

(Isaiah) the Cause & Cure of Spiritual Blindness

by David Guzik

David Guzik's sermon explores the themes of pride, judgment, and spiritual blindness in Isaiah 29, emphasizing God's response to Jerusalem's self-sufficiency and neglect of His word.

Duration: 56:26

Scripture: Proverbs 29:25, Isaiah 5:23, Isaiah 29:10, Isaiah 29:13, Isaiah 29:18-19, Isaiah 29:22

Topics: "Spiritual Blindness", "Gods Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on God's message to the spiritually blind people of Jerusalem. He emphasizes that it is not enough to speak spiritually and honor God with words if our hearts are far from Him. The preacher warns that we cannot judge a person's heart solely based on what they say or do. God will judge both Jerusalem and the nations that come against it, bringing down the proud and raising up the humble. The preacher also reminds us that even though our struggles may feel never-ending, God assures us that it is only for a little while before He brings about His plans.

Transcript

Isaiah chapter 29. We're in a section of the book of Isaiah that spans several chapters where the Lord is speaking to the southern kingdom of Judah. Let's just jump in here.

Isaiah chapter 29 verse 1. Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt. Add year to year, let feasts come around, yet I will distress Ariel. There shall be heaviness and sorrow and shall be to me as Aria.

I will encamp against you all around. I will lay siege against you with a mound and I will raise siege works against you. You shall be brought down.

You shall speak out of the ground. Your speech shall be low out of the dust. Your voice shall be like a mediums out of the ground and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

The chapter begins almost in a mysterious way, doesn't it? Woe to Ariel. You say, well, wait a minute, is this Little Mermaid or something here? What's going on with this? Well, the name Ariel in Hebrew means Lion of God. But I should let you know that there's some controversy among commentators.

If the idea here by this word Ariel is what it literally means, which is Lion of God, or if the meaning is an altar for sacrifice or an altar for burning, then you might say, well, they don't seem to sound very much alike. In the Hebrew, the word for altar for sacrifice is very close to the word Ariel, but it's not it, but it's very close to it. And so some commentators believe that it's speaking here of Jerusalem being as if it were a huge altar for sacrifice and the city is going to be judged and destroyed and burned just as a sacrifice would be burned upon an altar.

Personally, I don't believe so. I believe the best reading of this, although it's difficult to say with certainty, but in my best judgment, I think that the idea here by the name Ariel is the term Lion of God. Now, what's interesting about this is that in no other place in the Bible is Jerusalem referred to as the Lion of God.

And I said, well, how do we know he's talking about Jerusalem here? Well, look at it here. Verse one, woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt. Well, that settles it.

I mean, this is the city of David. And if you say, well, maybe it's Bethlehem and not Jerusalem. No, go to the end of verse eight and it says who will fight against Mount Zion.

Well, that settles it right there. This is referring to Jerusalem. So why would Jerusalem be called the Lion of God? It's a singular expression used in the whole scriptures.

Matter of fact, that word Ariel only appears one other time in the Bible other than it appears right here in Isaiah 29. It appears in the book of Ezra chapter eight, verse 16, and it's just the personal name of a priest. So the only time it's given as a title or as a word having a meaning other than a personal name is right here.

And what does it mean? Well, I really believe that when we consider the way Ariel is used in these verses and the context as a whole, the idea behind calling Jerusalem Lion of God, first of all, is something that the people of Jerusalem were saying about their own city. This is how they thought of it. You know, cities like to represent themselves and well, think of athletic teams, right? You know, you have the Detroit Lions, the New York Giants, you know, all the other, the Eagles, you know, these mighty warrior animals, you know, you'll never find the lambs or the puppies or something like that.

It's just not going to find it out there. The muskrats are never going to find it. Now, I think that Jerusalem, the people of Jerusalem were calling themselves the Lion of God.

They saw that attacks were on the way. They saw that that a siege was imminent. And so, you know, sort of an effort of civic pride of, you know, we're the Lions of God.

Yes, we're strong. Yes, Lions of God. And I believe that when God uses the term here in the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, he's speaking in a sense, sarcastically, woe to the Lion of God, to the Lion of God.

You see the repetition. In my mind, there's almost like a sarcastic feel to this. The city where David dwelt at year to year, let these come around and let life go on as regular.

The feeling here in Isaiah twenty nine one is that Jerusalem is proud, resting on its spiritual heritage instead of its present reality. Right. We're the city of David.

He was such a man of God, the greatest king Israel. Yes, the city of David is where these men and women in Jerusalem, they didn't have the heart David had, not one tenth of it. Yet they're resting on the spiritual

lawyers of the past.

And finally, they're living for present pleasures without any concern to God at year to year. Let the feast come around. Yes, we're the Lions of God.

What does the Lord say to this proud, self-sufficient attitude? Look at verse two. Yet I will distress Arielle. Oh, yeah, Mr. Lion of God.

I will distress you. I'll trouble you. Jerusalem may have this high opinion of itself, but it is not out of the reach of God's hand of judgment.

Instead of the routine of year to year, instead of the regular feast and say, oh, we'll live life as normal. God will send them. Look at it here.

Verse two, there shall be heaviness and sorrow and it shall be to me as Arielle. You see, instead of the routine of year to year and the feast, God will send heaviness and sorrow and Jerusalem sees itself as a lion, then God will fight against them with the same fury a man would have against the lion. And I think that's what he means when he says there in verse two, it shall be to me as Arielle.

You know, if you're fighting a lion, you're not holding back, are you? You're going with everything you have. And God says, that's how I'm going to bring my judgment upon you. Then he goes on and he says, using the terminology of warfare of that day, verse three, I will encamp against you all around.

I will lay siege against you with a mound. I will raise siege works against you using the images of warfare for that day. God promises to battle against Jerusalem and to conquer her.

You shall be brought down. In other words, as if God's saying, I'm going to bring in the bombers, I'm going to send in the infantry, I'm going to send out the cruise missiles. You're going down, Jerusalem.

If we were to use the modern imagery of war in our day, you pride yourself as being a lion of God. Wait until you get in this battle with me. And in all of this, the Lord will bring down the lofty self image Jerusalem has of itself.

Instead of calling herself Ariel, the lion of God, instead of calling herself the city where David dwelt, look what their speech will be instead. Look at it. Verse four, you shall speak out of the ground.

Your speech shall be low out of the dust. Instead of loud boasts, their speech shall whisper out of the dust. I'm going to bring you low, God says.

Your voice, your speaking is going to be low. It's just going to be out of the dust. There'll be no place for vainglory or proud speaking.

You're not going to be on top of the world anymore. I'm going to bring you low down to the dust. Now, that's pretty strong, isn't it? Lord grabbing his proud child by the lapels, shaking him around a little bit, if you will, casting him down to the ground.

And there is the proud child of God groveling in the dust. We think, wow, God must have forsaken that proud child of his, right? Not at all. Let an enemy come against that child of God and look what the Lord does.

You see, it's one thing for the Lord to do it right. Another thing for somebody else. I mean, you have the judgment and the discernment to discipline your own children.

You might have to, you know, apply the Board of Education to the seed of knowledge there to bring that about. But you wouldn't want anybody else hitting your kid like that, right? What's the idea here? Look at verse five. It says, Moreover, the multitude of your foes shall be like fine dust and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passes away.

Yes, it shall be in an instant. Suddenly you will be punished by the Lord of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire. That's the Lord speaking to the nations that will attack Israel.

In other words, he's saying, I'm going to put you in the dust. He carries the imagery of Israel being down in the dust or actually Jerusalem being down in the dust. And then he carries that imagery out and he says that the multitude of your foes are going to be like fine dust.

They're going to be numerous. They're going to be scattered to come against them. But I will judge them.

I will come against them with thunder and earthquake and great noise. Look at verse seven. It carries on the thought the multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel, even all who fight against her in her fortresses and distress her shall be as a dream of a night vision.

In other words, the nations that come against as numerous as dust against Jerusalem. And by the way, this prophecy, I'm sure it had a partial fulfillment in the days of the siege of the Assyrians and probably later among the Babylonians. But won't this have an ultimate fulfillment in the end times when all the nations come against Jerusalem, when they all come to attack Jerusalem and God rises up and saves God's people and saves Jerusalem? And look at the look how God will thwart these people who attack the city.

It says it shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams and look, he eats, but he awakes and his soul is still empty. Or when a thirsty man dreams and look, he drinks, but he wakes and indeed he is faint and his soul still craves.

So the multitude of all the nations shall be who fight against Mount Zion. God will frustrate Israel's enemies completely. Don't you love the imagery God uses? Man, God knows how to write a book.

He just says, you know what it's going to be like? It's going to be like when you have that dream, you go to bed hungry. There you are in your dream. You're just eating.

Oh, all your favorite foods. You're at this big table. Oh, it's just food, food, helping after hell.

Oh, wow. And you're just tasting it. You're salivating.

There's drool all over the pillow because you're just, oh, it's so good. And then you wake up, you know, and you blink your eyes and you know what? You're hungry. And all that dreaming, all that it was a delicious dream, wasn't it? But there was no reality to it.

You wanted it was so close, but so far away, so unsatisfying. And that's what God said. These nations are going to come and they're going to attack Israel and they're going to think it's going to be so close and it's going to be right in front.

It's going to be like a dream, but it's going to be unsatisfying. There'll be no fulfillment of it. What God says first, he says, if you notice in the first four verses, he says, I'm going to judge Jerusalem because of its pride.

But the nations that come against Jerusalem, I'm going to judge them and bring them low and protect my people. You know, friends, if you feel like the Lord has his hand of correction on you, his hand of discipline, don't think it's because he doesn't love you. Don't think it's because he just kind of cast you out to get kicked around by the devil for a while.

It's not like that at all. He's managing everything. I think that if there was one thing we could see in the spiritual realm tonight, among anything that would just give every one of us a tenfold increase in our appreciation of the love of God for us, is if we could see how much the Lord preserves us from that we never see.

How much in the natural realm? How much in the physical realm? How much in the spiritual realm? You know, we think we have a bad. Oh, what if the Lord wasn't protecting you? What do you think would come against you then? There'd be no place for you to stand. And the Lord was protecting Jerusalem, even though they were caught in this blindness of pride.

Well, speaking of blindness, he's going to talk now in the remainder of the chapter of the spiritual blindness of Jerusalem. Verse 9. Pause and wonder. Blind yourselves and be blind.

They are drunk, but not with wine. They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. For the Lord has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes, namely the prophets, and he has covered your heads, namely the seers.

Interesting, these two verses. Isaiah cries out and he says to the people of Jerusalem, pause and wonders, blind yourself and be blind. Jerusalem's pride, as it was expressed in the first part of the chapter, has made them spiritually blind and spiritually drunk.

And the Lord tells Jerusalem to pause and wonder at this, because they do it to themselves. They do it to themselves. Even though they do it to themselves, they lack the self-awareness to see that condition.

Look at it there again in verse 9. Blind yourselves and be blind. Now, let me ask you something. If you're blinding yourself, why should it be something amazing to you that you're blind? But that's how it works in spiritual blindness, doesn't it? You do it to yourself, yet you're amazed to find when you're in that condition.

Same way when you're spiritually drunk. Now, it's interesting that he brings up the idea or the image of drunkenness, because in the previous chapter, he condemned literal drunkenness. But now he's talking about spiritual drunkenness.

And it seems amazing that anybody who would make themselves spiritually inebriated would be blind to their condition. But they are. They lack the self-awareness to see their condition.

That's why he says there in verse 9, they stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. Now, let me ask you something, and I think we've got a room full of Bible scholars here this evening. Let me just ask you simply.

Is he speaking about this in a good way or in a bad way? Is this a compliment to the people of Jerusalem? Not at all. It's a rebuke. Isn't that interesting? In light of the movement that hopefully is passé among Christians now, and I'm hoping it is, of this whole business of being drunk in the spirit.

And, you know, the Holy Ghost bartenders where the guy comes up and, you know, let's all get drunk in the spirit and act like a bunch of foolish drunk people and on and on. My friends, you know, the Bible talks about that, doesn't it? I'll read it to you right now. They're drunk, but not with wine.

They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink. For the Lord has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes, namely the prophets. Oh, so you say, well, I'm like drunk by the spirit, you know, but I haven't consumed any alcohol.

And brother, you're under the judgment of God, is all I can say. This isn't a blessing from God. This is a rebuke.

This is a chastisement from him. This is a curse, both at the same time self-induced and sent from the Lord. And if you notice here, it says in verse 10, a connection here, you have Jerusalem choosing to be spiritually blind, choosing to be spiritually drunk.

And because Jerusalem chose blindness and chose spiritual drunkenness, God sent something to them. And what did he send? Look at it. Verse 10.

He sent he poured out on them the spirit of deep sleep. What's interesting about this is, you know, a drunk might sleep it off, right? He's so exhausted. He's so spent.

He's so wasted from from his drunkenness that he goes to sleep and he sleeps it off. What's interesting about that is that when the drunk finally wakes up, he's sober to some degree, right? That's not how it works, though, with spiritual drunkenness and spiritual sleep. When you sleep it off, you're in just as worse condition, if not worse than before, because when you're spiritually asleep, you're not alert to the things of God.

You're not sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit. You see, when we're asleep, we're doing nothing productive. When we're asleep, we're vulnerable.

When we're asleep, we're insensitive. And God sent these things to a blind, proud, drunk Jerusalem. He's made them spiritually asleep.

And we have to note that the problem of spiritual sleepiness didn't end with Jerusalem of Isaiah's day. Romans chapter 13, verse 11 was written to Christians, and it says, and do this knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

You know, people, if you believe that Jesus Christ is coming soon, if you believe that your salvation is nearer now than when you first came to Christ, it's all the more reason for you not to be spiritually asleep. If you're spiritually asleep, you're not productive for the Lord. If you're spiritually asleep, you're vulnerable.

I mean, that's an easy time to attack anybody, right? When they're asleep. When we're spiritually asleep, we're insensitive. We don't know what's going on.

You don't know what's going on around you when you're asleep. And that's how many people are today in the body of Christ. Friends, Christians need to be awake, especially knowing the time.

Now, that's what God sent upon them, is sleep. But because Jerusalem chose blindness and chose spiritual drunkenness, God not only sent them sleep, but he took away something as well. Look at it here in verse 10.

He has closed your eyes, namely the prophets. A drunk has blurred vision and poor perception. Even so, God closed the spiritual eyes of the nation, namely the prophets.

I mean, the prophets were silent and the word of God was neglected. There was no spiritual vision there because the word of God was neglected and the prophets were silent. And friends, it was because the people wanted it that way.

And silencing the prophets and the seers, God simply gave Jerusalem what she wanted. You know, the prophet Amos spoke of the same idea in Amos chapter eight. It says.

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east. They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but shall not find it.

Friends, when a people reject God's word long enough, when they come before God with their fingers in their ears, so to speak, God will say, fine, I won't speak to you anymore. I will send a famine for the word of God. I will close the eyes of your prophets.

As it says here, he'll cover the heads of the seers, those who bring the revelation from God. He'll close their eyes. As I look at our own culture in the United States and the church culture, if you will, you wonder if these principles aren't being fulfilled right now.

You sometimes just scratch your head and say, where are the people teaching the Bible? There's a lot of talking going on. You know, there's a lot of pulpitering. Where are the people teaching the Bible? It's a famine of the word of God.

And you wonder if it isn't the Lord just saying, listen, church, this is what you want. I'm giving you what you want. You don't want my word, then I'm not going to entrust you with this special gift.

And I suppose it's easy and they certainly bear responsibility, too. It's easy to blame the preachers. It's easy to blame the, you know, the the unfaithful ministers and the pulpits who aren't teaching the word of God.

Friends, what about the unfaithful people in the pews who don't want to hear the word of God? They just don't want to hear it. They'd rather have ears tickled. And so there's plenty of responsibility to go around for everybody.

And the bottom line is you need to understand that when God entrusts his word to you, it's a precious gift that you need to value, that you need to take to your heart, that you say, man, I want it. Lord, give me more. I want your word.

I don't want you to close the eyes of your prophets. I don't want you to seal up your vision. Lord, keep it coming to me.

And I'm not talking about some unique, ecstatic, prophetic vision in some hyper spiritual sense. I'm just talking about God revealing himself to you through his word, through the words of the prophets. Friends,

God wants to do that.

Well, it goes on here, he's kind of going to draw on another sort of idea here in verse 11. He says the whole vision has begun to you like the words of a book that is sealed. Which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, read this, please.

And he says, I cannot, for it is sealed. Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, read this, please. And he says, I'm not literate.

We see this is speaking of the spiritual illiteracy of Jerusalem. Isaiah likened Jerusalem to the blind and to the drunk. Now he likens them to the illiterate.

But this isn't a literal literacy because the literate man receives the vision. It's like Isaiah delivers the vision to the guy who can read. But to him, it's a sealed book because his heart isn't right with God.

And he looks at it and flips through the page. Well, I don't get anything out of this. What's in here? There's nothing in it for me.

So then Isaiah goes and he takes it to the illiterate man and the illiterate man looks at it and he goes, well, I can't do anything with this either. Both of them, the guy who can read and the guy who can't read, they're both spiritually illiterate. Friends, I wonder, I wonder how many people are spiritually illiterate.

Many people today read or receive God's word like an illiterate man reads the newspaper. I mean, think of a person who can't read and you give them a newspaper. Well, you know what? I bet they could have a fun time with that newspaper for quite a while.

I mean, you open it up and there's, of course, a few words you can pick out, right? I mean, even an illiterate man can pick out a few things here and there. And so, you know, well, he notices a few words. Oh, he just picks out, you know, the three or four words on every page that he can read that are big enough.

So he can amuse himself doing that. He can look at all the pictures, right? Well, there's a lot of interesting pictures to look at. Yeah, an illiterate man can amuse himself with the newspaper for quite a while.

They can sit with the open newspaper, enjoy themselves to some degree and appear to be reading. You got an illiterate man just picking out a word or two here and looking at the pictures and you got an expert English major next to him, you know, studying every word and knowing the intimate knowledge of every word there. They look the same, don't they? Right there, the literate and the illiterate.

But the true content escapes the illiterate man. Friends, how about that with your understanding of the Word of God? You know, really, do you receive it like an illiterate person? You come here and there's a few things here and there you can pick out, you know, you can pick out a word here or there. And, you know, the pictures or whatever you like, you know, yeah, that was funny.

That was interesting. This is that, you know, tell more stories. I like that or whatever, you know, I mean, there's pictures.

It's good to put pictures in the newspaper. That's fine. But the real content, the real meat of it, the real essence of what's been saying is right over your head.

You're not getting it. Now, if you hear that and you say, you know what, that that might be me. You know what you need to do? Cry out to the Spirit of God because your problem isn't fundamentally an intellectual problem.

The problem is a spiritual problem. You need your heart made alive by the Spirit of God so that you can be spiritually literate. And when the Spirit of God speaks to you, when the Spirit of God writes it on your heart, you can read it.

Lord will do that for you. Now look at verse 13. He says, Therefore, the Lord said.

Inasmuch as these people draw near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me and their fear toward me is taught by the commandment of men, therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder. For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden. Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord and their works are in the dark.

They say, who sees us and who knows us? Surely you have things turned around. Shall the potter be as esteemed as the clay? Or shall the thing made say of him who made it? He did not make me. Well, shall the thing form say of him who formed it? He has no understanding.

Wow, what a powerful section, God speaking to the spiritually blind people of Jerusalem, and he looks him square in the eye and he says, These people draw near to me with their mouths and they honor me with their lips, but they've removed their hearts far from me. Jerusalem knew how to talk the spiritual talk, but their hearts were far from God. My friends, can I just draw a very basic point from this? You can't always tell a person's heart by what they say.

You can know the right things to say spiritually. You can know how to come off right. You hang around Christians long enough, you know, just like you hang on.

You know, I tell you, you want lingo or something? Hang around your kids who are into skateboarding. You know, all the tricks, all the maneuvers, you know, all the, you know, the backside, fakie, nollie, manual, kickflip, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, all these things. And, you know, sometimes I try to act with my boys like I understand that stuff.

And so, you know, I say, Well, why don't you try it? And they'll look at me, you know, with that, you poor thing. That's impossible. You know, you can't do that.

You know, it's like two contradictory moves at the same time. Well, but if you hung around skateboarders long enough, you'd get the lingo, right? You know how to say it. Maybe you couldn't do it.

Maybe you wouldn't really understand, but you could say it. You know, it's the same thing with Christian walk, right? You come to church, you hear enough sermons, you hang around Christians, you know the things to say. I mean, you're smart enough to not get around a bunch of Christians and say, I'm the most spiritual dude here.

Right? You know that much. Come on. But you think it.

It's in your heart. You don't say it. You say the right things with your words.

You know enough to say, you know, Oh, don't we just love one another? You know, when it's like, Oh, man, if I could bring their neck, that's kind of what's in your heart. Friends, it's not enough. You can't just talk it.

These people draw near to me with their mouths. Oh, praise the Lord. We love the Lord.

But their hearts are far from me. You can't always tell a person's heart by what they say. And might I say this as well.

You can't always tell a person's heart by what they do. How many times have you done something and man, it's just been a mess and you go, oh, man, I didn't mean for it to turn out like this at all. Oh, my gosh, this is just a mess.

You know this. And you can't tell the heart by that necessarily. You know, the only way you can know a person's heart utterly and completely.

Well, you'd have to be God. Now, the next best way, the only way you and I can do it is not by looking just at what people say, not by looking just at what they may do in any isolated incident. You can look closely at a person's life and look at the whole of their life, not just what they say, not just what they do, and especially not only how they act at church or among Christians.

Right. Isn't that the measure? How do you act outside of these walls? You all here, you might have the right words to say, and your heart might be real close to the Lord right here in this room. How is it when you leave the room? How is it when you're someplace else? Now, Jesus said something very interesting regarding this in Matthew chapter 12, verse 34.

Jesus said, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And friends, that's certainly a true principle, isn't it? But it's not an absolute principle because people can draw near to God with their mouths and honor the Lord with their lips. But their hearts can still be far from God.

Now, of course, I think if you followed that person around, their speech would betray him sooner or later. But you can't do that, right? You can't be Jiminy Cricket on their shoulder or bug them all the time or simply put those things that they have in the spy movies on them or something. Their speech would betray them, but you might never hear it.

So friends, it's possible. It's possible for a person to honor God with their mouth, with their lips, but have their heart far from them. And if you notice it here in verse 13, it's very revealing.

How did their hearts get far from God? How did this happen? How? Look at it there. They have removed their hearts from me. Did God push them away? No.

They removed their hearts from God. Friends, let me tell you something. You're not close to God tonight.

He didn't move. It's you. You've removed yourself.

And it's just best for you to take responsibility for it. Stop blaming everybody else. You know, well, I did it because, you know, what blah, blah, blah, blah, blah did to me or blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever.

You know what? Fine. But you still did it. You removed yourself from him.

You can go around and kick yourself for it all day long. Oh, that's all. There's no hope.

Or you can just draw close to the Lord with your heart right now. Isn't that much better? Just draw close to him. He's near.

But if we are far from God, it's ourselves who have moved ourselves from him. The end of verse 13 is very interesting, too, where he says, and their fear toward me is taught by the commandment of men. In other words, the fear or the honor or the reverence they have of God, it doesn't come from within.

It comes from an outward commandment that people put upon them. Now, friends, it's better for people to fear the Lord by the commandment of men than for them not to fear the Lord at all. Right.

But it's far better for somebody to fear the Lord because their heart is turned towards God. And then you don't have to command them or the state doesn't have to command them or the church doesn't have to command them because their own heart is alive to God and God commands them. And God says, here's the breakdown.

You don't have any personal relationship with me, any personal ground with me. Instead, it's all external. It's all somebody else getting you to do something.

It's all upon you and somebody else. There's no motivation coming up from within you to draw near to God. Their hearts don't respond to God.

They only respond to men. What does the Lord say about all this? It says in verse 14, the wisdom of their wise men shall perish because Jerusalem's pride had led them into spiritual blindness, sleep and drunkenness and illiteracy and hypocrisy. God says, I'm going to destroy the wisdom of the wise men.

Their wise men promoted the pride that led to all these evils. And Isaiah here in verse 14, he calls it a marvelous work and a wonder. You know, when I rebuke the pride of man, it's going to be a marvelous work and a wonder.

It's going to blow people's minds. Isn't that exactly what Paul says in first Corinthians that God did in the gospel of Jesus Christ at the cross? Friends, according to human thinking, what could be more absurd than God saving the world by coming down to die just about the most shameful, excruciating death that a person could die? I'm going to save the world through that. By human reasoning, it's foolishness, but in the greatness of God, it's the wisdom of God.

It's the plan of God. It's a marvelous work and a wonder. If you want to see more of this pride, take a look here at verse 15.

They say, well, to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord and their words works are in the dark. And they say, who sees us? You see, in their false wisdom, the proud people of Jerusalem thought that they could hide their thoughts. They could hide their counsel.

They could hide their deeds. Their works are in the dark. They thought they could hide all that from the Lord.

Right. You know, God doesn't see us. God doesn't know what I'm thinking.

God doesn't know what I'm doing. And they might not say that, but that's how they're thinking. That's how they're acting.

And listen here. I love it. Verse 16.

This is so precious because surely you have things turned around. I think about that for a minute. They thought that they could hide from the Lord and they thought that they had God all figured out.

Okay. I'll hide from the Lord, but I got him figured out. Friends.

Surely you have things turned around. He has you all figured out. And you know what? You don't know him nearly as well as you think he's hidden from you.

You've got to turn around. And if you want to see how much they have to turn around, look at here, verse 16, shall the Potter be esteemed as the clay. The people of Jerusalem made the terrible mistake of raising themselves up and lowering God at the same time.

So for them, here's the pot. What you know, what went into making this pot? You know what? I think that the clay had just as much to do with it as the Potter. That's what they would say, you know, equal that they bring the Potter down and the clay up.

So for them, the clay was just as worthy, just as intelligent, just as powerful as the Potter was. And friends, it's not so. That clay can't do anything without the Potter.

And he goes on here and he says, for shall the thing made say of him who made it, he did not make me. You know, indeed, man says exactly this today. Man looks at God, our creator, and he says he did not make me.

For the Lord and his prophet, this is observed. But today it passes the high science, doesn't it? Yes, he did not make us. Or it goes on here, verse 16, or shall the thing for him to say of him who formed it, he has no understanding.

Indeed, man says exactly this today. Instead of seeing the need for an absolutely intelligent designer who created all things, many, many people believe created everything. Chance.

That's what created everything. Absolute blind, random, purposeless chance, which has no understanding at all. And so it says of the thing who formed it, he has no understanding.

They believe that chance brought all things into being. I think it's amazing if you look at the scientific literature. People who are otherwise very bright and intelligent scientists fall into this trap.

One very famous French biochemist named Jacques Monod said, chance alone is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind at the very root of this stupendous edifice of evolution. In other words, he says, evolution is a huge building, and at the root of the building, the foundation of it, the very basis of it, is chance.

Friends, let me tell you something. Chance never made anything in all of human existence. Chance has no power.

You might have heard me use this illustration before because I think it's just so logical, it bears repeating. If you flip a coin, what are the chances that it's going to come up heads or tails? Well, roughly 50-50, right? 50 pence at a time, it's going to come up heads or tails, 50% heads. Now, does chance make it come up heads or tails? Is there like some voodoo vibe in the air called chance that grabs the coin, twists it around, and puts it back on your hand, heads or tails, half of the time? No.

What makes the coin go heads or tails? Man, that's strictly science. That's cause and effect. You get a coin, and what it depends on is how hard you flip it, how big the coin is, whether you start it heads or tails, how many times it flips through the air, how many air currents are going through the air, where you grab it, whether or not you turn it over when you put it back on your hand.

I mean, if you could do it exactly the same every time, you would get exactly the same result every time, right? Because it's cause and effect. Now, chance describes the statistical probability of it, but chance doesn't do anything. It has no understanding.

It has no power. Remember Carl Sagan, who has since gone to the world beyond? Sagan with his series on public broadcasting, talking about billions and billions of years ago, the universe being created. Well, Carl Sagan, years ago, petitioned the federal government for a grant to search for intelligent life in outer space.

So, how did he hope to find it? He took a super sensitive instrument to pick up radio signals from distant space. Now, radio signals are out in outer space all the time, you know, from radiation and this and that. Radio signals are present in space all the time.

That's nothing. It's nothing unusual to get radio signals from outer space. So, how would he know if a radio signal was a sign of intelligent life? If it had order and pattern, then you knew that it came from something intelligent.

If it was just random noise, chance, then you knew that it didn't come from anything intelligent, that it was just scattered out there. What's the point of looking for chance of something? That's out there all the time. But if you found something that had order and pattern, you knew that there was intelligent life behind it out in outer space.

That was the whole basis of the experiment. And yet the same man, Carl Sagan, believed that all the order, all the pattern that's existent in all of the creation on this earth came about by chance. Scientists see chance in those radio signals all the time, but it tells them nothing.

So, friends, when anybody ever says that the universe or anything else came about by chance, I don't know, they might be really ignorant. Probably they're just repeating something that they've been told before and they never really thought it through. I mean, if you think it through, there's just no way around it.

Friends, just remember the whole context here. What has brought Jerusalem to the place where they look at God and they say, you are not my creator, or they look at what created and say it has no understanding? What is it? It's the height of man's pride and blindness to reject the Lord as our creator. Friends, I think we only have a small inkling, a small understanding of the damage that has been done in our culture as a whole by the popular embrace of the theory of evolution.

Once people no longer believe that there's a God in heaven who created them, that changes a person's outlook on life completely. Because if you believe that a God in heaven created him, then you know what,

friends? You owe him something. And the attitude of most people today is that they don't owe God anything.

If there is a God, there might be a God, but he didn't create me, evolution did, so I don't owe him anything. But friends, that's not true. God created you and you owe him.

You have an obligation to him. You are his creature. And therefore, it's a masterwork of Satan to promote the theory of evolution in the last century or so.

Going on here now, verse 17, it's been pretty dark so far. God really laying it on Jerusalem with their spiritual blindness, with their spiritual stupor, their drunkenness, their insensitivity, their sleep, just piling it on and on and on. But you know, one of the things that's great about the prophet Isaiah is that, you know, he just can't go too long without having to cheer things up.

He's always saying, you know what? As bad as it is, God's going to restore things. God's going to bring a restoration. So look at it here, verse 17.

He says, Is it not yet a very little while till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest? Now again, this is very interesting. You know, you used to be in my shoes sometime and get to read the commentaries I read and, you know, you get five commentaries and you get five different opinions on what this means. But I think it's fairly clear to me.

I mean, Lebanon, if you want to say botanically in the scriptures, it always speaks of the mighty cedar trees of Lebanon and so the forests of Lebanon. So what's it saying? The forests of Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field. Those trees will be cut down.

The forest of Lebanon will be brought low and then look at the next sentence and the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest. So what's God talking about? He's talking about, you know what I'm going to do in that day? I'm going to bring the high low and the low high. I'm going to shake things up.

You proud and sensitive people. I'm bringing you down the humble, the poor. I'm going to raise them up.

Look at how he says it. You know what? There's something I need to say. Verse 17.

I can't skip over this. He says, Is it not yet a very little while? Now, how many of us tonight would the Lord say that to us tonight? Is it not yet a very little while? You know, we think that when we're in the middle of something, it's just forever, right? Oh, forever and ever. Oh, this must be what eternity is like, you know, forever and ever.

You know, it's like the time spent in the dentist chair, just ever and ever on and on and on. You know, would the Lord just look you square in the eye and say, hey, look, is it not yet a very little while? Now, if you don't think it's a little while, think about it in terms of your whole life, right? Whatever should the Lord tarry, whatever 60, 70, 80 years the Lord gives you. Isn't whatever you're going through now just a little while? Yeah.

Well, but even if it doesn't seem that way, say, you know, I've had this affliction my whole life. Well, how about in comparison to eternity? Is it not yet a little while? It's an eye blink, an eye blink for eternity. So I think every one of us can receive that word from the Lord.

It doesn't matter what you are. It doesn't matter what you're going through. It doesn't matter if you have this affliction from the moment you're born to the moment you die.

The Lord can still look at you and say, is it not yet a very little while? Then notice he goes on and he says, verse 18, in that day, the deaf shall hear the words of the book and the eyes of the blind shall see out of the obscurity and out of the darkness. The humble shall increase their joy in the Lord and the poor among men shall rejoice in the holy one of Israel. Isn't that great? God's going to take the low and bring them high.

When God's people are restored, pride no longer prevents them from hearing God's word or from seeing God's work just as much as it's a miracle in the natural realm to give sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf. So it's a miracle in the spiritual realm as well. We need to humbly seek God for ears to hear and eyes to see.

Then he says, here's a glorious verse 19. He says, the humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord. Joy is the proper reward for the humble.

When we're humble, having an accurate, let me define what humbleness is. It's having an accurate estimation of yourself first. It's not humble.

Let's say you're a virtuoso pianist. It's not humble for you to say, oh, I can hardly play at all. Or let's say you're really terrible at the piano.

It's not humble for you to say, yeah, I'm pretty good. Humbleness begins with having an accurate picture of yourself, which sometimes is very difficult to do. Right.

I mean, let's face it, we're never as great as all our complimenters say we are, and we're never as bad as all of our critics say we are. I mean, somewhere it's in the middle there, but it begins with having an accurate estimation of ourselves. But then it also goes on to having a proper perspective of ourselves in relationship to others.

The truly humble person, you know what they think about themselves? Not much. They're too busy thinking about the Lord and thinking about other people. It's not humble to think about yourself, even if you're thinking about how humble you are.

It's just not humble. Humbleness has an accurate estimation of ourselves. Fine.

But it just doesn't think about ourselves very much. It would much rather think about the Lord and think about other people. That's what true humbleness is.

So what's the proper reward for a humbleness? When we're humble, when we have this accurate estimation of ourselves and a proper perspective of others, then our lives are filled with the most joy. Friends, the humble and the poor, look at it there in verse 18, they shall increase their joy in the Lord. The Lord is their constant source of joy that can never be taken away.

I think there's a contrast here because in a lot of this chapter, he's been talking about sort of a proud attitude on behalf of Jerusalem. And I say to you that pride is the enemy of joy. And you can be proud and have fun.

You can be proud and have success. You can be proud and experience excitement. You can be proud and be happy because of happy circumstances.

You take a proud person and a humble person and let them both spend a day at Disneyland. And I bet they're both pretty much have fun. Anybody can be happy in the happy times.

Proud or humble. But friends, you can't be proud and have joy in the Lord. Now, let me clarify that just for a minute.

You might say, I have joy in the Lord. That means I'm not proud. Let me also say that to whatever degree we are proud and all of us are to some degree, right? Isn't that something that's only going to be done away with completely when we are glorified with the Lord Jesus Christ? Isn't that something that everybody's going to have to battle with every day of their life? But friends, to whatever degree we are proud, we're missing out on joy in the Lord.

The proud can never have joy in the Lord if they're in humble or poor circumstances, then there's no joy, right? Because you're proud and you're in humble or poor circumstances. What's there to be happy? What's there to have joy about? The joy in the Lord. That's all the time.

So God's lifting up the humble and the poor. Look at what he's also doing here. Verse 20, for the terrible one is brought to nothing.

The scornful one is consumed and all who watch for iniquity are cut off, who make a man an offender by a word and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate and turn aside the just for a thing of not. What's God going to do with the terrible one? He's going to bring nothing. The work of the Lord does not stop at restoring the humble and the poor.

It extends to bringing justice upon the wicked and singled out for judgment by the prophet. Are those who have no sense of proportion for justice? Isn't this interesting in verse 21? Who are the people that the Lord is speaking against you? Look at verse 21, who make a man an offender by a word. In other words, well, he said something wrong, so he's an offender or who lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate.

In other words, you raise a little ruckus in the public gate there. So I'm going to set a trap for you or at the end part or turn aside the just for a thing of not nothing for a small thing. You turn aside the just.

What is somebody here? People have no sense of proportion. A slap on the wrist is deserved and you get out the executioner's sword. Well, he says that's not just.

There's no no. We need to have a sense of proportion and justice. The chapter ends here, verse 22.

Therefore, thus says the Lord who redeemed Abraham concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, nor shall his face grow now grow pale. But when he sees his children, the work of my hands in his midst, they will hallow my name and hallow the holy one of Jacob and fear the God of Israel. These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding and those who murmured will learn doctrine.

The picture here that Isaiah paints is really striking. I think it's such a vivid book. He pictures Jacob, right, the patriarch, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

He's looking out over his spiritual children. He's looking out over his descendants in the days of Isaiah. And how is he looking when he looks at them? He's ashamed and he's pale.

He's like, my heavens, look at these people. They're so with my descendants. They're so wicked.

They're so far from the Lord. But God says there's going to come a day when Jacob will not be ashamed. He will not be pale when he looks at his descendants.

Why? Because of the work of my hands in his midst, they will hallow my name and hallow the holy one of Jacob and fear the God of Israel. As the patriarch, Jacob, looks over his restored descendants, he's no longer ashamed of them because they now hallow the name of the Lord and respect the holiness of the Lord. Now, wouldn't we want Jesus to look over his children and say that? For Jesus to look over his children and say, I'm not ashamed.

I'm not pale. You know, the blood doesn't rush from my face when I look at my children because they hallow my name. They fear the Lord.

Those are his children. They're my children. It's a glorious thing that God's done.

Friends, the Lord wants to build you up that way. And maybe you need some restoration from the Lord tonight. Maybe some way or another, he's said tonight, you know, maybe I have a bit of that pride, a bit of that spiritual blindness.

A bit of that arrogance. Let's come back to the Lord tonight as our creator, as our maker. Say, Lord God, restore us.

Everybody here in some way or another tonight needs a touch from the restoring hand of God. Let's pray and ask him to do it. Father, that's what we want.

We want to think of Jesus Christ looking out over us, his children tonight, Lord, and he's not ashamed. His face isn't pale because when he looks at the work of your hands, Lord, what you've done in us, you've built in us a passion to serve you, a passion to love you, a passion to honor you. And we do love you, Lord.

We do honor your holy name, Jesus. Just fill us with your spirit. Restore us, God.

And revive your work in the midst of the years. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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