

A HUMILIATED NATION

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The Lord will be vindicated in judging iniquity (Isa. 22:8-14).
2. The Lord will be praised for judging iniquity (Isa. 25:1-5).
3. The Lord will be merciful after judging iniquity (Isa. 30:18-22).

Background Passage: Isaiah 13–31

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The Lord seeks to show mercy and compassion even to His disobedient people.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God is righteous to judge the iniquity of humanity as we deserve, but He is also merciful, providing a means of escape from the coming judgment that we do not deserve. All who trust in Jesus are saved from their sins and declared righteous before God.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus has provided the means of our forgiveness and righteousness, we live in full reliance on Him as we seek to declare God's plan of salvation to the nations.

GROUP TIME

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: God's people always had a tough time obeying. Faithfulness should have marked their lives, but often rebellion was the major key. How did God respond? Did He throw them out and bind Himself to another group of people? By no means! God remains faithful though His people are faithless. God remains true though His people stray. God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love and truth, staying true to a thousand generations of sinful men and women who love Him (Ex. 34:6-7). God is just and true, and He is loving and merciful, but He does correct and judge—all to bring us to repentance.

EXPLAIN: Sin has consequences. We see that truth leap from the pages of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, not to mention from the experience of our own lives. Because God is a God of justice, sin will be judged. It must be. His holiness demands it. So where does that leave us? If God were not as merciful as He is just, it would leave us in hell. But God steps into our sinful lives with His humbling power to say to us all: "It doesn't have to be like this. I can change your story. Will you let me?"

DISCUSS: **How have you experienced the power of God to humble you in your life?** (be prepared to share an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

TRANSITION: God is just and God is merciful. It is the power of these two attributes that commands our attention and gets us moving in the right direction. The justice God brings wakes us up, and the mercy He gives melts our hearts. We get better the nearer we get to God, and because He is loving and kind, steadfast and true, He draws near to us even when we run far from Him. In our pride, we believe we don't need Him. But His holiness humbles us and reminds us who we are and, more importantly, who He is.

POINT 1

THE LORD WILL BE VINDICATED IN JUDGING INIQUITY (ISA. 22:8-14).

8 He has taken away the covering of Judah. In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, **9** and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many. You collected the waters of the lower pool, **10** and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. **11** You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or see him who planned it long ago. **12** In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth; **13** and behold, joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” **14** The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: “Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you until you die,” says the Lord GOD of hosts.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Isaiah 22:8-14** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 8-11** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The people of Judah trusted in themselves and their fortifications rather than the Creator. God does not remain silent in the face of our disobedience. He intervenes to **humble** us, **save** us, and **redeem** us.

DISCUSS: Why might we find it so hard to abandon our self-reliance and trust God alone? (we think we are the ones accomplishing things; it’s hard to see God at work sometimes; we think we’re able and smart enough to not need God; we think we’re in control; we question God’s faithfulness in our sin)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 12-14** commentary to emphasize that God is just, even in His severe response to the people of Judah for their rejection of His grace and mercy (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #17: God Is Just: God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and His moral creatures will be **judged** according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God were not to uphold His righteousness, for such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has **sinned** by failing to live up to God’s righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make **provision** by being both just and the justifier of those who place their **faith** in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

TRANSITION: We all deserve judgment, and God deserves praise for His justice.

NOTES

WEARING SACKCLOTH

When people wore sackcloth in biblical times, it was a sign of mourning, anguish, or repentance. Sackcloth was usually made from goat or camel’s hair, a coarse material, and worn as a sign of despair and humility. It often was associated with fasting and sitting on ashes to further show those emotions.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”¹

–C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 8-11 / Isaiah 13–23 contains a series of pronouncements from the Lord against the pagan nations of the ancient world. Surprisingly included in the mix is a pronouncement against the city of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. The disobedience of God’s people had once again resulted in the Lord’s discipline as they were under threat of invasion.

God’s people had wisely built great **“walls”** of protection around Jerusalem and stockpiled **“weapons,”** but now they had put their trust in their defenses. We can become so proud of what we build, can’t we? After all, what we construct can be impressive. It can be strong and durable in the face of even the most intimidating threat. But what does God think of it all? God will not let His people attempt to live without Him. Dependence on God is our only true safety. So God gets involved to show us that: **“He has taken away the covering of Judah.”** What happens when He strips our protections away? Where do we turn then?

Seeing their defensive hopes crumble around them, the people of Judah unwisely chose not to turn to God. Instead, they attempted to pull themselves up by their bootstraps; they tightened their belts, grabbed their lunch pails, and went to work. They collected **“water”** in case of a siege and took a count of the houses in Jerusalem to figure which ones could be sacrificed for the patch work on the wall. They aimed to shore up their defensive shortcomings.

God’s people saw the flaw in their earthly defenses but couldn’t see the real issue in their heart defenses. They did a sensible thing given the disrepair of the fortifications. But they did not do the more important spiritual thing, given the state of their hearts toward God. God was willing to be their shelter, but they had to accept His offer to come under His wings (see Luke 13:34). Yet instead of looking to the God who made all things, including their source of water, they looked to the earth as if it could provide the comfort only God could give.

VERSES 12-14 / To emphasize the futility of Judah’s course of action, Isaiah identified the Creator God as **“the Lord God of hosts.”** The Lord God was in charge of Judah’s future just as He is in charge of every nation’s future. He was the God of Judah’s army and all other armies, not to mention the armies of angels at His command. What earthly defense can stand in God’s way? God was offering all He is for all their need, if only they would come to Him.

By calling **“for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth,”** God was calling Judah to repentance, these all being outward signs of an expected inner reality. But what did Judah do? Far from repenting, or even going through the motions, they celebrated! They looked at the work of their hands and saw accomplishment. They threw a party. Could anything have been more offensive?

Judah knew their danger, but instead of turning to God, they sought all that the world could offer. **“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”** is a far cry from the heart of faith. It is a grab for this world’s enjoyments, and while those can comfort for a time, they cannot save—they can’t even last until tomorrow.

The sin of Judah was evident: they had turned away from God and reveled in their independence. Therefore, Isaiah was blunt in revealing what the Lord had revealed to him—the iniquity of Judah would never be wiped out. They would bear the punishment for their sin. The Lord of hosts had spoken, and what He says comes to pass.

The Lord would be vindicated in judging Judah’s iniquity; after all, He is just. He offered Himself, but they refused to repent. And as with those who refuse to come to the crucified and resurrected Jesus in repentance and faith, judgment of sin is the only right response to disobeying God’s law and then, spurning God’s offer of grace and mercy.

POINT 2

THE LORD WILL BE PRAISED FOR JUDGING INIQUITY (ISA. 25:1-5).

NOTES

1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. **2** For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the foreigners' palace is a city no more; it will never be rebuilt. **3** Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. **4** For you have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall, **5** like heat in a dry place. You subdue the noise of the foreigners; as heat by the shade of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is put down.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Isaiah 25:1-5** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 1-3** commentary to explain the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Isaiah praised the Lord because of his **personal** knowledge of God, which informed his understanding of God's **justice** and **judgment** against the nations.

DISCUSS: Why should the promise and fulfillment of God's judgment cause people to worship the Lord? (being made in the image of God, we instinctively recognize the need for justice to set wrongs right; God's judgment reminds us of our proper place as creatures who owe our life, breath, and being to the Creator; God's judgment magnifies the offer of His mercy and grace to sinners)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God's justice is **against** the oppressor, but it is also **for** the poor and oppressed. People who come to the Lord in faith seeking refuge and salvation will find it, just as the Lord has **planned** and promised.

TRANSITION: We've seen that God judges iniquity in order to rescue His oppressed people. But our just God is also merciful, such that when He judges His people, He remains faithful to His promises to His people.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 1-3 / There are different kinds of knowledge about God. There is a kind of head knowledge that agrees there must be some kind of god out there somewhere, making the world work. Then there is a more personal heart kind of knowledge that affects not just your intellectual understanding of a divine, supreme being but also your personal and relational knowledge of Him. Isaiah had the latter kind of knowledge—the Lord was his God. God is not a theory but a reality. And Isaiah acknowledged God as his Master and Lord.

That personal knowledge led Isaiah to exaltation and **“praise”** of God. As Isaiah looked at the world, he saw a great need for justice to be brought forth. He saw how worthy the whole world was of divine judgment, especially for wicked people who had stubbornly turned away from God despite His kind and loving care over them (Isa. 24). Isaiah even saw himself as wicked—as we all should—until the Lord forgave him (Isa. 6). Now, as God gave Isaiah a vision of the end of the world, which included judgment of sin, Isaiah was compelled to shout out in praise and adoration.

Far from simply abiding with sin throughout time, God planned from the beginning a way to deal with sin and set all things right in the end. He had planned things **“faithful and sure,”** a phrase that commentator Alec Motyer points out means with “every imaginable faithfulness, perfect, quintessential faithfulness.”² All throughout the ages, as God’s people were downtrodden and oppressed, their sovereign God above was faithful in every imaginable way, not failing for a second to eternally care and provide for them, even as the promise of justice fulfilled was still far ahead.

In Philippians 2:9-11, the apostle Paul wrote about the end of the age, when every knee will bow before Jesus, the King of all. Ultimately, Isaiah was looking to that day in verses 2-3. On that day, King Jesus will defeat forever the great and mighty earthly cities who depend upon their own self-

worth and self-salvation efforts. Before the King, the city will be only **“a heap”** because He has made it so. The great fortress will lie in ruins because of God’s mighty acts. It will be a city no longer, and **“it will never be rebuilt.”**

This is a picture of everything man-made for humanity’s glory alone. In the end, all this will be a mere footnote in history, removed from any prominence it once had. Sinful self-reliance ends in ruins and rocks because God will have none of it. The once strong people who needed no one but themselves will bow their knees to Jesus in honor. The **“ruthless nations”** will fear God because of His almighty power and ability to do what He says He will do.

VERSES 4-5 / The sinful nations judged by God are one side of the justice coin. It is only right they should suffer for their sins. But the other side of the coin comes into focus here—the poor and oppressed are comforted. God is mighty to save. Though He is mighty and fierce with those who refuse to come under His care, He is also strong and tender, saving those who look to Him for help. For the poor and needy, God is **“a shelter from the storm”** from their oppressors. Oppression will not have the final word. God’s grace will. He will set things right, and it will be easy for Him, like **“the shade of a cloud”** that cools the day’s heat. When God covers His enemies, the lights go out on them and comfort comes to His people.

The lesson is simple. God is a just judge who has in His power the ability to see things as they really are, all the way down to the heart. He will judge accordingly. Yet God is also a merciful savior. He knows the people who are His and who are not His, and for those who come to Him in faith, He has in His power the ability to create a place of safety amid the worst of circumstances. From every sort of threat, God has within Himself every sort of refuge, every available shelter, every kind of comfort.

POINT 3

THE LORD WILL BE MERCIFUL AFTER JUDGING INIQUITY (ISA. 30:18-22).

NOTES

18 Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. **19** For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you. **20** And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. **21** And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. **22** Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, "Be gone!"

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Isaiah 30:18-22** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 18** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Sin deserves eternal punishment, but our just God waits to show **mercy!**
The Lord is not eager to **condemn** but patient to **save**.

DISCUSS: What does it mean to wait for the Lord? (to trust that God is sovereign and in control of our circumstances, working things out for our good; to rest in the salvation God has provided for us through Jesus's death and resurrection; to believe with patience that God will save and set everything right in this fallen world)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 19-22** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

God's mercy is also experienced in the immediacy of God's **presence** and His **counsel**, which **changes** the way we live and see the world.

DISCUSS: How has God's mercy changed the way you live and see the world? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

COMMENTARY

VERSE 18 / We know God is just and holy. Therefore, He has every right as God to judge sin and iniquity. But as wonderful as the attributes of His justice and holiness are, and as righteous as He is to judge sin and iniquity, this is not all of who God is. He is also merciful and patient and long-suffering, amongst other attributes. He waits not only to judge but to show mercy. It is to God's attribute of mercy that Isaiah now turned.

In verse 18, there are two waitings: the waiting of God and the waiting of His people. Here's how Ray Ortlund described this scenario:

We wait for him in faith, in openness, in humility, confident that his timing is right, his methods are wise, and so forth ("the LORD is a God of justice"). That mentality of trust is the way into spiritual blessedness: "Blessed are all those who wait for him." And for his part, the Lord waits to be gracious to us.³

If this verse were not in the Bible, would we ever imagine that God waits to show mercy? And He waits because He is just. In His justice, the Lord gives us ample opportunity to turn back to Him. He's actually not out to get us at every moment of sin. He's out to save us. If we are judged in the end, it will not be because God wasn't patient but because we were unrepentant.

VERSES 19-22 / So much of life includes tears, so much so that most of us learn how to turn the tear valve off. We quietly bear the pain without turning the faucet on for relief. We bury it inside. We weep within, where no one can see. But God sees even those silent, hidden tears, and He makes a promise to His weeping people: "**You shall weep no more.**" For God's people, the end of all this world's suffering is God's loving hand wiping away the tears (Rev. 21:4). Because that future day is coming, we can live in peace and confidence today, knowing our agonizing pains will not outlast God's care for us.

Not only will God cause His people to weep no more, He will also be near and available—as soon as He hears our cries, "**he answers.**" This immediacy will be a new thing to God's people. He will provide for their needs with bread and water. This provision will be meager, and it will be in the midst of continuing oppression, but all things will be different because their "**Teacher will not hide himself anymore.**" They will see Him for who He really is because He has opened Himself to them in mercy, and mercy changes people.

The immediacy of God's presence will also be combined with the immediacy of His counsel. To turn to "**the right or . . . the left**" is to deviate from the holiness of God's will and instruction. But should someone begin to stray, he or she will hear the Teacher say: "**This is the way, walk in it.**" Here is the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23, open and available to all His people.

When God's presence is recognized and heard among God's people, they walk differently, meaning their lives are characterized by the holiness of God. This shapes the decisions we make for our direction in life and the direction of our worship.

When God's people see God with their newly opened eyes, by God's grace, they see their idols for what they really are: nothing. Then they will choose not to worship those abominations but to "**defile**" them, throw them out, and reject them as filthy and unworthy. Though wrapped in precious metals, these idols become tarnished. When God comes to town, silver- or gold-plated idols shimmer no more. They are trash. Filth. Nothing.

A true vision of God changes our attitudes toward everything else. It brightens things once dulled by this world and dulls things once brightened by sin. God puts things in their proper place. All former idols once cared for are thrown in the junk pile and carted off to the landfill to rust away, and no one regrets the decision the next day.

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has provided the means of our forgiveness and righteousness, we live in full reliance on Him as we seek to declare God’s plan of salvation to the nations.

HEAD:

It is so easy to think wrongly about God. The Bible corrects our thinking all the time. As we read from page to page, we see the fullness of His entire person. Yes, God is a judge who rightly judges the sins of the world. But God is also merciful and gracious, and after judging sin and iniquity, He pours out mercy on His people. God is good to the undeserving. If He weren’t, none of us would have a place with Him. If we are to worship God rightly, we must see Him for all that He is.

How will the justice and mercy of God change the way you see yourself and others?

HEART:

If we’re honest with ourselves, we know we deserve God’s judgment. Our sins are many, and we cannot escape them. But God’s mercy is greater than our sin. His mercy is greater than our greatest sin. His mercy swallows up our sin. How is this possible? Because on the cross, Jesus took the punishment we deserve. God did not overlook our sin—Jesus paid for it. On the cross, our sin was placed upon Jesus, and His mercy came down to us. That truth melts our hearts and opens us up to God in new ways. When we see the wonder of mercy through faith, we fall to our knees in grateful worship.

What sins are prohibiting your grateful worship of God? How will you heed God’s call to repent?

HANDS:

In this life, we will be wronged. We will be abandoned. We will be sinned against. When that happens, we have two options: We can ensure those who hurt us pay the full cost, or we can forgive them deep in our hearts and never hold it against them again. Our flesh cries out for justice. It’s only right and natural. But with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can offer forgiveness to those who have harmed us. It won’t make what they did okay, but forgiveness doesn’t demand restitution—it offers peace. And perhaps our declaration of forgiveness might alter the course of our offenders’ lives. After all, God’s mercy changed ours.

How will you reflect God’s mercy today?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“He has seen us sinning and has borne with it. He who forbade us to sin before we did it does not stop waiting to pardon us even after we have sinned. The one we have rejected is calling us. We have turned away from him, but he has not turned away . . . We turn our backs on his face, so to speak, when we reject his words, when we trample his commandments under foot; but he who sees that we reject him still calls out to us by his commandments and waits for us by his patience, stands behind us, and calls us back when we have turned away.”⁴

—Gregory the Great
(c. 540-604)

POINT 1: THE LORD WILL BE VINDICATED IN JUDGING INIQUITY (ISA. 22:8-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“The prophet now explains why Jerusalem was in such a difficult situation and what went wrong ‘in that day.’ Before this Assyrian war ever moved to the capital city of Jerusalem (the Assyrians were busy defeating Lachish), the people of Jerusalem began to trust in their own strength and military preparation (vv. 8b-11b), rather than trusting completely in God (vv. 11b, cf. 30:1-5; 31:1-3). These verses became an indictment of the people’s foolish ways and justify Isaiah’s weeping in 22:12. Isaiah’s critique analyzed what the people trusted in by examining the focus of their eyes. They were ‘looking at, paying attention to’ (wattabbēt) (a) having many weapons (v. 8b; see 2 Chr 32:5b) stored in the Palace of the Forest, a 150 by 75 foot building with four rows of cedar pillars that Solomon built near the Temple (1 Kgs 7:2; 10:17, 21); (b) repairing the breaches in the walls of the city, plus building a second wall (22:9, see 2 Chr 32:5a); (c) digging a tunnel to carry water from the Gihon Spring that was outside the wall on the east side of the City of David to a new pool inside the wall on the west side of the City of David (22:9b, see 2 Chr 32:3-4); (d) destroying homes to strengthen the walls of Jerusalem (22:10); and (e) building a reservoir to hold more water (22:11a). Although all of these things seem to be normal activities for a city threatened by a military siege, it is apparent that the leaders of Jerusalem were not trusting God; they were doing everything humanly possible to defend themselves. They did not just repair the walls; they went the second mile and even tore down houses to build new walls. They did not just expand the existing old pool to increase their water supply; they dug a tunnel over 1700 feet long through solid rock in order to insure that they would have a steady supply of water from the Gihon Spring. Everything points to a self-sufficient philosophy that Isaiah condemns. They were ‘looking to, paying attention to’ (the root wattabbēt) themselves for protection (22:8b) instead of ‘looking to, paying attention to’ (the root wattabbēt) God for his deliverance from their enemies (22:11b). They could ‘see, perceive’ (the root wattabbēt) the importance of the breaches in the walls (22:9a) but did not ‘see, perceive’ (the root wattabbēt) the importance of the plans of God (22:11b).”⁵

+ ILLUSTRATION

Everything depends on how we view things. View it the wrong way, and the wrong action results. View it the right way, and things typically go well, even if there are challenges along the way. Of course, our vision can be dimmed for various reasons. Obstacles get in the way. Vision fades as age sets in. Sometimes we simply choose not to see what is clearly obvious. We turn

EXTRA

away and look at what we want rather than face what truly is. For all the problems we can rightly attribute to Judah in the days of Isaiah, perhaps none was greater than their misplaced vision. They looked and saw the wrong things. God was showing them the right way. Sometimes it was through provision, and sometimes it was through lack of provision. But the way was visible, and they chose not to see it.

POINT 2: THE LORD WILL BE PRAISED FOR JUDGING INIQUITY (ISA. 25:1-5).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“In Isaiah 24 we saw God crush the ‘City of Man,’ the self-glorifying empire building that has characterized history. Isaiah 25:2 picks up that same theme again, saying that part of God’s ancient plan is turning the fortress of ‘barbarians’ into piles of rubble, never to be rebuilt. But suddenly in verse 3 God reveals that his purpose in destroying these cities is so that ‘a strong people will honor [him]. The cities of violent nations will fear [him].’ This speaks of the power of God to convert formerly terrifying enemies into genuine worshipers: Nebuchadnezzar, the murderous tyrant (Dan 4:34-35); the Roman centurion who crucified Jesus (Mark 15:39); Saul of Tarsus, who began the day breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples and ended the day a Christian (Acts 9:1-8). This power to transform world conquerors into genuine worshipers has been played out again and again in history. Courageous missionaries have faced death and persecution to spread the gospel to one terrifying, war-loving people after another: world-conquering Romans, scimitar-wielding Muslims, fierce Viking warriors, head-hunting cannibals, Amazonian tribes, communist party officials behind the Iron Curtain, etc. Heaven will be full of formerly vicious warriors who became disillusioned and sat on piles of rubble in their home cities after returning home from lost wars, who later found Christ after their worldly dreams of conquest were shattered. Until the violent are converted, God must protect his beloved people from the storm of their vicious attacks, so verses 4-5 depict the refuge God is from their onslaught. The delight of his people comes when God at last stills the song of the violent by either converting them or crushing them, as he does at the end of the chapter.”⁶

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Think of the long history of this world. Every great empire has eventually crumbled. Every great dictator has eventually died. Every intimidating army has eventually lost. All man-made things weaken and fail.

Now think of the long history of God’s wonders. Think about the entire storyline of the Bible together and name some of the wondrous works of God. How did the Lord provide for His people? How did He keep His promises? How did He bring salvation into a world of sin? Help your group think about the wonderful works of God and spend time meditating on them together. Especially emphasize God’s salvific works. Talk about the story of redemption. Usher your group into a time of worship.

POINT 3: THE LORD WILL BE MERCIFUL AFTER JUDGING INIQUITY (ISA. 30:18-22).

+ COMMENTARY

“[Verse 18] is the hinge on which the chapter turns. Look at the logic of God. ‘You have been unwilling. Therefore, I wait to be gracious to you.’ What is he saying? ‘Wait’ is the operative word. The Lord waits, and we wait. But the grammar of the Hebrew tells us that the Lord’s waiting and our waiting are not quite the same. We wait for him in faith, in openness, in humility, confident that his timing is right, his methods are wise, and so forth (‘the LORD is a God of justice’). That mentality of trust is the way into spiritual blessedness: ‘Blessed are all those who wait for him.’ And for his part, the Lord waits to be gracious to us. In other words, he exercises continual patience with us, he puts up with us moment by moment. He doesn’t forsake us. He anticipates and compensates for our needs. Nothing will ever separate us from his love. His faithfulness, not ours, is what we can look forward to. So when we find ourselves asking the question, ‘How long, O Lord?’ his answer may be, ‘Whenever you’re ready.’”⁷

+ ILLUSTRATION

In the first Star Wars movie (confusingly known as *Episode IV: A New Hope*), Grand Moff Tarkin pulls Princess Leia into the control room of the Death Star as they hover over her home planet, Alderaan. Unless she gives him the information he desires, he will destroy her planet. She names the system where a rebel base is located, but then Tarkin destroys the planet anyway. In a flash, the entire planet is wiped out. The next scene shows Obi-Wan Kenobi sensing something tragic has just happened: “I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror, and were suddenly silenced. I fear something terrible has happened.”

Perhaps given what we’ve seen so far of God’s righteous judgment of sin, we expect the world to end this way: with the push of a button, it all explodes into a billion pieces. Could we blame God if that were the path He chose, given our sin and rebellion? In the end, there will be a great disturbance indeed, and because hell is real and God is just, there will be many unrepentant people who cry out in terror. But there will also be countless voices crying out in louder, joyous tones that something wonderful has happened. God had a plan from the beginning. His plan of mercy and grace provides a way for humanity to be saved through the person of Jesus Christ. Our Savior restores and remakes what we’ve tragically broken. He gives us new life and He will create a new heaven and new earth. God’s plan has always been to come to save His people.

References

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