For All This...

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[0:00] Good evening, Brunsfield. I hope you're all keeping well and continue to survive this period of our pandemic and lockdown. It's a great privilege to be with you this evening and also a great privilege to be joining you in your series in the book of Isaiah.

For what a wonderful book that is, Isaiah, full of prophecies to do with our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Prophecies that truly build our faith.
But if we're very honest, Isaiah is also often a book that gets picked over a little, where we jump from nice passage to nice passage. So it is good for us this evening to look perhaps to a passage that is maybe not as well known.
Certainly a passage that is a dark and sad chapter in this whole book of Isaiah. We're told at the beginning of our passage in verse 89 that this is a prophecy concerning the northern kingdom.
Even though Isaiah's main ministry is to the south, he does address things to do with the northern kingdom, partly so that the south may respond accordingly to the warnings that are spoken to the northern kingdom.
[1:14] We know this because Samaria would have been the capital city of the northern kingdom, and Ephraim and Manasseh would have been the two largest tribes.

Also, our prophecy, or our section, continues. The prophecy already started in chapter 8, verse 19 and following. So I think you looked at that last week.
Our section very handily falls into four parts. It's a poem. And every time, every section finishes with these incredibly powerful words, where God says through Isaiah his prophet, For all this, his anger has not turned away.
His hand is outstretched still. We find this in verse 12, verse 17, verse 21, and also in chapter 10, verse 4.
So the first thing we really need to consider this evening is the reality of God's anger expressed in these words. For all this, his anger has not turned away.
[2:23] Now, anger is a tricky thing, is it not? I grew up being told that to be angry is always wrong, bad. For anger, as Ed Welch puts it so beautifully, specializes in indicting others, but is unskilled at both self-indictment and love.

So it's true that certainly human anger is broken and easily self-serving. And yet the Bible is clear that, yes, on the one hand, we need to watch ourselves when it comes to anger and be self-controlled.
Yet we're not to repress it either. And my personal experience with anger is one that I've wrestled with anger, particularly when I was younger, in a way that my anger would be best described as nearly uncontrollable temper or that rage or, you know, the red flag to the bull, ready to hurt someone.
This particularly came out on the sports field, where I did find it hard sometimes not to have a go at my opposite player. I guess the good news is, and praise be to God, that he has been at work in me and that the fruit of his spirit has become more evident in my life since then.
But that's human anger. God's anger is different. God's anger is a good anger, a righteous, sinless indignation, a holy wrath.
[3:59] And it's an anger against the crimes committed against him. These crimes deserve to be punished. God has made this clear from the very beginning.

So for some who think that the Old Testament always speaks of a God of anger and the New Testament, great, it's about a God of love. Actually, this is not true. For as much as in Genesis, as well as the Gospels and the Epistles like Romans, it is very clear that the anger of God is a reality.

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But we're also told that God's anger is not only a righteous anger and a good anger, but also a slow anger. I guess an obvious question to ask when we come to this passage in Isaiah, how do we get here?
What has happened so far? Well, in many ways, what happened is that God in his generous, amazing love chose to create this earth and this world and us in it.
For him to share what he has enjoyed for all eternity with mankind. His love even went so far as to call and to choose a particular individual called Abraham.
[5:13] And for Abraham to be invited into this life with God, which would be filled with blessing, blessing of offspring, blessing of land. And God even went as far as securing those promises in a loving covenant with Abraham.

And then we find that when Abraham's descendants end up in Egypt, which sounds like a nice holiday destination, but in those days ended him in and subjected to slavery, God rescues his people.
Again, incredible love. Again, a powerful display of what his covenantal love looks like. But sadly, despite the fact that God's people were loved, were rescued, were protected, time and time again throughout history, mankind chooses to walk away, to rebel, to complain, even to defy God's wisdom.
We see that as soon as they've come out of Egypt, the people of God complain. We see it particularly in the time of the judges, where people continuously, from generation to generation, chose what was right in their own eyes.
And we see it again in the times of the kings. And really, there's perhaps only one good king, King David, and maybe a little bit of Solomon when he started off well. But after that, and particularly when the kingdom split to the north and the south, it seems a downward spiral, including the current king of the north, King Ahaz, who even sacrificed his own son in the religion, and to be like the nations around them.
[7:01] And so when you reflect on the whole time, from creation up till now, we see a God who is patient, who is indeed very slow to anger, very patient indeed, giving his people chance after chance after chance for nearly 1,300 years have elapsed after God's promise to Abraham by the time Isaiah proclaims this message that we read today.

So let it be clear that God is rightly angry, even after all, and especially after all this time, and that his anger is a good anger, for it is part of his love, not the opposite of.
It is part of his love for his creation to reign with justice. The Bible is very clear that God hates sin for its opposite of everything that he is himself, and therefore he will not choose to ignore sin.
Now sometimes that seems very harsh, but if you've ever been the victim of any type of injustice, however small or big that may be, it is truly good news that there will be a day in which justice will truly reign.
Justice will one day set everything right, and actually one day there will be no more sin in the world that we will share for eternity with our God.
[8:27] And so we find that one day God's generous love will actually do all these things for his people. Now again, sometimes we think that really what we want is a God who only loves, in the idea of never being angry with us.

But that's like imagining a family in which parents never become angry and only love their children, and we can only guess the result. We would have to spoil children, maybe even neglected children. For loving parents, at times, because of their love, will be angry. And so God's love likewise is so great that he won't hold back discipline which he knows would bring about good in our lives.
So God's anger is real. God's anger is good. God's anger is slow, but it is also incredibly frightening. As verse 14 and 15 tell us, for example, that the Lord here speaks his anger as saying he will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch, and reed in one day.
With these words, he's dealing with Israel's leaders and also with God's spokespeople, the prophets. And his anger will very much make these give account for what they have done with the responsibility given to them.
[10:04] they will be dealt accordingly. For these were people who had not only neglected their responsibility, but actually had abused it and led the people under their care astray.

And the picture of the branch and reed gives us even a picture of totality that actually God will deal with the most eminent to the most lowly.

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Actually, in many ways, in verse 17, it gives us a picture of what is perhaps the most frightening thing of what God will do in his anger. Not only keeping us to account, but it also tells us that God's joy and compassion will be withdrawn.
Indeed, actually, the most frightening part of God's anger is when he withdraws and leaves us to the consequences of our choices. And that is exactly the picture that we see in verse 18 and following where it reads that wickedness burns like a fire.
It consumes briars and thorns. It kindles the thickets of the forest and they roll upwards in a column of smoke. And through the wrath of the Lord of hosts, the land is scorched and the people are like fuel for the fire.
[11:21] No one spares another. Wickedness burns like fire. Do you remember that song, It Only Takes a spark? Well, that's the same of evil.

Spreads like wildfire. And when it says that by the wrath of Jehovah of hosts the land is scorched, it means that actually the wrath of God allows it to happen, but it's clear that that's not the fuel that makes it happen.
And the end result when God lets go and lets the people fall into the consequences of their own choices is ultimate civil war where we find that the people from the north turn against their fellow brother down south in Judah.
Wow. So God's anger is slow, God's anger is real, and it certainly is frightening. So let's move on to the next thing that we ought to see from this passage.
Secondly, let us see what causes God to be angry. So we've looked at the reality of God's anger. Now let's see what causes Him to be angry. Look with me to verse 17.
[12:34] Verse 17 tells us, For everyone is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. I want us to note how wrath is not being inflicted without the reasons for wrath being made clear.

There's grace right there. So God's wrath is not being inflicted without the reasons of wrath being made clear. Well, what are these reasons? Well, in verse 17, it speaks of the godless.
And the godless, this word refers to apostasy. So people who walk away from God. Or perhaps it can cover those who bring upon themselves defilement through disobedience.
And evildoers, well, evildoers in the Bible refer to those who break the moral law, who violate the moral law. So both these terms actually cover not only the whole of the Ten Commandments, but the whole of God's will.
That it's those who have stopped loving the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, and strength, and soul, and also those who do not love their neighbor as their self, the two greatest commandments as Jesus had taught us.
[13:54] Now it's interesting that in Scripture evil is not just the very bad, but actually describes all who sin. It's very clear that when we're not children of God, we are enemies of God.

And this strong language which we often struggle with, for we often compare ourselves to others and think actually I'm not that bad. But this strong language which we naturally associate with the greatest wickedness and darkness out there reveals to us God's perspective on sin which often isn't ours.
Anything other than God is darkness. All aspects astray from God is the opposite of light. this is backed up by the use of Isaiah's phrase there of the mouth and folly.
The word folly comes up a lot in wisdom literature, for example, in Proverbs. And you'll find that folly doesn't mean silly or foolish or funny. Actually, folly is very much in the meaning of all people who choose to live life without God.
those people are the people who are the folly in the Bible. Now, that's not the only reason. We also find in verse 10 that perhaps the cause of all of this is pride and arrogance.
[15:28] We read there that they say in their pride and arrogance of heart meaning great arrogance that the bricks have fallen but we will build with dressed stones and the sycamores have been cut down but we will put cedars in their place.

Their pride was what I would call a defiant pride. It's as if they're saying peace, peace when there is no peace. They're fixing it rather than listening to God and paying attention to his warnings.
It's as if they're saying well disaster has come upon us but we will sort it and we will rebuild even better than what it was. this is not only defiant arrogance and pride it is dangerous and it is blind even stubborn self-confidence.

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We especially probably see this this pride in their whole empty religion already addressed by the prophet Isaiah and by God through him. In the opening chapters we get this picture that in that time perhaps Israel and the people of God were busier than ever visiting the temple bringing all their sacrifices doing all the right things and yet with a heart that was far from God empty religion fueled and an expression of this arrogant pride.
But on top of all of this we then read in verse 13 that there is no repentance. So everyone is evildoers everyone is godless they're all full of pride and arrogance but then there's no repentance the people did not turn to him who struck them nor inquire of the lord of hosts.
[17:16] Surely a result of their pride but also revealing just how conscious their decision is to not only ignore God's message but to ignore God himself while pretending that all is well.

That's the situation that Isaiah speaks into. But I guess before we tut-tut the northern kingdom and point our finger and say how bad they are we do well to remember perhaps Paul's words in Romans chapter 3 or just simply look at our own lives and think we may pretend that all things are well but we also fall short of the glory of God.
How many of us do not struggle with pride with arrogance with actually saying maybe perhaps not in such words but even in our actions that we know better than God in particular areas in our lives. It is certainly a scary thing that even many serious Christians can fall into a practical atheism maybe proclaiming God with their mouth but denying him with their actions.
I certainly find Proverbs chapter 3 verse 5 one that can be very challenging to put into practice where we're called to trust in the Lord with all our heart and not to lean on our own understanding.
[18:46] How often do we not do the opposite? And if we're still not convinced that we're no better than the northern kingdom what about those greatest commandments? Do we truly love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength?

And do we love our neighbor as ourself the way that Christ loved his father and loved us dying on the cross for us? So people actually not only is God's anger a reality not only is God rightly angry with the northern kingdom with his own people but God is rightly angry even with us.
But thirdly let us then understand how Israel could have known that God was angry. How could Israel have known? Because you may say well the anger may have been there, may have even been fair, but perhaps they didn't know.
Well here we can truly see God's grace at work. For first God clearly and directly spoke to his own people. We see that again in verse 8 and verse 9 it says that the Lord has sent a word against Jacob.
This is a wonderful reference to the ministries of two prophets Hosea and Amos who both inward as well as with visual aids declared God's warnings and invitation to return.
[20:13] They were without excuse in that sense. But not only did God speak directly through his prophets to them, God also spoke to them through adversaries.

In verse 11 and 12 we see that the Lord raises the adversaries of resin against them and stirs up his enemies. Now what's happening here is that the hostile nations became tools in the hands of God almost like a megaphone to try to get through to them.
And this wasn't the first time that he has done that either. Think for example the young Joseph who had his dreams and was also struggling with pride. God actually used his adversaries, his brothers, to ultimately protect him from himself and actually through all of that ended up protecting his brothers and his family from dying of hunger by sending him to Egypt.
So in some ways if that hadn't happened maybe the story wouldn't have continued after him. But the same of course happened in the time of the judges. That on the one hand God allows as a consequence of people's sin these adversaries to come and raise themselves up but actually it was also God's tool to bring them back to return to him to cry out to him.
And unfortunately it seems that often that is what is needed for God to be able to get our attention. But almost when all these seem to fail for even in the phase of adversity the people of God were adamant that they were okay God then also spoke through direct action.
[22:03] And we've looked already at this verse but in verse 14 we see that after all this God then cut off from Israel head and tail or certainly promised to do that as we're not totally clear of all these things have already taken place.

Now these direct actions can at times feel very harsh. Think for example of Acts chapter 5 where Ananias and Sapphira both are killed due to their sin being hypocritical and untrue about their

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donation to the church and what they're holding back to themselves.
Or even the Old Testament example of Yuzah who stretched out his hand to stabilize the ark and yet he was killed on the spot. We struggle with this and yet very often these were necessary to stem the flow of ongoing sinfulness and at the same time always left room for a remnant to respond. These things were in many ways never final. And so again here although difficult and challenging to think of a God who would even raise adversaries and in direct action would confront his own people we must see God's grace.
We must see God's grace in that there's grace before action. that the word came before the direct action. And there's even grace in action where God in what he does has only one purpose in mind and that is for his people to come back to him.
[23:39] God deals in that sense rightly with those who are responsible. He deals with those who are not innocent. He deals with them who have been warned.

He deals with them who have had time to repent. He deals with those who have been good joled by the enemies and he speaks before acting. What an amazing loving God even gracious in his anger. And people in the exact same way you and I can know the reality of God's anger in our lives. Through God's word just like them that similarly we get to hear direct warnings as well as examples and there's plenty in the Bible of examples not to follow and in many ways we are incredibly privileged aren't we for the fact that we don't just have Hosea and Amos but we have the whole of scripture including the teachings of Jesus himself.
But I also believe that even adversaries and direct action can be ways in which God still tries to get through to us and explains his anger to us. Now I've got to pause here for a moment and speak very sensitively regarding this for it must be clear to all of us that I'm not saying that all opposition or disaster are a sign of God's anger yet all of what happens in our lives are always an opportunity even a spurring on to that repentance for us to and for us to start seeking after him yet again.
So his anger whether that is in our lives or not is not the final word but may it drive us back to him. Like I said I do want to be sensitive because I acknowledge that perhaps there is pain out there in your life of things that you've been wrestling pain that you have been facing.
[25:39] Perhaps you do know full well God's warnings for choices that you've made and yet you still made them. Perhaps you're dealing with guilt or even uncertainty of some kind.

Maybe you have a sense that God is far away that God's blessing has been withdrawn in your work in your life or in your relationships.
Perhaps you're experiencing adversary adversary or opposition. Does that mean that God is angry? That his hand is outstretched still in your life?
Well it can be. But as I said whatever it may be for your opposition may also be simply the result of Satan who goes around like a roaring and prowling lion seeking who he may devour.
and actually he's trying to seek us out because actually we are following God and serving him wholeheartedly. It may be God's discipline rather than his anger that he wants to teach us and to guide us at this stage in our lives mold and mature us so that we become more and more like him and reflect his character in all that we do.
[26:58] Or perhaps it could simply just be the consequences of choices that we have made. But whatever as I said it may be we do well to read the lessons of our experience and in all circumstances to turn to God.

If it's for wisdom if it's for wisdom but if it's for repentance certainly repent. And may it be a sincere repentance and a sincere seeking after him.
And do it without delay. Do it tonight. These are important things for us to hear. God's anger is real. We know the reasons why he's angry.
We also understand that he makes it clear to us through his word. For example through his word here through Isaiah. So may we respond and turn to him tonight. But there's one more thing that we must think about.
And so fourthly after looking at the reality of God's anger as well as the reason for his anger as well as how we are to know about his anger we must hear how we can truly be saved from God's anger.
[28:13] See when you read this chapter there is an ultimate question that the chapter raises and I believe that the Israelites should have asked. And that's this.

what can turn God's anger away and stop his arm from being outstretched? How can we all face the day of reckoning mentioned in chapter 10 verse 3?

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Is repentance truly the answer? Well, yes and no, but only a temporary one. Repentance is the right response and yet it doesn't necessarily deal with the deeper underlying problem.
And that is the problem of the heart, the human heart, and the injustice that still needs to be set right. Therefore, listen carefully.
May we tonight be assured that God is not and never has been content to show wrath no matter how holy it is.
[29:20] But that because of that God sent his very own son, Jesus Christ, who himself was the word and who took upon himself the wrath of God for us.

It was Jesus who willingly allowed himself to be cut off from the Father so that we don't have to. It was Jesus who defeated the greatest adversary, the greatest enemy of all, so that we can no longer be devoured by them.
And it is through Christ's sacrifice of himself, the innocent Son of God, that God's anger was satisfied, that justice was fulfilled, and now in God's hand is the gift of Christ's righteousness righteousness that will be bestowed on all who bend the knee and acknowledge and accept Jesus as their Lord and their Savior.
And so I hope we can see that even a dark and sad chapter teaches us something crucially important. For let us, unlike the people of God then, understand and see the reality of God's anger, whether we like it or not, but he is angry against all evil, including our own pride and arrogance.
Let us never trifle with God or trivialize his love, for we will never stand in awe of being loved by God until we reckon with the seriousness of our sin and the justice of his wrath against us.
[31:13] So let us heed the warning, let us repent and seek the Lord and may we then know that in the Lord Jesus Christ, God will once again rejoice over us with joy.

May God bless his word to us tonight and may we respond to him without delay. Amen. So let's stay there again for

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