

# isaiah part 2 | from darkness to dawn

**David McDonald's series on the first section of Isaiah appeared in Perspective 00-3 under the title "In the Presence of Greatness," and was warmly received by many readers. Now follow David as he leads us through Isaiah 40 to 66.**

Rock fishing is a dangerous sport. There are more fatalities from rock fishing than from any other sport (except perhaps for lawn bowls). I have stood on rocks 10 metres above the sea and still been drenched by the spray of seas pounding the rocks. Through experiences of my own, and the tragic experiences of others, I have learned to treat the sea with fear and respect. With this in mind, I anxiously followed a friend to his favourite rock hours before dawn one morning. Having crossed to the island and made our way around the shore platform in total darkness, I was shown the rock on which we would fish. By torch light I watched the sea rolling over the rock. The rock seemed less than a metre above the deep blackness of the ocean. The rocks to the right and left seemed more inviting and secure, but my friend asked me to put my trust in his word. He was calling me to trust my life to his word. And cautiously, I did. My legs didn't offer me the support I needed. Adrenaline and doubts competed for my attention. But I fished that rock, in total darkness, in safety. As the light crept into the sky I began to see clearly where we were, how the rock formations were shaped, and the path of the sea. I saw more clearly the hidden dangers of nearby ledges. I discovered the reasons for the security of 'our' rock. I had my faith confirmed.

In Isaiah 40 to 66, Isaiah calls the people of Judah to trust God in the darkness. God's people had avoided the Assyrian crisis, which had cast a dark shadow over chapters 1 to 39, only to fall to the Babylonians. Yet God has not forgotten his covenant. He will bring a new exodus. He will redeem his people and bring them home. Furthermore, God will deal with the deeper issues of corrupt hearts and the need for forgiveness. By the work of the servant, sin will be atoned for and God's people can look forward to a future of paradisiacal proportions. Big promises, indeed! But then this is a big God, and this is his big gospel!

While Israel was called to trust God in the darkness, we have seen the dawn. The

light has come into the world. We can look back on the promises of Isaiah and see clearly what even angels longed to understand (1 Pet 1:10-12). And yet, we too, must look forward in faith and hope as we await the return of our Servant King. Isaiah 40 to 66 calls us to a deep trust in the abundant promises of God. These chapters are a wonderful celebration of the gospel. They give much reason for rejoicing, and still they challenge us to continually assess our focus and priorities. Again, we are in the presence of greatness and God is calling us to let him be God, and for us to live as his holy people.

## **In the presence of Greatness (Series 2)**

Talk 9 - When your world falls apart (Isaiah 40)

Talk 10 - 20/20 spiritual vision (Isaiah 42)

Talk 11 - Do you know better than God? (Isaiah 44-45)

Talk 12 - The greatest message ever told (Isaiah 52-53)

Talk 13 - Total satisfaction (Isaiah 55)

Talk 14 - God isn't finished yet (Isaiah 56)

Talk 15 - The God of change (Isaiah 61)

Talk 16 - Your heart's desire (Isaiah 66)

## **Talk 9 - When Your World falls Apart - Isaiah 40**

### **1 For those whose world is falling apart**

Some people have days, some have years, we had holidays when it seemed our world was falling apart. *Tell stories of what went wrong in our holidays.* Has it ever got so bad that you wonder if God is there at all? Does he care? Can he do anything? Why do your prayers seem to go unanswered? Does it get too difficult to go on believing, trusting living for God?

#### **(a) The Babylonian Exile (39:5-7; 40:27)**

[39:5-7] This was a massive crisis for the people of God. *Briefly explain historical situation.* Their nation, land, temple, blessing were all taken away. Isaiah prophesied these things and they happened as he had written. You can feel something of their pain and abandonment in [40:27].

#### **(b) A new message for Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 6)**

In anticipation of these things, Isaiah writes. Remember Isaiah 6, where Isaiah is called to preach a message dominated by judgment. Chapter 40 serves as a kind of recommissioning. He is given a new message – one of hope, comfort and rescue. This is great news – gospel. This will be no cheap comfort of empty words, but a rich and powerful message grounded in the heart of God.

### **2 The gospel of God**

Firstly, let's examine this great news.

#### **(a) God has not forgotten (1)**

[1] God's people belong to him. His covenant with Moses and Israel still stands. They remain his treasured possession. God is not indifferent to their plight. In spite of their circumstances God has special plans.

#### **(b) God has forgiven them (2)**

[2] The penalty for their sins has been paid in full. How is this possible? Can 70 years of hard labour bring atonement? We will see how in chapter 53, but for now the great truth is that they have been forgiven. For a shattered nation under judgment, this brings great comfort.

#### **(c) God will bring them home (3-5,10-11)**

God has forgiven them and he will put his words into action. He will bring them home – a new exodus [3-5]. As God comes, he brings people with him [10]. He is awesome and gentle [11]. His glory is also seen in the rescue of his people [5].

#### **(d) God can be trusted (6-8)**

In contrast to people, God's word stands forever [6-8]. Isaiah's new message is of the faithfulness of God, who keeps his promise and rescues his people.

#### **(e) So, lift up your voice! (9)**

All this is very good news. This is the gospel! So, lift your voice and shout it out! [9] Good news is for passing on, not keeping to yourself. Here is the message: God is coming, in strength and tenderness. He has not forgotten his people, but has forgiven them and will bring them home. What a powerful gospel! The reason it is so powerful is that it is the gospel of God [Romans 1:1-2].

### **3 The God of the gospel**

Isaiah goes on to paint a breathtaking picture of the awesome God who brings this gospel.

#### **(a) The power of God (12-26)**

*Catalogue the wonderful statements of God.* There is no comparison [18,25]; the designer/creator of the universe [12]; who is infinitely wise [13-14]; untroubled by Israel's enemies [15-17]; cannot be represented [19-20]; enthroned over all [22]; and more. The God who has given his word is THIS God. There is plenty on the horizontal plain to discourage, so they should look to God. The danger is not that God is inadequate, but that they will forget. They needed reminding and so do *we*.

#### **(b) The compassion of God (27-31)**

It is one thing to believe in an all-powerful God. It is another to believe that he cares. The people question this [27]. God's glory is also displayed by his compassion and caring. He has a servant heart. He strengthens the weary [29]. Nothing is too small or insignificant for God. Those who hope in God will not do so in vain.

### **4 The gospel of God now**

We live in a world that desperately needs to hear these voices: comfort, forgiveness, compassion, salvation, and hope.

#### **(a) Substitute gods and substitute gospels**

People's worlds are caving in around them, but where do they turn? *Describe substitute gods and gospels.* What about you and me? Where do we turn?

#### **(b) Our only hope (Luke 2:25; 3:2-6,15-18)**

History shows that the comfort for Israel

was short-lived. But some, like Simeon, continued to hope [Luke 2:25]. Jesus is the promised comfort. John the Baptist is the voice [3:2-6]. Our only hope is *in Christ*. If you are not a Christian, then turn to Jesus. If you are a Christian, then keep your eyes on Jesus. When you are weary, struggling, burning out; when it seems that God doesn't care remember that God has kept every promise he has made. Lift your eyes to heaven and remember the gospel of our God.

## **Talk 10 - 20/20 Spiritual Vision (Isaiah 42)**

### **1 More than meets the eye**

Sometimes we get so focussed on our difficulties that we are blind to the real issues. Sometimes the problems run much deeper. I have a friend who is a debt collector. His job is not simply to reclaim money but to identify the underlying problems such as gambling debt, chronic unemployment, inability to budget etc.

At the time of exile, Israel is well aware of her political, economic, religious, and social problems. But she needs to appreciate that there is a far deeper problem – spiritual blindness.

Last week we noticed that Isaiah 40 marks a turning point. God is going to do a whole new thing [9]. The former things have taken place and God is announcing something new.

### **2 A new gospel**

#### **(a) Justice (1-4)**

The key message is 'justice' [1,3,4]. Israel would have had a passionate desire to receive justice. *Illustration of the Aboriginal people who have been dispossessed, families broken, spirituality quashed, etc and their desire for justice.*

#### **(b) All that 'justice' is meant to be (40:14; 42:5-9,16; 43:5-8)**

But, real justice has far greater implications. It will be as wide as the cosmos [40:14] and as deep and personal as the human heart [42:6-7].

### **3 A new Servant**

The real focus is on the Servant who is introduced with a regal announcement [1].

#### **(a) Israel (41:8-10; 42:18-19,23-24)**

Who is the servant? Isaiah [20:3]? Israel [41:8-10]? Moses, kings and prophets were

called God's servants – special people with a special role. However, 'servant Israel' has become blind and deaf [18-19], ignoring God [23-24].

**(b) All that Israel was meant to be (42:1-4)**

God is doing something new. He is raising up a Servant who will be everything Israel was meant to be – e.g. covenant and light [1-4]. Full of the Spirit and the power of the Word, he will bring real justice.

**4 A new testament**

**(a) The messiah people expected**

The people hoped for a powerful, kingly messiah [9:6-7] who would lead armies and rebellion, overthrow oppressors and establish a new political state. Have you ever wondered why Jesus keeps silencing people, instructing them not to reveal his identity?

**(b) The messiah people got (Matthew 12:15-21)**

[Matt 12:15-21] Jesus clearly saw himself as the Servant of Isaiah. He brings comfort, compassion, justice, tenderness, and rest [Matt 11:28-30].

**5 There is none so blind as the one who will not see**

A key theme is spiritual blindness – and this remains as important today.

**(a) The blindness of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)**

People are blind to their blindness. Yet, this unseen reality, left unchecked, will kill. If we saw a blind person about to step in front of a car, we would help instinctively. Do we care, urgently, for those who are spiritually blind?

**(b) The blindness of God's people (42:18-20,23)**

In Isaiah 42, it is God's people who are described as blind. Are we in danger of forgetting our first love? Have we become ho-hum about God's word? What do we need to change?

**Talk 11 - Do you know better than God? (Isaiah 44:24-45:25)**

**1 "I like to think of God as..."**

*"In the beginning man created God; and in the image of man he created him. And man gave unto God a multitude of names that he might be lord over the whole earth when it suited man."* (Jethro Tull)

Christians are often accused of creating God in our own image. He becomes a projection of our needs and insecurities. In this series we talk about God *as he reveals himself*. (Note: As a preacher, it is a daunting thing to talk about God in his presence!)

**2 The ONLY God**

**(a) No God, but the LORD (44:24; 45:5,6,14,18,21,22)**

This is a powerful theme. God alone is the creator. The negative makes the point even more bluntly in an age of relativism – there is no other God.

**(b) No alternatives (45:20)**

The nations believed in many gods, but such idols were only creations, not the creator. There is a nonsense, today, which says that it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere. The multi-faith push is ignorant at best, but blasphemous at heart. There is only one God – the LORD.

**3 The SOVEREIGN God**

**(a) Raises up a pagan messiah! (44:24-45:6)**

God keeps his promise to rescue Israel, by raising up a messiah. However, this messiah is not Davidic, nor even a Jew! Cyrus is to be God's messiah. This causes no end of difficulty for Israelite theology. God can use his enemies to punish, but to save? Yet, this is really only a problem for people who don't believe that God rules over everything.

**(b) Brings prosperity AND disaster (45:7; cf. 28:21 and Lamentations 3:33, 37-39)**

God is Lord over all – not just what is good and nice. He brought judgment on Israel before he acted to save them. Do we have too limited a view of God's sovereignty? Scripture shows that God can work through evil and suffering to achieve his good purposes. Yet, his delight is not in evil – it breaks his heart. His plans remain to create a perfect world.

**(c) Does as he pleases (45:9-13)**

So who is Israel to tell God how to do his job? The clay doesn't instruct the potter, nor the baby his parents. God defends his right to do as he pleases. He will save them and he will do it his way!

**4 The SAVIOUR God**

Cyrus is a 'short-term' messiah. He fades into the background and the Servant takes centre stage.

**(a) Salvation to Israel (45:14-17)**

God is already known as the Saviour of Israel [15-17]. As he did in the Exodus, so he will do again. This time salvation will be everlasting.

**(b) Salvation to the ends of the earth (45:20-23)**

There is hope for the nations if they will repent [20-23]. God is not racist. This is great news for 'non-Jews' like me!

**5 The MESSIAH God**

Historically, Cyrus didn't achieve world-wide, eternal salvation. So, Israel awaited another messiah. This Messiah has more in common with the LORD, than with Cyrus.

**(a) Jesus is the Saviour (45:21; Acts 4:10-12; 2:22-24)**

In the context of absolute monotheism, Jesus is called the only Saviour [Acts 4:12]. God, in Jesus the Messiah, achieves this salvation by working good through evil [Acts 2:22-24].

**(b) Jesus is the Sovereign Lord (45:23; Romans 14:10-12; Philippians 2:9-11)**

[23] God alone is sovereign and all will bow before him, yet we see Jesus in this role [Philippians 2:9-11].

**6 Knowing God**

As he is – not as we'd like him to be.

**(a) With confidence**

That God will save. That God will work all things for the good of those who love him. That life is not random and meaningless. That evil is not outside the control of God. That God answers prayer. We can have a robust view of God through all circumstances of life.

**(b) With humility**

God is the sole creator of the universe, whose ways are beyond our comprehension. So ease up on our arrogance. Don't make God in our own image. Don't tell God how to do his job. Humble ourselves before him, that he might lift us up.

## **Talk 12 - The Greatest Message Ever Told (Isaiah 52-53)**

### **1 Isaiah 53 and the fulfilment of prophecy**

People are fascinated with prophecy – Nostradamus, the new millennium, much ‘Christian’ literature. Isaiah 53 is a wonderful example of God’s faithfulness, as we see such clear fulfilment of something written over 700 years before the event. The Dead Sea discovery confirms that Isaiah 53 predates the events of Jesus. However, this is an exciting chapter for more reasons than its predictive prophecy.

### **2 The Servant Song**

The song divides neatly into 5 stanzas. Work through each, spotlighting the main ideas such as: rejection by man and God, substitutionary sacrifice, and victory beyond the grave.

### **3 The Servant in Isaiah**

Who is this servant? Not Isaiah, nor Israel, for this servant deals with the sin of both. He provides for the forgiveness of Isaiah [6:7] and Israel [40:2]. Big themes of

**He has not simply left us to suffer the consequences of Adam’s sin. He has made it possible for us to enter back into a relationship with him.**

atonement and forgiveness find their climax in this chapter. Threads previously left hanging are tied up in the suffering servant.

### **4 The Servant in the New Testament**

#### **(a) The connections (eg. Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32-35)**

The connections are prolific and precise. Jesus came in obscurity and poverty. Nothing is told of his appearance. He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows. He did no violence, nor deceived anyone. His trial was a miscarriage of justice. He didn’t speak up in his own defence. He was executed, with criminals; pierced with nails and a sword; and placed in a tomb owned by a rich man. He was stricken by God, crying out “My God, my God...” He arose again from the grave. Who could this be – but Jesus?

If in any doubt, notice that Jesus described himself as the servant [Luke 22:37], as did

the early Christians [Acts 8:32-35].

#### **(b) The significance (e.g. Mark 10:45; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4)**

The connections are deeper. It is not merely the facts, but their meaning and significance. Jesus understood that he *must* suffer, die and rise again. He spotlighted these things again and again. He described his mission in Isaiah 53 terms [Mark 10:45]. He is the sacrificial lamb [John 1:29, Revelation 5, etc.]. The New Testament gives central importance to the cross and resurrection of Jesus [eg. 1 Cor 15:1-4]. The whole NT resonates with the Servant Song. We don’t need ‘proof-texts’ to see fulfilment – it is everywhere.

### **5 The Servant in the year 2001**

#### **(a) Written for us (1 Peter 1:10-12)**

What an encouraging thing that the story of our salvation was written hundreds of years before it took place. We not only rejoice in God’s saving work, but in his promise-keeping faithfulness. Our confidence in God is deepened. Israel was called to faith in God’s Servant without seeing the full picture, whereas we see things now in the light of day. *I tell a story of faith about fishing on rocks in total darkness and then the dawn arriving.* Have you – will you – put your trust in the Servant?

#### **(b) Life and lifestyle (eg. 1 Peter 2:21-25)**

Not only does the servant give life, but he transforms life. The death of Jesus is a once for all, non-repeatable event. Yet, at the same time, it is the example of life to be copied again and again.

## **Talk 13 - Total Satisfaction (Isaiah 55)**

### **1 The unsatisfying search for satisfaction**

I often get dissatisfied. I’m an easy victim for junk mail. Dissatisfaction is the character of life for so many of us. We’d do well to read Ecclesiastes regularly. But there is one kind of dissatisfaction which is quite healthy – a dissatisfaction with the state of the world and the state of our hearts.

### **2 God’s invitation**

#### **(a) The invitation (1)**

God issues an invitation: ‘come’ (plural) ‘all of you’ (singular) – to all people and to each individual. Israel was thirsty, under the judgment of God. These are refreshing

words (e.g. Nelson Mandela, hearing of his freedom).

### **(b) The cover charge (1)**

[1] He highlights their poverty, yet this is no barrier to receiving the delights, which are offered free of charge. There is a price and a purchase, but it has been paid already by the servant (Isaiah 53).

### **(c) The comparisons (2)**

The invitation is to come and be satisfied, but don't be deceived by cheap imitations [2a]. We are so often lured by promises of satisfaction which cannot deliver.

### **(d) The guarantee (2-3; 25:6-8)**

[2b-3a] They are guaranteed satisfaction, not just of mind and body, but soul [25:6-8]. Here is a picture of relationship with God that is lavish, rich and satisfying. Contrast this with the common drab picture of Christianity.

## **3 Three reasons to accept the invitation**

### **(a) What God says – he does (3-5,10-11)**

[3-5] God's trustworthiness, keeping his covenant promises to David, despite the indicators to the contrary. God works powerfully through his word [10-11]. They should know this because of the creation, exodus, exile and now the promised return. We should know it more by the big picture climaxing in Christ and his gospel.

### **(b) What God offers is generous (6-9)**

[6-9] This is more than a statement about God's incomprehensibility. This speaks of the generosity of God in pardoning people whose thoughts are evil. God offers guilty people, like you and me, a pardon.

### **(c) What God does – will last (12-13)**

Here is a hint of the new creation [12-13] where joy, peace and prosperity abound. However, the returned exiles remained largely unsatisfied both physically and spiritually. When Jesus came he brought a message of blessing to the 'poor in spirit', to those who 'hunger and thirst for righteousness'. He brought an offer of mercy and pardon, which still stands.

## **4 RSVP**

### **(a) Listen to God (3)**

'Listen, give ear, hear'. With so much competing noise in our lives, we need to give God our undivided attention. The irony is that we are so often caught up seeking our own satisfaction, we don't stop and listen to the only one who can

satisfy.

### **(b) Don't put off (6)**

There is urgency to the invitation [6], for it will not stand forever. God has set a day of judgement, so don't keep making excuses.

### **(c) Make a U-turn (7)**

[7] Change now! Forsake the world's offers of satisfaction, which are selfishly 'me-centred'. Turn to the God who satisfies, through the work of the servant, Jesus Christ.

## **5 Don't be satisfied with less (John 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Revelation 21:6-7)**

Remember that satisfaction is found in God, through Christ. Don't be surprised if you are less than satisfied if you give lip service to Jesus, while you are really seeking satisfaction elsewhere. We need to keep drawing from the well of living water that satisfies. This doesn't mean that we will never be dissatisfied. Rather, this side of heaven, there remains a godly dissatisfaction, for God is not finished with us yet [Rev 21:6-7].

## **Talk 14 - God isn't finished yet (Isaiah 56:1-8)**

### **1 A great place to finish**

Chapter 55 would have been a great place to finish the book – the announcement of salvation made available by the servant! But, it continues. God goes on to speak to his saved people about how they are to live. Chapters 56-66 highlight the interim between salvation and the new creation. This makes this section immediately and specifically relevant to Christians now.

## **2 God desires saved people to change (1-2)**

### **(a) To honour God**

In the light of God's grace, this is how you are to live. Why spotlight the Sabbath [2, also 4 & 6]? The background [Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15] shows that honouring God, the creator and redeemer, is the key to the Sabbath. God is not seeking religious ritualism [cf. 1:11-14].

### **(b) To seek the welfare of others**

The Sabbath is also about seeking the welfare of others, so that those who are dependent upon us might rest. God was angry because of their injustice [1:15-17]. Now that they are saved, they are not to

return to their old ways. Being shown mercy should be a strong motivation to show mercy to others.

*Pause and consider the Sabbath today.*

The issue in the New Testament is not so much keeping special days, as finding our rest in God. However, honouring God and seeking the welfare of others are to be strongly in evidence among God's people. Do you honour God with your time? Do you set aside special time for God weekly, yearly, daily? Do you tune off from God when you arrive at work? What about having a short time of prayer each coffee break, for example? 'Workaholism' is dishonouring to God. It also abuses others. If we are too busy for our wives, husbands, kids, prayer and Bible group, church, or other people, then our business is ungodly.

## **3 God desires more people to be saved (3-8)**

### **(a) The God for all peoples**

[3] Eunuchs and foreigners – both were excluded [e.g. Deuteronomy 23:1-3]. God's plans for salvation are far reaching [4-5]. Unclean and damaged people can be made clean (Isaiah 53) and brought into the presence of God. Those with no hope of descendants will have an everlasting name among God's assembly. Even foreigners [5-7] will be brought into fellowship with Israel and her God.

### **(b) The missionary heart of God**

The temple had become a symbol of national pride – an exclusive clubhouse. Now the dividing walls that separate people are torn down. God is telling this to *Israel*, that they might welcome people in. God has a missionary heart and he will reach out and bring people in [8]. God's purposes are that people from every tribe, nation, people and language might unite around his throne, worshipping him.

### **(c) A wonderful case study (Acts 8:26-40)**

The Ethiopian – both foreigner and eunuch – is reading Isaiah 53. Perhaps he hadn't even got as far as chapter 55, when God opened his eyes to the gospel of Jesus. This is a major breakthrough in the book of Acts. It spells good news for foreigners like you and me!

### **(d) Growing a missionary heart**

Israel had to learn to welcome outsiders. So do you and I. It is easy to get so caught up with ourselves, that we forget the plight of others. Pray that God will transform

our hearts so that we care for our neighbours, city, country, world. Pray that God will expand our hearts. For example, Lance Armstrong, Tour de France cyclist, has a big heart through exercise. Pray that God will exercise and grow our hearts in loving others.

### **(e) Growing a missionary church**

We exist for the sake of the world. Do we recognise this? Let's continue to support well our link missionaries. Yet, it must run deeper still. Let's not create a Christian ghetto. Foreigners and eunuchs would have had trouble fitting into God's people and so *Israel* had to change. We must be committed to change too, so as to welcome all into fellowship with God and us.

## **Talk 15 - The God of Change (Isaiah 61)**

### **1 Change!**

We have a love/hate relationship with change. God is in the change business. Change is the character of the Christian life. God has often raised up change agents throughout history. His change agent par excellence is Jesus. We see him described so clearly around 800 years beforehand in Isaiah 61.

## **2 God's change agent**

### **(a) The Spirit-Messiah**

[1a] He is someone of extraordinary importance. The Sovereign Lord of the whole universe especially empowers him, filling him with his Spirit. [1b] He is anointed and sent by God, himself.

### **(b) The Servant-King**

The language here reminds us of two important figures in Isaiah – the King [11:1-2] and the Servant [42:1]. The reality is that the Servant and the King are one person – and that person is Jesus.

### **(c) Jesus**

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit; baptised in the Spirit; the Spirit descends on him at his own baptism; he is filled with the Spirit; the Spirit sends him into the desert; he returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and he stands up in the synagogue and reads Isaiah 61. What a climax! "This is me – the Servant, the King – the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me. I am the one promised in Isaiah."

## **3 God's agenda for change**

Back to Isaiah 61. What is God's agenda for change?

### **(a) A great reversal**

God's people had been oppressed and suffering and the Servant announces change. [1] The promise to the poor runs very deep. Those who are poor in spirit, broken hearted because they crave God's blessing, and captive within their spirits – these people will know freedom. [2] The year of jubilee stands behind this picture of all debts being cancelled and the people experiencing God's liberating forgiveness. The city will be rebuilt [4] and the nations will serve God's people [5]. The key word seems to be 'instead' [3,7] as their spirits are lifted to experience hope, light, refreshment and joy. Salvation will bring all these things.

### **(b) A priestly ministry**

God's people will serve the world as they serve him [6]. God is keeping his covenant promises to bless. And notice all this is for God's glory [3b]. It is no surprise that this chapter ends with a song of praise, for God deserves all the glory [10].

### **(c) Is this your experience?**

This chapter is so up-beat – full of the richest of delights. Does this describe your experience of relationship with God? Remember, these things are found ONLY in God [10a]. Look to God, spend time with God, and soak yourselves in the Word of God. Be reminded that you are clothed with Christ's righteousness and delight in this. Pray, like the Apostle Paul, that you might know how wide and high and deep is this love of God. If you still feel broken-hearted, captive, weak, and lacking, then remember the promises of Jesus [Matthew 5:3-12]. We are still longing, looking forward; there is still pain and evil; we still struggle – but not without hope. God has already demonstrated in Jesus that he keeps his promises and we will yet experience completely everything that Isaiah 61 has promised.

## **4 Fulfilment**

### **(a) Self-conscious**

[Luke 4:17,21] Jesus identifies himself as the Spirit-Messiah, the Servant-King. He came to bring liberation, freedom, gladness and rejoicing. This is his mission statement.

### **(b) Of what kind?**

Political? Economic? Freedom from oppression? Healing? The heart of his message is the announcement of God's favour. Spiritual debts cancelled, spiritual eyes opened, poverty of spirit richly filled, the freedom of relationship with God. And not just to preach it, but to achieve it. Love, compassion, tenderness, a passion for justice – they all take Jesus to one place, to a cross outside Jerusalem.

## **5 Our agenda for change**

### **(a) On the surface**

We still live in a world where people are hurting desperately. This has led Christians and churches to offer medical and educational help, social work and advocacy, to campaign for social justice or political liberation. There may be good in all these things. They may offer a taste of the new creation. But they are NOT what Jesus came to do

### **(b) Underneath**

The core thing for Jesus was restoring relationship with God. He was hated for it and suffered because of it – and we will too. Remember the difference between treating the symptoms and the cause, between band-aids and cures – and be committed to the cure. People's hearts can be mended forever. We can experience freedom from death itself.

And, if you are not experiencing the joy of all this, remember you are not home yet. Turn, again, to God. Be reminded of the great salvation in Christ. And, pray that you might delight and rejoice in Him.

## **Talk 16 -Your heart's desire (Isaiah 65:17-66:24)**

### **1 Living in the presence of greatness (Isaiah 66)**

The book opened by challenging our picture of God. It closes on the same note.

### **(a) God cannot be boxed (1-2)**

People have always wanted to box God – the temple, churches, compartmentalising God in our lives. God cannot be boxed [1-2a]. He is the creator of all things. He rules all things. He deserves to be honoured above all, and yet...

### **(b) Self-made worship (3)**

[3-4] The people thought worship equalled religious rituals and rules. They thought

this was what God wanted. The real problem [4b] was that they didn't listen to God and went their own way. Their lives were unaffected. They did evil and chose what displeased God. This is so easy to do – church and religious activities become substitutes for listening, faith and obedience. Restricting 'worship' to what we do in church is an example of this.

**(c) God-esteemed worship**

[2b] We need to recognise the truth about God and the truth about us. God is the powerful and holy Creator, Sustainer and Judge. We must first understand this if we are to appreciate that we can come before God as Father, Redeemer and Guide. Have you become too flippant? Do you take God for granted? Perhaps, we need an attitudinal check up.

**(d) Bringing offerings to God (18-21; Romans 15:15-16)**

Worship must embrace the whole of our lives [Romans 12:1-2]. One particular expression of worship is highlighted here [18-21]. God has a missionary heart and he is gathering people from everywhere to himself. He sends people to do the work of gathering – to bring brothers and sisters from the nations as offerings. This is worship!

Paul understood this [Romans 15:15-16]. This is worship that God desires and we have been called to be priests to share in this ministry. This is our church's mission – let's play our part.

**(e) The enormous patience of God has a limit (2 Peter 3)**

A sombre warning – one day we will all face judgment. Israel was promised this [6] and it happened to them. There remains a final judgment, which no one will escape [16,24]. It hasn't happened yet and this has caused many to question or doubt – but it will happen [2 Peter 3:8-13]. The *now* time is the time of God's patience. What about you, your friends and family? God doesn't want anyone to perish, but for people to turn to him and share in the new heaven and the new earth. What a great thing this will be. God will fulfil our heart's desire!

**2 Your heart's desire**

**(a) Paradise (17-19, 25)**

God has placed within us a desire for happiness. We look forward to a time of genuine blessing and goodness [17-19]. We are not there yet, so we should persevere in hope, trusting God to keep his promises. God has made us, and remade

us to share in paradise with him [25].

**(b) The fountain of youth (20)**

The new world will see the people of God living forever [20]. It is not right when people are 'cut down in their prime'. The real problem is not premature death, but death itself – and death has now been overcome in Christ.

**(c) Complete security of lifestyle (21-22)**

[21-22] Aussies spend so much time and money on protecting their lifestyle. Jesus said "Don't store up treasures on earth... but treasure in heaven". By faith we are to look forward to a lifestyle which is fully secure and satisfying – so don't be distracted by cheap imitations now.

**(d) Deeply satisfying work (22-23)**

One of the biggest areas of seduction is the lure of satisfying work. Some of you may even have found it – this is a gift of God. Yet, it is so easy to turn God's good gift into something that competes with God. If you live for your work, then you will be destroyed along with your work. Rather, live for the Lord and his work and know that the fruit of your labour will endure forever [22-23].

**People have always wanted to box God – the temple, churches, compartmentalising God in our lives ... God cannot be boxed ... He deserves to be honoured above all, and yet ...**

**(e) A delight and a joy (19,24)**

Perhaps the greatest news for us is that God looks upon his people as his delight – he rejoices in them [19]. What a wonderful message! If you are a Christian man or woman, then God delights in you! You are his joy! We are his workmanship – the results of his finest work. It is not our achievements. It is all the work of God who made us and remade us to share in paradise with him. Let's keep our eyes fixed on our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, as we look forward to the new heavens and the new earth.

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