

Isaiah

Sermon 23

“Coming Home”

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Revelation 22:1-5
Isaiah 27:1-13

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[1] Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. [3] No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. [5] And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (ESV)

Isaiah 27:1-13

[1] In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting

serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

[2] In that day,

“A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!

**[3] I, the LORD, am its keeper;
every moment I water it.**

Lest anyone punish it,

I keep it night and day;

[4] I have no wrath.

Would that I had thorns and briers to battle!

I would march against them,

I would burn them up together.

[5] Or let them lay hold of my protection,

let them make peace with me,

let them make peace with me.”

[6] In days to come Jacob shall take root,

Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots

and fill the whole world with fruit.

[7] Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them?

Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?

[8] Measure by measure, by exile you contended with them;

**he removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the
east wind.**

[9] Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for,

and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin:

**when he makes all the stones of the altars
like chalkstones crushed to pieces,
no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.**

**[10] For the fortified city is solitary,
a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness;
there the calf grazes;
there it lies down and strips its branches.**

**[11] When its boughs are dry, they are broken;
women come and make a fire of them.**

**For this is a people without discernment;
therefore he who made them will not have compassion
on them;
he who formed them will show them no favor.**

**[12] In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of
Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned
one by one, O people of Israel. [13] And in that day a great trumpet
will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and
those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and
worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (ESV)**

I. Introduction

A. Yearning for Home

Fall is my favorite season. I love the cool weather, the colorful leaves, and the lead-up to Thanksgiving and Christmas. My Mom used to put on big Thanksgiving dinners. She'd make the turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, asparagus, pumpkin pie, chocolate pie—the whole nine yards. The dining room would be decorated just so with fall themes, and there would be a white linen table cloth, and her parents' set of fine china. During Thanksgiving day, we'd have the NFL on the TV, and my Dad would throw the football out in the backyard with my brother and me.

After college, I moved to England to study theology. I liked the rain and the spires and the intellectual life of Oxford, but I missed my family. I had a silly 4x6 picture the four of us took of ourselves in our yard, and I stuck it to the wall of my room. My time in England was rewarding, but I was always glad to go home. It changed a little when my parent retired and moved to Virginia. Visits were still with the family, but it was no longer in the house where I grew up. Then my mother died when I was 29. During the week of the funeral, my Dad and my brother and I went out in the street and threw the football, and it was just like those family times growing up—only Mom wasn't inside the house somewhere. A few years later, my Dad died. And during the week of his funeral, my brother and I threw the football together outside, only it was just the two of us. A few days later, we each flew away to our separate homes.

When Caytie's grandmother lay dying at a hospital, she kept asking her children and grandchildren to take her home. She wanted to go home. Her parents were waiting for her, she said, even though she was 80 years

old. Have you ever experienced something like that with a loved one near death? Sometimes they ask to go home, and the one they have in mind turns out to be the house where they grew up, where their parents loved them and raised them.

As we live our lives, we're very conscious of the imperfections in the moment. But sometimes when we are removed from a situation, or when someone we love dies, we recall the past with nostalgia, focusing on the good, and leaving out the bad. And we yearn for love, and we yearn for home, and there's nothing in this world that will fully satisfy that deep sadness. But the good news is that God has promised us that homecoming, if we trust in him. Hebrews 11:13-14 talks about all the heroes of the faith, who lived their lives and went to their graves trusting in God, yearning for home, but not yet finding it. The Scripture says, *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.*

B. Choose Whom You Will Serve

But we can only find our way home through God. Because his plan is not yet complete, he calls on us to love him and serve him with perseverance in the sufferings of this fallen world. But some reject him, and go their own way, seeking to fulfill their own yearnings by means other than the delayed satisfaction ordained by God for this age. So how about you? How are you dealing with your own griefs, your yearning for home, your

frustration with the broken parts of your life? Will you follow the Lord? Or will you try out some other path? Nearing the time of his own death, Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, once told the congregation, *Choose this day whom you will serve... As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*¹

Our own yearnings, hopes, pains, and griefs are important. But we must also look up, and remember that we are but dust, creatures made by God, for his own glory. Our fulfillment is important to God, but it is secondary. The Lord is life and goodness in and of himself—all the benefits we seek for ourselves are byproducts of right relationship with him. He must come first, for this is the right order of things. We must love him with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength. Consider—are you willing to place his will above your own, trusting that he loves you and will take care of you? Or do you want to go your own way and be the king of your own life? In John Milton's book, *Paradise Lost*, he has Satan say that he would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven. How about you?

How does a lost child get home? Must you be rescued by your heavenly Father, or can you build your own house, wherever you are, on your own terms, and find satisfaction there?

You are either for God, or against him. There's no middle ground. You're all in, or all-out—a citizen of heaven, or not. And here on this earth, the

¹ Joshua 24:15.

two camps are mixed, with two different approaches to life going on at the same time, all around us. The Bible talks about this in terms of the city of God, and the city of Man. And while human and demonic rebellion may stand for a while, it will not stand forever. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, *thy kingdom come*—and one day, it will.

C. Consequences: The Last Day

This morning we return to our series in the book of Isaiah. Chapter 27 is the end of the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse, of chapters 24-27. This is revelation about the end times, much like the second half of the book of Daniel, or all of the book of Revelation. This is a unique section in the book of Isaiah. And whereas chapters 13-23 describe God's judgment on specific nations, chapters 24-27 give details about the world-wide once-and-for-all judgment day that is yet to come.

In all these chapters, from 13 to 27, God was making the point to eight-century B.C. Judah (and now, through the Bible, to all people for all ages), that he is Lord of the whole earth, even the universe. God is no mere local tribal deity. The Lord is God, and he alone—over all peoples and all things, both seen and unseen!

The Isaiah Apocalypse of chapters 24-27 focuses on the Last Judgment. Chapter 24 speaks about God's judgment on the whole world, and then chapter 25 speaks a powerful prophecy of the Lord's provision of salvation and eternal life. Isaiah 25 is a favorite chapter to read at funerals. Chapter 26 then breaks into a song, celebrating peace and

victory in God. Finally, we reach today's passage—chapter 27. And when we examine it closely, we will see that it speaks of the final destruction of evil, and then gives a glimpse at what things will be like in the City of God and in the City of Man *after* final judgment. Let's take a look—for when we know what the Lord's plans are for the future, we can live more faithfully—and patiently—in the present.

II. The Serpent Slain: Evil Destroyed (v. 1)

We begin in verse 1 with a prophetic promise from the Lord to destroy evil. It says, *In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.*

The word Leviathan is used in several ways in the Old Testament. At its most basic level, it refers to some sort of enormous sea creature—normally taken to be a whale. The word is used in this sense in Job 3:8, 41:1-10, and in Psalm 104:26. But Psalm 74:14 hints at something more. This verse says to the Lord, *You crushed the heads of Leviathan.* Multiple heads moves beyond a basic biological description of a whale, and a spiritual meaning is indicated. Further, contemporaneous ancient cultures² used the word Leviathan to refer to spiritual evil. The sea is also an apocalyptic symbol of chaos and disorder, and so Leviathan can come to mean the biggest expression of spiritual evil in chaotic times. Our passage in Isaiah 27 then ties the idea of Leviathan to Satan by

² E.g., Ugarit (and other Canaanite sources).

echoing the language of other ancient cultures at this time, and also by describing Leviathan as a twisting serpent. For Satan is a serpent in the book of Genesis as well as the book of Revelation, and he twists the word of God. Isaiah 27:1 is thus a promise to defeat Satan and destroy evil.

Consider Revelation 12:7–9: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, [8] but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. [9] And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

Satan is called a serpent, and a dragon—in both Isaiah and Revelation. To this end, I think it is important to note that in the Bible, the word dragon is *not* understood to be fiction. In the Bible, the word dragon always indicates great power, great malevolence, great evil, and great violence. It is a word for Satan himself. The great medieval literary heritage of the West that depicts knights seeking to slay dragons accurately echoes the biblical theme. J. R. R. Tolkien does this as well, in his Lord of the Rings books, where dragons are always evil. It is a more recent phenomenon in our own culture to attempt to recast dragons as cute, cuddly, and friendly. In the Bible, however, a dragon is never your friend, but it is always an evil enemy who must be destroyed.³ And that

³ Isaiah 51:9.

is *precisely* what Isaiah 27:1 promises to do. God will destroyed Leviathan, Satan, evil. He will do this on “the day”—which means judgment day. What follows, then, is the restoration of all things for all who belong to the heavenly city of God, which will be established even on earth, as it is in heaven. Verses 2-6 describe this new reality using the imagery of a pleasant vineyard. This is the Garden of Eden restored.

III. The Pleasant Vineyard: Eden Restored(vv. 2-6)

Now, way back in Isaiah chapter 5, God described his eight-century people as being like a ruined vineyard, and that due to their disobedience, he was going to let them be punished. But now, here in Isaiah 27, he speaks of the restoration of the vineyard—even to the level of the Garden of Eden! This is about both individual salvation, and the last judgment along with the restoration of all things for the people of God. The vineyard refers to the people of God.

God himself will be the cultivator of the vineyard, and he himself is the principal vine in the vineyard! Remember in John 15, where our Lord Jesus Christ said, *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*⁴ Isaiah 27:2-3 reads, *In that day, “A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the LORD, am its keeper.* “In that day” means that this is at judgment day and beyond. This vineyard—this restored world, will include God’s presence and his protection. That protection is symbolized in the book of Revelation by a great wall around the heavenly garden-city of God—all

⁴ Jesus also used many parables where he spoke of the people of God in terms of a vineyard (e.g., Matthew 20-21).

that is evil and wicked is excluded. Now, going further in Isaiah 27:3-4, we see that God sustains and cares for this vineyard. He says, *every moment I water it*. Certainly, this brings to mind Jesus' promise that believes will have a spring of water welling up to eternal life within them.⁵ It also fits with Revelation 22:1-2, which says, *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [2] through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

This vineyard, this community of the people of God, will have eternal life from the Lord, and will be safe from threats from without, as well as sin from within. God says, *Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day; I have no wrath*. The fact that he has no wrath shows that he no longer has anything to be wrathful about! That is, the sins of his people have been forgiven, and the people themselves have been changed so that they will no longer sin and cause him to have wrath. And therefore, because sin is gone, so is God's curse—death is gone, as well as all the suffering and decay we presently see in creation:

Verse 4: Would that I had thorns and briers to battle!

I would march against them,

I would burn them up together.

[5] Or let them lay hold of my protection,

⁵ John 4:14.

*let them make peace with me,
let them make peace with me.”*

God’s enemies are gone! Jesus the Prince of Peace will one day make perfect peace, everywhere. And so his people can begin to become the sort of people he always meant them to be. Verse 6: *In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.* Jesus is the root, he is the vine, and all who are in him by faith are the true Israel—that is, the people of God. And through our union with Christ, our sins are forgiven, and the Holy Spirit now lives within us, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit, which *is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*⁶ And God’s vineyard shall not be a small patch of cultivation—but it shall be the reality for the whole world, when it is made new. For the old world is reserved for fire,⁷ and the new heavens and the new earth shall come,⁸ and the vineyard of the Lord shall be established in every place.⁹

This is language connected with the perfect garden city of God, described in Revelation 21 and 22. Here is the perfect life of heaven, then to be established on the earth. What a wonderful future we have in store for us! This is the true home for which we have always yearned,

⁶ Galatians 5:22-23.

⁷ 2 Peter 3:7: *But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

⁸ Isaiah 65:17; 66:22. Revelation 21:1.

⁹ E.g., Ezek. 17; Zech. 8:12; John 15:5.

but have not yet experienced. All our nostalgia is not really about something we have lost from the past—really, it’s all about something we will gain in the future, that we have not yet received. When we yearn for home, we yearn for heaven.

IV. Looking Back on Hard Things: How God was at Work (vv. 7-9)

So ok—we have read God’s promise to destroy evil, to forgive us for our sins (so that he will have no more wrath against us), and how he will make us righteous in every way, and restore creation itself. In Revelation 21:3-4, he puts it directly: *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

These are all good and wonderful things that encourage our faith. But now, in verses 7-9, God answers the objection of the suffering saint. For we have these promises, and yet we still go through great hardship. Why? Why, O Lord, did you let that happen to me? Why must I bear up under evil situations? As we study these next three verses, we will find hope for grief and the pain of the believer who is just trying to hold on. Is that you? *Will* that be you? Fortify your soul against the attacks of the devil—for when pain comes, he would have you despair. But you must not! For here is the reality of situation. Listen carefully:

A. God Chastises His People, But Does Not Destroy Them

Isaiah 27:7–8: Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them?

Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?

*[8] Measure by measure, by exile you contended with them;
he removed them with his fierce breath in the day of the east
wind.*

These verses teach that God destroys those who strike and kill his people, but that he carefully measures the level of suffering he allows his own people to undergo. For example, he allowed the Judeans to go into exile—but it was for a specific length of time, and then he restored them. Ultimately, God measures, restrains, and limits the hardships he allows his people to undergo. Even if they should die, this is a limit on their pain, and they shall then have the relief of going to heaven. For the wicked, however, God punishes them in this life, and beyond. The point is that in allowing believers to undergo hardships, the Lord keeps the suffering within certain bounds, and has redemptive purposes in mind. He uses these times to discipline us, as a loving Father does for his children.

Think about it in these terms: In Isaiah 61:3, the Lord calls us oaks of righteousness. Here in Illinois and Iowa, we are right in the native range of the great oak savannahs. An oak savannah is a transitional area, between tall grass prairies and forests. You can still find patches of this around. When fires would come through the prairies, the other trees were killed off, but the oaks could survive the fires. And so you end up

with massive open-grown oaks, with prairie beneath them. The effect is much like walking through a big cultivated park, and the first European settlers here were amazed as they drove their wagons under the great branches of these spreading oaks. The oaks survive prairie fires in ways that other trees do not. And if we are oaks of righteousness, then we too survive the fires and sufferings of this life. Isaiah 43:2: *when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.*

When you look back on the hardships of your life, you will see that God was caring for you and sustaining you in the midst of them—even using them to help you grow as a Christian. Without prairie fires, you'd never have the huge open-grown oaks of the oak savannahs. And perhaps it is the case that without the hardships God has allowed in your life, you would not have grown as much as a Christian as you have.

B. Instead, He Atones for their Sin

And here is God's protection—he saves you from destruction by atoning for your sins. That is, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to live a righteous life on your behalf, and to suffer and die on the cross and rise from the dead, so that you might be forgiven and granted eternal life. Verse 9: *Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin.* If you believe in Jesus, then no hardship can ever destroy for—for in Jesus, you will be rescued and granted eternal life.

C. And Makes Them Righteous

In Jesus, God has atoned for you—that is, he has removed from you the *guilt* of your sins. He is also in the process of saving you from the *power* of sin in your life. The guilt is already gone, and now we are also learning to leave behind the *practice* of sin. Here’s where verse 10 describes how God will help his people to leave behind all false religion: *when he makes all the stones of the altars, like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.* The Lord forgives us for our sins, and then empowers us to leave more faithfully to him going forward.

V. The End of All Things—And Beyond (vv. 10-12)

Finally, in verses 10-12, we get a glimpse of the Last Day—of the end of all things, and beyond. Here we see that the wicked have been destroyed, and that the suffering of the faithful has ended, and they have been gathered safely home to God.

A. The City of Man in Ruins (vv. 10-11)

In verses 10-11, the city of man is in ruins. The way of the world ends in death, desolation, ignorance, God’s rejection of them: *[10] For the fortified city is solitary,*

a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness;

there the calf grazes;

there it lies down and strips its branches.

[11] When its boughs are dry, they are broken;

women come and make a fire of them.

*For this is a people without discernment;
therefore he who made them will not have compassion on them;
he who formed them will show them no favor.*

B. The Elect Gathered Home to the City of God (vv. 12-13)

By contrast, the elect—all who trust in Christ—are gathered to the Lord like a valuable harvest. Not one is missing, and each is of great value to the Lord—even you and me! *[12] In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel. [13] And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.*

All of God’s people—living and dead, will be gathered to the Lord, and will worship him, and inherit eternal life and joy! Revelation 7:9–17 describes the scene in greater detail:

[9] After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10] and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” [11] And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12] saying, “Amen! Blessing and

glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

[13] Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" [14] I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

[15] "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

[16] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

[17] For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (ESV)

VI. Conclusion: Homecoming

Heaven and the new earth are the true home for which we have always yearned. It will include our beloved Lord, and our beloved friends and family in Christ. Evil will be defeated, sin and suffering will end, and our earthly trials will have been turned to redemptive ends. We will live in a restored and perfected new Garden city of Eden—the New Jerusalem.

And we will love and worship and give thanks to the Lord forever.

So in light of these certain events which God has prophesied to us ahead of time, let us then choose this day whom we will serve. Let us be faithful to the Lord God Almighty, and serve him alone. Trust in Jesus, persevere in hardship, and keep running the race here in this life until it is finished. Don't give up, but hold on, focus on God, and trust in him to save. For he has saved us, he is saving us and he will fulfill all his promises. And it will be glorious beyond measure! In the end, you will have a great homecoming, and even though we die, yet shall we live, and rejoice in the Lord, forever.

Alleluia! Amen.