

Isaiah 23

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[0 : 00] I'm sorry, 23. You may have heard of the two elderly couples who were having a chat one day. And one of the men said to the other, Fred, how was that memory clinic that you went to last month?

And Fred replied, it was really great. They taught me all sorts of new techniques, visualisation, association. It's really made a big difference to me. Fred said, that's brilliant. What's the name of the clinic? At that point, Fred's face goes blank. He thought and he thought. And he couldn't remember what the name was. But a smile breaks over his face and he says, what do you call that flower?

With the long stem and the thorns. And the friend says, a rose. Yes, that's it. He changed to his wife. Rose, what was the name of that clinic? Now, who are the kind of tricks that are drunk? That's the... isn't it? There are some things in life we can forget and it just doesn't matter. And there are other things that we cannot forget. There are some things that if we forget them in life, it's to our peril.

[1 : 08] And the Bible is constantly reminding you and I of the importance of remembering the truth of God's word and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The German reformer, Martin Luther, recognized how forgetful we are when he said this. It is most necessary that we learn the gospel well, teach it to others and beat it into their heads continually. And in this series of Isaiah, what you have from chapter 13 to 23, we could say is Isaiah doing a bit of head beating. There are ten oracles. There are ten messages, ten sermons about neighbouring cities.

About the nations surrounding Judah. And today it's the fourth of the ten. I'm going to look at it. But the message to the people of Judah throughout these oracles has been the same.

And it's this. They are not to trust. Don't you even dare trust in the nations around you, God says. You are to trust people of Judah only in the Lord.

[2 : 12] I don't know about you, but the temptation is when we start reading through a section like Isaiah 13 to 23, and we see that kind of repetition, that it's the same message, we think, okay, I'm going to just skip a little bit forward until I get something new.

We're going to miss out some of it. And in a sense I've done a little bit on that in the series, even though there are ten oracles, we've only looked at four of them. But if we do skip ahead, we need to at least acknowledge that Isaiah spent 11 chapters on the same overall point.

And the reason he does that is because you and I so easily forget that it's the Lord who we're to trust in all things. It is the Lord that we're to trust in everything.

And we forget. It's not so much in our heads, is it? If I was to give you a pop quiz this morning and ask, who are you to trust in life and in death? Well, most of us, nearly all of us would say, we're going to trust in the Lord.

But it's not we forget in our hearts. Our hearts constantly need to be reminded. Our wills constantly need to be reminded that we need to trust in the Lord. Our hearts continually want to trust in other things.

[3 : 28] In our reputation to justify ourselves. Maybe in our job status, for our security. Maybe we trust in our ability in sport. Or our popularity. Or our music.

Or our cooking. Or our exam results. Or even we can trust in how great a family we are. Our hearts don't naturally want to trust in God.

So don't we find we need to beat the gospel into our heads continually? So that it keeps going deep down into our hearts. So that if nothing else this morning, we can at least give Isaiah some credit for reminding you and I how forgetful we are.

When it comes to the truth of God's word. Which is why you've got so many of these oracles. Now having said that, Isaiah's ten oracles, they are not copycats. They are not carbon copies of each other.

Each oracle goes out to a different nation. And city. And in particular it highlights an idol. Something that they were trusting in. Or a god that they were following.

[4 : 31] Or worshipping. So as we come to the oracle in Isaiah 23. That is no different. It's about Tyre. And it focuses on something specific that was going on in the city of Tyre.

Tyre in the time of Isaiah was a Phoenician city. It was on an island right off the coast of the Mediterranean. And it's a suitable conclusion to these oracles.

Because Isaiah began, if you remember chapter 13, he began with Babylon. And Babylon was known for its might. It was known for its army. For its military and cultural achievements.

And Tyre is the last of the oracles. And it's just as well known as Babylon in the ancient world. But it's not known for its military might. It's known for its commercial wealth.

It's known as a financial centre. It is, if you like, the square mile of the city. Or Wall Street of the ancient world.

[5 : 27] So the standing in the first place and the last place in these oracles. Is Babylon and Tyre. And it's summing up all that's impressive in the world.

Might and rights. Wealth and power. All that would be a new room for a little nation. And here in Isaiah 23. Judah, the people of God, are faced with the temptation to line themselves up with another nation.

Another place. Another city. In this case, to line themselves with the economic superpower of the world. And God comes in with the same message. Of where they're really pleased they trust.

Their faith. And in this case, it is to trust the Lord and not in the prophets. P-R-O-F-I-T-S To trust the Lord and not in the prophets.

So we're going to flesh out today by looking at three things. I want us to first think about the purposes of God. That are revealed in the message. I want us to think of the future of the prophets. P-R-O-F-I-T-S And then I want us to think of the transformation that comes to generosity in our lives.

[6 : 38] So first of all, the purposes of God. The chapter is divided into two sections. And you might have noticed that. The first section begins and ends in the same way. Look at verse 1. The oracle concerning Tyre.

Wail Oshet of Tyre. Of Tarshish. Or Tarshish, as it was pronounced. That's the first part of the oracle. And then you look at verse 14. Wail Oshet of Tarshish.

There the book ends. Tarshish is probably most famous, isn't it? It's the city that Jonah didn't want to go to. He wanted to run away from.

It's a city that's now in Spain. In one of the many colonies. Established by the Phoenicians around the Mediterranean in the world. And it was a base for their lucrative sea trade. It was a sea force. And it was rolling in wealth.

But when the news reaches the ships of Tarshish. The news coming to the ships is not good at all. They're told to wail, aren't they?

[7 : 41] They're told to mourn. They're told to lament. And in verses 2-7 we are given the reason for the lamenting. The what of what is going to happen. They are to wail because of the stunning news.

Of Tyre's collapse. There's about to be a Black Monday. And destruction. No one in that world would have believed the news that they were receiving.

We get a sense that we have a reputation of Tyre. Look at verse 3. What are they called in verse 3? Verse 20 of chapter 23. They are called the merchant of the nations. Tyre's traders carried a reputation before them.

Everywhere they went. But Isaiah says that will be no more. The downfall will be so swift. That the homeland sailors, they'll hear the news before they even get to the shore.

And we're told that a hushed silence will come over the neighbouring city of Sidon. And as they get the news, they are incredulous. They can't believe it. That this could ever have happened to the mighty Tyre.

[9 : 01] But Isaiah says that the nation of Egypt would weep as he contemplated the devastating impact on her weak exports. Tarshish would get news because refugees would start flooding back to that city.

Because there's nothing left for them. In Tyre. In other words, Isaiah wants us to see that a lot of people have got a lot to lose in Isaiah 23. A lot of people have got a great deal to lose in the collapse of Tyre.

But when this collapse would come, it will hit the Mediterranean world hard. Like a wall street crash. Of devastating proportions. And it won't just be this country, but across the globe the ripples will be felt.

And verse 2 to 7 gives them what is going to happen. But verses 8 to 12 give us the why. Look at verse 8. Whose purpose necessitates Tyre? Who's planned it? It's from days of old.

Whose feet carried her to settle far away? Who has purposed this against Tyre? The bestower of crowns. Whose merchants are princes. Whose traders are the honour of the earth. Who is it? Verse 9.

[10:10] The Lord of hosts. The Lord of hosts has purposed it. To defile a pompous pride of all glory. To dishonour all the honour to the earth. Cross over your land like the Nile. O daughter of Tarshish.

There's no restraint anymore. He's stretched out his hand over the sea. He's shaken the kingdoms. The Lord has given command concerning Canaan. To destroy its stronghold. And he said.

You will no more exalt. O oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise cross over to Cyprus. Even there you will have no rest. It's pretty straightforward. It is God.

God is the purpose driven God. Who has purposed all things according to his plan. You can't underline that enough. The message of Isaiah is. God is the sovereign God over all the nations. And he plans. And he purposes what is going to happen. And Isaiah says. The destruction of Tyre will be no different. The Lord Almighty planned this destruction. He purposed it.

[11:08] But what is particularly important to know. Here is that the reason given for the judgment. Of destruction. Is not that God is against commerce. It's not that God is against banking.

It's not that God is against city traders. It's not that he's against markets. No. God is against pride. And that's why he judges Tyre. He judges her for her self-confidence.

Which she has adopted. As a result of her affluence. I am rich. He says. No one can touch me. And her wealth. And her income. And that is one of the great consistent messages.

Of the Bible. Isn't it? That one of God's purposes. Throughout all of history. Is to humble the proud. And it's pretty difficult. To read a passage like this.

And not in some manner. Think that it's. Not relevant to our city. I read this week. In a newspaper. Of a report of a meeting.

[12:06] Where somebody said. This system needs reformed. Speaking of the city of London. And if it doesn't get reformed. We will destroy it. It's a very strong language. Isn't it? But I think in some of those things.

There are some. Right concerns. About the city. That we do have to recognise. As relevant. There are. A lot of people.

Very. Very. Anti-capitalism. I'll read a bit more about this. One of the slogans. Of their movement. Is we are the 99%. You know. It's the Occupy movement. You don't hear so much of them now.

You can. What's that? Sitting in banks. Occupy. We are the 99%. They said. And it's an intriguing. Slogan. Isn't it? People who sit in banks.

And financial institutions. We are the 99%. Standing against the Ukrainian. Of the cent. But to be honest. The more I read of it. The more it got on my nerves.

[13:03] And it is hopelessly idealistic. So today. I am starting a new movement. And I'd like you to join it. You can be here for the launch. You can say I was there. And here is my slogan.

We are the 100%. We are the 100%. Let me explain what I mean by that. We are all part of the system. And the root of the problem.

That you may be able to see. In the corporate world. And the economy. And maybe you can see it. In the political world. And our economic world. The root of that problem. Isaiah says.

Is pride. And that pride. Absolutely. Every single one of us. Is guilty of. All of us. Have built.

Bought into the system. We are guilty of greed. We are guilty of consumerism. We are guilty of materialism. Because each. Each of us. Deep down. Wants to define ourselves.

[14:02] By what we have. Or define ourselves. By what we look like. Or define ourselves. By what we own. Or define ourselves. By what we achieve. And we are part of the problem.

So there is a lack of humility. Dare I say there is pride. There is pride. That points the finger. On the other side of the issue. And says. They are the problem.

And we can't do that. Because we are the hundred percent. Let me quote this again. From Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

It says this. If only there were evil people. Somewhere. If only there were evil people. Somewhere. Insidiously committing evil deeds. And it were necessary. Only to separate them. From the rest of us. And destroy them.

But the line dividing. Good and evil. Cuts through the heart. Of every human being. And who is willing. To destroy a piece of his own heart. God declares.

[15:01] That his purpose here. Is to judge. The economic powerhouse. Of Tyre. And the reason. He says. Is because of her. Pride. And that is something.

Of which we are all guilty. Secondly. We don't just see. The purposes of God here. We see the future. Of the prophets. Look in verses 15 to 18. In that day.

In that day. Tyre will be forgotten. For 70 years. At the days of one king. At the end of 70 years. It will happen to Tyre. As in the son. And prostitute. Take a heart.

Go about the city. You have forgotten prostitute. Make sweet melodies. Sing many songs. That you may be remembered. At the end of 70 years. The Lord will visit Tyre. And she will return to her wages. And will prostitute herself.

With all the kingdoms of the world. On the face of the earth. Her merchandise. Her merchandise. Will be. Holy to the Lord. Will not be stored. Or hoarding.

[15:57] But her merchandise. Will supply. Abundant food. And fine clothing. For those who dwell. Before the Lord. It seems that Isaiah is predicting. A period of 70 years. During which time.

Tyre would lie desolate. Which probably refers to. The period between the campaign. Of the Assyrian ruler. Sennacherib. In 701 BC. And then the decline of Assyria.

Some 70 years later. But what Isaiah seems to mention here. In highlight. Which he wants us to know. Is the prostituting heart of the nation. As he puts it.

And he's not referring primarily there. To sexual activity. And sexual sin. Rather he's saying. That all the activity of Tyre. Was done for one thing. Money. Everything they did.

Was for the money. Just as in prostitution. And after the 70 years of devastation. It appears that Tyre. Hadn't really learned anything. At least initially. She returned.

[16:52] The society. To her proud. And selfish ways. But in verse 18. Can you see that? It's utter transformation. There's something of a major development.

Isn't there? Because now we see. That her profits. And her earnings. Will be set apart. For the Lord. We know that Tyre. Was there.

To supply materials. For the temple. At Julia's return. From Babylon. We read that in Ezra chapter 3. But as we've seen. Several times. As you go through Isaiah.

Isaiah operates in three time zones. They operate in the now. And the later. And the much later. So when he speaks. What he says.

Applies to the now. And the later. And the much later. And the scale of events. To which Isaiah is talking about here. Seem to be much larger.

[17:46] Than what is talked about. In the book of Ezra. Something bigger. Is in view. Yes. Ezra 3 is in view. But it's bigger than that. The question is. What is it? So there's some debate.

When you come to verse 18. Some believe that. Isaiah was just looking forward. To a day. When God will reclaim. Everything. Riches.

Because they ultimately. Belong to him. For the blessing of those who are his. And it's possible. I think it's more likely. And others think that. There's more going on here. Than just God.

Taking the profits. That it is actually a picture here. Of future transformation. It's a picture of a converted.

Prostitute. Consecrating. Giving. All that her old life. Now past. And gone. Has meant. One reason I think that's the case.

[18:39] Is that in Deuteronomy 23.18. It tells us that it was forbidden. To bring the earnings of prostitution. As an offering to the Lord. But now. That prostitute.

Is converted now. And everything that she has. Everything that she's got. She hands over to the Lord. And to his people. It's all now his. And she hands it to him. No longer is it kept.

A selfish game. So the sense is that one day. All things will come together. For the glory of God. And the blessings of God's people. Some riches.

Will be brought willingly. By those who trust the Lord. They'll be handed over to him. But there is a sense. Isn't there in the Bible.

That other riches. Will be taken from those. Who trusted in other things. But the future of all prophets. Is such that they will be in the hands of God.

[19 : 38] For the enjoyment of his people. Seems to me that. Isaiah 23 presents you and I. With two ways of living. One way is the way of tired.

It's the way of pride. And the way of greed. And living for ourselves. Earning an income. So that you can climb the social ladder. A bigger salary.

A better house. A better image. A fancier wardrobe. More expensive toys. But the other way. Is to recognise.

That everything that you have. Actually belongs to the Lord of glory. And it's to be used for his glory. The problem of going from the first path.

To the second path. Is that greed. Is one of the hardest sins. To identify in our lives. I've been the minister of this church. I think 30 years. On Thursday.

[20 : 35] And no one. No one has ever come to me. And said. I really struggle with this sin. And the sin is. Greed.

No one. Lots of other things. But no one really admits to it. What we are very good at. Is we're very good at. Identifying other people who are greedy.

Aren't we? But it's very very rare. That you will hear someone say. I am actually a very greedy person. We're willing to admit other sins.

But greed just doesn't happen to be one of them. That's why Jesus says. Isn't he? Jesus is very clear. That you've always got to be on your guard against greed. You've got to be on the watch for greed.

Because it's not. It's one of the most difficult sins to spot. But rather than give you clues. As to what to look for in your life. As to whether you're a greedy person or not.

[21 : 29] I want to give you a suggestion. A couple of suggestions in our lives. Where we see a transformation. In our lives. From greed to generosity. How do we make that switch? What might it look like.

If we move in the direction. Suggested this year. As we live out the truth. That everything that we have. Every single thing that we have. Belongs to the Lord. And is to be used for his glory.

And the first place to transition. From greed to generosity. Is in our attitude. To our work and our income. How we look at our work. And our income. The business entire.

The city entire. Had one central goal in their trading. And it was this. It was their own glory. It was to build themselves up. And so the income.

And the profits. And the bonuses. Enabled them. To increasingly live. More selfish. And increase luxurious living. And increase their stature.

[22 : 28] And their reputation. That's what they did with their money. Their goal was their own glory. A friend of mine. Used to run a consultancy company. And at the bottom.

Of his website. And on his head. Notepaper. There were three words. Three little words. Sali. Deo. Gloria. A few seconds.

And pass. Or you drive your car past. Turn right. And a few seconds. You go out. Go across the lights. And follow the road round. And as you're turning around. You will see a house. On the right.

And above the door. It's a wooden door. And above the door. You will see. I think it's an eagle. Carved in the door. Carved in the window. And underneath the window. Is engraved. S. D.

G. Fort Laudy. Old home. If you know that. Sali. Deo. Gloria. What does it mean? It means. To God alone. Be the glory.

[23 : 27] It's the same words. The same three words. Johann Sebastian Bach wrote. On every piece of music. He composed. Sali. Deo. Gloria. To God alone. Be the glory. And that is the attitude.

That God wants you to have. About your work. And I think. By implication of that. Of our income. That we've received. From that work. That it is all. Ultimately. For God's glory.

And that is why. I want to argue with you. That I think the Bible. Instructs you. To give. At least. 10% of your income. To ministry. A mission. You can argue. And say. With the New Testament.

Never says about 10%. I would want to argue. Back. It speaks about. A lot more than that. But in actually. A very practical way. We show. That we're fighting. We're fighting. Greed in our lives. And we are acknowledging. That actually. All that we have. Belongs to God. And we want to use it. For his glory. All that we have. We've been made stewards. Of.

[24 : 25] We are stewards. Of this income. That ultimately. Comes from him. And that actually. Has to affect the way. We use money. Spend money. Invest money. Sali deo gloria.

The second. Related way. I think. We are transformed. From greed. To generosity. Has to do with. Our thinking. Particularly about us. As a church. About investing.

In our vision. If I can put it like that. I don't like the word. Vision. You know that. But at the start. Of this academic year. I just want to remind you. Of what we're facing. In the summertime. I read. Lots of books. That I don't get to read. During the year. And I always pick one book. That I. I know I won't like. Written by. Someone from a very difficult. Different theological perspective. Who I won't like.

And. He certainly did that this year. One book that will drive me nuts. But there was one quote. That I got out of this book. Let me read it to you. If the size. Of the vision.

[25 : 22] That you have. For your life. Isn't intimidating. To you. It is likely. That it's insulting. To God. It's good isn't it. Two good lines. In a pretty awful book.

If the size. Of the vision. That you have. For your life. Isn't intimidating. To you. It's likely. That it's insulting. To God. And I think. We need to apply that. To us. As a church. If the size.

Of the vision. Of our congregation. Isn't intimidating to us. It is likely. That it's insulting to God. Well. What is our vision. You say. That's the same vision.

As every other church. We want to see people. Come to know God. Through Jesus Christ. By the power of his spirit. We want people. To become. People of the book.

Can we. We want to see. Lives. To be. Transformed. So that they become. More and more. Like the Lord Jesus. We want to see people. Trained. And equipped.

[26 : 18] To live out the Christian life. In their workplace. And wherever they are. We want to see. Covenant children. Raised. We want to see. Internationals. Reached. We want to see.

Workers. Raised up. And sent out. Around the world. We want to plant churches. And we want to build. A bigger building. Because that will enable us. In the long term. To proclaim.

Christ. And to reach people. In this area. In further afield. Years. And not just in our day. But for generations to come. And so we need to start dreaming.

What God might do. In and through this church. Dream of things. That might. Bring us. As a body. To maturity in Christ.

Dream of things. That will enable us. To effectively. Reach out to people. And I think. One of the things. That might hold us back. From dreaming. And praying.

[27 : 18] As much as we could have done. I think sometimes. In the UK church. It is fear. And particularly. Financial fear. One of the dangers.

Is we think. We've always got to play it safe. And if playing it safe. Means being a good steward. Of what we have. And that is God. I'm all for it. But if playing it safe. Means avoiding.

Intimidating vision. If playing it safe. Means not taking risks. For God. I don't think that is God. Or him at all. And I expect.

Some of you are sitting there. And thinking. How dare you talk to us. About money and giving again. Don't you know. How expensive it is. To live in this city. And I hear you. But I think.

With a right. On godly vision. Comes creativity. With godly vision. Godly vision. Comes freedom. And boldness. And with godly vision. Our priorities. Including our financial priorities.

[28 : 12] Become much much clearer. When we realise. What it is. We are to do. Then our priorities. Become much clearer. So I'm asking you.

To start praying. God clarify our vision. What is it. That God. Would. Be asking us to do. To enable people. To come to know Christ. To enable people.

To come to maturity in Christ. To bring others. To Christ. Let's risk. Let's do things. Where we realise. The only way. That this could happen. Is if we trust in the Lord.

Is that a great place to be. So that more. And more people. Can come to know Christ. And can come to be like Christ. In the words.

The pioneer missionary. William Carey. That we expect. Great things. From God. And at the same time. We attempt. Great things. For God. One last thing.

Let's pray.