

Isaiah 19

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[0 : 00] Isaiah 19. Kirk Paster is an artisanal professor in Australia.! One day you bring it up with your mother, and without a pause she comments, Oh, I didn't tell you.

A new family moved here across the road, and I thought it would be nice to be neighborly. So I took them a casserole, and I gave them grandma's wedding as well. They looked so pleased. And Paster, imagine the situation.

You might be rather bewildered by your mother's reckless, scandalous generosity. You might have an outburst of anger or jealousy. But the reason Paster gives that illustration here is because in Isaiah 19, Isaiah is announcing God's plan to give away Israel's wedding ring.

Or at least to melt it down into three rings. Yes, one for Israel, but apparently and astonishingly one for Egypt and one for Assyria.

And I don't know whether you've noticed it as I've been preaching through these early chapters, that Isaiah is a book of surprises. But here is one big surprise that I wasn't expecting.

[1 : 35] Here in this chapter you see the reckless, scandalous generosity of God. You see the reckless, scandalous love of God. And the reckless, scandalous dreams of God.

All coming from itself. From itself. If you were here last week, let me try to really up to speed on where we're at. I'm going to a new section. Chapter 30 to 23.

It's really a series of oracles that are delivered to Judah about neighbouring nations. In some ways it's the street of the nations address. But what's interesting is that it's addressed to Judah.

Isaiah doesn't go around with all these other nations. And speak to them. No, he speaks to Judah about the other nations. And the reason he does that is because very simply he is saying to Judah, whatever you do, whatever you do, do not put your trust in these other nations.

Do not trust them. You need to put your trust in the Lord God Almighty alone. Because the problem is for Judah, at different points, all these different nations seem to be attractive.

[2 : 47] In terms of form and political alliances. So these nations, they might be the one Israel would think that could protect us against the other nations. And so we see Isaiah goes through each of these nations and he says, here's why you don't want to trust them.

Here's why you don't want to trust them. And the bottom line is God is going to come and judge these people and destroy them. So that's where we began with Babylon. And God said that Babylon will be judged and destroyed.

And chapter by chapter he's working through these various nations. The Philistines, Moab, Damascus, Hush. All of which, for instance, chapter 19 of this oracle concerning Egypt.

And of all the nations that are mentioned, Egypt would be the one that invoked memories. Memories of opposition and persecution of God's people.

It was, of course, Pharaoh and the Egyptians who held Israeli slavery for 400 years. And who God had delivered the Israelites some 700 years prior. And Isaiah speaks here of them.

[3 : 56] And you would think, wouldn't you, that that memory of what happened in Egypt would still be very strong. The southern kingdom, they would have said, we've got nothing to do with Egypt.

And yet, what a difference that 700 years has made. Because now with Babylon, that kind of not yet is the power, and Assyria is still the mightiest nation on earth, Judah is looking for something to help them.

They want to get out from under the rule of Assyria and Egypt. And Egypt comes as a very willing volunteer and says, if you do what we say, we'll protect you.

And Isaiah says to Judah, don't even think about it. And what is somewhat different from this oracle, than the previous ones, is what is promised to Egypt after judgment.

Here's what we're going to look into in this chapter. We'll pick up on the language of verse 22. Do you see that? There's two things the Lord will do there. He will strike and he will heal. And what is promised to strike Egypt, but then also heal them.

[5 : 00] So first of all, the striking of Egypt. Look at verse 1. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud, and he comes to Egypt. And the idols of Egypt will thank God of his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt with him.

And I will stir up the Egyptians against Egyptians. And they will fight against each other, and each against his favour, sitting against sitting, kingdom against kingdom.

And the spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out. I'll confound their counsel. They'll inquire of the idols, of the sorcerers, the mediums, the necromancers. And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a heart of master.

And a fierce king will rule over them, says the Lord God of hosts. Isaiah, he gets in all these articles. He basically begins by saying, God is almighty. God's sovereign power.

Do you see what he's riding on in verse 1? He's riding on a swift cloud, because he's in such control, and he's the master of the natural world. And Israel can do nothing about what God is going to do.

[5 : 59] And so it's no wonder he says, that you and the Egyptians, as well, that idols tremble, and their hearts melt. Well, I'm going to pick apart the whole section, the first half of Isaiah 19, but let me give you the basic breakdown of what Isaiah says will happen to Egypt.

He says there will be a collapse in three areas. First of all, there will be a social collapse, verse 24. That God's actions are going to bring relationships falling apart.

Frustrations will set in. Nothing in the nation will go to plan. The Egyptians will fall into a kind of spiritual mumbo-jumbo. The country will come under dictatorship. And the question is, who has got the power?

Who's got that kind of power to turn one great nation against another great nation? And Isaiah says, the answer is the Lord God of mighty. But there's not only social collapse, there's economic collapse.

Look at verses 5 to 10. Can you see what's mentioned again, and again, and again? Look at verses 6 and 7. Do you see one word that keeps being mentioned?

[7 : 06] It comes up five times. Four times as a synonym. The synonym as well. Isaiah wants you to understand that there's an economic collapse coming. And it's symbolised by the dry heaven of the Nile.

That's the word that's used again and again. The Nile, the Nile, the Nile. And the river was Egypt's lifeline. No river, no life.

No river, no life. Who is it that could and would drive the Nile? Which means, Jesus was not just a great river, but the Nile was a great God in Egypt.

And Isaiah says, well, there's only one man who can do it. And that's the Lord God Almighty. And then thirdly, there's political collapse. It's not just a corruption of our country.

It doesn't get distracted. Then it's in the Lamb of the Thirteen. The ruling cabinet of Egypt. Well, there'll be folly there. That's not the rules to free. The leaders were enlightened in their claims.

[8 : 07] They weren't reading the signs of the times. And all they were doing is misleading. So then all in all, there's a comprehensive picture. There's a total unraveling of Egypt.

The eternal unity will grow. The traditional religion. The political independence. The water supply. Agriculture. Commerce. Commerce. Political strategy. The markets.

Wise teaching. Everything is unraveling. And Egypt is unable to do anything about it. And behind it all, there's one sovereign Lord riding on a cloud. A cloud of judgment.

Judgment on a nation. Which was really like an enlarged version of people. Judgment's allowed to be talked about last week, didn't we? The place where human determination, where human felt, humans felt we can meet every need by self-project.

We've got the wisdom to solve every problem. We don't need God. And that pride of Babel is at the very heart of this people.

[9 : 14] And without turning to God, God struck Babel. And God will strike Egypt. And so Isaiah says, okay to Judah, what are you going to do? Are you going to put your trust in Egypt?

You think you're going to place all your security and your safety Isaiah says, don't you dare. Don't you do it. The Lord says, the one to trust is the Lord who rides on the cross.

Our own rides on the clouds. The one to trust is the Lord who strikes in judgment. But in verse 16, there's a great change of gear. Can you pick that up? Can you see me, others?

There's a change of writing style, actually. It moves from poetry to prose in verse 16. And it's a very deliberate contrast in writing style.

And I think it's there to make you stop and think. It's intended to point you to a change. There's a contrast. And there's a series of five, isn't there?

[10:16] In that day. Can you see that? There's 16, 18, 19, 23, 24, in that day.

And it points beyond the striking of Egypt to the astounding healing of Egypt. It's a shocker. So verses 16 and 17, there are a bit of a hinge where Egypt is portrayed as women who are fearful of the Lord.

They're terrified. But as we read on, we read on that fear is a good fear. Because it's a fear that has led to repentance. Look at verse 18.

In that day, there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that will speak the language of Cagan. And they'll swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. And one of these will be called the city of destruction. And in that day, there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt and a pillar to the Lord and his border.

And it will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt where they cry to the Lord because of oppressors. He will send them a saviour and a defender and a deliverer. And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians.

[11:28] And the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and they will worship and sacrifice and offering and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them. And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing. And they will return to the Lord and he will listen to their opinions and mercy on the Lord.

So right away, there's something monumental happening. There's a profound shift in loyalty and allegiance that's going to take place in the future. And do you notice what Isaiah pictures?

He says, you go into Cairo, you'll put it into cities and you'll go into the shop and they will start speaking Hebrew to you. Now you talk to refugees or migrants who move from their homeland to a new country.

And they will tell you that the day they stop speaking their mother tongue and they start speaking and thinking and dreaming and speaking naturally the language of the land they are living in, that day is a huge day, isn't it?

So for many of you, you're not there yet, are you? For many of you, second language is English. You're not at that stage where you think and you speak and you dream and you pray and your heart language becomes English.

[12:41] You're not there yet. But when it comes up to you, it will be the moment of the state of Cance. Because what does it say? It means that in terms of your identity, and perhaps in terms of your allegiance, they've changed me.

Now these people here in Isaiah 19, they've not moved out of Egypt. And yet, they are speaking Hebrew. And here it is a representative of a change of allegiance.

Something is going on in the inside that is represented by a different language. We've discussed today and we talk about totally a change of allegiance in my life or your life.

and where you're trying to follow after other things. And you're trying to find your fulfillment and your happiness and then you turn and you start worshipping God.

Now it's unlikely that that's going to be marked by a change of language. We continue to speak the language we speak. But what is helpful in this passage is there are four markers which show that there's a change of allegiance going on.

[13:55] And I think the four markers are helpful because they show us what does a change of allegiance look like in our lives. It's not an exhaustive list. But there are four things that Isaiah is pointing to and let's use them as a checklist and say who might follow it.

So let's look at the four together. It's represented in verse 19 by the altar. Number one. There's an altar. The altar that the Egyptians would have put up this monument.

It was for sale as a sign and a witness to the Lord. And we are told that back in Joshua 22 we read about the tribes of Israel who settled on the far side of the Jordan River. They built an altar as a witness to the fact that they belonged.

To the fact that they belonged to the people of the Lord even though they were separated from the other tribes by this body of water. And the altar represented a sign and a witness that they belonged to God.

Now we don't build holders today. What do we do? What we do are signs. We are signed aren't we at the time of our baptism.

[15:02] We are signed in the name of the Trinity. You are baptized into the name of the Triune God. What is happening at baptism? We are saying that I if we are being baptized all my children if they are being baptized they belong to the Triune God.

That their ultimate allegiance is to the Lord. And when we take the bread and the wine it is a cup of our allegiance. It is not just a ritual.

That when you eat that bread and drink that cup you are saying I belong to the Lord. My allegiance is ultimately to Him. And that is a pretty significant and serious thing to say.

Actually that what He says goes in my life. That is a sign and a witness to the Lord that we belong to Him. The second is this marker of prayer.

Look at verse 20. It says Egyptians will cry out to the Lord. They will cry out to the Lord. Why? Because they are now in a relationship with the Lord.

[16:08] And their allegiance has been marked by this altar. They are in a relationship and it is a speaking relationship. But because they now belong to the Lord they enter into this fellowship with Him. So that now as dangers come and problems need to be solved they don't do it just by human self-confidence.

as the problem was in the judgment. And now by prayer and crying out to the Lord the Lord responds.

And the question for you and I is what is our physical call when we are in need? And I suspect the inclination is not to call on the name of the Lord.

The temptation has got a place to spiritual orphans to think that well we are alone. No one can help us. We can fix our problems ourselves but that is not Bible tells us at all is it?

That God through His grace for us in Jesus Christ we are not orphans. Well that's just as well isn't it because you cannot fix your problems.

[17:15] But if you were called on the name of the Lord you are not an orphan you are a son or a doer in the living God and therefore He delights to hear us cry out to Him. The first part of call for the believer when there is a need is to pray and say God I cannot fix this.

I cannot fix this when you step in and do it. And God delights when we cry to Him in helpless dependence. Thirdly we see the mark of Revelation verse 21 that God would reveal Himself to His people and what we see here is that God is always the initiator of this relationship.

That God reveals Himself and only when God reveals Himself to the Egyptians know the Lord.

Christianity is not about you searching for God. It is not about you searching for God but it is about you responding to God's reveals of truth because God has revealed Himself in the Bible.

In His Word. You don't have to go searching for God because He says read this and you will find me. You will find out who I am. And the Egyptians will understand that.

That revelation will be given so that they would have a relationship. So that they would know to whom they are speaking. And so if their allegiance has changed God's Word has become your truth.

[18:36] You love the Bible. He's worried about who He is. What He's done. And about who we are. The fourth marker is there in verse 21 is worship.

The word that is used literally there is to serve. And it points to what our worship really is. Our service of God is 24 hours, seven days a week.

The Bible picture of worship is not just what we do here every morning from 10.30 to 11.40. But what we do in the rest of our lives. As referred to us, vows to the Lord.

But if your allegiance has changed, you now understand that your life is now primarily about serving God, not yourself. It's not even serving your boss at work. But life is about serving God.

So four markers. Four markers have changed allegiance. But what is additionally surprising is actually the words in Isaiah 19 form really like a Bible overview.

[19:47] The second Old Testament survey, Isaiah 19. Think about the altars and the monuments. What do they remind you of? They remind you of the Israelites in the book of Joshua.

And they're crying out for deliverance. What does that remind you of? When did the Israelites cry out for deliverance?

Well it again reminds you of the judges, doesn't it? They again and again cry out to God for deliverance and God sent a judge to deliverance and receive them. The don't sacrifice and grain offerings and vows reminds you of what?

Well the book of Leviticus. And so the thing is these early chapters from the Old Testament who was the main character? The main character was Israel. But why Isaiah was done in Isaiah 19 is he switched that.

The main character of these events that were true of Israel he says they are now true of Egypt. And the people who would have been struck by God in judgment they are now going to be healed by God.

[20 : 55] So the striking of Egypt and the subsequent healing of Egypt is going to lead to the conclusion of this chapter which would seem absolutely impossible. Look at the last few verses. Verse 23.

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to land to Syria. Assyria will come into Egypt and Egypt into Assyria and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. And in that day Israel will be third with Egypt and Assyria.

A blessing in the midst of the earth whom the Lord of hosts has blessed the Egypt my people and Assyria the work of my hands and Israel my inheritance. And right here we see the wedding ring being melted down and made into three rings.

It's an astounding picture. And so thirdly let's see the astounding scandalous act of global blessing. You see Egypt and Assyria they weren't just the patch of enemies of Israel.

They hated Israel's guts. They couldn't stand each other. And here we see that we look at verse 23. You see this day when they're not only found to a point where they put up with each other but now they're in a delight of each other and enjoy one another.

[22 : 07] It's the peaceful kingdom all over again. It's Isaiah 11 which is portrayed by animals of a wolf and a lamb but now it's nations. And in this kingdom Egypt is God's people and Assyria is handiwork and Israel is inheritance.

And the kingdom is no longer defined ethnically or nationally. In this kingdom God's people are no longer defined racially or by their ethnicity.

city. But now we have a spreading kingdom of peace. In verse 18 it's a few cities. In verse 19 it's a whole country. But at the end of the chapter it's three nations.

And I would suggest to you that those nations represent all nations. It's a picture of God's peace coming to the hell of the world. Here's the question. How can this be?

How can it be true? How can God melt down the wedding ring and give it to three nations? In fact to all nations. Egyptians. How can God come to you and to me and say you are now my people?

[23 : 10] You are my inheritance. How can he do that? You know don't you? We may not be Egyptians but we have that same kind of attitude. That's represented by pride in every single one of our hearts.

So how can self-confident proud Egyptians or people like us be treated now as God's people? God. And in verse 20 I give the clue.

He refers to them crying out and God giving a saviour who will rescue them. But I think Isaiah wants to be more specific. Look at verse 22. And the Lord will strike Egypt.

Strike him and heath. Isaiah speaks of Egyptians turning to the Lord and repenting but God is still a God of justice. It's not that when God puts his forgiveness hat on he kind of forgets the justice thing. God cannot pretend that Egypt hasn't sinned. God cannot pretend that you haven't sinned. His heart longs to forgive but our sin needs to be punished.

[24 : 21] And the punishment needs to be taken by someone. So how can self-confident proud defiant people like the Egyptians and like me be treated as God's people and the astounding answer is because of the one who was struck as the one who was struck.

That was his word and then healed. He is the one who was struck so that you and I could be healed. Let me read you from Isaiah 53. That's what he says.

Surely he is, it says this, he's despised and rejected by men amount of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men had their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

And he uses those exact same words. he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him he was the chastised from the broadest peace, and by his wounds we are healed, same words, Isaiah 19.

[25 : 39] One will be struck so that some can be healed. Of course, Isaiah 53 is talking of the Lord Jesus, isn't it? Who came into this world and was struck by God, and smitten by him, and was afflicted by him on the cross, struck by God on the cross, so that Egyptians, and Assyrians, and Brits, and Europeans, and Africans, and Asians, and every other nation could be healed.

Do we deserve it? Of course we don't. Is he talking about everyone in every nation, they will be healed, they will be forgiven? No, he's talking about all those who put their faith in the suffering servant.

Who put their faith in the one who is struck, so that you can be healed. So that we can be adopted into his handily and forgiven, so that we can now be called his people, and his handily work and his inheritance, so that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ, regardless of ethnicity, or nationality, or background, knows that when they read the words of the apostle in the New Testament, that we're about to read, he's talking about us, he's talking about every believer, so that Peter says, you are a chosen race.

You are a royal priesthood, you are a holy nation, a people by his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are a people. Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Isaiah is a family of Gentiles foresaw the day of scandalous global blessing, a day made possible by the striking of Jesus for the healing of the nations, so that we as believers of Jesus Christ, we are referred to today as the chosen people, the royal priesthood, the holy nation.

[27 : 32] Let me give you two applications, one that has got to do with identity, and one that has got to do with relationships. All of the churches, all of the early churches in the Mediterranean world were multi-Afric.

All of them were. They consisted of at least Jews and Gentiles, but many of them were Afroans and Asians as well. And just as we saw as Peter refers to Christians, he refers to us as a holy nation. Literally, the New Testament calls us a neo-ethnic for those who are in Christ. That means that our relationships to each other in Christ and our relationship to other believers in Christ are actually to be stronger than our relationships to our racial or ethnic or national group.

That means if you are a Christian, you are not to primarily consider yourself as British, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, American, Iranian, Nigerian.

You are not primarily Anglo, you are not primarily black, you are not primarily Asian, you are citizens of God's nation, and that is your primary identity.

[28 : 59] That's a good question to ask, God's to say who are you, to ask yourself who am I, is that where I would begin? I belong to the new ethnic, I'm part of God's nation, it's challenging to examine ourselves.

The implication of that, the New Testament teases out, it says that the only real division in the human race, there is only one real division in the human race, and that is the division of faith. And so God understands, as God sees it, there are only really two nations there.

There are two peoples, there are those who trust in Christ, and those who don't trust in Christ. And that is why, for example, God forbids marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, between a Christian and somebody who is not a Christian, God forbids that marriage, because that is the only way a Christian can marry you outside your people.

faith and unbelief, they are the dividers. So let me ask you this, if you would rather have your close friend or family member marry someone of the same race, or the same nationality, instead of a strong Christian of a different race, well, your racial prejudice has not been dealt with, and you've not understood the gospel.

Let me ask you that again. If you would rather have a close friend or family member marry someone of the same race or nationality, instead of a strong Christian of a different race, you've got to listen to the gospel.

[30 : 37] And that new identity of the new ethnic, leads us secondly to being a blessing on the whole earth. He says at the end, at the very end of the passage, he says in Isaiah 19, they will be blessed by Egypt, my people, and Assyria, the work of my hands.

I came home last week, I saw a land of it, you know, one of those kind of plague things, and they're called Ireland, the land of a thousand, the land of a hundred thousand welcomes. I'm not sure my aim was, show me that.

The land of a hundred thousand welcomes. That's good, isn't it? But I want to say to you, the church should be the church of a hundred thousand welcomes.

And that will cover a whole range of people and groups. This is a quote from John Piper. He's addressing our attitude to Muslims. Here's what he says, maybe even as we speak, the population of the planet is passing seven billion.

And of those seven billion, well over a billion are Muslims. And as you know, tens of thousands live in our neighbourhoods, and we are glad they've come. Biblical Christians do not have a parochial mindset that wants to keep non-Christians out of our neighbourhoods.

[31 : 50] Christians have a kingdom mindset that rejoices when King Jesus brings non-Christians who had once been far away near to the crossfall. Christians do not live to escape non-believers, we live to reach non-believers.

Across the ocean and across the street. Now what mindset do you and I have? I don't know what your neighbors alike. But there might not be people that you naturally connect with.

But you see, the gospel keeps pushing us out, doesn't it? Of a parochial mindset to a kingdom mindset. And the gospel keeps pushing us out and saying, you know he's melted down the rain.

And now every nation, and God is going to call people from every nation to this new ethnic. the gospel reminds us that God announced that Egypt will be my people, and Syria will be my handiwork, and Israel will be my inheritance.

And you and I are not, we are not to live to escape non-believers, we are to live to reach out to the gospel. The gospel of the one who was struck, so that all nations could be healed, that people of all nations could be brought into one family, all as a part of God's stentless act of blessing.

[33 : 13] Let's pray.