

Daily Bible Reading



MARK
ISAIAH
PSALMS

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Foreword

As Christians, we not only believe that God speaks to us through his word...

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16)

...but that the opportunity to listen to him is precious.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105)

Through the pages of the Bible, we meet Jesus, the true word of God. So, use these notes to help you regularly open your Bible and – even if it is only for a few minutes in your day – listen to God's word. Allow it to challenge, comfort or encourage you, and point you to Jesus. We hope this leads you into prayer and assists you to commit each day to do "the good works God has prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

This booklet

On Monday and Tuesday, we will continue with the sermon series in Mark. From Wednesday through Saturday, we will begin a deep dive into the riches of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Each Sunday, as always, we will meditate on a Psalm. Throughout the week, we will include a blend of commentary and reflection questions.

Note on Isaiah readings:

We have been very conscious of the challenge of dividing this complex book into "bite size" pieces for a short devotion slot in someone's day and also of giving sufficient, helpful commentary within our word limits!

So here are two pieces of advice:

- Where there are several chapters in one reading – feel free to skim or to just focus on the passages referred to in the notes
- If you have unanswered questions or want to delve further into this very rewarding book you may choose to turn to an actual

detailed commentary. We have mainly used two in our preparation:

1. The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb in the Bible Speaks Today series edited by Alec Motyer
2. Isaiah by John N. Oswalt in The NIV Application Commentary series

St Paul's Daily Bible Reading Team

MONDAY, 9 MARCH

MARK 12:13–34

Masterminds or Mastermind?

"...the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom..."

1 Corinthians 1:25

The religious leaders were looking for a way to arrest Jesus (12) and we now see several attempts to trap Jesus in his words in a way which would alienate him with a section of the people. They first employed some Pharisees and Herodians who used flattery to precede their question about paying the imperial tax to Caesar. Jesus' answer turned the question back on them. They would have to decide what they owed to Caesar and what they owed to God.

The lesson for us? It is possible and necessary to be both a faithful disciple and a loyal citizen.

Having failed to snare Jesus by a political question, his opponents try a theological one. While the Pharisees believed in life after death, the Sadducees rejected the idea of resurrection. They only accepted the first five books of the Bible and framed a question based on Levitical marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5–6). They attempted to make spiritual truth look ridiculous by describing an absurd scenario which would allow them to abolish the truth.

Jesus plainly points out that they do not know the Scriptures. Firstly, there is no marriage when the dead are raised. Secondly, God is the God of the living. He identified himself to Moses at the burning bush as "I am... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". I am, not I was. Thus, these three patriarchs are alive in their resurrected life. Notice that Jesus proved his point using Scripture that Sadducees accepted.

Finally, Jesus tells a teacher of the law the two commandments which sum up all of the Law: love God (Deuteronomy 6:4–5) and love others (Leviticus 19:18). These totally encompass the Law and take priority over all sacrifices, worship and ritual.

Pray that you might not only hear God's word but do it (James 1:22).

TUESDAY, 10 MARCH

MARK 12:35-44

True Devotion

"God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble"

1 Peter 5:4

1. The title "Son of David" was commonly used for the coming Messiah. Jesus asked his listeners "How can the Messiah be David's son when David called him Lord"? How was he trying to get them to see that he was more than a descendent of David?

2. Yesterday we read of Jesus commending a scribe (34). Now he launches a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of most of the religious professionals. Do we ever do things to be seen by others? Are there some ways we can guard against this?

3. Mark then describes an example of true devotion in contrast to the showy pretence of the scribes. In what way was the widow's offering costly? Many people would have looked down on her. Why did Jesus honour her?

Lord, help me to love you more and to love others as you commanded. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH

ISAIAH 28:1–29:24

Foolish Leaders

When facing a hard truth or consequence of your actions, are you ever tempted to opt for escape into an unhelpful habit or distraction?

The next few chapters (28–35) centre on the issue of whether Judah will rely on Egypt rather than on the Lord, in the face of the growing threat from an increasingly powerful Assyria. Isaiah is strongly, consistently, advising the king, Hezekiah, in opposition to the voices at court which will eventually lead to his defiance of Assyria and the near destruction of Judah (Chapters 36–37).

In 28:1–13, we first look at the irresponsible drunks of Ephraim – the northern kingdom, whose leaders, including priests and prophets, escape into a drunken stupor, and instead of entering the promised rest which God offers his people, choose to scoff (the quoted ridicule repeated in verses 10 and 13).

From 14–22, the Lord delivers his judgement. Those who trusted in a lie, believing themselves immune to death, will see that it is the faithful remnant, those who continue to trust in their Sovereign Lord, who will actually survive what is to come (16 – and later used to refer to Jesus the ultimate, perfect faithful one in Acts 4:11).

We learn two things from the farmer in verses 23–29. Just as a farmer changes his methods, depending on the situation, so too will the Lord – although he is always working for a good outcome for his people. The farmer is also – unlike the leaders – open to following God's wisdom.

Chapter 29 re-emphasises the Lord's disdain for those who "honour me with their lips" but whose "hearts are far from me". Their condemnation is sure, then and now.

Father God, when life throws up difficult situations, help us to turn to you with sincere and humble hearts, trusting in your sovereign and perfect plan, seeking to obey you and to act according to your wise counsel. Amen

THURSDAY, 12 MARCH

ISAIAH 30:1–31:9

Turning Away from False Solutions

Reflect on a time you have acted obstinately – keeping to your own chosen path and not the one God has asked you to follow.

1. Isaiah Why are God's people described as "obstinate children" (30:1–2,9–11)?

2. How is the Lord's readiness to help portrayed (30:18–21)? How is his attitude to his people (30:23–26) contrasted with his judgement on their enemies (30:27–28; 31:4–5)?

3. What will true repentance involve (31: 6–7)? How are we given the hint that the Assyrians defeat is not just a momentary military victory (8–9)?

Lord thank you that you long to be gracious to us and that as soon as you hear us you will answer. Help us to trust that your ways are right and follow them, blocking out the temptations to look for other help or just go our own way. Amen.

FRIDAY, 13 MARCH

ISAIAH 32:1–33:24

True Solution: The Kingdom of Righteousness

How do you feel about the evils in our society today? What are you praying for?

We need to read these chapters with reference to their original context – a warning to the people of Jerusalem of both coming judgement and eventual rescue. But as we read, in the light of Jesus' coming, we realise that Isaiah is referring to a much greater eternal restoration.

The focus here seems to be the restoration of a kingdom of righteousness and justice where there will be judgement on the ungodly scoundrels and wicked fools who use lies and evil schemes to “destroy the poor” and to “spread error concerning the Lord” (32: 1–8). We should take note that this judgement is not only on external enemies of God's people, but on those within the city. We should not, like the women of Jerusalem (32:9), be complacent when we see such behaviour growing in our society (or the church).

Hope is introduced with the coming of the Spirit (32:15) and it seems justice, righteousness and peace will be the blessing God's people receive. The heartfelt cry to the Lord in 33:2 is answered as the Lord establishes justice and righteousness in Zion – providing “a rich store of salvation” (33:6) opened up by the fear of the Lord.

Sinners recognise their guilt (33:14) and the righteous are rewarded, but the true source of all that is good in Zion is the Lord himself (33:22). We can remind ourselves that though we too are sinners, unworthy of this wonderful king and his kingdom, the Father has graciously restored us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the true King of Kings.

Father God, thank you that you are holy, just and righteous, yet merciful to those who repent. Help us to live with integrity, promoting justice and care of the vulnerable wherever we live and work. Forgive us for complacency. Thank you for your mercy and grace. Amen.

SATURDAY, 14 MARCH

ISAIAH 34

Final Judgement

How do you imagine the final judgement? Can you bear to think about it?

1. Note the urgent cry to all nations to pay attention (1), before the bloody vision of the end of the earth unfolds. How does the imagery in verse 4 help us to see the completeness of destruction?

2. In verse 5–7 how do the type of animals killed by the Lord’s sword remind us that judgement involves seeing God for who he is and giving him his due?

3. How do the images of the “desert creatures’ in verses 8–17 highlight the utter desolation of nations punished by God for their enmity to him and his people?

Lord, help me never forget that you are worthy of worship and obedience, and that there will be terrible judgement for those who choose to ignore or disobey you. Help me to have a heart for the lost. Thank you for your patience – and that you forgive all those who turn to you and repent. Amen.

SUNDAY, 15 MARCH

PSALM 137

How Can We Sing?

Do you ever feel far from God?

This Psalm makes such sad reading. We can imagine the exiles, gathered together in a forlorn huddle on the edge of the river, protesting to their captors, "How can we sing when we have lost everything that is important to us?"

Perhaps we are reminded of the plight of refugees everywhere, who have to face displacement and loss, often after the trauma of violence. However, there is another aspect to the Israelites' deep sense of loss. The Jerusalem temple was the place where their God – the God of their fathers – dwelt with them. Their inconsolable grief is for their separation from their God and the sense that he has abandoned them (or perhaps even been defeated), even though he has promised never to leave or forsake them. It is also for the nation of Israel – the chosen nation, God's own people. How is it possible that they will be wiped out? Their whole worldview has been overturned.

And yet, they remind themselves to remember Jerusalem "my highest joy" (6). Then they cry out to the Lord to inflict dreadful punishment on those who have been part of this destruction. Babylon, throughout the Bible, symbolises all that is wicked and deserving of punishment for evil. However, these verses rightly shock us – especially when we put them under the authority of Jesus' words to "love our enemies".

We realise that the question "How can we sing the songs of the Lord?" will eventually have a positive answer, because they have not actually been abandoned and though they are far from their home, the Lord is not far from them.

Lord, help us to remember that you are never defeated and you will never abandon your people, even in the face of overwhelming evil. Whatever our circumstances help us to trust in your unfailing love and seek to call others into your kingdom, through repentance and faith. Amen.

MONDAY, 16 MARCH

MARK 13:1–13

Should We Be Surprised?

What noteworthy buildings do we have in Australia? Sydney Opera House? Commonwealth Parliament?

Jesus' Galilean disciples hadn't seen anything to compare with the temples' magnificence and were puzzled by his comment that it would be totally destroyed. It was God's house. Its destruction was unthinkable.

Four key disciples asked him when it would be destroyed and what would be the sign that it was about to happen. Jesus' response doesn't say when but warns them what to expect in the meantime. We now know that the temple was destroyed in AD70 when the Romans conquered Jerusalem. The warning also clearly applies to the time before a larger worldwide event yet to occur.

Jesus describes a world with imposters claiming to be him or his representative, wars and rumours of war, earthquakes, famines and other natural disasters, hostility towards Christians, persecution and family betrayal.

The warning applies to us as well. By God's grace we aren't experiencing many of these but there have been few periods of history when they are not happening somewhere in the world. There are different views on how to understand the whole of chapter 13 (including tomorrow). For now, let's see how Jesus tells us to handle these issues in today's passage. Also, what other scriptures say.

Jesus' warnings are not meant to frighten us, but to help us be alert and prepared

- Jesus in verses 7–8 says not to get carried away by these happenings.
 - Remember that Jesus loves those who love him and is committed to seeing that they will not fall away. Paul says that true Christians will hold fast because God will hold them fast (Romans 14:4).
 - If brought to trial his followers will be given what to say (11).
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Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are the good shepherd and we are safe in your hands. Help me to grow in my love for you. Amen.

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH

MARK 13:14–37

Day and Hour Unknown

What are your plans for today?

In today's reading Jesus talks of a yet to happen, worldwide event which is coming ready or not; his return to earth which will happen when the Father calls time. Not even Jesus knows when this will be (32).

But first (14–16), Jesus answers the disciples' question. When will the temple be destroyed and what will be the sign that it is about to happen? "The abomination that causes desolation" is first spoken about in Daniel and refers to any idol placed in the temple to desecrate it. Luke 21:20–21 says that Jesus is referring to the surrounding of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in AD70. Many in the Jerusalem church fled to safety. Jesus again warns of false messiahs and false prophets (21–22). Christians should not be deceived when they perform miracles.

Jesus introduces the time of his return (24–25) by quoting from Isaiah. The heavenly bodies will be darkened. It's not clear whether this will actually occur or it is a prophetic illustration of a change in world order. There will certainly be a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13) which will not need a sun or lamps (Revelation 22:5).

The balance of the chapter (26–36) describes the coming of the Son of Man (Jesus) to earth with great power and glory and the need to be ready. As the day or hour is not known we should "watch and pray"

What does it mean for you to "watch"? We cannot spend all our time thinking of Jesus' return. We have many tasks, including many which require concentration. Is the unknown day and hour motivation for consistent Christian living? Can you think of what would help you be mindful of the possibility that Christ may come any day?

Lord, please give me discernment to know how to be prepared for your return at any time and to live rightly for it. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH

ISAIAH 35

The Joy Of The Redeemed

Have you ever witnessed the sudden arrival of Spring? Or seen a situation of sickness or suffering miraculously turned around?

Webb calls this chapter “a wonderful oasis” on our journey through Isaiah. For the original readers, there was hope of return from exile, but Isaiah is giving us an insight into the ultimate realities. The previous chapter told of the everlasting destruction that would meet God’s enemies. This chapter opens our eyes to the possibility of its opposite: everlasting joy. Those who are weary, lame, blind – and utterly unable to save themselves – will be rescued, redeemed, ransomed by the Lord. The desolate places will be restored and renewed.

Most excitingly we are directed to the way which leads to Zion, the city of God and all that it symbolises. In New Testament terms we are talking about the highway to heaven, which will lead to eternal joy and gladness with the Lord. Here it is referred to as the Way of Holiness. “For Isaiah holiness is a defining character of God himself” (Webb 145).

God rescues and redeems us – paying the costly price of his Son for our salvation, to make us holy. But we also need to choose to live holy lives, to renounce our former ways and pursue Christ-like obedience. This way may seem difficult to us but take note that it is “a highway straight from conversion to glory” (Motyer168)! How wonderful, too, that this Way of Holiness is not emotionless trudging, but full of joy as we enter God’s holy city singing and “sorrow and sighing flee away” (10)!)

Lord God, thank you for this wonderful vision of gladness and joy for those who follow your ways. Thank you that when we were powerless, you were mighty to save. You redeemed us, through Jesus’ sacrifice, to enjoy your presence for ever. Amen.

THURSDAY, 19 MARCH

ISAIAH 36:1–37:13

The Enemy At The Gates

Did you notice that we have changed to prose? Why do you think the writer made that choice?

For the next 4 chapters we will be following the actual story of some of what Isaiah has been prophesying about. Hezekiah, who had turned to other nations for protection, will turn back to the Lord and be rescued. However, this wise trust will not last.

1. What do you find most shocking about the Assyrian field commanders claims to both the envoys and the men “on the wall”?

2. Do you think Hezekiah sent messengers to Isaiah confident that God would act (1–4)? What impact would the subsequent withdrawal of troops have had on Hezekiah and his people?

3. Even from afar, Sennacherib taunts Hezekiah, reminding him of the fate of other nations and their kings. What does the Assyrian leader have so wrong?

We are surrounded not by armies, but certainly by those who think our God is just as weak or powerless as the gods of other faiths. Ask for the Spirit to strengthen you so that you will never be ashamed of the gospel and can continue to trust in the One who saves, even when powerful, influential people ridicule him.

FRIDAY, 20 MARCH

ISAIAH 37:14–38

Rulers In The Hands Of The Lord

"Almighty God, Ruler of the nations, your Word teaches us that the hearts of rulers are in your control and that you influence and direct them according to your wisdom"

(sydneyanglicans.net)

This Hezekiah surprise us with this heartfelt prayer, urging the Lord to deliver his people "so that all the kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God". The surprise is that he seems to care for the honour of God's name, rather than his own safety. But we are not surprised by God's response delivered through Isaiah for Hezekiah but directed at Sennacherib – who should have been terrified.

The tone is mocking, asserting the Lord's utter superiority over this man who has claimed such power. He begins with a focus on Jerusalem, using the imagery of a powerless young woman, to show contempt for this king who is so sure of himself. As for all rulers, he only has power because "long ago, I ordained it" (26). Then comes the ominous verse 28 – God is not just watching all his movements, but has heard his insulting, boastful words.

The Lord demonstrates his total control of the situation. He pronounces both a plan of relief for Hezekiah and immediate judgement on Sennacherib. There will be prosperity for the house of Judah and a remnant will survive – all accomplished by the "zeal of the Lord" not by the careful planning of the king. Furthermore, Sennacherib will not just be defeated, he will not even shoot an arrow into the city. This prophecy is immediately fulfilled as 185,000 soldiers die suddenly, and Sennacherib is murdered by his sons.

Lord, in our troubled world it can be hard to trust that you are in control. Thank you for your word which teaches us to pray for deliverance to the One who is over all – who sees and who hears. Help us to trust that you will judge righteously. Deliver those who are suffering and persecuted. Amen.

SATURDAY, 21 MARCH

ISAIAH 38

Hezekiah's Recovery

Think back to a time when God answered your prayers, changed your circumstances and renewed your trust in him.

It seems that this chapter is a "step back in time" to a private moment, before the events of the previous couple of chapters.

1. In his illness and distress at the prospect of imminent death, Hezekiah's prayer is brief and focused on justifying himself. How does the Lord respond generously (4–8)?

2. Verses 9–14 outline Hezekiah's grief and suffering. At verse 15, everything changes. What has happened and what is Hezekiah's response?

3. Verse 21 seems a pretty down to earth way to cure a desperate illness. Do we see God's hand in healing? What is the proper response to answered prayer – no matter how mundane the solution seems to be?

Lord, help me to turn to you in in sickness and in health, knowing that you alone hold my life in your hands. Help me to always give thanks for answered prayers and to encourage others through sharing them. Amen.

SUNDAY, 22 MARCH

PSALM 138

When I Called, You Answered Me

Think back to the sadness of last week's Psalm 137. Read this Psalm as a reaffirmation of trust in the Lord.

This psalm begins a final grouping of Psalms attributed to David. The eight psalms that follow will reaffirm that God's promises are still trustworthy (despite the terrible events of the exile).

The psalmist is surrounded by trials of all kinds: other "gods" (1), the "kings of the earth" (4), the "proud" (6), 'trouble" and "foes" (7). However, he determines to keep praising and worshipping the Lord for several reasons. The Lord is great, exalted above all things. Moreover, the Lord is committed to his people. Even though he is far above lowly humans he sees and cares for the humble.

There is a personal relationship too. He has a purpose for this believer – which he will fulfil. He is faithful, his love endures for ever. He answers him when he calls, protects him and makes him "bold and stout-hearted" (3).

We may be impressed with David's assurance of God's love for him but caution ourselves that David had a very special relationship with the Lord. Yet, each believer, on this side of the cross, can *"approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may find grace to help us in our time of need"* (Hebrews 4:16).

Do you have that confidence in your Lord – that he sees you, and will answer you when you call? Do you trust him to fulfil his purposes for you?¹⁸

Thank you, Lord, that you see me and you hear me when I call to you. Thank you that Jesus' sacrifice opened the way for me to approach you with boldness. Help me to trust in your unfailing love and faithfulness. Amen.

MONDAY, 23 MARCH

MARK 14:1–11

For Love or Money?

What is your motivation for giving money, time or energy?

This chapter begins with a clear decision in the minds of the religious leaders – that Jesus must die. They were waiting for an opportunity but were hindered by Jesus' popularity especially with the visiting pilgrims in Jerusalem at the time of the festival of Unleavened Bread. Their delight (11) when Judas offered to betray Jesus, meant they could carry out their murderous intent sooner than they had expected. So blinded were they by hate and jealousy, that there seems to be no hesitation that this should be done in the midst of a religious festival!

Jesus understood the heart of this woman in "wasting" such an expensive gift for his burial. Hers wasn't a calculated gift, but one from the heart giving all she could. Jesus' quick defence of her shows he saw through the false indignation of the disciples. (Was it particularly Judas Iscariot as mentioned in John's gospel?) Did they really care for the poor that much? Had they no love for Jesus their Master to consider he was worth the cost of the perfume?

Jesus' protective comment "Leave her alone", not only showed up the disciples calculating meanness, but led onto a further not-so-veiled comment about his forthcoming death. Jesus also issued a prophetic word about this woman's generous act of love which is once again being proclaimed as we read this story!

The contrast between this woman's loving act and the cruel, shrewd attitude of Judas is very obvious. Was he so disillusioned with Jesus that the promise of money (11) was such an easy temptation to fall into? How easily we sin when we don't have love for God at the heart of our Christian discipleship!

Father, we ask for a generous, cheerful attitude to giving, and a heart of love and compassion as we remember your great love for us. Amen.

TUESDAY, 24 MARCH

MARK 14:12–26

Jesus Prepares His Disciples

*"Man of Sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"*

– Philipp Bliss 1838–76

1. According to verse 15, there was a *"large upper room, furnished and ready"* for Jesus to have a private meal with his disciples. Despite this practical preparation, what shows Jesus' supernatural foreknowledge to guide the disciples to the right house (13)? Do you think Jesus wanted to have some time alone with his disciples before his arrest and trial?

2. Why do you think Jesus mentions that one of his disciples will betray him? What did you think of the disciples' response, *"Surely not I?"* Do you think Jesus was giving Judas one last opportunity to turn back from his evil way?

3. What paradox do you see in verse 21? Do you think Judas was responsible for his betrayal despite God's plan for Jesus to die? (See Peter's comments on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:23)

4. When Jesus shares the bread and the wine with his disciples and announces a covenant (24), what is the basis of this new covenant? How is it different from the original Passover meal? (Exodus 12:1–13)

Thank you for the way you prepared the disciples for what lay ahead. Help us to trust you to lead and guide us into the future. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, 25 MARCH

ISAIAH 39 – 40:11

Comfort

*"The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"*

Psalm 103:8

The passage today presents a stark contrast, between the fickleness of Hezekiah and the faithfulness of the Lord. The powerful king of Babylon seeks support from Hezekiah, who foolishly appears to demonstrate his enthusiasm for dependence on the human might of his neighbour by showing off the treasures in the temple. All this despite the Lord's clear promise (38:6), the accompanying sign in the heavens (38:8) and the miracle of his recent recovery from illness.

Hezekiah's response to the coming judgement, destruction of his city and the suffering of his own sons, seems to be a selfish sigh of relief. We end Chapter 39, wondering why God bothers with this weak and fickle man.

So chapter 40 comes as a wonderful, surprising, generous blessing. We know exile and defeat is coming, but the Lord comforts his people by reiterating his firm promise of an end to hardship (2), the forgiveness of sins (2), that Yahweh himself is coming, to be revealed in all his glory to all (3–5). They (and we) are reminded that the word of God can never fail (6–8), that the true shepherd holds his people in his tender hands ((9–11).

As Alec Motyer puts it (188) *"This is the Lord undefeated even by our most grievous sin; the Lord who never calls back a word he has spoken, and who cannot be deflected from its fulfilment"*.

Thank you, Lord, that you are faithful even when I am faithless. Thank you, that despite my sinfulness, you abound in mercy and love. You offer me forgiveness through Christ's perfect sacrifice. Help me to respond in thankfulness, love and obedience. Amen.

THURSDAY, 26 MARCH

ISAIAH 40:12–31

Majesty

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of heaven and earth.”

Isaiah 40:28a

1. The passage is full of rhetorical questions to which we must answer “only our God”. What image of God’s majesty and power strikes you most forcefully?

2. How are idols (18–20) and princes (23–24) shown to be worthless?

3. What encouragement do you take from verse 30–31? You might like to memorise it or put it on a post it note somewhere to remind you of the blessings to those who *“hope in the Lord”*.

Thank you Lord, that though you are the Almighty, the Creator of all things, you reach down to us, through your Son, Jesus, giving hope and strength to those who hope in you. Amen.

FRIDAY, 27 MARCH

ISAIAH 41

The Helper Of Israel

"I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times what is still to come."

Isaiah 46:9–10

The people of "little Israel" (14) must have felt powerless in the midst of the great nations' conflict swirling around them. And now, another conqueror is on the move – Cyrus, who would find the Persian empire. God reassures them here – the nations are put on trial (1–7, 21–29) and seen to be "nothing" and then, in the middle section (8–20), God reminds his chosen servant that he is in control, and they do not need to fear.

God calls the nations to prove, if they can, that they shape history, but their response shows that they are afraid of Cyrus. They take refuge in their idols (7), but God claims here that it is he that has actually called Cyrus (4). The Lord is sovereign over historical events. Unlike worthless idols and their followers, he actually accurately predicts and warns about coming events through his prophets (25–29).

Verses 8–16 contain some wonderful promises for those "chosen servants" who trust in the Lord. They are told not to fear, simply because they belong to the Lord (10,13). He will, like a loving Father, take hold of their hands and help them. They are small, defenceless (14) but in the hands of their Redeemer, they will become like a "threshing sledge". This image refers to judgement – separating the wheat from the chaff. The promised transformation of the barren desert – with rivers flowing and forests growing – reminds them of God's provision in the Exodus wilderness and reassures them of his faithfulness and power.

Thank you, Lord, that you hold the nations in your hands and that you are sovereign over our past, present and future. Help us to learn from your promise to your servants, not to be afraid, but to trust in our Redeemer. Amen.

SATURDAY, 28 MARCH

ISAIAH 42:1–9

God's Perfect Saviour

"This is our God, the Servant king. He calls us now to follow him."
(Graham Kendrick 1988)

1. How would you describe the attributes and mission of God's chosen servant (1–4)?

2. What has the Lord called Israel to be (6–7)?

3. Jesus reads similar verses to verse 7 (Isaiah 61:1–2) and proclaims, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* (Luke 4:18–21). How does Jesus fulfil this prophecy?

Thank you for Jesus, your chosen one who brings justice and righteousness, and in whom we can hope. Thanks that in his death and resurrection, he has led us out of darkness into your wonderful light. Amen.

SUNDAY, 29 MARCH

PSALM 139:1–12

Our All-Knowing God

No Place Beyond His Presence, No Detail Beyond His Care.

David begins with simple, everyday actions—sitting, rising, going out, and lying down—to show that God knows him in every ordinary moment (2–4). God understands not only what David does, but also what he thinks and what he will say before any word is on his tongue.

In verse 6, David acknowledges that God’s knowledge is far beyond his reach. The NIV describes it as “too lofty” for him to attain, while the ESV says, “it is high” and David cannot attain it. The NIV highlights David’s sense of wonder at the vastness of God’s wisdom, while the ESV emphasises the simple fact that God’s understanding is completely beyond human grasp.

David then reflects on God’s presence. He uses opposite extremes—the “wings of the morning” in the far east and the “uttermost parts of the sea” in the far west—to show that there is nowhere he can go where God is not already present (7–10). Even darkness, which often feels overwhelming or covering, is not hidden from God. To him, the night shines like the day (11–12).

For David, these truths brought awe and comfort. But through Christ, they offer us even more. Ephesians 2:18 reminds us that through Jesus, we now have full access to the Father. God’s nearness is not only unavoidable—it is inviting. The God who surrounds us also welcomes us. This gives us assurance that wherever we go, we are fully known, fully seen, and fully embraced by our Father.

Lord, thank you for seeing me despite my sins and sending Jesus to bring me into your home. Amen

MONDAY, 30 MARCH

MARK 14:27–42

In the Garden – Strength and Weakness

Can you see evidence of true strength, imagined strength and weakness in this passage?

While The 11 disciples (Judas has left) accompany Jesus to a garden on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. Further preparing them for what is about to happen, Jesus predicts that, not one, but all of his disciples will desert him. He also speaks of his resurrection and his reunion with them all in Galilee – portraying Jesus' foreknowledge and the fulfilment of scripture (Zechariah 13:7).

But is Peter too busy protesting his loyalty that he doesn't hear everything Jesus is saying? And is he putting himself up a notch by comparing himself with the other disciples? After all, the other disciples asserted loyalty too. Jesus gently, but firmly, exposes the depths to which Peter will go. His devotion, and that of the other disciples, has not been fully tested. They had not come to distrust their natural strength.

How easy it is to think we are stronger than we are! I remember considering myself a patient person until I had my own children to care for! A strong dose of humility was needed!

We see Jesus' humanity in choosing three of his disciples to be his close companions in his time of anguish and also in his prayer to be relieved of this "cup" of suffering. Jesus was aware not only of the physical death he was facing, horrible as it was, but also of the burden of taking the sin of the world in his person. He endured the temptation he was facing with great strength and overcame in his submission to his Father (Hebrews 5:7).

Meanwhile the disciples were sleeping and were ill-equipped to face what was coming despite Jesus' warnings.

Father, thank you that in your will Jesus went to the cross. Give us the strength to do your will, being watchful and prayerful so that we don't fall into temptation. Amen.

TUESDAY, 31 MARCH

MARK 14:43–59

Arrested and Falsely Accused

*Meekness and majesty, Manhood and Deity,
In perfect harmony, The Man who is God.
Father's pure radiance, Perfect in innocence,
Yet learns obedience To death on a cross.*
(Graham Kendrick, Copyright © 1986 Thankyou Music)

1. Who sent the "crowd armed with swords and clubs" with Judas to arrest Jesus? What point does Jesus make about this in verses 48 and 49? Did you notice Jesus' calm and authoritative manner?
 2. Jesus says, "the Scriptures must be fulfilled" (49). What do you think gave him the strength to be obedient to death on the cross, considering the disciples had failed to pray and support him in his hour of need?
 3. While Jesus doesn't resist arrest, what does one of his disciples do (47)? John's gospel tells us it was Peter (John 18:10) Do you think Peter impulsively thought he could defend Jesus in this way? What do the other disciples do?
 4. The chief priests and the Sanhedrin were intent on putting Jesus to death "legally", but were they able to find any evidence for this? Mark writes twice that there was conflicting evidence about what Jesus said. What does this suggest?
-

For Reflection:

*O what a mystery, Meekness and majesty.
Bow down and worship For this is your God,
This is your God.*
(Graham Kendrick, Copyright © 1986 Thankyou Music)

WEDNESDAY, 1 APRIL

MARK 14:60–72

At the Trial – Strength and Weakness

"...Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example... When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats."

1 Peter 2:21, 23

This gathering at night-time was illegal under Jewish law. The many that testified were just as disorganised as the rabble that came to arrest Jesus. *"It was harder to agree on a consistent lie than to tell the simple truth"*. (Alan Cole)

Jesus' unwillingness to answer the questions of the false witnesses is in sharp contrast to his forthright answer to the High Priest. Jesus, who is the Truth, plainly states he is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of God, and goes on to prophesy his coming glory in line with quotes from Daniel 7 and Psalm 110.

Both responses show Jesus' strength and wisdom in the face of hostility, but after the High Priest's dramatic reaction and claim of blasphemy, the Sanhedrin consider Jesus worthy of death, humiliation and physical abuse.

Meanwhile, what is happening to Peter? Does he go into the courtyard, thinking he can support Jesus to the end? Instead, we read the sorry story of Peter denying his Master, not once, but three times before he hears the cock crow. The genuine sorrow he shows now is so different from the brash self-confidence earlier on.

In Luke's gospel when Jesus is telling Peter of his future failure, he says, "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail". How reassuring to know that in the midst of what lay ahead for Jesus, he was praying for Peter and had a future purpose for him. We too, can be assured that there is a way back, after repentance of our sins, because of God's love and faithfulness.

Father, we thank you for your faithfulness in restoring us when we sin and fall short of your glory. Increase our love for you for all you have done and are doing for us. Amen.

THURSDAY, 2 APRIL

MARK 15:1–20

Jesus Before Pilate

Have you ever stayed silent when you really wanted to speak up?

If the chief priests had told Pilate that Jesus was a blasphemer or a heretic, Pilate wouldn't have cared. So instead, they tell him that Jesus is claiming to be 'King of the Jews', a sign of rebellion against Rome.

Pilate's reluctance to execute Jesus seems unrealistic at first. But there are several possible reasons for it, such as the warning from his wife (Matthew 27:19), an ingrained distrust of the chief priests, a fear of inciting rebellion, and perhaps a sense that there was more to Jesus than met the eye.

Not only was Jesus innocent, but he was also a powerful orator. But this time, after responding to Pilate's initial questions and confirming that he was, indeed, king of the Jews, he remains silent. If he'd spoken, I'm sure he could have convinced Pilate to let him go. It was for our sake that he remained silent before Pilate and then throughout the beatings, mockery and final cross-laden walk to his death. He is fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy "*as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*" (Isaiah 53: 7).

When Pilate offers to release a prisoner, the people choose the prisoner that he least wants to free, a Jew who has violently rebelled against Roman rule. Barabas was the first rebel whose life was spared because of Jesus' death. But he wasn't the last.)?

Though he was innocent and could have spared himself the upcoming ordeal, Jesus remained silent for our sake. Let us give thanks. Amen.

FRIDAY, 3 APRIL

MARK 15:21–39

The Saviour Lays Down His Life

How well do you understand the cost of your sin? Re-read this passage, dwelling on all that Christ suffered for your sake.

1. Wine mixed with myrrh is thought to have been for anaesthetic purposes. Why would Jesus refuse to drink it?

2. Many aspects of the way Jesus were treated fulfil Old Testament scriptures (the division of his clothes by lots, his crucifixion alongside criminals). These verses point to the one who would suffer and die for the sins of many (Isaiah 53). Why didn't the scribes and Pharisees recognise him?

3. Many mock Jesus as he dies, but what was it about Jesus' death which caused the centurion's response?

4. Make time, today, to read Psalm 22, which begins with the cry Jesus quotes at his death. What might we understand about Jesus' trust in God from understanding the rest of the Psalm?

It's confronting to remember that this is what our sin deserves. Let us pray that this reminder of our sin's severity will help lead us to repentance.

SATURDAY, 4 APRIL

MARK 15:40–47

Jesus' Burial

Sometimes God gives us gifts so that we can give them back to him.

This was true of the women who gathered at a distance, watching the crucifixion of their Lord. He had blessed them in various ways, and they had followed him caring for his needs. But now, they are powerless to help – mute, weeping witnesses – but still hovering as close as they dare.

Joseph was a prominent member of the Jewish council, but where was he when Jesus was being condemned? His boldness in approaching Pilate is possibly motivated by guilt over his earlier timidity. Or maybe he only found faith in Jesus as he hung on the cross, and we're seeing the fervour of a new convert.

Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly, because the crucified usually took a day or more to die. It's possible to conclude that Jesus succumbed so quickly because of the torture he endured at the hands of the soldiers. What we can be sure of is that Jesus died at the God-ordained time and that his death was so cosmically significant that the temple curtain -- the symbolic barrier to access to God – was instantly torn from the top to the bottom.

Jesus' body was buried hurriedly because the sabbath was approaching. In verse 47, we see that the women follow until the end. It will be they who return to this tomb on Easter Sunday, because they still intend to honour their Lord by anointing his body, trying to repay his love for them.

Because of his wealth, Joseph was able to give Jesus something none of his disciples or the women could – a tomb. I wonder if he'd heard Jesus' predictions and knew he wouldn't be needing it for long.

It can be hard to joyfully give something up to God, but that is often the reason God has given us that thing in the first place. On this "in between" day, reflect on what God might be asking you to give for his service.

SUNDAY, 5 APRIL

MARK 16:1–8

The Resurrection

The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed!

1. We see in John 20:19 that Jesus in his resurrected form can walk through walls. So why do you think the stone was rolled away? Why are the women so frightened?

2. Mark's original account ends here, before Jesus appears to his disciples. How does this ending help us to experience some of the "bewilderment" of the women?

3. Some translations say 'He has risen' in verse 6. Some say 'He is risen'. Which do you prefer, and why?

4. Why is Peter mentioned by name in verse 7? What does it tell us about Jesus?

Lord, you conquered sin and death and rose again, giving all who trust in you hope that we too can have eternal life. Thank you, Lord. Help us to share that joy today. Amen.

MONDAY, 6 APRIL

LUKE 24:13–35

The Road to Emmaus

Do you feel that spreading the Gospel is urgent?

1. After hearing what the women had said, and checking on the empty tomb, the disciples still seem confused. Why does Jesus rebuke them (25–27)?

2. The travellers don't recognise Jesus until he breaks bread with them. Why are their eyes opened at this point?

3. The travellers returned "at once" to Jerusalem to share the good news. Why do you think there is so much excitement among the gathered disciples?

The Gospel is even more pressing now than it was then. The final day is two-thousand years closer. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help to spread the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, with a sense of urgency – and joy!

TUESDAY, 7 APRIL

LUKE 24:36–53

Jesus' Witnesses

How often do you wonder what Heaven will be like?

The start of this passage emphasises the importance of Jesus' bodily resurrection. What the disciples saw was not a vision or a ghost. Jesus rose to life in the same body he had died in. But now it had been made immortal, never again to experience death. This is the difference between resurrection and resuscitation.

This is important because Jesus' resurrection is a template for the resurrection we will experience. We will not be ghosts in heaven, we will be people with bodies who can sit down and eat. Does that mean that physical wounds we sustain in life will be carried over to heaven? I suspect this particular attribute is unique to Jesus. He retains his wounds as a reminder to all who see him of his glorious saving sacrifice.

Jesus rose from the dead to demonstrate his power over death, and he ascended to Heaven to attest to his eternal life, which we now share in.

When preaching about Jesus' resurrection, it would've been tempting to avoid the very town that decided to execute him. Perhaps that's why Jesus has them begin there. It's also the heartland of Israel, to whom God wished to bring the Gospel first. But Jesus' command takes in all nations – the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins – is one everyone in the world needs to hear. Be thankful for those original faithful witnesses and honour them by obeying Jesus and continuing to share his life-giving message.

Even in the very town where Jesus was executed, there were people who needed to hear the Gospel. Let the promise of eternal life for all who truly believe, fuel your evangelism, even in difficult places.

WEDNESDAY, 8 APRIL

ISAIAH 42:10–17

Praise the Lord!

What is your favourite worship song?

How many songs of praise are there that we can sing to God? So many! And yet new songs will always be written about the Lord and his works. As we continue to marvel at him and as he continues to work in our world and our lives, there will always be more for which to praise him. This is true for those who are wandering the desert, on a far away island, out at sea or for those a part of the nomadic tribe of Kedar. This is true for us too.

In the second half of this passage, we see that God is waiting in his perfect timing to reveal himself through mighty acts, whether that be acts of judgment and justice, or acts of rescue and grace. When he is ready to act, he does so in a very intense way, like the intensity and exertion of a woman giving birth. God also acts in mysterious ways, and although we will not always understand, he will guide us 'the blind' on his path, bringing light and never abandoning us.

Before this passage ends, it concludes with a final warning. God is the creator, working tirelessly for his world, and yet we are sometimes too quick to give our praise and allegiance to something else, to created things, to idols. Whether they be the ancient statues that people bowed down to or more subtle idols such as money, or even just ourselves, we need to remember that everything that is good in this world happens by God's power.

Spend some time praising God for all he has done for you, and all he has given you!

THURSDAY, 9 APRIL

ISAIAH 42:18–25

Blind and Deaf

“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”

Matthew 13:13

Israel was once in a very privileged position. Israel was God’s chosen servant, and as God’s messenger, they were to be an example to all the nations around them. They had access to God, his laws, and a front row seat to all his wonders. How did they use this privileged position? They wasted it away. They closed off their hearts to him and ignored all his words and deeds, that is why they are called blind and deaf. Now the Israelites have lost their position that God gave them, lost their land, their home and some of their rights.

Many ancient people would have assumed that because the Israelite people were destroyed and captured by the Babylonians, that would mean that the Israelite god had been defeated by the Babylonian gods. Who could rescue them now? Was God now powerless to save his people? Read again verse 24. Isaiah reminds us that God was entirely in control and never powerless or defeated by some other gods. God has the power to take back his people whenever he chooses. But even still, Israel continued to have their heart closed to God, they did not take his mighty acts to heart.

Today we have accounts of God’s most mighty act, the death and resurrection of his son Jesus, bringing salvation to anyone who believes. Are there times when you take this for granted? Are there times when, despite that close access we have to God, you choose not to draw near to him, or choose not to listen to his words?

Pray for forgiveness for those times when you are blind to God’s work in your life and deaf to his words and instructions.

FRIDAY, 10 APRIL

ISAIAH 43:1-13

Fear Not, For I Have Redeemed You

How do you show those you love most that you love and care for them?

1. How much is God willing to do for his people? What does this tell us about how much he loves them?

2. How is 43:5-7 good news for the Israelites who are living in exile? How might this be good news for us if this prophecy is also about our future as God's people?

3. In what ways is God better than other supposed 'gods' and religions? In what ways can you be a witness to God and his greatness this week?

Pray that God would help you be his witness and that he would always remind you of his great love for you.

SATURDAY, 11 APRIL

ISAIAH 43:14–44:5

Strong Encouragement

Have you ever gone through a time when you felt a bit distant from God or felt like your enthusiasm for following him had dwindled?

1. How does 43:16 contrast with 43:19 and what does this teach us about the extent of God's power and creativity?

2. In what ways does this passage show God's generosity and grace?

3. Sometimes it feels like we fight with ourselves; we want to follow God but struggle with that and our relationship with him can feel a bit lifeless and dry. What hope does 44:1–5 offer us?

Pray that God would use his Spirit and transform you, helping you to follow him.

SUNDAY, 12 APRIL

PSALM 139:13–24

Our All-Creating, All-Searching God

Made by His Hand; Guided in His Way

David moves from God's all-knowing presence to his intimate care in creation. He pictures God "knitting" him together in the hidden place of the womb (13), reminding us that our lives begin not by chance but by deliberate, loving craftsmanship. Before a single day unfolded, God already knew and shaped them all (16). Our stories are not random; they are held within His wise and sovereign hands.

These truths stir David to wonder. God's thoughts toward him are precious and beyond number (17–18). Whether he sleeps or wakes, God remains nearby. Divine care is not occasional; it is constant, steady, and overflowing.

Yet God's holiness casts a revealing light. While some speak against him with evil intent (20), David refuses to remain focused only on the darkness around him. He turns inward, inviting God to search his heart, expose what is hidden, and lead him on the everlasting path (23–24). The God who formed him is also the only One who can cleanse, redirect, and sustain him.

Through Jesus, this becomes our story too. The One who fashioned us has also redeemed us. In Christ, our worth is affirmed by his cross, and our welcome to the Father is secured. By his Spirit, God's searching does not crush but heals, bringing hidden sin into the light and guiding us into truth and holiness. And the "way everlasting" David longed to walk is revealed in Jesus himself—the Way, the Truth, and the Life—who leads us in newness now and into eternity.

Lord, you formed me with care and know me completely. Search my heart, remove what is harmful, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

MONDAY, 13 APRIL

ISAIAH 44:6–23

Idolatry

Do you have neighbours or family who worship idols or statues of their gods?

1. How does the long detailed account of making the idol – and using the materials for different purposes – emphasise the worthlessness of idols (9–20)?

2. How do verses 21–23 remind Israel of their great blessing in their special relationship with their God, who is like no other (6–8)?

3. Romans 1:22–25 reminds us that worshipping man-made/ created things rather than the creator is a human failing. Can you see the danger of this in your own life?

Lord, help me to see if I have placed any idols before my worship and service of you. We pray for those we know who even now worship images/ statues of other gods. Enable us to introduce them to the true God. Amen.

TUESDAY, 14 APRIL

ISAIAH 44: 24–45:13

Cyrus, the Lord's Chosen Instrument

Are there limits on the type of person God can use to achieve his purposes?

After the previous passage so strongly condemning idolatry, it comes as a shock that God chooses a pagan, idolater king to achieve his purposes. The Lord asserts his supremacy and his right to choose even those who don't acknowledge him to carry out his plans. The Lord reigns supreme. He made all things (24). He is all wise (25). He can both build out of ruins (26) and dry up an ocean (27).

The naming of Cyrus as "shepherd" and "anointed one" and God's promise to hold his right hand (45:1) may cause fear that God's favour has left the line of David. However, it is clear that this is only a temporary measure and that God's mission is centred on the rebuilding of the temple and he is doing all *this "for the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen"* (45:4). Moreover, we see that the Lord's primary purpose is to establish for all men that *"I am the Lord and there is no other."* (5, 6). He will, through his chosen instrument, bring salvation and righteousness.

Verses 9–13 address those who might question God's methods. They need to acknowledge that, as the clay does not question the potter who creates it, nor the baby his parents who brought him into being, they also have no right to question their Maker. The Lord's commitment to his people is reiterated in verse 13 when he asserts that Cyrus' task (for which he will receive no reward) is to *"rebuild my city and set my exiles free"*.

Lord, help me to trust you as the Almighty, Wise Creator to use whoever you want to achieve your purposes. Help me to daily seek your kingdom first and to do the good works you have prepared for me to do, ever thankful for your love, mercy and grace. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, 15 APRIL

ISAIAH 45:14–25

No Other Saviour

"...And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me"

Isaiah 45:21b

We read yesterday that the re-establishment of Jerusalem will be done for a purpose, so that *"men may know that there is none beside me"* (45:6). Today's passage reinforces the glory and supremacy of the Lord.

1. Look through today's passage for the several verses where it is asserted that there is no other God. Why is this both reassuring and a rebuke to Israel?

2. What do these verses tell us about what our God is like: 17,18,19, 21, 24?

3. Other nations will face disgrace and shame, but what hope is there for them in verses 22–23?

Lord, your Word tells us *that "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow... And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"* (Philippians 2:10). Help us to remember the truth of where all history is heading, flee from other "gods" and worship him alone. Amen.

THURSDAY, 16 APRIL

ISAIAH 46

I Will Carry You

Do you think of yourself as standing on your own two feet in this world or being “carried” and “sustained” by God?

This passage opens with a striking contrast between man-made idols and the Lord God. Though it is clearly addressed to “all who remain of the house of Israel” at a particular time in history, there is much we can learn from it.

Those who worship idols are weighed down by them, having to carry them as heavy burdens (1–2). But our God is the one to carry us, in fact he will carry, sustain and rescue us from birth to our old age (3–4). Praise God for this wonderful reassurance!

Again, we are pointed to the folly of creating our own gods, gods that cannot answer our cries or save us (5–7). Then in verses 8–10 God takes Israel to task. He rebukes them and repeatedly reminds them to “Remember”, “Listen to me”. He characterises them as “rebels” and “stubborn hearted”. Why? Because God has constantly revealed himself to them as the one and only God, who accomplishes his plans formed before time began, who can use both animals and men to fulfil his purposes.

And his purposes are to bring righteousness near – to bring salvation to Israel. He is faithful, despite Israel’s faithlessness. He is powerful, there is no other like him, and he will accomplish all he has planned. For us too there is the certain hope of salvation for all who put their trust in Jesus.

Thank you, Lord, that you carry and sustain me. Help me not to be stubborn-hearted but to trust in your promises, accepting the salvation you offer in Christ, and living in dependence on you. Amen.

FRIDAY, 17 APRIL

ISAIAH 47

Fall of Babylon

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Proverbs 16:18

Babylon here does not just refer to the ancient city but symbolises "humankind organised in defiance of God" (Webb,190).

1. The image of Babylon as a wealthy woman driven to poverty and shame (1-3,8-11) is confronting. What shows us Babylon's pride and its impact (6-10)?

2. Why is her claim in verses 8 and 10 particularly shocking?

3. What is the terrible truth about putting your trust in sorcery/astrology (12-15)? How could we warn those caught up in these things today and lead them to the one who truly can save them?

Lord keep us from pride in ourselves and in our own understanding. Humble us and help us to seek forgiveness at the foot of the cross. Amen.

SATURDAY, 18 APRIL

ISAIAH 48

Stubborn Israel

Have you ever stubbornly refused to obey the clear command of God? What happened?

In verse 1 we find the first of many calls to “Listen”. There is a contrast between Israel’s people’s claims to take oaths in the name of the Lord, to be “citizens of the holy city”, to rely on the God of Israel and their stubborn hearted refusal to listen to the Lord’s warnings. They have known, from long ago, that their disobedience, their lack of truth and righteousness would result in judgement, but they refused to repent and to acknowledge God’s sovereignty, preferring their “wooden images”. The Lord reminds them that any delay is only because of his own name’s sake. He has tested them, refined them, and still delays his wrath for his own glory’s sake.

In verse 12 he calls to them again – this time reminding them who he is – the Creator, the first and last... and also reminding them of his personal relationship with them “Israel whom I have called”. He tells them again that his chosen one will defeat Babylon.

Again, in verse 16 he calls them near to him to listen. This time he reminds them of his character and their relationship with him. He is their Redeemer... who teaches them what is best for them and leads them in the way they should go. In the last verse, he laments the life they could have had if they had been obedient, but still does not abandon them, repeating his warnings to flee from Babylon – reminding them again of the Exodus and the way the Lord provided for his people.

Lord, help us not to be like the Israelites in this passage, stubborn and refusing to listen. Help us to have open ears to your Word. Thank you for your great love and patience with us. Thank you especially for our Redeemer, Jesus, who, in mercy, rescued us from sin. Amen.

SUNDAY, 19 APRIL

PSALM 140

Rescue Me

Have you, or someone you love, ever needed protection from evil men or vindication in the face of slander? Where did you turn?

1. David was a mighty military leader. His enemies did actually threaten his life. In what ways in our modern world can Christians be the victims of “evil plans” or those whose lips are full of “poison”?

2. What does David ask God to do (1,4,8–11)?

3. What is it about God’s character that makes the psalmist confident to pray (7,12)?

4. How can we apply this psalm to our own modern day trials?

Father God, I pray too that you would rescue me and protect me when I am unjustly undermined or slandered. I pray for Christians in the public eye – or others known to me – for strength to endure when they are attacked for following you and living upright and righteous lives. Amen.

Notes

