

Isaiah 30

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[0 : 00] Let me add my word of welcoming you here, a visitor. It's really great that you're here today.! We're going to the book of Isaiah, and today we come to Isaiah chapter 30. It's on page 591 in the Black Bibles.

I wish you'd got that. I'd say well done on making it through the crowds of runners. It feels like a subversive act, doesn't it, to come to worship when the rest of Ian is running or in bed. Ray Orland is a pastor in the US, and he's written a decent book on Isaiah. And in it he writes this. He says there's something deep inside us that diminishes past facts and magnifies present uncertainties. Somehow God's faithfulness in the past doesn't carry weight for long, and pretty soon we start feeling as unloved and alone as ever.

It's just the way we are. And it's why we need constant renewal. There is always some plausible alternative to trusting in God. Something to take our eyes off God.

[1 : 12] I don't know about you, but I can identify exactly with what Ray Orland is saying there. How easy it is to forget how God has acted in the past.

So we see God come through for us in our lives. Over and over again. We see him heal relationships that we thought were irreparably separated.

And he sustains us through some financial challenges. Or he gets us through health difficulties. He delivers us from idols in our lives.

Perhaps from addictions. Perhaps from deep-seated sin that we never thought we'd be able to be free of. And every time God comes through for us. And then we come up against some big challenge.

Some fresh obstacle in our life. Some discouragement. And we suddenly get a case of spiritual amnesia. We forget all that's gone in the past. All the grace and the favour of the past.

[2 : 12] It seems to us like a long-distant memory. If it's even a memory at all. And Isaiah says it's actually worse than spiritual amnesia. It's actually caught unbelief.

It's these things inside us that diminish past facts. And magnify present uncertainties. All of which more often than that tempts us to want to take things into our own hands.

To try and sort it out ourselves rather than to trust the God who's got us through in the past. And it leads us down the path of rebellion. So we've been going through Isaiah. And here we are in chapter 30.

And in this chapter the people of Judah seem oblivious to the fact that God is the one who's taken care of them in the past. He's the one who's got them through. And so he can be trusted to take care of them in the future.

And we actually find the people of Judah living and acting like practical atheists. They move ahead in their plans as if God didn't really exist.

[3 : 12] But as I mentioned last week the reason God offers works of judgment and the reason God acts in judgment is not only to satisfy his justice.

It is because God cares about his people. He's not willing to leave you and I in a state that is not best for us. And so in this chapter I hope that you heard it as we read it.

We see something of the astounding and astonishing response of God to the rebellion of his people. What we find in this chapter is that God is a God who waits. That God is a God who waits to show grace to those who wait for him.

God waits to show grace to show kindness to those who wait for him. Two points and then two applications. Verses 1 to 17 we see that God is a God who judges rebellious people.

God is a God who judges rebellious people. You can't sweep his judgment under the carpets. I mentioned last week that Judah is now led by King Hezekiah.

[4 : 20] Who as the kings of Judah go, he's not bad actually. He's a pretty good king. A godly king. But he also made the mistake of his predecessors. He thought that the way to deal with political threat from the neighbouring superpower of Assyria, the way to be comfortable, the way to be protected is to build an alliance with another superpower.

So the threat for Judah and Hezekiah is coming from the north, from Assyria. And so they go running off to the superpower of the south to Egypt. And they try to get our help. And all along, he seems to ignore the fact that God is saying, I am the only one you need in this life. I am the only one you need to trust.

So look at verse 1. I, you stubborn child, declares the Lord. You carry out a plan, but it's not mine. You make an alliance, but not of my spirit, that they may add to sin. Who set out to go down to Egypt without asking for my direction. To take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh. To seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore, the protection of Pharaoh will turn to your shame.

[5 : 30] And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt will end up in your humiliation. Now you can understand why God might be a bit upset. God is the one who would deliver Israel.

We all know the story in Exodus. Of how he delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. How he exercised his power and his might. How he rescued the Israelites out of slavery.

He showed, didn't he, in the plagues. That he has absolute superiority over Egypt. And its little gods in the Exodus. And the Exodus was the defining experience for the people of Israel.

It was the way in which they understood who their God was. God would say to them, wouldn't he, again and again. We read it in the start of the 10th chapter. I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt. And God even makes it really clear in Deuteronomy chapter 17 and verse 16. That his people were forbidden to look to Egypt for their help. It's not a matter of wisdom for the people of Judah. It's not a matter of, is this the right thing to do or not.

[6 : 35] No, this is a matter of obedience or disobedience. God says, I do not want you running to Egypt for help. But now look at the people of Judah.

They think that Egypt is their protection and their shade and their refuge. They are the very words that the psalm uses again and again of God.

What is God to the Christian? God is a refuge. God is our protection. God is our shade. We hide in God.

That's what the psalms tell us to do. But the people of Judah, they look at their neighbouring nation, Egypt. And they say, Egypt is my shade. Egypt is where I run to. Egypt is my rock.

And Judah's allegiance and hope is in Egypt. And they send their government envoys laden with gifts to butter up the Egyptians. And to solicit their help. And God says, all this is going to lead to, in verse 3, the end of the first sentence, shame.

[7 : 39] And the end of the last sentence, humiliation. Now the question is, how do you get to a place when you're trusting in other people? In other powers, in other nations, instead of trusting in God?

How do you get to that stage? What is the journey that gets you there? Well, at the very least, Isaiah tells us. And he says, first of all, it involves a rejection of God's word.

Verses 8 to 13. Can you see that? And now go write it before them on a tablet. That's a tablet on stone, not a little iPad. And inscribe it in a book. That it may be for the time to come as a witness forever.

For they are a rebellious people. Lying children. Children who are unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord. Who say to the seers, the religious men do not see. Say to the prophets, do not prophesy to us what is right. Speak to us smooth things.

Prophecy illusions. Leave the way. Turn aside from the path. Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel. Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel. Because you despise this word. And you trust in oppression and perverseness.

[8 : 40] And rely on them. Therefore, this iniquity shall be to you like a breach in a high wall. It will bulge out. And it will be about to collapse. Whose breaking comes suddenly in an instant.

As I was told, write this down. Write down God's message for the people. So that the people of God will understand it in the future. Because he knows that this people, whom he's speaking to now. He's wasting his breath on them. Because they're not going to listen. They're not going to hear. The people of Judah will refuse to listen to God's words. They just want him to refine his message.

Just see who they are. They say to Isaiah. Isaiah, don't bother us. With commands about money. And what we do with our money. They say, Isaiah, we don't want you to talk to us about sexual immorality.

And who we can and who we can't sleep with. We don't want you, Isaiah, to tell us how to treat the poor and the oppressed. What we do with our possessions. And we certainly don't want you to tell us about judgment.

[9 : 44] Tell us about our best life now. Isaiah, why don't you go and read Joel Osteen. That's how you communicate with people. Give us some chicken soup for the soul.

Go to the God Channel. Look how great and positive Joyce Meyer's message is. That's what you need to be like, Isaiah. That's what we want. And Isaiah's audience isn't the last to make of demands, is it?

So listen to what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 4. He says, for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching.

But they'll have itching ears. Itching ears. It's a great image, isn't it? That they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions. They have teachers which will tell them what they want to hear.

And will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. And immediately we see that. That's there in modern day, don't we? Here, God says, is what happens when you reject my word.

[10 : 47] There are dire consequences. But one thing God says to you, don't think that by wishing me away that I'll just disappear. You see this in verses 11 to 12.

The people say to the prophets, stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel. Look at the next sentence. Look at the next sentence in verse 12. Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel. God isn't going to go away just because you don't want to listen to him. What is it that he says? Look at verse 11 and 12. Leave the way. Turn aside from the path. Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.

Therefore, thus says the Holy One of Israel. Because you despise this word. You trust in oppression and perverseness. And rely on them. He's not going away. And God judges rebellious people.

Now thankfully, that's not the end of the picture, is it? Because in chapter 15, verses 15 to 18, we see that God is a God who shows mercy to repentant people. He shows mercy to repentant people.

[11 : 54] Look with me at verse 18. It's an amazing verse. Therefore, the Lord waits to be gracious to you. Therefore, he exalts himself to show mercy to you.

For the Lord is a God of justice. And blessed are all those who wait for him. It's really the hinge in which the whole chapter turns. It's a great picture, isn't it, of who God is.

There's God who waits. He waits to show grace to us. Who stands as if on tiptoes. Who's eager to show you and me compassion.

It's another parallel in Isaiah, isn't it? Where God is pictured like the father in the prodigal son. Remember that story in Luke 15? There's the father who's watching. Who's waiting for the rebellious son to come back to him.

Who's waiting to open his arms to receive him. And celebrate. And it's interesting, isn't it? We're told here that God is waiting because he's a God of justice.

[12 : 53] Verse 18. You see, God cannot be gracious. God cannot be kind and compassionate to you. Without also satisfying his justice and his righteousness.

I think there's always a temptation in our minds. To want to pit God's love and grace. In some way against his wrath and judgment. And his justice.

All of us want to gravitate to one or the other. And yet the Bible says that God is all those things at the same time. He is just and merciful at the same time.

He hates sin. And yet he loves his people all at the same time. The question for you and me is how can God be both of those things to us?

How can he be just and punish the sin of which Isaiah calls this sinful and rebellious people? Which if we're honest includes you and I, doesn't it?

[13 : 58] How can he be just towards that sin? And how can he show us grace and kindness and favour? And the answer of the Bible is of course 700 years later.

It is in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's son. The Bible tells us, doesn't it, that when Jesus was on the cross. When he was hanging on the cross in the middle of the day from noon till 3pm.

It went dark. Darkness descended over the land. It wasn't a natural thing. It wasn't an eclipse. It was a supernatural thing. For three hours. Because God is showing you and I at the cross.

By the darkness. That judgment is now falling on his son. It's falling on Jesus. It's a sign that Jesus was bearing the judgment for our sin.

That God is pouring out his wrath. And the judgment that we deserved was poured out of the Lord Jesus instead. And so Jesus took hell for us on the cross.

[15:01] And you know what that means is that if we have trusted in Jesus. If we are in Christ this morning. And he took all of that for us.

The only thing that we have coming to us from God is now grace and compassion. And fatherly favour. It's at the cross.

Where God's justice and grace are satisfied at the same time. Frank Hendrick wrote. We worship at his feet. Where wrath and mercy meet.

And a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream. For us. He was made sin. Oh help me take it in. Deep wounds of love.

Cry out father forgive. I worship. I worship the lamb who was slain. And so Isaiah writes doesn't he. The Lord waits to be gracious.

[16:01] And then he says. Can you see at the end of verse 18. Blessed are those who wait for him. And you say well that makes sense doesn't it. This is in Isaiah's day. They are waiting for the saviour to come.

And if they are waiting for the time when his wrath and his mercy will be satisfied at the same time. But Jesus has now come. How are you and I meant to wait? And the answer to that is our waiting. It's not so much a temporal thing. That we're waiting for something in the future. But if I can put it like this. The waiting that we do at the end of verse 18 is a resting. That we are not waiting for something to come.

We are waiting in the sense of resting. Which is the word he uses here. The attitude that I think Isaiah is lifting up here is an attitude. It's the attitude of verse 15.

Can you see what it says? Verse 15. For thus says the Lord God. The Holy One of Israel. In returning and rest. You shall be saved. In quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

[17:05] What's the problem for the people of Judah? The problem for the people of Judah is that they thought. And they wanted to believe that they could achieve their own safety. They thought that they could get salvation for themselves.

That their well-being depended on what they did. So they prance off down to Egypt. And they tell the prophet. We don't want to hear any more about the Lord God of Israel. We've got this under control. They're relying on.

They're trusting in verse 12. Oppression. They're trusting in deceit. And they think they can work it all out. And God says you are so wrong. You've got it completely upside down.

He says in repentance. In returning to me. And resting. Is your salvation. And in quietness and strength. Is your trust. To wait for the Lord.

Is to repent from our sin. To turn away from it. And to rest in him. Is to trust him. Now I recognise. It's a bit of a challenge isn't it.

[18:09] To go from. The 8th century before Christ. To come right up to 2016. How do you connect this to our lives? You are not a chosen nation state.

And we are not tempted. To seek an alliance. With a neighbouring country. Against the direct command of God. That's not us. But I think what we read in this chapter. Gets very close.

To the big issue. In your life. And in mine. Of who you are. And who I am. So I want to try to play it. On an objective level. And then a subjective level. And in an objective level.

In terms of how we relate to God. And then a subjective level. How does this work itself out. In our daily lives. So let me ask you. The objective question. Okay. Let me ask you.

How are you and I. Accepted by God. To begin with. How are you and I. Accepted by God. To begin with. You can ask that question.

[19:09] A number of ways. Isn't it? One question I'm asking. How can we be saved. By God. How can we be rescued. By God. Or to put it another way. How can I be sure. I get to heaven. I read the

story.

A while ago. Of a Sunday school teacher. In America. Who wanted to explain. To six year olds. In his class. What it was. That somebody had to do. In order to get to heaven. And he wanted to find out. Where the kids were. In the question.

So he asked him a few questions. He said. If I sold my house. And my car. And I had a big. Garage sale. And I gave all the money. To the poor. Would that get me.

Into heaven. And the chorus of the class. Was no. That would not get you. Into heaven. So he encouraged by this. He asked another question. If I cleaned the church. Every day. And if I mowed the church.

Lawn. And I kept everything. Neat and tidy. Around the church. Would that get me. Into heaven. And again. They say. No. It's not going to. Get you to heaven. And so he said.

[20 : 03] If I was kind. To animals. If I gave. All my sweets away. To the children. If I love my wife. Would that get me. Into heaven. And they all say. No. That's not going to.

Get you into heaven. So he looks out. At the whole class. And he says. So how can I get to heaven. One little boy. Puts his hand up. At the back of class. The man says. Yes.

How do I get to heaven. He says. You've got to be dead. Right. It's absolutely rude. It's like. So we know. You've got to. You've got to die. Right. But before that.

How do you. How do we get to heaven. How can you and I know. This morning. That we are qualified. That we are accepted. By the living God. Because there is. Believe it or not.

Nothing more important. The majority view. In our culture. Is that God. Accepts us. Basically. On how good we are. So if somebody.

[21 : 00] Is religious. Or. Can I say. Moral. And you say. Do you think. You're going to heaven. You say. That's your mates. They would. Probably. Say. Yes. And then.

If you ask them. What. Why do you think. That you are going to heaven. They would. Basically. Say. Because. I'm. A good person. Probably. Now.

Let's just. Try and work that out. Let's assume. That is the basis. On which. God. Makes the decision. Of whether. You get into heaven. Or not. Whether God. Accepts you. Or me. Or not. The question.

Becomes. How good. Is good enough. How good. Is good enough. To get you into heaven. Or to put it more crass. What's the pass mark. What is God's pass mark. 75%.

Let's say. 75% of the time. You are loving. And generous. And you get good manners. Will that get you into heaven. Some of you might think. Well it's a little bit high.

[21 : 56] Isn't it. Let's try 60%. I think the pass mark. When I was in school. For example. Was 45%. Maybe that's it. Let's say 45%. Okay. It's a little bit grotesque.

Isn't it. Trying to set a pass mark. But you have to do that. You have to do that. If you say. God accepts good people.

You have to be able to say. Okay. I'm good enough. Well you have to define. Don't you want it. Enough. So let's say. You and your best friend. You lived on this basis. And by some remarkable coincidence.

You died on the same day. Some accident with the E1. And you both. Arrive. At the gates of heaven. And you come before God. To get your grades. And God says to your friend.

You really kind of find it new. You kind of close. But. I'm really pleased to tell you. You got 46%. You're in. And you get to enjoy. All the beauty.

[22 : 56] And all the splendor. Of eternal life. In heaven forever. The friend is so delighted. He beats. And God turns to you. And he says. I'm really.

Really sorry. To have to tell you this. You were really close. But you got 44.5%. You just.

You just weren't quite good enough. You were nearly there. But not good enough. And you get to spend eternity. In hell. That to me. Is the most grotesque.

Imitation. Of a God. That I can think of. It's horrific. And yet. I want to say to you. That is the logical. Outworking. Of the majority view. Of how you and I.

Get to heaven. And thankfully. Isaiah says. That is not how God works at all. But Isaiah says. In repentance. In returning and rest. Is your salvation. In quietness.

[23 : 51] And trust. Is your strength. Because the reality is. Isn't it the past line. Actually. The Bible tells us. Is 100%. Which means. I need to tell you this. You have failed.

As I have. And there is only one person. Who did not fail the test. And that is the Lord Jesus. Who came into this world. And he lived the perfect life. And he passed the test. And then he goes. As the qualified one. To the cross. To die on the cross. To pay for the fact. That everybody else has failed. And if you trust. That he took the test.

For you. That he died on the cross. For you. He says. You get the benefits. Of all eternity. By my grace. And by my mercy. Do you see the good news. Of the gospel. It's not what you have to do. To live as a Christian. It's not about doing. It's about what has been done. By Christ. It's what Christ has done for you. And you rest in that. Don't you? You give up your trying.

[24 : 47] You walk away from your sin. And you repent of all. That he died for. And if you do that. On an ongoing business. It's not just when you become a Christian. You repent of everything.

And you just move on. No. It's a daily thing. It's a daily thing. Because. Our repentance. Day by day. Our. Returning.

And resting. Drives us every day. To Jesus. And so. If you are a Christian. You will realize. That you need Jesus.

More now. Than you ever did. And that you and I. We cannot save ourselves. But praise God. Jesus. Come. And Jesus has. Now that is great news.

Isn't it? In and of itself. But if you take. That objective reality. And you apply it. To your life. It actually changes.

[25 : 42] The subjective reality. How we feel. And how we live. I want to say to you. It changes. How you look. At your week. I wonder what this coming week. Holds for you.

If we take. The objective reality. Of what Christ has done. And apply it. It changes everything. And one of the things. Isaiah does here. Is to help us. Help us understand. What the rest of our week. Should look like. Because underneath. All the work. That you and I. Do in life. I'm talking about paid work. I'm talking about work at home. Unpaid work.

House chores. Our daily. Toilet. Our studies. All the stuff. That we do. Beneath all the work. There's another work.

Going on. It's the work. Beneath the work. If you can understand. Because in everything we do. The temptation is. We want to prove ourselves. We want to justify ourselves.

[26 : 39] We want to make ourselves. Feel like. We're okay in life. We want to impress other people. We want to impress ourselves. First of all. And we want to make ourselves.

Feel better. We want to make ourselves. Feel that we really matter. And whatever you are doing. Whatever the work.

Underneath the work is. That is what you're really trusting in. For your security. It's your Egypt. It's what you're going to run to. To find your security. So it could be your job. It could be money. It could be your relationship. It could be your reputation. It could be anything. What is it that you look for. For meaning. What is the work. Behind the work. Let me give you a couple of examples of this. Madonna the singer. Sometimes singer. She wrote this. Every time I accomplish something. I feel like a special human being. But after a little while.

[27 : 36] I feel mediocre. And uninteresting again. I find that I have to get past this. Again and again in life. My drive is from the horrible fear. Of being mediocre.

I have to prove. I am somebody. It's the work beneath the work. Remember he can charge a fire. And with Eric Liddell. Who wouldn't race on a Sunday.

Wouldn't take part in the Ealing Half Marathon. Which we all applaud. And figure's right. And then. And there's Harold Abrams. Isn't there?

Harold Abrams. Is the guy. The Jewish guy. Who's running the 100 meters. And he's a competitor. Do you remember in the film. In that Olympic race. Right before that final. Abrams says. I have 10 seconds. 10 seconds.

To justify my existence. The work beneath the work. Do you see it? And all of us do it. And whatever your work is.

[28 : 30] Beneath your work. It leaves you restless. Because it never achieves. What we hope it will achieve. We never find. What we're ultimately looking for.

There's no rest. There's no rest. And God comes and says. Can you see it? In verse 15. In returning. In repentance.

And rest. Is your salvation. He says there's a deep rest. There's a deep rest.

That saves you. From the work. Beneath the work. Augustine says. Our hearts are restless. Until they find their rest in me. Think about your sleep.

I'm told. Listen. My mother used to say that. An hour before midnight. Is worth two hours afterwards. That. That's not. It somehow works. But it doesn't make any sense at all. Does it? That if you get to sleep before midnight.

[29 : 30] But there is something. That's there called. REM sleep. Rapid eye movement sleep. That if you get. REM sleep. For an hour or two. A night. Two or a night. That determines. Whether you are properly rested.

Or not. And when it comes to your overall life. That is the kind of rest. God says. I need. God says to you. I can give you the rest.

So you really feel rested. I can give you the rest. Jesus says. So that you can stop trying to prove yourself all the time. That you can stop trying to prove. That you are good enough. That you are smart enough.

And the way you find that rest. Is where? Well it's if you come back to the cross again. Gospel writers tell us. That when Jesus died on the cross. He said a number of things. And he said. Father forgive them.

For they don't know what they are doing. He said. I thirst. He said. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? But the last thing he said. Was. On the cross.

[30 : 25] It is finished. It is finished. Was he saying. I am finished. No. He is saying. The work that you gave me to do.

Father. Father. The work that would make. Your people. Acceptable to you. That work. Is finished. It's the work that he has done.

To prove that we are loved. And we are accepted. And we are delighted in. By the God of the universe. And so once you get that. Once you realize that.

Then you continue to work. It's not as if we stop doing. All that we do. That work is just work. School is just a school. It's not trying to prove myself.

Because we know. Don't we? We have been proven. We know that we have been justified. We know that we are delighted in. By God. All because of what Jesus has done. Jesus has worked.

[31 : 27] So that you and I. Can really know rest. And so there may be a sense today. In which God is. In a sense. Still waiting. He's not waiting for his justice.

And his grace. To be satisfied. But he is waiting for you. To wait on him. He is waiting for you. To stop the running. Stop the running.

To the work. Beneath the work. He's waiting for you and I. To come to our senses. In a sense. I'm the prodigal. And see that. Whatever we've been doing. For our justification. And our meaning. Well actually. We've just been running to Egypt. And Egypt will let us down. Again and again and again. He's waiting for you and me. To see that in repentance. And in rest.

Is our salvation. And for some of us. Here. That might be. Coming to God. And saying. I'm actually coming to you. For the first time. Because I've never. Come to you.

[32 : 22] For this rest. I've been looking at. All sorts of things. My school work. My work. My relationships. And I've never found. Satisfaction.

But I'm coming to you now God. Because I know. And I understand. That you are the only one. Who can give me this. And for some of us. It's a reminder. Isn't it. That we've gone to God before. But now we're running to Egypt.

And we've gone back. And we think that something else. Or someone else. Is going to give us the satisfaction. That we need. And what we need to understand.

Is that it is. In returning. And resting. In Jesus. You shall be saved. Ray Orton is right. Isn't he. You and I lead constant renewal.

Because there's something. Deep in us. That diminishes. Past facts. And magnifies. Present uncertainties. And that is why you come to church. Sunday by Sunday. That is why we meet together.

[33 : 18] In house groups. During the week. And that is why we take. Every opportunity we can. For fellowship. Because you and I. Forget this stuff. All the time. We leak. And we need to be reminded. Of it constantly.

And it's why we read the Bible. And it's why we encourage. One another. As long as it is called today. Because we forget. And so I want you to be renewed.

By these words from Isaiah. But also these words. Because Jesus knew. That he was the one. Who would bring the rest. That you need. And so before he went.

To that death. Which satisfied God's justice. And God's grace. Here's what he says. Jesus says to you this morning. Come to me. Come to me. All you who are weary.

And heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke. Upon you. And learn from me. For I am gentle.

[34 : 12] And lowly. In heart. And you will find rest. For your souls. Let's pray.