

Isaiah 45:1-13

Reassurance (1-8)

This section is a continuation of the reassurance God has been speaking to his people. (44:24-28) Its one thing to know that future events have been organised for your comfort but something else to find comfort in them when they start to happen. Cyrus is described as Gods shepherd and the one who would order the rebuilding of Jerusalem (44:28) But those in Babylon would experience this Persian King as someone who brought about astonishing destruction. He will *level mountains and break down gates of bronze*. (2) It challenges us to trust what God tells us in his word and not allow ourselves to be unsettled by distressing circumstances. The death of Jesus Christ looked bleak. It turned out to be our greatest blessing.

God's purposes go beyond the rescue and return of his people. He will do these things *for the sake of Jacob* (4) but there is more here than their planned return: *so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none beside me, I am the Lord and there is no other.*(6) The challenge of Isaiah is to keep that big goal in mind. The Lord hears our cries and sends his help to us in the everyday struggles of our lives. But his concerns don't stop at the door of his Church.

Questioning (9-13)

Isaiah may have found himself an unpopular messenger by suggesting God would use a pagan king to bring about his purposes. The prophet's listeners would not be the last people to find fault with Gods ways. Does God have to come to the bar of our justice to justify his methods. Does he have to satisfy me that his way of salvation is fair to everyone? Do I sit in judgment over God and his ways? *Does the clay say to the potter what are you making?* (9) It is a devastating 'put down'. *Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherd and potsherds on the ground.* (9) A potsherd is a piece of broken pottery. The gulf between ourselves and God could not be greater. When Job sensed who God was it prompted him to '*put his hand over his mouth*' (Job 40:4,5) This perspective ought to make us careful how we respond to God's way when they seem unattractive to us.

- If you are struggling with what God appears to be doing in your life at present read Psalm 131
- Can we see beyond ourselves and our struggles to Gods greater purpose for our world?

Isaiah 45:14-25

Gods attractive people (14-17)

Earlier in the prophecy, Isaiah foretold of a day when *Many peoples will come and say, Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord....he will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.* (Isa 2:3) v14 picks up that of the nations being drawn to Israel. They will come not because of Israel's enterprise or ability but because of their relationship with the one true God. These words must wait the coming of Jesus Christ and his disciple making ministry. They serve though as a reminder that what we have to offer the world is not our skill or intelligence but our faith in our God.

The rest of the section (15-17) emphasises that the most important thing about us is who we worship. Serve the idols and we are destined for shame and disgrace. Those though who put their trust in the God of Israel can look forward to everlasting salvation. Check who has your allegiance.

Those attracted to the Lord's people (18-25)

Here is the picture from the other side. V20 addresses *the fugitives from the nations*. This describes those previously mentioned in v14 who *come over to Israel in chains*. What do they find?

They come to the one who is the creator of all things. (18) This planet is not an end in itself. It was made with an end in view. *He did not create it to be empty but formed it to be inhabited*. People have a place in God's plans.

The Lord is pleased to reveal himself. (19). God does not conceal his plans under layers of mystery nor does he play with words or break his promises. *I have not said to Jacob's descendants "Seek me in vain" I the Lord, speak truth: I declare what is right.* (19) Those nations who seek the Lord can be sure they are on solid ground.

God reveals himself to the end that people will see that he is the Saviour. (20,21) These verses describe a court scene. In the first two lines the court is called to order. The point at issue is stated in the second half of v20. Idols can't save. Their inability to predict future events is presented as evidence of their impotence. All this is intended to convict us of the truth of the second half of v21. *Was it not I the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me.* The issue is not merely who is the true God but rather where the saving God can be found.

So the section ends with an appeal: *Turn to me and be saved all you ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.* (22). The outcome is not in doubt. *Before me every knee will bow by me every tongue will swear.* (23) Paul takes up these words in Philippians 2:10,11 not merely as an invitation to the nations to trust Christ but as a challenge to Christians to adopt a servant mindset

- Let the Bible encourage you to see beyond the present struggles of the Church to the final outcome of God's victory
- Be encouraged that God has not invited us to seek him in vain. Remind yourself it's never a futile thing to turn to the Lord for the help promised in his word.
- God's concerns are global. He looks for us to fall into step with that.

Isaiah 46:1-13

Idolatry is burdensome. (1,2)

When Israel first arrived in Babylon (think of Daniel and his 3 friends) it would have been natural to be mesmerized by the gods of this powerful country. Bel and Nebo (1) were the source of the nation's success on the battlefield. Now though in defeat they are shown for the useless burdens they really are. You can't miss the word 'burden' used 4 times in verses 1&2. Our more sophisticated idols (money, possessions, success, sport) have the same characteristic. They make big promises but you have to do the work. You make the sacrifices, you invest the effort, you pay the bills – in short you bear the burden.

The Lord carries his people (3,4)

By contrast Israel's God upholds his people and has carried them all through their life. On their journey from Egypt to Canaan, in their conflict with the Amorites and even now living as captives in Babylon the Lord has sustained and protected his people. It is of his character to take responsibility

for and endure along with his people. Verse 4 is one of the great promises of the bible and well worth committing to memory.

The Lord appeals to his people (5-13)

For all the tenderness of God's description of himself in v4 the tone of this chapter is dark. Isaiah addresses the nation as rebels (8) and stubborn hearted (12). Will they yield to Gods description of their history? Will they concede to his conclusion? *Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me.* (9) An idol is defined by its impotence. *It cannot move....it cannot answer.....it cannot save* (7) By contrast God purpose will stand and he will do all that he pleases (10)

The chapter ends with a challenge. Israel are 'far from Gods righteousness' but God is bringing 'his righteousness near' This is their choice. Will they hold to their own sense of what is right or bow to his? It's the choice that faces all of us. Will I endeavour to establish my own righteousness or embrace the gift of righteousness offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

- Thank God that in the gospel there is an offer to remove our burden of guilt and regret and fear from our lives. (Matt 11:28-30)
- *Little children keep yourselves from idols* (1John 5:21) John's warning would suggest this is something we need to remain vigilant over.
- Are we conscious of others carrying considerable burdens? Could we be part of Gods provision for them?

Isaiah 47:1-15

From Genesis 11 to Revelation 19 the story of Babylon runs alongside the story of 'Jerusalem'. These 2 cities represent two peoples and two ways of life. Babylon stands for life organised and run in opposition to God and his people. The book of Daniel reveals both its fury and subtlety as it attempts to neutralise the faith of Daniel and his three friends.

Isaiah 47 declares that God rules over Babylon. She may think of herself as 'the eternal queen' (7) but she will be reduced to grinding corn and wading through streams. (2) God is poised to judge her for her excessive cruelty and indiscriminate violence. *I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke.* (6)

Babylon's problem stems from her pride.

Now listen, you lover of pleasure, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, I am and there is no one beside me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children. (8)

Their pride has led them to think they can do what they like. *You have trusted in your wickedness and said no one sees me.* But their wisdom will be found wanting.

Their pride is bolstered by an extensive 'religious system' of astrologers and stargazers. But *'Disaster will come upon you and you will not know how to conjure it away.'* In other words their religious system will not be able to save them. And even their vast wealth will not protect them for Gods judgment. *A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom.* (11)

And behind all this stands the Holy One of Israel. (4)

He is *Our Redeemer*. In short he is a God who saves. He rescues us from an evil regime to bring us under his gracious rule. (Colossians 1:13)

The Lord Almighty is his name. The reason he can save is because he is in charge. *See the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. (40:10) He brings princes to naught and reduces the rules of this world to nothing. (40:23) The Lord is the everlasting God.....those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. (40:28,31)*

(He) is the Holy One of Israel. He saves us to enable us to share his company. His holiness overwhelms the unsinning angels (Isaiah 6) and yet he provides a means of forgiveness so that people like us can participate in his fellowship.

- As the Lord's people we want to stand apart from the ways of Babylon. Its pride and love of pleasure are all too evident around us. We need to be on our guard.
- The recurring instruction, "Don't be afraid..." runs throughout this prophecy. When we are all too aware of the power and opposition of the world we need to pay attention to those promises. *For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, "Do not fear I will help you."* (Isa 41:13)
- Take some time to reflect on God's character set out in v4.

Isaiah 48:1-11

Reading through these chapters (from chap 40) we sense that although God speaks 'comfort' to his exiled people he is met by resistance. There is morose self pity (40:27). Although they are captives in Babylon for their disobedience, they seem insensitive to the moral issues involved (42:18-25). They are weary of the Lord and careless of the meaning of true religion. (43:22-24). This section brings this behaviour to a head. The assessment comes in v4. *For I knew how stubborn you were.*

In order to frustrate their resistance God announced the former things long ago. (3) The former things likely refer to the rise of Cyrus, his supremacy over Babylon and his policy of repatriation. God spoke these predictions in the 8th century BC, we are now in the 4th century BC. In acting as he did God closed down the option of attributing these things to the idols. (5)

He is presently going to bring about 'a new thing' (6) This likely refers to the ministry of the Servant, first spoken of in 42:1-4 and coming to a climax at 52:12-53:13. Who could have expected such a move by God?

We are not to be under any illusions about the reason behind these developments. God will act for 'his own name sake'. (9-11) There is little that attracts God's blessing. But these are people to whom the Lord has made promises. He will not allow anyone to think his word is not trustworthy or enduring.

- We are apt to think our failure disqualifies us from God's future. Israel serve to emphasise how seriously God takes his promises and how confident we can be that he will deliver on what he has said.
- Can you detect any measure of 'stubbornness' in your relationship with the Lord? How ready are we to bend and flex when God's word is spoken? How quick are we to give God the credit when things work out well? How expectant are we when the Bible discloses God's future plans?

Isaiah 48:12-22

Listen to me (12-16)

The importance of listening to God is underlined in three ways.

God's authority over the created order is set out in v12,13. *When I summon (call to them) they stand up together.* God addresses *Israel whom I have called.* The implication is the nation stands in contrast to the heavens and the earth. They don't respond to his summons.

God rules over history (14,15). Cyrus is described as *the Lord's chosen ally who will carry out his purpose against Babylon.* His rise and success ought to speak to the exiles of the reliability and goodness of God's word.

God makes a further appeal in v16 for the nation to listen.

If only you had listened (17-19)

These verses set out the blessing that follows listening and heeding God's voice. Obeying God's word delivers peace. *If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river.* (18) This is because the Lord teaches you what is best and directs you in the way you should go. (17) There is something bitter and distressing about the 'if only' of v18. There is such a thing as missed opportunity. We need to hear again the urgent call of Psalm 95 *Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts.* The tragedy is summed up in the final verse. *There is no peace, says the Lord for the wicked.*

Opportunity Missed (20,21)

Only those sensitive to God's wise ways and his trustworthy word will respond to his rescue plan. *Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians!* Many will be daunted by the prospect of the journey and chose to remain in Babylon. God's track record of supporting and leading his people during the journey from Egypt to Canaan should have reassured them. (21)

- Whose wisdom fills our minds? Who has our attention? How important do we reckon engaging with God's word is?
- Are we convinced that 'the Lord our God teaches us what is best for us'?
- God's word is able to lead us into peace even when we are in a difficult place. Ask God to help you find that peace for your situation.

Isaiah 49:1-7

This is the second of four poems describing the ministry of the Lord's Servant. Israel ought to be the Lord's servant (3) but it turns out they need someone to serve them. Cyrus will bring them back to their land but it will be this figure of the Servant who will bring them back to the Lord. *And now the Lord says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him.* (5)

Jesus Christ is the Lord's Servant par excellence. How he will long to see the nation return to their God. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing and you were not willing. Look your house is left to you desolate.* (Luke 13:34) Little wonder we hear the Servant express his dismay at the reception his ministry receives: *I have laboured in vain.*(4) Isaiah gives us a glimpse behind the curtain of the Lord's life.

But Israel's rejection is only part of the story. Indeed their refusal will lead to the expansion of the Servant's mission. *It is too small a thing for you to be my servant I will also make you a light for the Gentiles.* (6) Through him God's splendour will be put on display (3) And through his ministry the Lord's salvation will reach to the ends of the earth. (6) Central to this is the word of God. The servant's mouth is like a sharpened sword (2) His words have the ability to bring deep and lasting change to people's lives.

There are 2 sides to the servant's work. Superficially and in the short term little seems to be happening. He is *despised and abhorred by the nation.* (7) But there is no despair. This will not be allowed to be the end of the story. *Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see you and bow down.* It is a reminder of what we have heard already: *before me every knee will bow and by me every tongue will swear.* (45:23) All this is the work of the Lord *who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.* (7)

- The Lord's service will have times when it seems to be in vain. Be encouraged by the leadership of the Lord Jesus who assures us *'my reward is with my God'*
- Thank God that Christ came not only to bring Israel back but to be a light to Gentiles like us.
- Be encouraged to see the potential of God's word: *He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.*

Isaiah 49: 8-26

The return from exile is entitled *the day of salvation.* (8) Earlier (42:7) the Servant is described as freeing captives and releasing those who sit in dungeons. That theme of liberation is spelled out here. (9-12) Here is what God's salvation looks like. Jesus did not 'spring' John the Baptist from his prison cell. His ministry is directed at our bondage to sin. He comes to enable us to gladly and freely serve God.

- Sin is no longer our master. Are we clear that real freedom is found under the rule of the Lord Jesus?

This prospect is met by despondency. *But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.'* (14) In a series of tender encouragements God seeks to renew the faith of his people. They are more precious to him than a new born baby to a nursing mother. They are ever before him like a tattoo drawn on someone's hand. And to these apparently desolate people will come throngs of family members whose arrival will demand more space. (17,18) It is a great picture of the growth of the gospel. If God can preserve and multiply his people through times of opposition and set back he can repeat this feat in the situations we find ourselves. Perhaps though we need first to appreciate the extent of the Lord's compassion toward those who are his people.

- Satan sows doubt. God is eager to reassure his people. These tender pictures are in harmony with the NT's encouragements. Far from forsaking us the apostle asks: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35ff)

The exiles raise another objection: *Can plunder be taken from warriors or captives be rescued from the fierce?* (24) The answer depends on who you think the Lord is. The final statement makes that clear. He is their Saviour... the Mighty One of Jacob. (26) Jesus' exorcisms demonstrated his ability to

plunder the strong man's house. His resurrection proves his ability to overcome the gates of Hades. His Scripture fulfilling death pays the ransom for all our sin.

- Its not difficult to feel small and feeble as we seek to share the gospel in our sophisticated and scientific age. The question is where is our confidence located – in ourselves or our God?

Isaiah 50:1-11

The chapter opens with a series of accusations. (1-3) Has God divorced his bride? Has he been forced to sell Israel as a slave? The implication is the unfailing love has failed and sovereign power has proved wanting. But the truth is otherwise. Verse 2 reads like a husband looking for his wife. *When I came, why was there no one.* He returns home only to find an empty house and a note on the table. She has left for her lover. The problem is not God's faithfulness or his power. The second half of v2 makes clear the problem does not lie with his ability. *Was my arm too short to rescue you?* They must look elsewhere if they are to diagnose the problem.

In v4-9 the attention shifts once again to the Lord's Servant. In contrast to the wayward wife (*when I came why was there no one*) the servant listens attentively to the voice of the Sovereign Lord. *He ... wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious...(4,5)* Although his service involves him in suffering he does not abandon his calling. Instead he *sets his face like a flint (7)* to faithfully discharge all the responsibilities committed to him. And he does so confident in the knowledge that the Lord will both help him and vindicate him.

These words find their fulfilment in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. *He replied, 'Go tell that fox "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow and on the third day I will reach my goal. In any case I must press on today and tomorrow for surely no prophet can die outside of Jerusalem." (Luke 13:32,33) "You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone for my Father is with me." (John 16:32)*

The application of this is we are to learn to live like the servant not like rebellious Israel. *Let the one who walks in the dark and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on their God. (10)* In Romans 8 Paul picks up the language used by the Servant (v8,9) and invites us to see its appropriateness to the Christian. Isaiah's *Who then will bring charges against me? Becomes Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that who was raised to life -is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Rom 8:34)* This confidence allows us to serve faithfully in difficult places knowing we will not miss out on Gods blessing.

- Its good for us to be clear that when we are struggling the problem does not lie with Gods love or power.
- The focus of our faith is the Lord Jesus. It is never futile to consider his life and service.
- Are we or perhaps we know of someone who is 'walking in the dark'. Is there a word here that might *sustain the weary?*

Isaiah 51:1-16

Not all exiled Israel is stubborn. There are others who will emerge later, people like Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel who continue to trust God in these dark days. It is people like them who are addressed in

this chapter. *Listen to me you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord. (1)* see also v7. God reminds them of their small yet miraculous beginnings. They are the 'offspring' of this aged barren couple Abraham and Sarah. More importantly they are the people of this trustworthy covenant God who keeps all his promises. As they have a remarkable past so they will enjoy a glorious future. And as they were invited to look to Abraham we can look to Christ. *As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him, you also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4,5)*

In the light of this they are urged not to fear 'mere mortals' (7 & 12) Isaiah's prophecy moves their attention off their oppressors and onto their God. They are urged not to forget the Lord their Maker who has brought the universe into being. (13) He is the one who *stirs up the sea so that its waves roar.... who laid the foundations of the earth and who says to Zion, "You are my people" (16)*. These are great strong faith affirming words.

The passage takes us beyond the nation in exile. The promises to Abraham went beyond his family and extended to the whole of humankind. *Listen to me my people; hear me my nation: instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. (4)* Humanly that would have seemed an impossible prospect but for the promise of v5. *My arm will bring justice to the nations.*

Gods 'arm' his active involvement in history is described in poetic terms in v9,10. The Exodus was an illustration of God in action, destroying Satan's proxy, Pharaoh and providing an escape route through the sea. It will be God's arm that will effect the greater liberation from sin and death but it will be by a much less observable means. (53:1)

- 'Look to the rock....' It's a good exercise to reflect on our small beginnings and Gods faithfulness to his promises.
- Isaiah invites us to set our fears down in the light of Gods character
- Gods plan goes beyond the health and security of his church. Justice for the nations is his mission. Many in our world live in places where they are subject to lies and restrictions around the gospel. These things should shape our prayers and move us to action.

Isaiah 51:17-23

The theme of these chapters is comfort for Jerusalem and specifically *that her hard service has been completed and her sin paid for. (40:2)* The image at the heart of this section is of a dangerously intoxicated individual staggering by the canal bank unaware he is one step away from disaster. Although he ought to have people to support him he is bereft, none of his 'children' are there to lead him home to safety. This is the plight of the exiled nation, defeated, deported and helpless before the power of Babylon.

The cause of these circumstances is spelled out in v17. *You have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath.* Gods wrath is revealed in all its terrifying detail in the experience of Judah as Babylon closes in. The famine, the ruthlessness, the violence, the destruction is put on display by Nebuchadnezzar's forces (2 Kings 25). Behind these events stands the Lord who places the cup of his wrath in the hands of the people of Judah.

But the nation is invited to awaken to what the Lord has done. (17) Its described in v22 with these words: *See I have taken out of your hand that cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath you will never drink again.* It's a statement that invites us to focus our attention in the

right place. Judah could have set its hope on one of its neighbours coming to rescue them or it could have become despairing that there was no one. The lesson is to see that God is the one who stands behind all the events of this world and it is his intervention that determines outcomes.

The section ends with the announcement that God is going to place the *cup of his wrath* into the hands of his people's oppressors. But all this begs the question: How has the wrath of God been removed? We will need to wait until 52:13 for an answer to that question, when the Lord will say, *See my servant....*

- The 'wrath of God' was a reality for Isaiah, is it for us?
- Judah was invited to awaken to what God had done for them. Do we need rouse ourselves similarly?
- As those who understand more of the 'big picture' than Judah are we tempted to take the words '*you will never drink it again*' (22) for granted.

Isaiah 52:1-12

Isaiah addresses Jerusalem and its inhabitants in extravagant terms (1,2). From one angle this makes no sense. The city is devastated and all but the poorest have gone. Think of one of those Syrian cities bombarded and ruined through warfare with a handful of people barely surviving in the ruins. But the prophet can speak like this because the real problem has been addressed. The issue is not Babylon's continuing oppression but the removal of the Lord's wrath. Because this threat has gone, a new holiness is possible.

It's not difficult for the Church to think of itself as a struggling and despised community. The NT writers would urge us to wake up to who we are. Think of Peter's words to the 'exiles' he wrote to: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession....(1Peter 2:9)*

Central to God's activity is a concern for his name.*my name is constantly blasphemed. Therefore my people will know my name (5,6)* God's reputation has been damaged by the behaviour of his people and the events of the exile. He is regarded as the God who can't save. But he is about to do something that will put that right. And that sense of anticipation is heightened by the next section. Someone is pictured as arriving with good news and this is transmitted by the watchmen to the city. The people rejoice that '*the Lord will lay bare his holy arm*'. (7-10)

As we come to the end of this section the questions of how God's wrath will be removed, how he will reveal his character (his name) and what his 'arm' is about to accomplish remain unanswered. The mystery though is about to be revealed in the final servant song (52:13 – 53:12)

- How do we think of ourselves – in the terms our culture assigns to us (dull, irrelevant, narrow minded) or as the Bible describes us (holy, enthroned, liberated)
- God cares about his name. Do we? *When you pray say, "Father hallowed be your name."*
- We have good news to proclaim. We need to remind one another and the world that our God reigns.

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

This is the final poem in the series, describing the work of the Lord's Servant who is assigned the task of bringing the Lord's people back to him. It answers the questions that have been piling up in the

previous chapters. Here is how Gods wrath can be removed and here is what it looks like when God rolls up his sleeves to act. *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (53:1)*

Although this passage is famous for the picture it presents of the suffering of the Lord Jesus it begins and ends with success and approval. *See my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. (13, see also 53:12)* It emphasises the principle that in Gods scheme of things the way down is the way up. We are invited to *have the same mindset as Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5)* and to *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may lift you up in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)*

This passage describes a sacrifice. (52:15 sprinkle many nations: 53:10 he will make his life an offering for sin; 53:12 made intercession for the transgressors) This though is no animal brought to the altar unaware of what awaits it. This is the sacrifice of a willing individual. Unlike the sheep or the lamb who behave meekly because they don't know where they are (7) he is silent and uncomplaining before his executioners. The OT worshipper who came with his weight of sin looked for something better than an unwilling animal to represent him before God. His problem lay at precisely this point. Much of his sin (and ours) had been committed knowingly and deliberately. He needed an answer that addressed his guilty conscience.

The previous chapters have made much of the cup of Gods wrath. (51:17) The people are invited to 'See I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger' (51:22) It is now revealed to whom it has been given. *It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. (53:10).* And we are left in do doubt about the reality of the Servant's suffering nor about the immense benefits that flow to us. He was *pierced, crushed, punished and wounded.* And we are those who enjoy peace (5) experience justification (11) have intercession made on our behalf (12) as a consequence.

- The bible tells us the prophets were serving us when they described the suffering of Christ and the glory that would follow. Thank God for these precise predictions that strengthen our faith.
- Many saw little glory in these things. If Isaiah's prophecy makes sense, give thanks that God has revealed his plan and power to you.
- Reflect on those remarkable verses (4-6) Here is the cost of our salvation and Christ's willing service on our behalf.

Isaiah 54: 1-17

The next 2 chapters describe how we are to respond to the Servant's work. "The way is therefore open for response, pure and simple: to sing over what someone else has accomplished (54:1), to enjoy a feast that someone else has paid for (55:1)" (Alec Motyer)

The death of Christ creates a new family (1-5)

This is a community of people linked not by common ancestry or shared interest but by the life giving work of God's Spirit. They are not inward looking and protective but designed for growth. *Enlarge the place of your tent.* William Carey who headed up the modern missionary movement saw this text as spur to take the gospel to people in India. They are secure in the loving care of the Lord. These things are true only because *'your Maker is your husband – the Lord Almighty is his name.'* (5) This is a description of the Church, its what you and I have become part of.

The death of Christ restores a broken marriage (6-10)

Isaiah has previously referred to this broken marriage (50:1-3) There, the husband called to his wayward wife but his invitation was ignored. It was left to the Servant to *bring back Jacob (49:5,6)*. V10 describes this new situation as a covenant of peace. All this has been the work of the Servant: *the punishment that brought us peace was on him. (53:5)* Because this renewed relationship is now based not on our affection for God but Christ's work on our behalf we are invited to appreciate its security and stability. (10)

The death of Christ guarantees a wonderful future (11-17)

Isaiah's book rests on the contrast between the city humankind builds without God which ends in destruction and the city of God in all its eternal glory. The fulfilment of these words will await the descent of the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:2) But the Church provides a glimpse, albeit imperfect, of this future. There is an attractiveness in seeing people who previously would have little to do with one another serving and caring for each other. There is a stability about the Church that comes from its foundation and there is a comfort from knowing the Lord himself has determined to vindicate his people. (17)

- Does the gospel make us want to sing?
- Reflect on the security that comes from benefitting from the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf.
- Let these verses direct your mind to their ultimate fulfilment described in Revelation 21.

Isaiah 55:1-13.

The theme of response to the Servants work continues in chapter 55. The message is urgent and passionate; appreciate the richness of the offer. This is a picture of the gospel invitation made to men and women who have 'nothing to trade with' *Come.....you who have no money.(1)* There is no preparation required, other than a sense of our need, before we can come to Christ.

We may come as we are but we can't stay as we are. V6,7 describe the process of repentance that coming to Christ brings about. *Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord. (7)*. To repent is to come under the direction and leadership of Christ. Having announced "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near." He called Peter to "Come follow me and I will send you out to fish for people." (Matt 4:17,19)

It could seem that v8 marks a change in direction, simply a comment on the gulf between ourselves and God. Back in chapter 6 where the prophet encountered the Lord in the temple what shook him was not the contrast in power or wisdom but the deadly moral gulf that separated him from the one who sat on the throne. That gulf could only be bridged by the pardon issuing from God's side.

The final section focusses our attention on the word of God. Like rain from heaven it is effective in producing a harvest on earth. On the one hand repentance is the way to enter the great free feast. On the other the call to repent is a word of God enabling us to do what is required. Salvation is God's work from start to finish. He deserves our praise for such things.

- We have a great invitation to take to people. Can we see the gospel in the terms of v1,2
- Repentance is central to the gospel. Are we tempted to play down this aspect?

- It's God's word that is able to bring about what is demanded. Are we confident of that fact?