

A Picture of God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, everyone. It's lovely to see you here tonight. I hope that you are doing well. Let me just thank everybody who's participated so far in our service. It's just lovely to meet together.

We were going to take in three chapters of Isaiah tonight, but the more that I've spent in Isaiah chapter 30, there is plenty to keep us occupied here tonight. So let me encourage you to go to Isaiah chapter 30.

It's where we'll predominantly be this evening. But here's the question I want to ask you as you come here tonight, a bit of honest reflection. What is the picture of God that you have in your heart and your mind as you come here this evening?

So it was a theologian back in the day called A.W. Tozer, who once said that the first thing that comes into our minds when we think of God is the most important thing about us.

So let me ask you as you come here tonight, what is the picture of God that you've got in your head and in your heart? Who is he? Is he like, I don't know, the kind of fifth emergency service?

[1 : 1 1] You've got the card in your wallet, you're signed up, and you're really glad that he's there. If you have a kind of spiritual flat tire, you're really glad that he's there to be called upon in an emergency.

Is he that kind of God? Is he a kind of cosmic office boss? The relationship that you have is kind of about attendance and about performance.

But truth be told, there is no relationship really there other than that. Is that the kind of picture of God that you have in your mind? Or is he like the rugby referee who's kind of just out to spoil your fun?

He's just there to help you keep the rules. Is he like the kind of divine A&E; doctor that you call upon him if you're ever in need of assistance? Who is? What is the picture of God that you have in your head and your heart tonight as you come here?

Here's what I want us to do. I want us to really get into Isaiah chapter 30. Because what we see here in this passage is a surprisingly magnificent description that captures the heart of the God of the Bible.

[2 : 2 2] And it's a picture that I hope deeply confronts us and greatly encourages us as we take in the breadth of who he is.

Because this passage shows us a God who, despite his people giving him every reason under the sun for him to call it quits and walk away, this passage shows us a God who is willing to wait.

A God who is willing to wait. And it's incredible. Now to see the truth of the wonder of that, we could just jump straight in there. But I think we need to see the context in which Isaiah, God through Isaiah, gives us this description of who he is.

And this is what, at this point, I'm going to break my own golden rule in preaching. You know, there was in every kind of profession, they tell you don't do certain things. This is me breaking one in here. I'm going to talk about politics.

Right? Deep breath. I'm going to talk about 600 BC politics. Now, if we're going to get this, think of the song that is kind of popular in our days.

[3 : 32] Was it Bill Withers who sang this song? Lean on me. Right? You've got that in your mind? Lean on me when you're not strong. And I'll be your friend. I'll help you carry on.

You've got those lyrics in your mind? It's going to help us with the context of what's going on here politically. So we've got the nation of Judah. Isaiah is speaking to the nation of Judah. And at this point in history, they are not strong.

They are not strong. For a whole host of reasons, I think the biggest one is territorially. Where they are on the map. The superpower of the day to the north of them are Assyria.

And the nation of Judah are geographically sitting in prime spots, prime territory in the Middle East as the link between the north and the south.

So Assyria up top are big, they're massive, they're scary, they're unfriendly. And Judah in the south are really small and have got absolutely nothing really going for them.

[4 : 33] And the luring call to lean on me when you're not strong to the people of Judah, I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on, comes from Egypt in the south. Now what does Egypt have that is so deeply attractive to King Hezekiah and the people of Judah?

Have a look at chapter 31. We'll just dip our toes in there. But you'll see what God knows that his people are looking for in Egypt. Do you see it?

What do they have? They have horses. They have chariots. And they have strong riders. Do you see it? Now that seems pretty unimpressive to us today.

We think, what's the big deal about a horse? Yeah? But this is the equivalent of, I guess, what was the Sherman tank in the 1940s. This is the equivalent of the stealth aircraft of the 2000s.

The horse is the most impressive looking and effective defence strategy of the day. So here's the choice that's facing God's people at this particular moment in time.

[5 : 40] So on the one hand, you've got forming an alliance with Egypt. Looking to them for safety, everything that they can provide. That's on the one hand. Or on the other hand, you've got God's covenant promises to you as his people.

And particularly you've got them concerning the fact that there will always be a king on David's throne. So will you trust God's promises?

Will you live by faith? Or will you live by sight? And right there is the question of the life of faith, is it not?

Will we live according to what our eyes can see and our minds can fathom? Or will we live according to the promises and the unchanging, timeless word of God?

That's the challenge that faces us all here tonight, isn't it? Will we live by faith or will we live by sight? Well, in the first half of chapter 30, taking us up from 1 to 17, God is speaking to a deaf-eared people who are looking to dead-end saviors.

[6 : 51] Right? Deaf-eared people, dead-end saviors. And track with me, he has got two things that he's got against his people who are living their lives in this day. Here's number one.

They aren't asking. So come with me to verse 1 and we'll just follow it through again. This is what God says. He says, woe, and feel the strength of that word.

As in, what are you playing at? What are you doing? What a foolish decision. Woe to the obstinate children, declares the Lord. To those who carry out plans that are not mine.

Forming an alliance, but not by my spirit. Heaping sin upon sin. Who go down to Egypt without consulting me? So the impression you get here is that the nation, God's people, have panicked.

They've panicked. And they've got just tired. And you could even argue they've got bored waiting on the Lord. And what have they done? They've gone about taking matters into their own hands.

[7 : 52] So let's not wait on God. Wasting your time. Let's get down to Egypt and see what they've got to offer. What are they seeking down in Egypt? Who look for help to Pharaoh's protection to Egypt's shade for refuge.

What are they seeking there? What are they trying to get down in Egypt? Help, protection, refuge. Now don't miss the point. These are truths that God has used to describe himself.

And what does that mean they're looking for down in Egypt? They're looking for a God substitute. Someone else to be the Lord. Because our God isn't quite cutting it at the minute. We're looking somewhere else.

And what you get from verse 6. Kind of weird language. But follow with me from verse 6. It's a description almost of the peace envoy. That King Hezekiah, who's the king.

Has sent from Judah all the way down to Egypt. To try and strike a deal. So do you see how Isaiah's talking about how they're walking a difficult road. That's what they're doing.

[8 : 57] They're going down. They're carrying riches on their backs. Those riches that they're planning on using to try and win the favor of the Egyptians. That's what they're doing.

So there's a peace envoy making its way down to Egypt. Because this is where the people think that they're going to find protection and refuge. And remember, this isn't any old superpower.

This is Egypt. Israel's very identity as a nation is wrapped up in the fact that God has saved them. Out of where? Out of Egypt. And he said, you're never going back there.

Don't go back there as my people. And yet, that's exactly what they're doing. And that's why God says, verse 7, he wants them to know, to Egypt. Whose help is utterly useless.

Therefore, I call her Rehob the do-nothing. You see, God knows that Egypt is a false source of protection. This is what God knows. The all-seeing eternal God.

[9 : 56] All-knowing God. He knows that Egypt are a false source of protection. And he knows that Assyria are a false threat of destruction. And what's he saying?

He's saying, if only you'd asked. If only you'd listened. They aren't asking. They've not even bothered to stop and pray. They've just cracked on.

Now, just pause here for a minute. By way of secondary application. Friends, how easy is it to do that? We make plans.

And I do this all the time because I love making plans. Just, I love making plans. Thinking about things. How it's going to map out. Now, this really hit me this week. How often do we make plans?

And then we retrospectively bring them before the Lord and say, Lord, could you bless what we're trying to do? No, no, no, no. Do you see how this challenges us? Before the careful planning, we've got to spend time in deep praying.

[11 : 00] Do you see the challenge? How easy is it to do that? What God would say to us tonight? You never asked. You never asked. Friends, is that, I don't know, God by his spirit moving amongst us tonight.

Is that maybe some of us here, we're contemplating a massive decision. We're contemplating do something. Have you consulted the Lord? What a challenge. God is saying, you ain't asking.

Particularly, I think, as we move forward as a church. That's a huge lesson for us, isn't it? Corporately. Have we asked? I feel the pressure is one of the elders here.

We thought about it as we went a day away recently. Thinking about all these things. No, no, no. Have you asked? Do you believe that Christ is enough? Have you asked? They aren't asking.

And number two, they aren't listening. Do you see verse nine? For these are rebellious people, deceitful children.

[12 : 01] Children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction. So the people had it right there. They had how God, what the promises God had made, how God had acted in the past.

They had it. His actions throughout history. And yet they are marked by just an unwillingness to listen. And more than that, do you see, they are driven by a preference for lies.

Some of you might remember that, the words of that Fleetwood Mac song. Remember, Dad played it in the car all the time when we were growing up. Tell me lies. Tell me sweet little lies.

Remember that song, Fleetwood Mac of your certain generation? That's this generation of God's people. Tell us lies. Tell us lies. Do you see, they say to their seers, see no more visions.

And to the prophets, give us no more visions of what is right. Tell us pleasant things. Do you see it? Tell us pleasant things. Prophecy illusions. Leave this way.

[13 : 00] Get off this path and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel. So you can imagine the chat doing the rounds at the time. Would you just tell us that we're good with God? Would you just kind of offer us some kind of genetic blessing to let us know that he's on our team?

Would you stop talking about this sin and repentance and turning stuff? We're not just all play happy families. They won't listen. They won't listen.

And what should they have done? And friends, get this tonight. I think this is one of the most important verses in this section. Get it. Verse 15. In repentance and rest is your salvation.

In quietness and trust is your strength. So this is what God is saying. This is what you should have done. This is what you should have done. You know, right now I'm getting emails aplenty.

I know these emails are, so many of them are offering me the silver bullet to get the church back on track and alive and kicking again after the pandemic.

[14 : 04] Right? Come in left, right and center. Have you considered this new resource that's going to kick your church back into action? Have you considered capitalizing on website expertise that we can offer you to kind of get people back into the church again?

Can you do this? Can you do that? Not just church life, but private life as well. Home life. Have you thought about what's going on in your bank account?

Have you thought about the interest rates on your mortgage? Have you thought about the state of your pension? Have you thought about that? Have you thought about the gas prices? Have you thought about everything that's going on? Friends, how easy is it to run to the place where we think we will find security?

Listen, many of these, this is the real world, right? Many of these things are good things, but you see the temptation is to think all these different voices coming in. That's where I'll be safe.

That's where we'll find refuge. That's the answer. That's going to secure our status for the future, surely. But here's what I want us to see tonight. I want us to see what God is calling his people to do then.

[15 : 11] What God is calling his people to do now. Where is our strength? In quietness and trust. What's he calling his people to? Quietness and trust.

Do you know, I'm so thankful that that is what God is calling us to. Can you just imagine if this verse read, in a spectacular life and an impressive array of gifts, that's where your strength is.

Can you imagine if it was your impressive life and your sorted mental health, that that's where your strength was. Do you see what this God is calling us to? Where is our strength?

It's found in quietness and trust. Our friends, are we not so thankful that that's what God says to this people?

Quietness and trust will be your strength. Because it's not about you and who you are and what you can fathom, what you think, what you plan. It's about who I am. I am the Lord. So let me, that encourage you tonight.

[16 : 12] Let me just spend a little bit of time here. If you're here tonight and you feel and you sense that your life is anything but spectacular. That your Christian life, you're thinking to yourself, if only it was a bit more glitz and glam.

Nonsense. What God calls us to, is to one day after another, walking with one another in terms of obedience to the Lord.

Faith that plods along day after day after day, knowing the promises that God has made. Because this is what he's calling us to.

I know some of you tomorrow, the thought of getting up tomorrow and going to work is one that you just don't want to entertain on a Sunday night. I always think that's why BBC put some of their best and biggest shows at nine o'clock on a Sunday night.

Because it's some kind of switch off from what's going to happen tomorrow morning. Is it not? And yet, friends, if you're going to work tomorrow to be a faithful employee who gets up and goes to work.

[17 : 07] And does it for the glory of God. Want you to be encouraged by this tonight. That quietness and trust is where your strength is. Doing it because you live for a better king. If you're a faithful parent whose day tomorrow you know is going to be changing nappies and cleaning dishes.

And you're going to get up the next day and it's going to be exactly the same. But you keep on going because you're living for a better city. Know how good that is in God's eyes. If you're here and your tomorrow is going to be you again being just a faithful spouse who's going to care for the person that you love in the hardest of times.

Because you know that your life is caught up in the greater marriage between Jesus and the church. Know that that glorifies God. What is he calling us to? He's calling us to a life of quietness and strength.

Do you see it? Quietness and strength. I hope that encourages you tonight. A life of quiet trust that refuses to be enticed by the glitz and the glam. That resists trusting in the latest and the new.

But a life that keeps the main thing the main thing. Remember that old hymn that we used to sing trust and obey. Trust and obey because there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

[18 : 19] God calls his people to quietness and trust. And yet sadly Isaiah speaks to a people who have fully bought the fact that their future is found somewhere else and they bought it hook, line and sinker.

And make no mistake in this passage, it's why the opening word is woe. Make no mistake that God is going to judge his people for their rebellion. Right? He's going to judge them for their foolishness.

He'd be compromising on his holiness if he didn't. Later in the story, you get that. The Assyrian army. God is going to miraculously intervene. But as people turn to him, you get that in a few chapters time.

But make no mistake in the future, the Assyrian army are going to come smashing through as God's agent of judgment. Oh friends, do you feel God's heart here? Here are a deaf-eared people looking to dead-end saviors.

And it's against that backdrop of rebellion and folly that we get the marvellous truth about who God is. Because given all that, what would you expect? What would you think?

[19 : 28] At worst, you'd almost expect a God who would sever ties with his people right there and then. Hands off, I've had enough. Cut his losses. Or at best, we might expect a God who would stand at the side with his arms folded like a parent at the side of the playground.

Thinking, come on son. Come on, get your act together. Is that what we'd expect? It's how our minds work. A God who is cutting his losses and touching his lips. Is that what we'd expect?

Oh, the joy. The life. Because instead we get a long-suffering God longing for heart-turned sinners. Verse 18, folks, is the pivot verse of this chapter.

Have a look at it if you've got it there. It's a game changer. It's the moment changer. Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you. Therefore, he will rise up to show you compassion.

For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait on him. So watch the image of the Lord here. Do you get it? He's like a father on his tiptoes. And he's looking out and he's longing for his child to come back to him.

[20 : 35] He's like a father, parent who's camped out by the side of the phone. Some of you might remember phones where you couldn't. It was a cord attached to it. And that's why there was, in our house, there was a seat next to the phone.

Because you couldn't leave, could you? Except on the phone. I remember getting home at night, realizing that my parents had sat right there waiting for me to call when I was out. That's the image of God, isn't it, that you get here. What is he doing?

He's camped out waiting on his child to call. The Lord longs for his people to see the folly of their ways. Turn, repent, and run back to him in no grace.

Do you see verse 19? How gracious he will be when you cry for help. And get this. Get this if you're away from him tonight. As soon as he hears. Do you see it? As soon as he hears, he will answer you.

Here is a God longing to be found. Here is a God longing that his people would come back to him. Here is a God, despite his people's rebellion, here is a God who is willing to wait.

[21 : 37] Praise him that he's that. Okay? Three quick things he longs to be. We get them in the rest of chapter 30. Rattle through these. Verse 20, he longs to be what? He longs to be their teacher. Wants to be their guide.

To instruct them. To tell them the way to go. Do you get the language there? The intimacy, I think, of this language. He wants to be what? The voice that speaks from behind them. That says, this is the way, walk in it.

He wants to be the God who deeply works in the hearts of his people. The idols that have got a grip of their hearts. They are banished from their lives, never to return. I take it that's a deep work of God that he's going to go do in their hearts of his people.

He's going to transform them so that they did test the thought of idols that would get in the way of God. As God cleanses them from these God pretenders. And you see the language there?

What would they say? They would say, be gone. Get out of my life. Because I want the Lord. He longs to be their teacher. Do you see? And so sovereign is he that he will even be their teacher through adversity.

[22 : 43] That's how good this God is. That's how sovereign his purposes are. He longs to be their teacher. He longs to be their provider. Do you see it? The imagery here of rain, of livestock, of running water, of sun shining.

His people healed from the scars by the suffering they've endured. I take it these are all marks of the new creation. The renewed creation that God is going to bring in. Of course in the context that this is the covenant blessings that God has promised his people.

This is the future. This is where he's taken them. He longs to be their provider. And he longs to be their victor. Because what you get from verse 27 is a description of what God will do to the nations who come after Judah, who come after the Lord's people and try and destroy them.

Namely the Assyrians. As God thunders his majestic voice. As they know the fire of his justice. As he banishes his enemies to the place he's prepared for them.

And we've got to feel the strength of the language that's used there. That God's, I mean we thought about right at the start. God will have the last laugh. He will have the last say. This is, he is the God of justice.

[23 : 54] And his people celebrate the fact to know that he is the rock of Israel. He is the rock of Israel. So did you see friends, he longs to be these things for his people.

He longs to be their teacher. He longs to be their provider. And he longs to be their victor. And not to do too quick a jump. But friends, as we, as New Testament people.

Do you see how God holds out all of those things tonight for us in Jesus? To be our teacher. When we put our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, lives in our lives.

Helping us to say no to sin and yes to Jesus. Yes to Christ. We're talking about guidance. The Holy Spirit living inside of us. Longs to be our provider. Isn't it?

In Christ we have a wonderful heritage ahead of us, don't we? We've got a wonderful vision of the future that he has sealed for us on the cross. We'll be thinking about that later. And he longs to be, in fact, sorry, he is our victor.

[24 : 57] Defeating our sin at the cross. And he will have the final say in all people. And to see how God holds all of these things out tonight for us in Christ.

And yet also, when we think of the person of Jesus, friends, is he not the one who also reveals the father who is waiting? I'm sure some of you have made that connection perhaps between this passage and Luke 15.

Parable of the prodigal son. It's one of the most loved parables that Jesus tells. And it's a father whose heart is ripped in two. That's quite literally the word that God's heart is ripped in two.

The father, as he hands his son who wants to go on the run, half of his estate. As the son leaves the father's house in search of something better, of some kind of better future for himself.

Believing the lie that a better source of life is found in the things that his eyes can see and his mind can fathom. As opposed to just having life with the father at home.

[26 : 05] And the running son realizes the error of his ways. He turns. And what's the father doing? He's looking.

And he's longing. That his son would come home. He's there. He's waiting on his call. The son who deserves the full fury of the father.

Gets the fattened calf. The son who deserves humiliation. Gets a ring in his finger. 600 BC.

Friends, you see in 2021 AD. The heart of this God hasn't changed. Longing that people would repent. Maybe that's you tonight. You need to do that. Stop. And listen.

And turn. And run to this God with nothing in your hands. This is what this God is longing for us to do. For this God is willing to humiliate himself to get his son.

[27 : 05] Win his people. It's exactly what he does in Jesus. Exactly what we see. He is the one who takes the bread of affliction. He is the one who takes the adversity that his people deserve. And he takes it for us on the cross.

So that we would know the joy of that restored relationship with our heavenly father. Folks, as we close.

What picture of God do you have in your mind? And in your heart tonight as you come here? You see, here is a God, despite his rebellious people giving him every reason to quit.

Because of the rejection of him. Here is a God who is willing to wait. Let me encourage you tonight. Don't pass this opportunity by.

Here is a God who is calling us to run to him. Longing that his people would enter that place of quietness and trust. Let me just finish with these words of, I think it was Chris Bullwater.

[28 : 06] I remember finding these so powerful. Growing up, thinking about who this God is. Just read them to you. God of grace, I turn my face to you. I cannot hide my nakedness.

My shame, my guilt are all before your eyes. Strivings and all anguished tears in rags lie at my feet. And only grace provides the way for me to stand complete.

And your grace clothes me in righteousness. And your mercy covers me in love. Your life adorns and beautifies.

I stand complete in you. Friends, this is our God. Let's pray. And so, Father, we would think of the words, the promise of the Lord Jesus, who would beckon the crowd, helpless, harassed, a sheep without a shepherd, who would say, come to me, all you who are wearied and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.

And so, Father, we thank you for this glorious picture of who you are tonight. Lord, thank you that we, even though we have given you countless reasons to quit on us, Father, that your steadfast and your covenant love for us endures forever.

[29 : 26] Thank you, Lord, for who Jesus is tonight. And I pray, Father, that your spirit would be moving amongst us, helping our eyes, the eyes of our hearts, be fixed on him.

So, Father, we pray that you'd just be with us now as we turn to take communion together. Father, may we be strengthened by the grace that's found in Jesus Christ. Pray these things in his worthy and his precious name.

Amen.