

Isaiah 65

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[0 : 00] Isaiah 65. Children, you know what it's like to play hide and seek, don't you? We talked about it. Hide and seek, where somebody is hiding and somebody is seeking.

! What you've got in this chapter, I don't know whether you picked it up, is God playing a form of hide and seek. But it's a strange hide and seek. It's a hide and seek with eternal consequences. But God's version of hide and seek for the people of Isaiah's day was, I don't hide. And you don't seek. I don't hide. And you don't seek.

We played it in Sunday school. It's a pretty boring game, isn't it? And a dull version of that game. But in a moment, you'll see what it looks like in Isaiah 65. Now we've travelled a long way to get to this passage, haven't we?

You are to be commended for persevering through the book of Isaiah with me. And in chapter 66, we see this glorious eternal home that God has in store for all his people, that he is secured by his resurrection.

[1 : 03] But in the smallings section, Isaiah is really determined to kind of nail down whose home is it going to be. That is, who is it that can call this eternal and stunning and beautiful heavenly home?

Who can call it my home? And here's what we're going to see today. We're going to see that God's rich blessings, or God's home, if we want to describe it that way, God's rich blessings are reserved for his chosen servants who seek him.

God's rich blessings are reserved for his chosen servants who seek him. We'll think about the God who doesn't hide. We'll think about the servants who do seek.

And then we'll think about the outcome of our choosing. So first of all, the God who doesn't hide.

Last week we saw, didn't we, Isaiah pleading with God to act. God, look down from heaven.

In fact, no God, come down from heaven. No longer restrain yourself. Split the heavens and come down. Reveal your glory and your beauty to the world and rescue.

[2 : 13] But here is the question that Isaiah's prayer finished with. Look at chapter 64 and verse 12. Will you restrain yourself at these things, O Lord? Will you keep silent and afflict us so terribly?

From appearances. It looks like God is absent. It seems as if God is distant. And God is restraining himself from acting on behalf of his people.

But appearances can be deceiving, can't they? Because here God answers the prayer and he explains that that was far from the truth. Chapter 65 and verse 1. He says, I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me.

I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, here I am. Here I am. So far from being removed or distant.

God says, I was eager to reveal myself. I was found by those who weren't even looking for me. I wasn't hiding. But they weren't seeking and yet they still found me.

[3 : 24] And God says, I was actually doing the opposite of hiding. I was standing there. Like in a game of hide and seek, doing the exact reverse. Waving my arms and saying, here I am. Here I am.

So who is God talking about when he mentions those who found him that weren't even seeking him? Well very helpfully Paul, the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 10 says, God is speaking here about the Gentiles.

People like you and I, non-Jews. And it's a stunning picture of grace. That instead of demanding that they would adopt towards him the respectful attitude of a servant.

Towards their master. Saying, here I am Lord. Here I am Master, your servant. God reverses the roles. And God offers himself to them as a servant.

And he says to people like you and I, here I am. God takes initiative to be found by a people who are not even looking. Because God is not a hiding God.

[4 : 28] And if you are here this morning and you've not committed your life to God. He is not trying to make this a puzzle for you. God never wants to play games with you.

God is not wanting to trick you in any way. God is never in the business of hiding himself away. He says, I even reveal myself to those who didn't look for me.

And so perhaps today as we go through Isaiah 65. Saying amongst his people here in Hanwell. God is saying to you today, here I am.

Here I am. And God said here, I didn't just extend my grace to the Gentiles. All day long. Look at verse 2. All day long. I held out my hands for stubborn people.

Who walk in ways that are not good. And they pursue their own devices, their imaginations. The Apostle Paul quotes that verse in Romans 10 as well.

[5 : 29] As a demonstration of God's gracious invitation. Towards the people of Israel. His people. But what he says here that he did is actually stunning.

Because when God said, I held out my hands. It is literally, I spread out my hands. And in the overwhelming majority of cases in the Old Testament. That means adopting an attitude of prayer. Lifted up holy hands to the Lord. It is God saying, I was praying. And I spread out my hands to the stubborn, hard-hearted people.

I have not just allowed myself to be found with them. I have pleaded with them. I have petitioned them. I have appealed to them to return to me.

But he says there has been no positive response. Instead the response is negative and resistant and dismissive. God hadn't hid himself at all. But they have actively remained a disobedient.

[6 : 33] An obstinate people. So look at verses 3 to 7. God lays out the proof of their explicit disobedience. Of the people of Israel. We've read all the verses.

We don't go through the things he mentions. But he says they've been involved in DIY religion. It's involved consulting the dead. Practicing the occult. He says you've got this obnoxious, holier-than-thou attitude.

You've stood aloof from your neighbours. You've been divisive. You've thought that you were better than others. When you weren't practicing any holiness in your life.

It's outrageous idolatry. They would whistle as the sound of music as they watched it. Climb every mountain. While failing to go up the one mountain. To meet with the holy true God.

But the hub of the problem is stated in verse 2. It's a people. Can you see it? Who followed at the end of the verse their own devices. And their imaginations. And their desires. And that is the hub of the problem for every human being.

[7 : 36] For you and for me. That we will not let God. Be God. We will not let God be God.

So we might say. Oh I like to think of God as. Or I could never believe in a God who dot dot dot. I believe in a God who would dot dot dot.

Tim Keller says we've created a Stepford God. You know that book and film Stepford Wives? The husbands of Connecticut. Have turned their wives into robots.

Who will never cross them. Who will never disagree with them. And the result is that the Stepford Wives are wonderfully compliant. They are beautiful. But the reality is.

There's no personal relationship. There's no intimacy there. Because there's no truly personal relationship. The other person has to be able to contradict you.

[8 : 35] And that is true with God. We create Stepford Gods. Gods who essentially are of our own making. Who are in our own image.

Who never contradict us. Who never contradict our culture. It's amazing. People's Gods never disagree with them. But you'll never have a relationship with them.

Because they are a figment of your imagination. Only if God is and does and says things that you disagree with. Or struggle with.

Or outrage you at points. Will you know that you've got hold of the real God. Who's not a figment of your own imagination. God in his grace does not hide himself away.

He passionately pursues people. That they might find him. But neither does God hide himself. Or hide when it comes to the exercise of judgment. Look at verses 6 and 7.

[9 : 37] Behold it is written before me. I will not keep silent. But I will repay. I will indeed repay into their lap. Both their iniquities. And your father's iniquities together.

Says the Lord. Because they made offerings on the mountains. And insulted me on the hills. I will measure into their lap. Payment for their former deeds. To the kind of disobedience.

That God. That Isaiah has just spelled out. God's reaction is unequivocal. He says God will judge. Those. Provocative flirts.

Those pious. Religious. Church going flirts. Will face the judgment of God. And notice what he says about the judgment. He says it is absolutely certain.

He says it is written. He says it is personal. I will not be silent. He says it is a measured justice.

[10:35] I will pay them back. In full. He says it is individual in their application. That it is into their individual lap. It is not impersonal. Forces of faith.

God's wrath is not an impersonal. Out of control. Cranky explosion. No God's wrath is his measured. Personal. Settled. Opposition to the cancer of sin.

That is eating out the insides of the human race. He loves. With his whole being. God does not hide in salvation or judgment.

He speaks of himself as the God who doesn't hide. And not then. God moves our direction. To the servants who seek. Look at verses 8 to 10. He says thus says the Lord.

As the new wine is found in the cluster. And they say do not destroy it. For there is a blessing in it. So I will do for my servants sake. And not destroy them all. I will bring forth offspring from Jacob.

[11:36] And from Judah. Possessors of my mountains. My chosen shall possess it. And my servants shall dwell there. Sharon will become a pasture for her flocks. And the valley of Acre a place for herds to lie down.

For my people who sought me. Who seek me. Do you see that amazing image? God picks up on that picture of the warrior servant.

So in chapter 3. The one who treads the winepress of God's wrath. Do you remember that picture? On the final day of judgment. When God will judge the earth. But here he offers this world a word of hope.

That the winepress of God's wrath discriminates. I'm no expert on wine at all. But I discovered that the best champagne uphouses. Only use the juice that comes out of the grape.

Initially. You know you kind of. It squirts in your eye. When you crush it for your children. That juice there. It's that bit of the juice. It's the best juice. Supposedly.

[12:34] According to winemakers. That juice is the finest. And the sweetest. And that seems to be the image here. That every one of us merits the winepress.

But in God's kindness. And in God's mercy. Some are saved from it. Some he calls a blessing here. The destruction will not be total. But God will fulfill his promise.

By saving a remnant. By saving a part. In order that his purposes will be fulfilled. Now the question of course. Is who's going to be saved? It's a question that should interest all of us.

Who will avoid the winepress of God's wrath? Well look at the verses again. Because God refers to those whom he will save. As my servants. My chosen people.

My servants. My people. So the question is again. Who are his servants? Servant. And here's where going through the book of Isaiah.

[13:34] Pays big dividends. It's why it's so important to go through a book of the Bible. Because if you need to do a study of the word servant. In the book of Isaiah. You find something really interesting.

The first time the word servant. That is plural. Is used. Is chapter 54. Verse 17. But prior to that. In verses 14 to 53.

Which we've worked through. The word servant appears 20 times. But it's always in the singular. Do you get it? 20 times in the singular. 54 verse 17. Plural.

So we know who the servant is. Don't we? We know who the servant singular is. It is the Lord Jesus. He is the suffering servant. Chapter 53. He is the one who is.

Going to be pierced for our transgressions. Who is crushed for our iniquities. Who will bear the full penalty for our sins. Of all who trust in him. Servant of course is Jesus.

[14:33] But from chapter 54 onwards. The word servant. Only appears in Isaiah in the plural. It's always servants from then on. And the clear implication is.

Who are these servants? Well these servants. Are the ones. Who have put their trust in the servant. In the suffering servant.

Who have their sins forgiven. Who have had their judgment day paid for. So when God refers to my servants. My chosen people. He's not thinking of a group. That's defined by nationality.

Or by ethnicity. Or by history. Or by ritual. It is the elect of God. It is all those. Who have put their trust.

In the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you are able to say in sincerity this morning. Yes that is me. I have trusted my life to him. I love him. I follow him.

[15:33] God has incredibly good news for you. He says to you. I promise to rescue you. From the winepress. Of my wrath. And save you.

And give you. My blessings. And my eternal home. If you will trust. In my servant. We are servants. Of the suffering servant. And we are the only ones. Who are the recipients. Of God's eternal blessing. So God here gives one verb. To summarise what the servants.

Of the suffering do. Can you see it? Can you see it? It's they. Seek. God. That's what they do. Before God rescued us. God wasn't hiding. We weren't seeking. But still in his grace. God revealed himself. So that we found him. But now that God has rescued us.

[16:31] We actively. Consciously. With laser beam intensity. We will seek the Lord. That's what a Christian is. We take on the attitude.

Of the apostle Paul. In Philippians 3. Who says. I press on. To take hold. Of that. For which Christ Jesus. Took hold of me. I press on. Towards the goal.

To win the prize. Which God has called me. Heavenwards. In Christ Jesus. Paul goes on. In that letter. To say. I want you to follow. My example in this. I want you to live. With laser beam intensity. Where life is gathered in. And pushed out. Towards God. And maybe that for you. This morning. Just sounds over the top. Just preachers talk.

And you may say. Yeah. I'm a Christian. And my Christianity. Is actually more of a private thing. I keep my head down. I actually. I don't want to talk about it too much.

[17:30] I don't want to make it. A big thing. Let's live. And let live. It's the best you can do. Do you know what the problem is with that? The problem with that. Is that. It assumes that Christianity.

Is just. A piece of your life. As if Christianity. Is just a compartment. It fits nicely. On a Sunday morning. But it's got nothing to do.

With the rest of your life. It's got nothing to do. With how you spend your money. Or how you do your work. Or your sex life. Or your social life. Or your temper.

Or how you treat the poor. And the disadvantaged. And Paul says. You need to rethink that. Because this is not the way. That God has set you up. To live. To be a Christian.

To be somebody who is in Christ. Means that your entire life. Is gathered in. And pushed out. Towards seeking God. In every area of your life.

[18:32] And so the servants of the Lord. Are rescued from the wrath of God. But God then flips the coin. Isaiah 65. And just in case. You're unsure of what I'm talking about. Let me show you the pattern.

Of those who are destined. For the wrath of God's winepress. And that's the third point. The outcome of our choosing. Look at verses 11 and 12. But you who forsake the Lord.

You who don't seek the Lord. To forsake is the opposite. To seek. You who forsake the Lord. And forget my holy mountain. Who set a table for fortune. And fill cups of mixed wine.

For destiny. I will destiny you to the sword. And all of you shall bow down. To the slaughter. Because when I called.

You did not answer. And when I spoke. You did not listen. But you did what was evil in my eyes. And you chose what I did not delight in.

[19:29] Isaiah leaves them and you. In no doubt. For there is a coming day of judgment. And on that day there will be a final and irrevocable separation.

Between those who are God's servants. Who have trusted in his servant. And those who have not. And it isn't arbitrary.

We are not going to be able to say. None of us saw this coming. No long before that day. The choice that people have made. Regarding their final destiny. Becomes clear. That if you or I. Choose to live in a way. That forsakes the Lord. We must be under no illusion. That our destiny will be judgment. And the eternal sword.

The pattern is already set. I called God says. And you did not answer. The pattern is. I spoke. And you did not listen. And some of you might say.

[20:36] This morning. I don't think he's ever called me. I don't think he's ever given me the chance. To respond. But the thing he has. He's doing it right now. Every time you open this book.

Every time you read it. Every time someone reads it to you. Every time you hear someone proclaim this book. The Bible to you. God is calling you. He is speaking to you. He says the pattern is this. You do evil in God's sight. You choose. What displeases him. Now that's a sobering reality. But Isaiah is telling us here.

In the end. That hell. Is simply God. Giving people what they've chosen. If you choose this morning. What you know displeases God. And God is clear. That the final destiny. Of those who choose. What displeases him is hell. Then hell.

[21 : 38] Is God. Simply giving people. What they themselves have chosen. Can you see that? C.S. Lewis in the problem of pain.

Writes this. He says. In the long run. The answer to all those who object. To the doctrine of hell. Is itself a question. What are you wanting God to do?

To wipe out their past sins. And at all costs. Give them a fresh start. Smoothing every difficulty. And offering every miraculous help. That he has done so.

On Calvary. On Calvary. To forgive them. But they don't ask for forgiveness. But to leave them alone. Alas.

I am afraid. That is what he does. Christianity asserts. That we are going to live on forever. That must either be true or false. If it is true. There are many good things.

[22 : 34] Which would not be worth bothering about. If I was only going to live 80 years or so. But which I better bother about. If I am going to live forever. Perhaps my bad temper. Or my jealousy.

Are gradually getting worse. So gradually. That the increase in my life in time. Will not be very noticeable. But it might be absolute hell.

In a million years. In fact. If Christianity is true. Then hell is precisely. The correct. Technical term for it. Do you see what C.S. Lewis is saying.

Hell is simply. Giving. God giving people. What they have chosen. They have chosen a path. That displeases God.

And it leads to an ever increasing. Disintegration. And alienation. And isolation. So no one goes to hell.

[23 : 33] Who doesn't choose to. Hell is the greatest monument. To freedom. That there is. God says. If you want to build your life.

Around something else. Other than me. If you want to live without me. Okay. But you need to see at least. Where that leads you.

So Lewis again. Puts it like this. There are only two sets of people. Those who say to God. Thy will be done. And those of whom God says.

Thy will be done. That is brilliant. There are only two types of people. Those who say to God. Thy will be done Lord. And those of whom God says.

Thy will be done. All who are in hell. Choose it. The doors of hell. Are locked from the inside. That is really helpful. It has been really interesting.

[24 : 31] For me to study this. That the Bible gives actually. No evidence. That there are souls in hell. Saying let me out. Let me out. You know there are popular pictures.

There are kind of fire pits. Isn't there. And there are people. Kind of clambering out. And God is throwing people in. That is not the picture of the Bible at all. Because no one goes to hell.

Except those who want to. Hell is simply God giving people. What they themselves have chosen. So let me ask you. What path have you chosen? And some of us.

You might want to say to me. This morning. Paul I have not chosen. I have not worked it out yet. But the truth is. If you actually haven't made a choice. You have made a choice.

The human default is what? We know what it is. Isn't it? Our human default is to please ourselves. To do what pleases us. And to do what displeases God.

[25 : 29] It's to listen to your own voice. And not listen to God's voice. But unless you make that conscious decision. To seek God. To be a servant. Of the suffering servant.

You are on your way. To the wrath of God's wine press. Now I am not saying this to you today. Because it's a big emotional push on you. I am not trying to twist your arm.

Through emotions this morning. I am simply trying to say to you. As clearly. And as simply as I can. What is at stake here. And so God lays out.

What is at stake. Look at verses 13 to 15. And it couldn't be clearer. Verse 13. Therefore thus says the Lord God. Behold my servants shall eat.

But you shall be hungry. Behold my servant shall drink. But you shall be thirsty. Behold my servant shall rejoice. But you shall be put to shame.

[26 : 25] Behold my servant will sing for gladness of heart. But you shall cry out for pain of heart. You shall wait for breaking of spirit. You shall leave your name. To my chosen for a curse.

The Lord God will put you to death. But his servants will be called by another name. It couldn't be clearer if it is. Isaiah is drawing on material.

That he has written already. About how his people will feast in the new Jerusalem. Do you remember? Come you who have no money. Come buy and eat. The invitation of Isaiah 55. You'll eat and you'll drink without money and without cost. You'll enter into the new heavens and the new earth. And there will be unbelievable joy. That God has given to his people a new name. Because he's bringing them into a new city.

And there will be a new people. But that is all in total contrast to those who have not sought the Lord, isn't it? Those who have forsaken the Lord.

[27 : 29] Those who have not listened. Those who haven't answered when he called. For them he says it will be eternal hunger. And eternal thirst. And eternal shame. And eternal anguish. And eternal brokenness.

And curse and death. And if this description does not move you. If you are in that position. Or it doesn't move you. If you're a Christian. To think that maybe you need to be a little bit more proactive in sharing your faith.

Then I don't know what will. But I want you to notice. As we come to the Lord's table. That even in this description. There is a gracious call.

Because God is saying to you through this passage. Won't you be my servant? He's saying to you this morning. Doesn't this world. Food and drink.

Of joy and singing. And gladness. Doesn't that world sound more beautiful. And more attractive. And more desirable. Than the other one over there. Don't you want.

[28 : 28] A future that is characterized. By feasting. By rejoicing. And by singing. And you say yes. And God says.

It's not complicated. I just ask you to trust. Your life. To my servant. I ask you to repent of your sins. And to put your hope in him. And to become a servant. Of the suffering servant. And to seek me. And to love me. And to trust me. Jesus called the crowd to him.

And he said. If anyone would come after me. Let him deny himself. And take up his cross. And follow me. For whoever will save his life. Will lose it. But whoever loses his life.

For my sake. And for the gospels. Will save it. Following God. Is not some suicidal gesture. Some people think that. Don't they? They think you give your life to Jesus.

[29 : 25] Young people sometimes think that. I give my life to Jesus. It ruins everything. It ruins my fun. It's the exact opposite of that. It's the path to saving your life. And the reason that you and I.

Are tempted to create. Stafford gods. Is because we think that. The God of the Bible. Doesn't really love us. The God of the Bible. Doesn't really have my best interests at heart. And that is a lie.

And Jesus says. No. Seeking me. Is the way to real life. I do love you. I do have your best interests at heart.

I gave. My son. Isn't that what this table says to us. God gave his son. There was nothing. More costly. For him to give. Than his son.

He gave his only son. The suffering servant. My eternal son. As the means. To secure for you. What is best for you.

[30 : 26] Because God longs. For you and for me. To feast. To feast. To rejoice. To sing. And he pleads with us.

This morning. And he lays out his arms. Before us. He says. Forsake the path. That leads. To eternal hunger.

Leave the things. That will not satisfy. Leave the path. To shame. Leave the path. To anguish. And brokenness.

And curse. And death. And he says. Here I am. Here I am. There's nothing more powerful.

Is that? It is the Lord's supper. It is the Lord's table. It is the risen Christ. Who feeds us. At his table. And he says.

[31 : 22] To you stay. Here I am. Would you trust me? He is not hiding. He is not hiding. Let's pray.