

The Pride-Destroying, Glory-Giving Future Jesus Brings (Isaiah 2–4)

Isaiah: Trusting the God Who Judges, Saves, and Renews

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The world is deeply broken—we know this.

Injustice. War. Violence. Poverty. Oppression. Division. We all long for a better one.

Many leaders have articulated this longing for a better world where our problems are overcome—especially when persuading people to give them power to make it happen.

- President Lyndon Johnson in 1964 gave a vision of the Great Society. “In your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society... The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all.”ⁱ
- Twenty years later Ronald Reagan kept this kind of hope alive: “This is the world that can be for each child born... a world at peace and alive with freedom; a society of growth, opportunity, and progress... To a tired and disillusioned world, we've always been a New World and, yes, a shining city on a hill where all things are possible.”ⁱⁱ
- Then just over twenty years after that, Barack Obama expanded this vision. “Our nation is at war. Our planet is in peril. Our healthcare system is broken, our economy is out of balance, our education system fails too many of our children, and our retirement system is in tatters... I was certain that if we could just mobilize... there was no problem we couldn't solve - no destiny we couldn't fulfill...”ⁱⁱⁱ

“Hope is the bedrock of this nation; the belief that our destiny will not be written for us, but by us; by all those men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is; who have the courage to remake the world as it should be.”^{iv}

It seems every election cycle the world is a disaster, but a candidate can make everything right.

When that doesn't work, the candidate in the next election makes a new set of promises.

Why are these speeches so powerful? Because we all long for this world to become what we know it can and should be. We long for a world of peace and flourishing.

In our text this morning, the prophet Isaiah also gives a vision for a future world of peace.

But this is not a man-made vision. It's from the Lord.

This is not an uncertain vision; it is certainly coming.

And this will not come about through our own efforts; it will come from Jesus.

And one great surprise is that Jesus *is* starting to bring this about—through the church.

We're in a new sermon series in Isaiah—and this morning we're in chapters 2–4.

This section shows us a better vision of the future, a darker picture of the present, and the only hope for how Jesus will remake it.

This progresses in three sections, and that's what we'll follow: We'll see the world God will make, the pride God will destroy, and the glory God will give. We'll read the text as we go.

1. The World God Will Make (2:1–5)

First, the world God will make. This is Isaiah 2:1–5. We'll spend the most time with this part.

Verse 1 shows us that the focus of this section is on Judah and Jerusalem. Verse 2 says the vision is about what will happen “in the latter days.” Let's read verses 2–4 together.

2 It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
3 and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
4 He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.

Isaiah gives three features of this future hope.

1. First, he says “the mountain of the house of the Lord” will be preeminent.

This mountain of God's house is Jerusalem. It's where the temple was—which was called the house of the Lord. In the Ancient Near East, temples were always on the highest hills and mountains. This was viewed as the place where heaven and earth met.

Jerusalem wasn't really much of a mountain. It was pretty small. But Isaiah pictures it being raised up as the highest point on earth. This is figurative and poetic language. The idea is that it will become the most important place on earth.^v

2. Second, people from all nations will start streaming toward it.

Verse 3 says God's word will go out to the nations from Jerusalem. And then the nations will be drawn to this temple-mount. They will come to learn from God and walk in his ways.

3. Third, the result of this is that the world will be at peace.

Verse 4 says God will be a king who settles the disputes of the people. There will be no more division and no more war. It says, "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." They will take their weapons of war, and turn them into equipment for farming. No more swords, no more guns, no more nuclear weapons.

Here's the question: when will this happen?

Isaiah says this will happen "in the latter days." He is speaking about the consummation of history. The prophets saw the world as having two ages: this current age of sin and death and war. And then a future age of love and life and peace. This was the new creation to come, the eternal state, when God would renew the world.

We're still waiting for this to come in its fullness when Jesus returns and renews the world.

But here's the surprise: When Jesus came the first time, he started this. He repeatedly taught that the mystery of his kingdom is that it was already beginning. The future age has broken into the present. Jesus has brought about what theologians call "the overlap of the ages." The current age of sin and death and war is *overlapping with* the new age of love and life and peace.

Jesus has brought this about through his life, death, resurrection, and building of his church. Which means you and I are already living in the time of fulfillment of this vision.

Here's what I mean.

Think of the three features we just saw of this vision: 1) The temple-mount becomes pre-eminent, 2) God's goes out to the nations and they stream in, and 3) they learn God's ways and live at peace.

Each of these have begun to happen as a result of Jesus's first coming.

1. First, the temple mount *is* pre-eminent. Not the physical temple mount in Jerusalem (there's a mosque there right now). It is pre-eminent because Jesus *is* now the true temple.

In John 2 Jesus said, “[Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...he was speaking about the temple of his body](#)” (John 2:19, 21). Jesus is the true temple. And the New Testament repeatedly says his church is now part of this temple. The Holy Spirit is dwelling in us. Jesus and his people are the temple.

In John 4 a woman asked if people should to worship on the mountain in Jerusalem. Jesus said, the time is now here when people would not worship in Jerusalem, but would worship in Spirit and truth (John 4:21–24).

And the book of Hebrews says people *have already come* to Mount Zion. Hebrews 12:22 says to Christians, “[you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.](#)” The exalted temple-mount in Isaiah 2 has been established, and we have already come to it.

2. Second, the word of God is going out to the nations from this new temple-mount.

The new temple-mount is Jesus and his people—we are the temple. And the word of God goes out from us to all nations. And this even started in Jerusalem like Isaiah said.

Jesus said something curious when he commissioned his disciples to spread the gospel. In Luke 24, he said that “it is written... that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, *beginning from Jerusalem*” (Luke 24:46–47). The gospel must be proclaimed to all nations. And it must start from Jerusalem. And Jesus says this is what was written—this was in the Old Testament.

Where? I think text like this one right here.^{vi} Jesus and his people are the new temple—and the gospel spreads out from them. But it starts in Jerusalem. And that’s exactly what happened in the book of Acts.

And now people are streaming in from all nations—not to the old mountain of Jerusalem. But to Jesus, and to his people, and the to the heavenly Mount Zion and new Jerusalem.

3. And what about the promise of world peace? What about no more war?

That’s beginning to happen as well. As people come to Christ, they become part of a new people. And the church is a people who love one another across all social and ethnic lines. I still put locks on my doors, but not because I think any of *you* will break in.

Let me summarize this.

Isaiah is giving a vision of the future eternal state—a world where the temple-mount is preeminent, the nations stream in to learn God’s ways, and there is no more hostility. We are still waiting for this to fully happen—upon Jesus’s return.

But it has already begun. Jesus is the true temple and his church becomes part of this. And we have already come to Mount Zion. And as the gospel keeps spreading—from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth—more and more people stream up to Christ. And we learn to love one another across all ethnic and national divisions within the church. We live at peace.

So, we may grieve that the old temple-mount now has an idolatrous mosque on it. But, in my view, we aren't waiting for a physical temple to be rebuilt there. We aren't waiting of a millennial age for this to happen. Jesus and his people are the temple. And it's already raised. Our task now, then, is to keep spreading the good news of Jesus.

Now, when Isaiah gave this vision of the future, the current reality was very different. Jerusalem was a dark contrast to this. So, the next section shows us our deepest problem.

2. The Pride God Will Destroy (2:6–4:1)

So, first, we saw the world God will make. Second, we see the pride God will destroy.

This is the rest of chapter 2 and 3.

God speaks to the people of Judah and Jerusalem in particular here. And he says before this future will arrive; judgment must come first.

Verse 6 introduces the section.

Isaiah says to God, “For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob.”

Why did he reject them? The people of Jerusalem were very wealthy at this time. And the rich and powerful lived in luxury at the expense of the oppressed poor. They had a prideful, God-diminishing trust in wealth, political power, military strength, physical appearance, and false religion. Their problem *then* is still humanity's problem *now*.

And Isaiah unearths this problem, and shows God's coming judgment against it all.

They have emptied themselves of God and filled themselves with God-replacements. Do you see the repeated word “Filled” in verses 6–8? In verse 6, they filled themselves with false religion. In verse 7, they filled themselves with wealth. In verse 8, with military strength and idols.

Isaiah warns them of God's judgment—and also shows us the root problem. He calls them to hide from the terror of the Lord. And there is a refrain Isaiah repeats in verses 11 and 17. It says, “The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.” This is the issue. They have lifted themselves up in pride. So God will bring them low.

Then in chapter 3, he focuses on how pride works itself out in men and women.

He focuses on the pride men have in leadership, and the pride women have in beauty. There is nothing wrong with leadership and beauty. The problem was how pride led them to diminish God, exalt themselves, and mistreat others.

First, leaders, and especially men, in the first fifteen verses of chapter 3.

God will judge Jerusalem with a military invasion that leads to societal collapse. This all ended up happening—God did end up using the Assyrian army to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. God was removing all that they trusted in.

So, we see the leaders removed in 3:1–3. Military leaders and soldiers, political leaders, religious leaders, economic leaders. Everyone will be taken down.

And what happens when the leaders of a land are gone? The only ones left to lead are too young or immature to lead. That's verse 4, "I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them."

And this leads to further social breakdown, oppression, and division across society. This is verse 5: the people will oppress each other. The youth will be insolent to the older ones.

Any good society needs good, wise, strong leaders. But what happens when there aren't any left? Verse 6 is comical: "For a man will take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying: 'You have a cloak; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule.'" If you find someone who has nice coat, you're like, "hey, you have some money. You look like you can lead us." The standards have dropped pretty low.

But even then, the person doesn't want to lead. Verse 7 says he won't do it.

So, here's the situation. When God judges a nation, there will hardly be any good men left to lead. People will then appoint unqualified people. And many still won't even step into that responsibility. The problems are too big. It's too hard.

As a side-note: Don't we see some of this happening in our own time? We have so few good options for leaders. There are not many morally serious, wise, godly men stepping in to lead. There are not many around; and those who are around, don't want take on the responsibility. And so we're left with immature options. Our communities and institutions and government needs godly, wise, mature men to step up to lead at the highest levels. And we need a population willing to value that and vote for them.

And now Isaiah gets to the root problem of the social collapse.

It is an open defiance of God. 3:8 is striking: “For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen...” Why? “because their speech and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence.” And they reject him and his ways openly. Verse 9 says they don’t hide their moral corruption. They promote it openly.

This is also happening more and more in our own time. Many people are openly rejecting the basic foundations of God’s created order from Genesis 1–2. These are the issues of the sanctity of life, gender as a gift, marriage as a lifelong union of one man and one woman, and so forth. But many in our time are not just rejecting it, but openly set against it.

And in Isaiah 14–15, God enters into judgment against the men in particular. And especially because they have accumulated wealth through oppressing the poor.

And then God enters into judgment against the women beginning in verse 16.

These are proud, wealthy, upper-class women; likely participating in oppressing the poor. They flaunt their wealth. Their life is wrapped up in making themselves attractive and looking down on others. The problem is not being beautiful or having wealth; it is that attracting attention has become an idol.

This is one of the idols in our culture. And idols never treat us well. Which is why in a culture that idolizes beauty—so many are so miserable trying to pursue it. They afflict their bodies. They spend an inordinate amount of money. And they develop anxiety and depression when they compare themselves with others. And then they age and desperately try to hold on to their younger image.

And in Jerusalem, it was especially the wealthy who pridefully flaunted their beauty.

And so God describes what will happen to their wealth and beauty when judgment comes—when Assyria (and then Babylonia) would come and destroy Jerusalem. In verses 18–13, all their many adornments will be taken away:

Verse 24, “Instead of perfume there will be rotteness” because of corpses.

“instead of a belt, a rope,” no more fashion belt, but a rope to lead them into exile.

“instead of well-set hair, baldness,” because the invaders will shave their heads.

And finally, “branding instead of beauty,” because they will be branded as slaves.

All these judgments did happen to them.

This is what it was like for Judah be overtaken by the Assyrians and then Babylonians. They were taken into exile.

Isaiah is showing us the deepest problem of humanity. It is our God-diminishing pride. It is our rejection of God and our prideful dependence on ourselves. Or our prideful dependence in anything other than God—military strength, political leadership, wealth, false religion and spirituality, physical beauty.

And do we not see these tendencies in our own hearts, and our own nation?
We focus on gaining wealth and put our trust in that instead of God.
We rage against people who disagree with us politically because this is our hope.
And the cult of physical beauty is everywhere—leading to women sacrificing their wealth and physical health and mental health so they can match a standard of beauty.

Under it all is a replacement of God with ourselves. And so God brings their pride down.

You may be thinking: what happened to that vision of the exalted mountain and world peace?

We're now getting back to that in chapter 4. The movement of these chapters is from the vision of the future exalted mountain and world peace. Then to the current situation and the judgment that must first come. And then, now in chapter 4, we see how that exalted vision will come about.

3. The Glory God Will Give (4:2–6)

So, the final section: the glory God will give.

The story could end here with God's judgment. But God's grace refuses to let that to be the last word. All through Isaiah—his judgment paves the way for a beautiful future.

Isaiah 4 is a short chapter—but here we see how the vision of the future we started with actually comes about. God will cleanse and create a new people by grace.

Let's read this together—and I'll add a few comments as we go.

1. First, we see God's people living in a renewed and fruitful land. Verse 2, "In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel." The "branch of the Lord," may refer to Jesus—he's called that elsewhere in the Old Testament. If so, this is saying Jesus would come and we would behold his glory. And we do. This could also refer God's people—calling them beautified and secure in a fruitful land.
2. Second, the people are called holy. Verse 3, "And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem." God washed the land clean of all pride and God-diminishing idolatry. And now those who are there set apart and devoted to him.

3. Third, they are cleansed. Verse 4, “when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.” God cleansed the land of pride and oppression.
4. And fourth, we will dwell with God, and he will protect us forever. This is verses 5 and 6: “Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.”

This is the most astonishing part. In ancient Jerusalem, the temple was a building on the mountain—and the people were left outside. But do you see what this is describing? It is saying that *the whole mountain* will have God’s presence. He will dwell over the people.

Isaiah is saying God’s presence is no longer contained in a building. It’s over the whole mountain. It’s over all the people.

This is like the book of Revelation describes the future new creation—there will be no temple, because God will be with us.

The wealth that people seek apart from God—will be given to them.
The beauty that people seek apart from God—will be given to them.
The security people seek apart from God—will be given to them.
But it won’t be given apart from God; it will be given by God.
God himself will fill us and satisfy us.

And how will this future world come about?

It comes through Jesus. But think about *how* it comes through Jesus.

This whole text shows how humanity pridefully diminishes God to exalt ourselves or others. And then God destroys pride by removing their security and wealth and beauty.

But what happened to Jesus when he came? He was the very presence of God with us. He was the only one worthy to be lifted up and exalted and honored. He could have come to judge the whole world—crushing our pride and exalting himself.

And yet what did he do for us?

He humbled himself.

He endured a shameful and ugly death on the cross.

He endured the terrifying judgment of God.

He had no security, wealth, or physical beauty.

He came as the one who should be exalted; but he was cast down.

He was to be honored, but he was dishonored.

Why? Because this was the only way he could bring in this new world and let us join him.
He took our judgment so we won't be judged.
He did this so he could be raised as the new temple, and welcome us by grace.
He did this so that we could have God's presence with us now and forever

Implications

So, let's wrap up with a few implications.

First, there is an encouragement for us to follow in 2:5.

The vision of the future should lead us to walk in God's ways. Isaiah gives that future vision, and then in 2:5 says, "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD."

The vision of the future God alone can bring, should lead us to live like this today. We're living in the time of fulfillment. The true and better Mount Zion has been raised. Jesus and his church are the temple. And the message of Jesus is going out into the world.

So, have you received his grace? Have you come to Jesus? Have you been cleansed? If not, you can today. Cast your pride down. Humble yourself before him. Receive his forgiveness. And enjoy a new relationship with him forever.

And Christians, are you walking in his light? Are you receiving and following his instruction? Do you immerse yourself in his word? And do you let it functionally change your lives?

Second, there is an exhortation to hear in 2:22.

Isaiah says, "Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?" Isaiah is saying: think about what you're doing. Look at your money. Look at your house. Look at your beauty. Look at the political leaders you hope in. What is all this? Who are they? This is all just created stuff. Those are just people in who nostrils is breath—and that breath will one day stop.

And in contrast to regarding man, the point of this whole text is to regard God. We need to repent of our prideful self-exaltation, and humble ourselves before God.

Now, let's think about this. This talks a lot about political leadership and wealth and beauty. But none of those are problems in themselves. The problem is how our pride leads us to use those things. We trust in them rather than God. We exalt ourselves rather than God.

So, how can you tell if you are making too much of this stuff and too little of God? You need to ask yourself: how much time and energy and emotions are you investing in this. And are you okay if you lose all of this, and only have God left?

- Think about beauty:
How much time do you spend in front of the mirror?
How much money do you spend on products?
What kind of emotional grip does beauty have on your heart?
Would you be okay if God takes away your beauty?
Or if you don't think you are attractive; can you trust the Lord with what you have?
Do you think and care more about your appearance than Jesus?
- Think about political leadership:
How much time do you spend consuming news, podcasts, and articles about politics?
How much of your emotions get worked up when people disagree with your view?
Do you get overly anxious about it? Do feel pridefully superior to others who disagree?
How does the time you spend with this compare with your time reading other topics?
- Think about wealth:
How much time do you spend trying to make more money and get better things?
How much do you save and invest versus give away generously to the church?
Are you using your wealth to advance the gospel in the world and serve those in need?
If God took away your wealth, would you be okay and trust him through it?
And if you don't have wealth, are you trusting him with contentment?

Third, let's take this message of grace to our friends, family, neighbors, and the nations.

Isaiah reminds us of the privilege we have to share the good news of Jesus with people.

When we share the message of Jesus.

When we give someone a bible and encourage them to read about Jesus.

When we invite someone to a church service.

When we pray for the gospel to spread and for God to give people new hearts.

When we send and support missionaries; or prepare to be a missionary ourselves...

In all of this... we are participating in the fulfillment of the vision of Isaiah 2. We are participating in taking the word out from Jesus to the nations. And we are inviting them to come in to receive his grace and walk in his ways.

So, the next time you hear a presidential candidate give a vision for the future...

Know that that may be a good vision. And we should want to support candidates who give a reasonable, hopeful future. But remember that Jesus's vision is better, and he will bring it. And he already is, through the church.

ⁱ <https://www.lbjlibrary.org/object/text/remarks-university-michigan-05-22-1964>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-eve-presidential-election>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-des-moines-iowa-our-moment-now>

^{iv} From <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-following-the-iowa-caucuses-2>

^v As McConville notes, “The language of height is used to proclaim preeminence” (McConville, *Isaiah*, BCOT, 49–51).

^{vi} I think this is what Jesus meant when he said in John 12, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). He is lifted up in his death, and then his resurrection. He is lifted up as the new temple. And people are now being drawn to him, to flow toward him like streams flowing to the mountain.