn't we, to avoid depending on it. And again, maybe especially as we apply this to us as a church. Just as Judah has become dependent on the wealth of Tyre.

For us, as a relatively wealthy church in an incredibly wealthy city, speaking, you know, globally, it's possible for us to think as we look around at this incredible building.

[23 : 34] Many churches in this city don't have a building. And the impressive tech equipment that we have, the fancy glass doors on the way in. It's easy for us to see our wealth and to think that as a result of that, we will stand.

That as a result of that, God's kingdom will grow here in Brunsfield. And that we're going to be part of that growth. It's easy for our dependence on the Lord to shift to dependence on the merchants of Tyre.

To shift to wealth dependence. But if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all. Here comes the twist.

For it would be easy, wouldn't it, to come away thinking, well, isn't wealth bad? Aren't the wealthy bad? But we see in the last few verses of this chapter, as Isaiah looks ahead to the new Jerusalem, words here that John uses in Revelation chapter 21, we see that all wealth will ultimately be brought into God's city for God's glory.

Notice in verse 18. Yet her profit and her earning will be set apart for the Lord. They will not be stored up or hoarded. Her profits will go to those who live before the Lord for abundant food and fine clothes.

[24 : 50] As the Lord restores the wealth of Tyre, all of her wealth, indeed all of our wealth, the wealth of all the nations will be carried into the heavenly city and bring glory to God in so doing.

And so would we depend on him and look to his glory, standing not on works dependence or man dependence or wealth dependence, but standing instead firm in faith.

And as we do that, it's worth asking the question just as we finish, what does it really look like today to stand firm in faith?

We enter into this world utterly dependent on our mothers and our fathers. And then we may pursue independence then at every turn as we grow.

Ironically, then I think we tend to return to a state of utter dependence, don't we, in our old age very often. But I wonder what it would look like if throughout life, instead of pursuing independence, we actually sought to be dependent in faith, to stand firm in faith.

[25 : 58] And as we answer that question, wouldn't it be appropriate for us to look at Jesus, the author and protector of our faith, the God who became man.

And as a man, Jesus was just utterly dependent on the Father. In the garden of Gethsemane, knowing what was to come, he sunk to his knees in prayer, in total dependence on his Father.

Think that faithlessness is very often first evident in prayerlessness. Not those hollow, empty, wordy, showy prayers, but dependent prayer, secret prayer.

We've got to ask ourselves, are we individually and corporately as a church, really seeking our Heavenly Father in prayer? Are we desperately dependent on him on our knees?

Because faithlessness is so often first evident in prayerlessness. We've seen too, haven't we, the dangers of man dependence, of Shebna and Hiliah.

[27 : 09] But of course, as we look to Jesus, here is a man that we really can depend on. The God who took on flesh, who lived an absolutely perfect life, who died in our place to deliver us from the ultimate enemy of sin and death, who rose again and promised us new life.

Here is a man that we really can depend on. Will we? Will we depend on him? Is our eternal standing before God really dependent on him and what he's done for us?

Or are we just trying to tick the boxes, read my Bible, said my prayers? And you know, he's a man who did all of that, not as a wealthy king on a throne, not depending on the wealth of other kings on thrones, but this is a God who took on flesh, who came from glory and entered the world in rags and poverty, and who was raised again to glory through weakness.

So for us, as we navigate the challenges of life, recognizing that we cannot save ourselves, that the world we live in is a mess and that we're part of the mess.

In his life, in his death and in his resurrection, Jesus shows us what it means not to stand in works dependence or in man dependence or in wealth dependence, but to stand firm in faith.

[28 : 45] Faith ultimately in him. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

We look to him as the perfect example of faith and we look to him as the object of our faith. Help us by your Holy Spirit to depend on you in everything that we do, to depend on what you have done in your mercy, what you've done for us through your son, Jesus Christ, to bring us into eternal relationship with you.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.